

Yesterday's Decisions...Today's Traditions

At Chi Omega's first five conventions, held between 1900 and 1910, delegates adopted standards, enacted changes, and established customs which have become today's traditions. Many matters were further refined when Council members began to meet in non-Convention years. The decisions made during these early years enabled the Fraternity to gain internal stability as it grew externally to become national in spirit and in distribution of chapters.



1900 Convention

Originally planned for 1899, fifteen delegates assembled in June, 1900, at the Peabody Hotel in Memphis, Tennessee, for Chi Omega's First Biennial Convention. The year-long delay was fortuitous, for in 1899 we had only three chapters; by the 1900 Convention our roll had grown to nine. By today's standards, fifteen delegates may seem small and insignificant, but it was a group of outstanding young women; it is the impetus given by their enthusiasm, perseverance, sound common sense, and womanly dignity in these early days that started Chi Omega off on a career of success and achievement. During the three days devoted to the Convention, business sessions were held twice daily and many decisions made to determine the policies of the future. National dues were increased, provision made for engraved charters, and the design for an improved coat of

arms was adopted. One of the events of greatest interest was the "model initiation." Social events included a trolley ride, an informal reception, a theater party, sight seeing, and a banquet. It was determined at the conclusion of the session that the rapid development of the Fraternity demanded the next convention be held the following year and would be called the Second Biennial Convention, as the one at Memphis had been a postponement from the preceding year.

At the Second Biennial Convention, held in Little Rock, Arkansas, in June, 1901, the most important decision made by the delegates was to follow Dr. Richardson's advice to increase extension activities, with the result that a committee on extension was appointed and included a member from every chapter. The assembly also passed a resolution to allow no honorary members other than Dr. Richardson; this decision protected the fraternity and gave special distinction to Dr. Richardson's membership. Additionally, *The Eleusis* editor was made a member of the Governing Council.



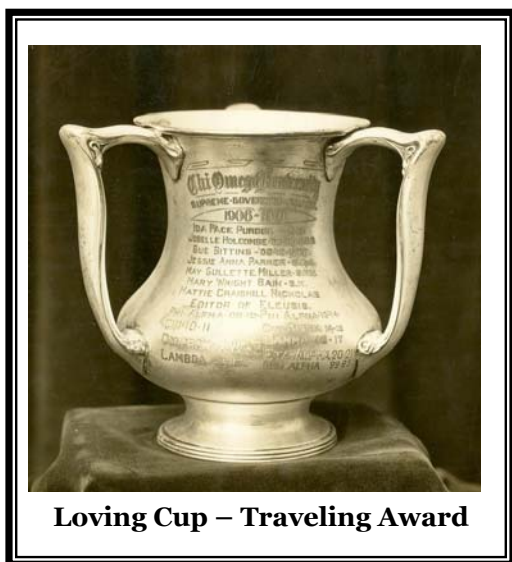
1901 Convention

By the time of our Third Biennial Convention, Chi Omega stretched from shore to shore. Originally planned to coincide with the Louisiana Purchase Exposition scheduled for 1903 in St. Louis, our Convention was postponed when the Exposition delayed its opening to the following year. Held at the Hamilton Hotel, business meetings were conducted in a downstairs room, improvised for the occasion. Red and yellow bunting was the decor and delegates sat on wooden benches. The crashing street cars sometimes made hearing difficult but did not seem to mar the occasion. One major resolution reflective of the growth of the Fraternity was to print the Constitution and Ritual. Until this time, hand-written copies of these documents were made and

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sent to newly installed chapters. Now that the roll numbered ten active chapters and three alumnae chapters with petitions being received regularly, it was time for more modern methods of reproduction, and shortly after the Convention adjourned, beautifully printed documents bound in leather were sent to each chapter.

Other major decisions of the 1903 Convention included the adoption of a uniform design for our pledge pin and some standardization of the Fraternity's badge. The first pledge pins were "chapter pins," what we call "guards" today. They were stick pins which also held the colors; upon initiation, this pin was added to the member's badge, probably affixed with a chain. The convention adopted a design by Julia Winchell of Xi Chapter, Northwestern University: The black oval pledge pin with gold edges and Greek letters is still used today. As for the Fraternity badge, delegates decided it should be worn only by members of Chi Omega, that the badge should not be used on novelties, in other jewelry or on stationery, and that it must be worn only over the heart—until this time, members were known to wear their pins in a variety of places, including at the waistband and on the collar.



Loving Cup – Traveling Award

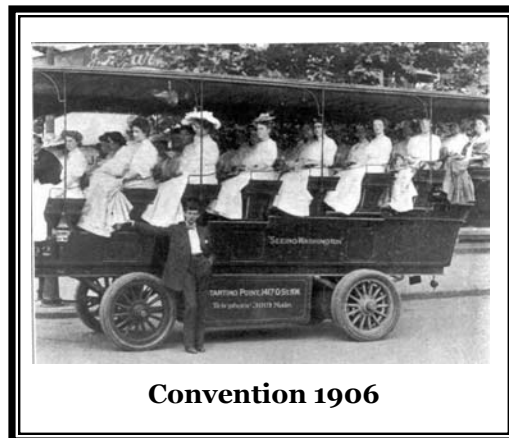
This Convention also provided for annual testing, requiring that every active member pass a yearly examination on Chi Omega history, secret work, and matters of general fraternity interest. For many years hereafter, chapter exam grades were published in *The Mystagogue* and were a heavily-weighted component in the contest for the Loving Cup. Social events in St. Louis included a visit to the Exposition grounds and theater parties in addition to the now-traditional closing night banquet. Prior to the Convention, Ida Pace Purdue asked

Mattie Craighill (Nicholas) to act as toastmistress at the closing night banquet. An independent young woman of 22 years, Mattie accepted eagerly and arranged the opportunity for every chapter, then 15 in number, to have a chance at a toast. This landmark Convention elected Ida Pace Purdue to the office of national president and Mattie as editor of *The Eleusis*.

In the summer of 1905, when the Fraternity was 10 years old, the first Council meeting ever called between Conventions met in Indianapolis. This began the organization of the Fraternity in the most up-to-date fashion. At this meeting, it was decided to print a private bulletin, for which the name *The Mystagogue* was selected; Mattie was appointed editor of the initial issues. Intended for Chi Omegas only, *The Mystagogue* contains minutes of conventions, secret information, and general direction to the chapters. Thirty-five issues were printed from November 1905 through 1972. With this series, Chi Omega became the first fraternity to have a private publication.

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The Fourth Biennial Convention was held in Washington, D.C., in June, 1906. Outings included a visit to the Congressional Library, an automobile ride through the city and surrounding area, and a visit to the Congressional Cemetery for a memorial service at the grave of Founder Alice Simonds Smith who had entered Omega Chapter in 1900. This Convention was especially notable to delegates because of the reception given for them by President Theodore Roosevelt. Wearing a dainty lavender and white organdy dress and a very feminine sheer summer hat, National President Ida Pace Purdue stood at the head of the line, and with perfect poise met the President; then she called the delegates' names and states while the great "T.R." smiled his famous smile and said "De-lighted" as he waved his large palm leaf fans, for it was one of those suffocating June days and the President was very hot and red in the face. The President asked Ida to mention the state of each young woman just after her name was given. So great was his interest in all parts of the country, that he was able to make a remark that was almost personal to each one as she passed by. Convention business sessions were held in the chapel of George Washington University during which a policy was made that members of alumnae chapters must also take the annual Fraternity examination. (This decree was revoked two years later by the Chicago Convention because of impracticality.) These delegates also finalized the standardization of the badge, restricting it to the present-day size, to the raised X, and to pearls and diamonds as the only jewels allowed.



Because the Governing Council was pleased with accomplishments made in 1905 during its first meeting held between Conventions, they met again in 1907 in Eureka Springs, Arkansas. As a result of these deliberations, Membership Certificates became a reality.

The Chicago Beach Hotel was the scene of the Fifth Biennial Convention in June, 1908. For the first time, an informal reception included "vaudeville" entertainment by the hostess chapters: Omicron, Xi, Nu, Eta & Chicago alumnae. Social events included a theater party, an automobile ride through the city, an all-day beach party and a visit to Northwestern University. To everyone's delight, Dr. Richardson attended the last two days. This convention decided that the acquisition of chapter houses should be encouraged, with the goal to have chapters own their houses at those institutions where chapter houses are the custom. (Eta Chapter at the University of Michigan was the first to own its own house, purchased in 1906.) This was Mary Love's first convention and she made an enormous impression on her Sisters.

In the summer of 1909, Ida appointed Mary Love the business manager of *The Eleusis*. When Ida declined to be re-elected national president in 1910 and when Mattie resigned that same year as editor of *The Eleusis*, Mary Love was elected national president and a new set of Council officers went in. Thus ended the initial, formative years of Chi Omega's development.