

Historically Speaking.....

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I will be attending my first General Convention in June and wonder when the first Convention was held? It may seem strange that any inaccuracy could exist in regard to the number of General Conventions held by Kappa Kappa Gamma, and yet such is the case. When the first efforts were made to collect historical data concerning the first decade of the Fraternity, Minnie Stewart Nelson wrote as follows: “The first convention was held in Monmouth in 1871, shortly after organizing the Beta and Gamma Chapters” and again in 1884, she wrote in response to further inquiries concerning that meeting, “We did hold a Convention in Monmouth in 1871. It was attended by delegates from Knoxville, and I think from Rockport. We had speeches, toasts, and a banquet.”

Based on this evidence, subsequent Conventions have been numbered accordingly, but it appears that she was mistaken, for no other evidence of such a meeting can be found and other Founders wrote the following: Louise Bennett Boyd said, “I was graduated in 1874. There were no Conventions while I was an active member.” Louisa Stevenson Miller said, “That Convention could not have been held in 1871, there were no Kappas to have a Convention then, the date is wrong.”

In her brief 1903 history of the Fraternity, *Kappa's Record*, Minnie Royse Walker expressed another opinion: “In 1871 the members of Alpha Chapter, which was then only a year old, met to decide the question as to whether or not Kappa Kappa Gamma should extend its domain to other colleges. This meeting has commonly been called the first Convention and the momentous question of expansion was decided by the authorization of the Beta Chapter at Knox College.” (We also know now that Beta Chapter was not at Knox College but at St. Mary's School in Knoxville, Ill.) Members of several other chapters supported the conclusion that the Convention of 1876 in Greencastle, Ind., hosted by Iota Chapter, *DePauw*, was the first true Convention of the Fraternity, even though Minnie Stewart Nelson's comment of 1883 caused Conventions to be counted incorrectly from 1871.

Kappa's first Conventions were held in homes or on college campuses of hostess chapters, planned and executed by undergraduates. The 1876 Convention was held in Greencastle, Ind., and Iota Chapter, *DePauw*, was the hostess chapter.

At the 1876 Convention, the *Constitution* and *Bylaws* were revised; Delta, *Indiana*, Chapter's Ritual and Initiation were adopted. The *Constitution*, as revised at that Convention, provided for a General Convention to be held biennially. Therefore, the second General Convention was to be held in Bloomington, Ill., in 1878.

The 1880 Convention was numbered although it was never held. The last Wednesday in August had been set at the previous Convention for the assembling of the one in 1880, with Eta Chapter, *Wisconsin*, as hostess in Madison, Wis. The hostess chapter postponed the date one week but the secretary failed to inform the other chapters of this change. This failure in communication resulted in scattered arrivals but the Convention was never held.

Delta, *Indiana*, served as hostess in 1881. This odd-year event saw the Fraternity change from Grand Chapter to Grand Council government, create a code of Fraternity laws, place chapters into provinces, adopt Fraternity colors and provide for publication of *The Golden Key*. Conventions returned to even-numbered years in 1882, when Eta, *Wisconsin*, invited Kappas to Madison and made up for the 1880 confusion.

The Convention of 1918 was canceled because of World War I. The 1942 Convention was planned for Quebec, Canada, but there was concern as to whether World War II would cause it to be cancelled. However, it was held as planned. In 1944, an officers' conference was held at the Broadmoor, Colorado Springs, Colo., in lieu of a General Convention because of World War II. Those attending were the Fraternity and Associate Councils, chairmen whose work directly concerned chapters and alumna groups, special officers and members of the Central Office (Headquarters) staff.

Plan to attend the 67th Biennial Convention at the Arizona Biltmore Resort and Spa in Phoenix, June 25-29, 2008.