

UNIVERSITY *of* PENNSYLVANIA



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A Guide to the
Phi Beta Kappa. Delta of Pennsylvania Records
1898-1972 (bulk 1935-1968)

7.0 Cubic feet

UPS 43.4

Prepared by Timothy H. Horning
August 2014

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PROVENANCE

The records of Phi Beta Kappa were donated to the University Archives in 1968 (accession number 68/4), 1975 (accession number 75-5) and 2014 (accession number 2014:23).

ARRANGEMENT

The records of Phi Beta Kappa are organized into four series - Delta of Pennsylvania; Delta of Pennsylvania, Women's Section; United Chapters of Phi Beta Kappa; and Other Phi Beta Kappa Chapters - each of which are arranged alphabetically.

AGENCY HISTORY

Phi Beta Kappa is the oldest undergraduate honor society in the United States. The first chapter was founded in 1776 at the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia (Alpha of Virginia), followed by chapters at Yale (Alpha of Connecticut) in 1780 and Harvard (Alpha of Massachusetts) in 1781. The purpose of Phi Beta Kappa was to encourage academic achievement

and a lifelong pursuit of learning. The name Phi Beta Kappa comes from the Greek phrase "Philosophia Biou Cybernetes" meaning "the love of wisdom is the guide of life." Early Phi Beta Kappa displayed many attributes that would in time come to be considered hallmarks of modern-day Greek letter fraternities – use of a Greek motto, governing rules for its members, initiation rituals for new members, and an oath of secrecy. Early Phi Beta Kappa also displayed characteristics of a traditional debating or literary society. However, during a wave of anti-secret society sentiment in 1830s America, chapters abandoned their secrecy oaths and focused solely on functioning as a scholastic honor society.

The origins of Phi Beta Kappa at the University of Pennsylvania can be traced back to 1892 and George Egbert Fisher, a Professor of Mathematics (and later Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences), who had been elected to Phi Beta Kappa as a student at Cornell University. Professor Fisher submitted a charter for a University of Pennsylvania chapter to the Council of the United Chapters which was granted in September 1892. Following the established naming convention for new chapters, as the fourth chapter founded in Pennsylvania, the chapter at the University of Pennsylvania was called Delta of Pennsylvania. The initial membership consisted of members of University of Pennsylvania faculty who likely would have been elected to Phi Beta Kappa had they been alumni of institutions that had a chapter. At the end of the 1892-93 academic year the initial members elected the most academically gifted members of the departing senior class, a select few from the junior class, and a handful of honorary members. In 1935 a section for the College of Liberal Arts for Women was established. These were not separate chapters, as spelled out in the Delta of Pennsylvania's constitution and by-laws at the time, though the two sections did have their own officers, conducted independent elections, had separate finances, and maintained a separate correspondence with the United Chapters.

SCOPE AND CONTENT

The records of Phi Beta Kappa, Delta of Pennsylvania document the activities of the national honor society's chapter at the University of Pennsylvania mostly from the mid-1930s to the late-1960s. The documentation consists of correspondence, election results, handbooks, member lists, and reports. Similar material also exists for Delta of Pennsylvania's Women's Section.

There is some material generated under the auspices of the United Chapters of Phi Beta Kappa, the central and governing body of Phi Beta Kappa. This includes chapter manuals, constitution

and by-laws, mailings to chapters, and significant runs of the *Phi Beta Kappa Bulletin*, distributed amongst chapter officers, and the *Phi Beta Kappa Key*, the United Chapters' quarterly publication for news.

Some documentation of other Phi Beta Kappa chapters exists, which is mostly chapter handbooks and member directories.

CONTROLLED ACCESS HEADINGS

Occupation(s)

- University of Pennsylvania--Students.

Personal Name(s)

- Albrecht, Otto Edwin, 1899-1984
- Brownlee, Rebecca Jean, 1912-1995

Subject(s)

- Greek letter societies--Pennsylvania--Philadelphia.
- University of Pennsylvania--Societies, etc.

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INVENTORY

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