



D.C. Area Phi Beta Kappa Association

founded December 6, 1913

A Brief History

By

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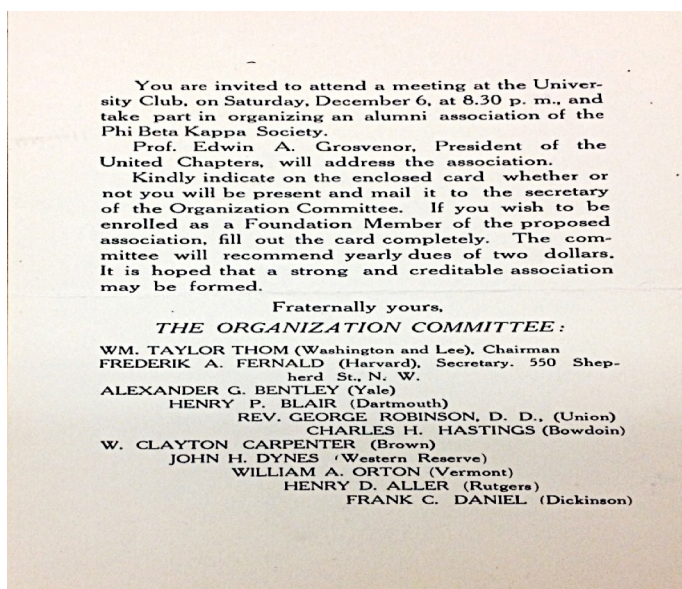
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Introduction

This history of our Association is the result of countless hours of research conducted by past presidents Christel McDonald and Paul Lubliner with the help of fellow member Korrin Bishop. Most of the research from 1913 through the 1950s is based on old documents that the Association stored at the Society headquarters in the early 1980s, which were later passed on with the Society's own documents to be archived at the Library of Congress. Information from the last 30 years is from notes and materials that members of the association still have in their possession. Online research and recollections from some of our members also helped inform this history. Each of us thoroughly enjoyed the process of putting this narrative together.

The Formation of the Association

The D.C. Phi Beta Kappa Association was formed in 1913, a time Woodrow Wilson became President of the United States, workers protested against long hours and low wages, suffragettes demanded equal voting rights, and 22 women at Howard University created Delta Sigma Theta, now the largest Black Women's sorority in the world. The founding of our association and other associations across the country at this time was due to the tireless work of Phi Beta Kappa Secretary Oscar Vorhees.



Invitation to founding meeting

He worked for four years with Phi Betes in Washington, D.C. to attempt the formation of an association. Reading the correspondence between the United Chapters in New York and Phi Betes living in Washington DC, it seemed the only real challenge to starting an association was finding people with enough time in their busy careers. The United Chapters in New York constantly updated the list of Phi Betes who moved to Washington, and eventually from those lists an Organizational Committee was formed.

In the fall of 1913 an invitation was mailed to all on the list to attend a meeting on December 6, 1913 to organize a Phi Beta Kappa Association. The invitation was well received. On December 6, 1913, ninety Phi Beta Kappa alumni living in the Washington D.C. area gathered at the University Club on 15th and I Streets, NW,

Washington, D.C. and founded *The Phi Beta Kappa Association in the District of Columbia*.

Developments within the Association

The participation of women

Interestingly, the Phi Beta Kappa Association in the District of Columbia (now known as the D.C. Area Phi Beta Kappa Association) did not have any women members at the time of its founding. Our research revealed that the DC Association's Constitution was modeled after the New York Phi Beta Kappa (PBK) Association's Constitution, which was established in 1877. At that time, no Phi Beta Kappa women were living in New York City, as women were first admitted into the PBK Society 1875. Obviously, the organizers of a future association in the District of Columbia overlooked this important detail of Phi Beta Kappa women, several of whom had moved to Washington, D.C. between 1875 and 1913.

Mr. F.A.Ferrald, the Secretary of the Association, aware of this fact, wrote in a postscript in May 1914 to Dr. Vorhees that he had the names of 50 Phi Bete women in D.C., and that he had contacted four or five of them to organize an alumnae organization, one of whom accepted his suggestion. He later reported that 32 PBK women held a banquet "with much spirited discussion;" while they decided to form an association, no association was ever activated.

The issue of women was raised again 11 years later, in 1925, when the United Chapters held a fund-raiser in Washington, D.C. with letters addressed to all Phi Betes living in this city, including women. Ms. Caroline L. Hunt, receiving such a letter, wrote back to the United Chapters, wondering why she should make a financial contribution when she was not welcome in the local association in Washington, D.C. Secretary Vorhees responded to Ms. Hunt with the suggestion that women should either be part of the organization in D.C. or form their own association as women in New York had done just before the turn of the century, but he had no control over this decision. It wasn't until three years later in 1929 that the D.C. Association finally admitted women.

The integration of Blacks into the DC Association life

In tandem with the issues regarding greater involvement of women in the Phi Beta Kappa Association in the District of Columbia came the issue of race. The United Chapters has inducted black men into the Society since 1877 and black women since 1899 and regularly updated the roster of PBKs living in Washington, D.C., but the names were not an indication of race. While the Association's invitations to the

annual meeting went to everyone on their list, most black members did not seem to respond to the invitations because the venue for the meetings was most often in places such as the University Club, the Cosmos Club and restaurants, places known not to allow access to Blacks. The DC Association seems to have tried to find ways to circumvent the restrictions regarding Blacks in public venues, however, there were only rare cases when black Phi Betes joined the official meetings.

In the 1940s, the tensions grew as more Black Phi Betes felt purposefully excluded from Association activities correspondence between the United Chapters and Association leaders show that everyone was trying to find a solution. In the meantime, PBK Faculty at Howard University began its application process to host its own PBK Chapter in Washington, D.C., which was finally granted in 1953. Even so, this did not settle the matter of Blacks joining the Association and participating in its meetings because the status of Blacks in the United States in general had changed little; segregation remained an obstacle to organizing association events at venues because race or ethnicity remained an issue.

It is, nevertheless, noteworthy that as early as of Spring 1926, the United Chapters stated repeatedly that “in theory, Phi Beta Kappa has eliminated all consideration of race, color, creed and sex”. To translate this into reality was the challenge.

The use of the words “in theory” describes what continued to be true into the late 1960s and beyond. Whites and Blacks, even belonging to the same organization, did not meet together on a regular basis. While small improvement occurred in local government administrations and at the work place, Blacks were rarely welcome, if not officially excluded, from clubs, theaters and other public venues. Over the decades, our Association has made many efforts to reach out to all Phi Betes regardless of color, ethnicity and gender.

Like in many other organizations here in Washington, even today we rarely see African Americans, Blacks, and other ethnic groups or individuals in our PBK Association environment. When Howard University Chapter invites our Association president to the inductions, we try to spread the word that the inductees are welcome to join our Association, but very few do. We hope this will change.

Application for a Phi Beta Kappa Association Charter in 1938

On November 21, 1938, the Phi Beta Kappa Association of the District of Columbia filled out the application form to apply for a charter. The form indicates the foundation date of December 6, 1913 and states that there were between 1000 and 1500 Phi Beta Kappa members in this region (which included contiguous counties of Maryland and Virginia). The number of active members given was 215, holding six

to eight meetings throughout the Fall to Spring season. The usual attendance was about 60 persons, with annual dues of \$2.

While the Association waited for the Phi Beta Kappa Senate to approve its charter, it celebrated its 25 anniversary on December 6th. At the celebration, the Secretary of the Association, Mr. Hemelt, laid out how the Association tried to live up to the Phi Beta Kappa ideals, both in some special activity attempted from time to time, and in calling the attention to the eighty-some speakers the Association had had since 1913. These lectured ran the gamut and included, "Factors of Heredity and Environment", "Adult Education", "the New Unity in Religion," "the Land of Pygmies," "Old and New theories of Gravitation", "Virgil: Patriot, Prophet, Poet" and "Palestine" among others.

Shortly after the celebration, on December 20, 1938, Mr. Hamelt received a letter from the United Chapters informing him that the Phi Beta Kappa Senate approved the Association's charter under the name: The Phi Beta Kappa Association in the District of Columbia. About 55 years later, in the early 1990s, that name was changed to our official name today: *The D.C. Area Phi Beta Kappa Association* to show that we welcome members from the whole Metropolitan Area of Washington, D.C.

The History of the Association during the Later Part of the Twentieth Century

From the 1950s and into the 1970s, there wasn't much of the D.C. Area Phi Beta Kappa Association that was not touched by Edward R. Place. Place served several terms as president during this era, and in the years that he was not heading the Association, was involved with the organization's Board through other positions. In later years, he served under the title of President Emeritus, a label that further codified his honor within the Association.

Place was a public relations consultant in government and private industry for the majority of his career, operating his own public relations firm, Edward R. Place Associates, in both Washington and Boston. As the mid-sixties were under way, Place became increasingly interested in world peace efforts, and affiliated himself with several related organizations, including the American Peace Society, the World Peace Through Law Center, and the United Nations Association of the U.S.A. It was likely Place's interest in world peace efforts that led to the appearance of John R. Hall, Foreign Affairs Officer of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, as a speaker at the Association's September 24, 1965 meeting. Hall's address to the Association was entitled, "To Be or Not to Be—The Question of Peace."

In a letter to Carl Billman, the 1965 Secretary of the United Chapters of Phi Beta Kappa, Place attached a copy of Hall's address to be considered for publication in *The Key Reporter*. Place reported that the meeting had 80 paid dinner guests, and that he "received many compliments on Mr. Hall's address." He further declared his feelings on the importance of Hall's topic, writing, "I don't need to tell you how vital the question of peace is in this nuclear age. I am devoting my attention to this problem, and will attend the White House Conference on International Cooperation starting next Sunday here."

Topics surrounding peace efforts in the nuclear age continued throughout this era with a talk at the June 14, 1968 meeting titled, "Progress Report on the World Peace Through Law Center," and at the February 9, 1971 meeting called, "Nuclear Energy—Some Insights and Outlooks."

The typical format of the Association's meetings included speakers, as well as a meal and various meeting announcements. Meeting announcements could include items such as the "PBK of the Month" and the "PBK Couple of the Month," as well as general news about members. As a prominent example, the November 20, 1970 meeting agenda included a letter addressed to Edward R. Place from President Richard Nixon regarding Association member, Nancy Hanks. The letter reads:

Dear Mr. Place: It is always a special pleasure to pay tribute to a woman who has made an outstanding contribution to the life of her community and country. And it gives me special pride on this occasion since the lady happens to be a prominent member of my Administration. As the Phi Beta Kappa Association of the District of Columbia honors Miss Nancy Hanks, I want you to know how much I share your appreciation of her talents and how much the distinction she brings to your Association daily benefits our society and our way of life. My congratulations to Nancy, and best wishes to all who attend your dinner. Sincerely, Richard Nixon

Association meetings took place at a variety of locations, including the Ballroom of the Hotel Willard, the Gold Room at the Woodner hotel, the Cosmos Club, the Folger Shakespeare Library, the Embassy of China, and a board member's apartment at the Watergate Hotel. At the August 10, 1973 meeting, it was decided that the number of meetings for the following year would be cut from eleven to eight in order to increase attendance and provide flexibility for event planning.

In addition to the traditional meetings, the Association planned a variety of social and philanthropic events throughout this era. This included events such as a guided tour of the Smithsonian Museum of History and Technology in 1973, the donation of

eyeglasses to the Prevention of Blindness Society at the January 20, 1965 Association meeting, and the celebration of the Association's Diamond Jubilee (75th Anniversary) in December of 1988. The Diamond Jubilee featured a tour of colonial Williamsburg, Virginia and a colonial dinner at the Royce hotel with a balladeer for entertainment.


In addition, the Association planned social events called "Patio Parties," typically held in early summer from the 1960s into the 1990s. Both the 1965 and 1970 patio parties were held in collaboration with Phi Gamma Delta and held at Phi Gamma

Delta's headquarters. The 1970 patio party's honorary guest was Bryce Harlow, counselor to President Nixon, and the 1965 party included a talk on, "Farmers, their organizations and the paradox confronting them." Whether meetings or social events, the Association's activities were wont to weave in intellectual discourse into the happenings.

One of the most well known speakers during this time period was Ralph Nader, a 1955 Phi Beta Kappa Princeton graduate. He spoke to the Association in 1968

about his best-selling auto-safety book, *Unsafe at Any*

The Phi Beta Kappa Association
in the District of Columbia
ROOM 404, 1507 M STREET, N.W.
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20005



Ralph Nader

First Meeting of 1968: Saturday, January 27. Cash bar - 6:30 p.m.; Dinner - 7:30 p.m.

Place: Ballroom of the Hotel Willard, 14th Street & Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.

Speaker: RALPH NADER, Class of 1955 at Princeton, where he was elected to Phi Beta Kappa; Harvard Law '58; author of the best-seller auto-safety book, "Unsafe at Any Speed," which sold 450,000 hard-cover and paperback copies, and earned him \$55,000. An attorney who was an adviser to the Senate sub-committee investigating automobile hazards, he has also been a consultant to government agencies, legislative committees, and universities, and is the author of articles and lectures that have alerted the legal profession to the need for preventive action to bring automobile safety under a more comprehensive rule of law.

Dinner Chairman: Miss Janet E. Anderson of the Executive Committee, who may be contacted for information at home, 234-0533, or at her office, 963-4429.

Door Prizes: Copies of "Unsafe at Any Speed," autographed by the author.

Phi Beta Kappa of the Month: Mrs. Chase S. Osborn, Vice President of the International Movement for Atlantic Union (15 countries), and recently returned from Belgium. She was recipient on Nov. 4, 1967 of an "Outstanding Achievement Award" from the University of Michigan, where she was elected to Phi Beta Kappa in 1922 and earned her Master of Arts in 1930. She is a member of the Phi Beta Kappa Associates.

Dinner reservations should be made by Monday, Jan. 22, if possible. Dinner will feature Filet mignon. \$6.50 per plate, including tax and gratuity. Please send your checks to Kenneth McGill, Secretary-Treasurer, at Room 404, 1507 M Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20005.

Ralph Nader Speaks to D.C. PBK

Speed. An autographed copy of his book was given as a door prize at the meeting.

A few topics of discussion recurred amongst both the D.C. Area Phi Beta Kappa Association and the United Chapters of Phi Beta Kappa during this era, in which Edward R. Place played an active voice.

The first issue concerned wearing the Phi Beta Kappa key. In the February 24, 1971 publication of *The New York Times*, there was an article titled, "Why Women Seldom Wear the Phi Beta Kappa Key." Some women interviewed for the article mentioned that, post-graduation, Phi Beta Kappa didn't feel like a big part of their daily lives, and others mentioned that it could sometimes feel like a hindrance when applying for non-academic jobs.

The simple conventions of wearing the key caused additional controversy. In both the previously mentioned *New York Times* article, as well as a 1955 article in *The Washington Daily News*, Edward R. Place is described as a rebel trendsetter in his wearing of the key. For many years, it was custom to either wear the key on a vest or a watch chain. Describing vests and watch chains as "old hat," Place began wearing his key on a gold-chain tie clasp. Nervous first about how the more veteran members of Phi Beta Kappa would respond to his breaking of tradition, Place found affirmation from Dr. William T. Hastings, Phi Beta Kappa's national president in 1955, at an event where Dr. Hastings pointed to the tie clasp and remarked, "Very ingenious. I'm glad to see you young fellows still appreciate the key enough to find a way to wear it. We old timers still have our watch chains, but they don't look quite right on your generation."

A second recurring topic of conversation amongst the Association was the guidelines around electing members to Phi Beta Kappa. Many Association members felt that the organization was becoming too lax in its standards for admittance. At the December 11, 1970 meeting of the Association, Edward R. Place raised this topic for discussion. At the meeting's end, the Association had unanimously passed a resolution that called upon the United Chapters of Phi Beta Kappa "to stand immovable on its past standards of admitting undergraduates to its ranks solely on the basis of academic achievement as measured in a way satisfactory to the college chapter." On December 29, 1970, the United Chapters responded with a letter expressing solidarity with the Association's stance and sharing that a special committee was being established "to work out a statement reaffirming [Phi Beta Kappa's] principles and also to prepare recommendations on viable ways of evaluating scholarly performance."

When it came to the Association, admission was not strict beyond the requirement of being a Phi Bete. The Association actively recruited, including contacting young

members from nearby universities and asking the Society to provide the Association with additional publicity, as well as the names and addresses of known Phi Betes living in the D.C. area for outreach via mail.

After decades of organizational growth, scholarly debate, and community leadership, the Association neared the end of its history throughout this period, beckoning in the new millennium and a slowly growing cohort of young Phi Betes moving to Washington from all across the country.

The D.C. Area Phi Beta Kappa Association in the 21st Century: Change tempered by the continuity of decades past

The most rapid changes in the Association have occurred during its recent history in the 21st century, particularly since 2010. These changes are due primarily to two enabling factors: changing demographics in the D.C. area and advances in technology. As of 2013, more than half of the Association's membership graduated in 2009 or later with the rate of joins for each year of cohorts having greater numbers than the previous year.

For the majority of its history, the Association was composed primarily of seasoned professionals or retirees. These members included educators, medical and legal practitioners, and prominent figures throughout the U.S. government. This is evident in the 1917 Register of the Association. Further, a survey from 1984 found that the percentages of highest degrees earned were roughly as follows: Bachelors degree (13%); Masters degree (60%); and doctorate or law degree (27%). About half were semi-retired or completely retired.

During this time period, the Association reached out to recent graduates at nearby universities, but had very limited luck recruiting. However, by 1994, the Association engaged a recent graduate, Eric Holt, to serve on the executive committee. Eric sought to increase recruitment and participation of younger members through the use of happy hours. While this proved a step in the right direction, change manifested itself slowly.

By the early 2000s, the Association finally began to see a steady incline in the number of younger members. Momentum in this effort increased with the creation of a Young Professionals Program in 2003, which was easily communicated to prospective young Phi Betes as a result of the implementation of online newsletters. The use of an online platform allowed young prospective members easy access to information on the value of Association membership when deciding to join. In addition, this style of communication resulted in young members being more likely

to stay involved in Association events after joining. In 2010, the Association updated its website to a 21st century design and launched an even more comprehensive website two years later—further helping outreach efforts. Since, social media has also played a role in keeping members engaged.

Like the Association as a whole, the current composition of executive committee members and officers comprises a much younger group of people than in previous years. In response to this change, the historically expensive dinners and luncheons of the past, and many of the past formalities have given way to a much more informal atmosphere and less expensive events that cater to the younger generation. As of December 2013, the Association began developing a mentorship program to further meet the needs of its expanding cohort of young professionals. The program will give another outlet for members of all ages to interact with each other, ideally creating a more cohesive organization as a result.

Despite the changes to the Association in recent years, many traditions and themes continue from decades past. One of these traditions is recognizing local area high school seniors based on their academic successes, and their beneficial application of knowledge to their communities.

The Association's High School Awards Program began in 1974 as a Book Award for students in D.C. and was later expanded to include the greater D.C. area and a monetary award. Of note, one of the original committee members, Mary Corinne Rosebrook, who served on the committee until 1989, was still tutoring young D.C. pupils upon her 100th birthday in 1993; her service is as an example of one of the five criteria for the award: *a concern for the responsible exercise and application of knowledge, such as participating in tutoring services, student government, or outstanding citizenship and community activities*. A member of the Association for nearly half a century, Ms. Rosebrook died two months shy of her 108th birthday.

Despite offering a noble service to the local community, the awards program has faced challenges over the years. In 1980, the awards committee raised the issue that awards had been made at all good public schools; only poor ones were left out. Getting submissions from poorer schools in D.C. has been a challenge that continues to this day. While the awards are no longer presented at a dinner, and the ceremony is now more informal, its continued existence is a testament to its importance.

Even as the Association continues to change, old traditions continually manifest themselves in new ways. Holiday parties are still held in the winter, though in the past were often referred to as Christmas Parties. Past president Eddie Eitches used to hold these at his home in the 1990s and 2000s, but since 2008 opened up his

home instead to a new tradition, the Annual Spring Fling. However, this is in many ways simply a new version of the previously mentioned "Patio Parties" held from the 1960s into the 1990s, usually at the home of past president Esther Lawton. The primary difference between the two is that, unlike the Patio Parties, the Annual Spring Fling is held without the installation of officers. This now happens at a later date each year.

To a greater or lesser degree, the Association's events also echo themes of times past. Archeology is one such theme. At the 1979 Christmas get-together, Dr. Robert Jones, a well-known biblical scholar who used to chair the Religious Department at George Washington University (GWU), gave an address on "The Syncretic Archaeological Sites of the Holy Land." During his presentation, he presented a slide show of various digs, including many layers of sites such as Megiddo-Armageddon that shows the claims of various civilizations to the "layers" of the Holy Land. Twenty-six years later, Dr. Eric Cline, chairman of the Department of Classical and Semitic Languages and Literature at GWU, gave a talk entitled "Excavating Megiddo: New Discoveries and Old Debates." In 2013, Dr. Cline gave an update on his excavation work.

The Association's continued interest in international affairs has several themes that have captivated members over the years. One such theme is Russia. In 1920, Baron Korff spoke of the political conditions in Russia during the revolution. In 1957, Julius N. Cahn, Counsel of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee spoke about the course of Soviet Imperialism. Twenty-three years later, in 1980, the Association arranged a dinner meeting at the Fort McNair Officer's Club with Four Star Admiral John S. McCain Jr. who echoed Mr. Cahn's general concerns, but from a naval perspective.

McCain had been slated to speak in 1978, however, he fell ill at that time and so his son, then Director of the Navy/Senate Liaison spoke instead on the military and defense issues facing Congress. His son, John S. McCain III, has since become a well-known Senator from Arizona and was the Republican presidential nominee in the 2008 election.

In 2001, U.S. Senator Richard Lugar, speaking before the Association, addressed the successes of the Nunn-Lugar Act in promoting stability in the nuclear community of the former Soviet Union, in addition to sharing his thoughts on the then recent 9/11 terrorist attacks. And, in a final example of the Association's continued interest in international affairs and discourse on Russia, Mr. E. Wayne Merry, an expert on U.S. - Russian relations at the American Foreign Policy Council, spoke on the current Russian economic and political scene, and its relations with the U.S. regarding

foreign oil and international troop presence in the Middle East at the Annual Business Meeting in 2011.



Supreme Court Assoc. Justice Sotomayor speaks to D.C. PBK

While the overall attendance at a typical event is more modest than in years past, the Association is capable of holding events with high turnout from time to time. One of particular note occurred on April 18, 2012, when well over 100 D.C. Area Phi Beta Kappa Association members and their guests

gathered at the Supreme Court for a question and answer session with Justice Sonia Sotomayor, herself a member of Phi Beta Kappa.

While the Association's meetings and events have taken place all over the D.C. area, there are a few places that have spanned decades of use, including the Cosmos Club, PBK Society headquarters, and Pier 7. And one location will have endured more than a century—The University Club. The Association held its first meeting at the University Club and will hold its 100th Anniversary celebration there 100 years and one day later.