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The History of Chi Lambda Kappa Honorary Dental Fraternity

By JUDSON E. BEST, D.D.S., '24

TWO DECADES AGO there gathered at the portals of the College of Dentistry of Howard University, students from all sections of this country and foreign lands. Spontaneous friendships sprang up among these students, whose common meeting ground and purpose was the study of dentistry. As time passed, the friendships became lasting ones, the influences of which were instrumental in aiding us through the years at the university.

Shortly after we had begun our studies, and especially after the first examinations, most of us were thoroughly convinced that we were not so sufficient unto ourselves; therefore, a few of us banded together for group study. The members of this group included Cyril P. Absalom, Walter J. Bacon, Finus Clayton, Vernon H. DuBois, Cicero Edwards, William G. Herbert, Eugene E. T. Mavritte, Fleming Norris, Edmond Presley, Edward Swaby and the writer. We met twice a week in my room at 1829 Fourth Street, Northwest, to study, exchange views and help each other in the many problems which confronted us as dental students. It was an amicable, sympathetic and conscientious group, and the results of mutual assistance were richly rewarded in excelling scholarship and a firmer bond of good-fellowship.

One night in the spring of 1921, after we had finished our regular study sessions and were enjoying a snack of coffee and cake, the conversation drifted to the scholastic abilities of various members of our class and the relation of scholarship to the dental school in general. Suddenly, one of the group suggested that we organize an honorary dental fraternity in order to stimulate scholarship in the dental school. The enthusiasm with which this suggestion was received clearly indicated that the need for such an organization would justify its existence.

During the subsequent weeks there were many discussions, and plans were formulated under the chairmanship of Vernon "Duke" DuBois. By the June recess, most of the ground work was completed. In the fall of 1921 a committee was appointed

to send a petition to the university asking for permission to organize. It was granted by the faculty of medicine in November. Approval and full grant was given by the board of trustees of Howard University, December 7, 1921. Thus the Alpha Chapter of Chi Lambda Kappa Honorary Dental Fraternity became a reality, having for its purpose the awarding of memberships for excellence in scholarship.

The constitution was formally presented to the body December 18, 1921, and was duly ratified. The following officers were elected: Vernon DuBois, president; Eugene Mavritte, vice-president; Fleming Norris, treasurer, and I served as secretary for three years. The other seven students also became charter members.

Eugene Mavritte composed the induction rituals and designed the first fraternity key. Orange and black were chosen as the fraternity's colors. The original membership certificates were printed in orange and black. Only sophomores were eligible for membership, and only upon certification of good scholarship by the dean of the dental school.

The first elected members included James H. Barnhill, Bernard Christmas, Eugene Dabney, Harry Hardwick, William Mason, Hosea Proffit, Sylvester Smith, William Washington, Harrison Meekins, Ernest Wetmore, Leonard L. Lewis and Samuel Williamson.

We moved to 1800 Fourth Street, Northwest, in the fall of 1923 and dubbed the building "The Castle." This building was the headquarters of the "Clique," as we were called by our classmates, until graduation in June, 1924.

With the increase in size of the study group, it became necessary to arrange a regular schedule in order to facilitate group study. The following volunteer coaches supervised the study periods:

DuBois and Presley, Materia Medica; Washington and Absalom, Prosthetic Dentistry; Bacon and Smith, Oral Surgery; Mason and Hardwick, Crown and Bridgework; Best and Dabney, Metallurgy; Herbert, Radiography; Edwards and Norris, Operative Dentistry; Mavritte, Anatomy.

Each member was taxed to help equip a laboratory at "The Castle" in order that we might improve our techniques and maintain the principle upon which the fraternity was founded.

Other elected members of the fraternity during my school



Chi Lambda Kappa Honorary Fraternity, 1933-40

terms were F. E. Everley, John Ford, T. A. Giles, Walter Gibson, William Jenkins, S. A. Linsey, R. L. Lockett, G. E. Monroe, L. E. Paxton and R. B. Pearson.

We gave our first informal dance Friday, March 28, 1924, at the Capital City Clef Club.

Ten of the charter members graduated with the class of '24. Finus Clayton transferred in 1923 to Meharry Dental College

to continue his dental studies. I was awarded the first prize of one hundred dollars in gold donated by the late Dr. Charles E. Bentley of Chicago, Ill., for maintaining the highest average for four years. Vernon DuBois was second, Eugene Mavritte was awarded twenty-five dollars for being the best "all-around" student for four years. All of the other members maintained a high scholastic average for the entire four years.

In 1925 Ernest Wetmore received the Dr. Charles E. Bentley Prize for maintaining the highest average for four years.

All of the charter members are in active practice and enjoying some degree of success. Dr. Eugene Mavritte is instructor at the College of Dentistry, Howard University, Washington, D.C.; Dr. C. P. Absalom is a member of the executive board of the National Dental Association; Dr. Fleming Norris is chairman of the exhibits of the National Dental Association. Each member is striving to maintain the principles upon which the Chi Lambda Kappa Honorary Dental Fraternity was founded.

The present members of Chi Lambda Kappa Honorary Fraternity of Howard Dental School take this opportunity to extend a hearty greeting to all the graduate members for their effort in establishing this organization, which, by virtue of its constitution, fosters scholarship and integrity of character. Furthermore, we especially call to the attention of all prospective and present students of Howard Dental College that there is such an organization in the school, and we sincerely hope that an earnest effort be put forth by each and every student of the school to become a member of this society.

George H. Jones, President.
Stanford A. Roman, Secretary.
Granville M. Norris.
John W. Butcher.
George I. Johnson, Jr.
Morris Kelman.

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