

From the KAΘ Archives...The First Coeds



An Undated Founders Day Message from Bettie Locke Hamilton

Dear Oeta Sisters,

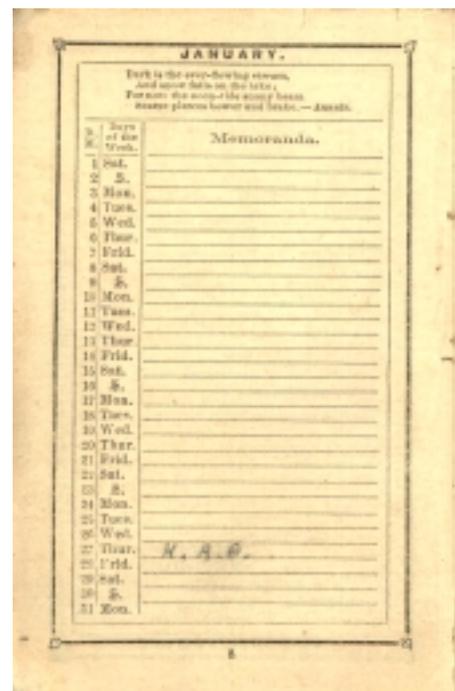
I send love and greetings only wishing I could be with you and help enjoy your banquet, which is so lovely and novel.

I take this opportunity, too, to thank each and all of you for what you have done to make K.A.Θ. what it is today for without the efforts of all girls who followed us – our struggles in trying to found a fraternity for women would have been in vain. With love to each and all of you that wear my pin, I am

*Your Oldest Sister
Bettie Locke Hamilton.*

Bettie Locke was one of the first four women admitted to Indiana Asbury College in 1867. Typical of the period, the first coeds were not welcomed by the male students at Asbury. The college newspaper declared, “Let us present an almost unanimous petition...for this action...to be repealed. If it is not, there are other halls of learning which have not yet experienced the withering touch of this erroneous and demoralizing system.” The women found their position an uncomfortable one. They were shunned by the male students and disparaged by townspeople.

Organizations on campus offered opportunities for friendship, leadership development and academic support, but none included women. When the Phi Gamma Deltas asked Bettie to wear the fraternity’s badge, she replied she would like to be initiated as a member. The group didn’t think that possible, so she declined. Bettie’s father, a professor at Asbury, suggested she form a Greek-letter fraternity for women. Bettie asked Alice Allen to join with her in laying the ground work for the endeavor, and on January 27, 1870, more than two years after they enrolled at Asbury. KAΘ was founded and announced to the college community when the eventual four founding members wore their badges on campus.



Alice Allen entered Asbury when its doors opened to women. Sending a daughter to college was unusual in 1867, especially for a modest midwestern farm family with eleven children. It was not widely believed that women needed a college education. Scientists and doctors considered women physiologically unsuited for academic training. But Alice was bright, and her parents wanted her to have the opportunity for further education. Alice Allen, an innovative educator, taught in Indiana and Illinois and also became a principal before marrying classmate T.J. Brant. The mother of two, she was active in the community and the world at large, attending both the 1876 Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia and the 1893 Chicago World’s Fair. Above is her 1870 date book, documenting the founding of K.A.Θ. on January 27.

“Choosing an Occupation,”
Selections from an essay written by
Hannah Fitch, 1871

Whatever apology may be made for laziness, there is no one who will say that it needs further cultivation or encouragement since the supply already exceeds the demand.

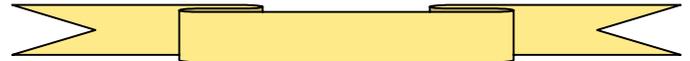
Although activity and energy are always essential to success, yet even with these qualities, none were ever thoroughly successful in any important work in life who had not something like a passion for their calling.

There is a common notion that a collegiate education is a preparation for a learned profession alone; and when students return to their homes to engage in some quiet pursuit, or to share a part of domestic duties the question is gravely asked “what advantage will Calculus be in housekeeping, what use will Astronomy and Geology be in cooking? And what good will Greek and Latin do a young lady in society?”

As if education should consist merely in the acquirement of such knowledge as may be displayed in ordinary conversation, or readily converted into cash or else made to subserve the interests of the kitchen.

Whatever tends to develop the nobler faculties, to strengthen the reasoning powers or to cultivate and refine the taste, is of practical importance and it should be the constant aim of every student to acquire an education as liberal and extensive as circumstances will permit, and at the same time to make it practical by studying with some definite purpose in view.

When women have the courage to choose congenial occupations in which by proper application they may achieve honor and success, then will they attain their greatest influence and whether in the law office, at the merchants counter, in the school room, with sculptor's chisel or painter's brush, or engaged in the daily routine of home duties we shall everywhere find them cheerful and contented, and accomplishing the great work of life.



Hannah Fitch entered Asbury in January 1869, along with her brother. She ranked first in her class but left at the end of the term in the spring of 1869, disappointed in the lack of opportunities to develop friendships and be involved in college affairs. Bettie Locke encouraged her return, silently hoping Hannah would join the founding group of a fraternity for women. Hannah did return and joined this new support group. She became the first woman to serve on the editorial board of the college newspaper, the *Asbury Review*. Hannah became president of the chapter and was the last founder to graduate, in 1873. Because of her indomitable spirit, Theta owes much of its ultimate success to Hannah Fitch. Hannah's badge, first worn on March 14, 1870, is pictured here.



Bettie Tipton, from Mt. Sterling, Kentucky, entered Asbury in the fall of 1869. She remained there one year and became a founding member of KAΘ. She also took part in establishing the Philomathean Society at Asbury. In the fall of 1870 she enrolled at Millersburg College, a school for girls, and graduated from there the following spring. While at Millersburg, Bettie established a new chapter of KAΘ which lasted only the one year she was a student there.

What Do You Think?

- ❖ When the Fraternity was founded, young women were just beginning to attend coeducational colleges. What kind of support did this new organization offer to young women of the 1870s? What does membership in Kappa Alpha Theta offer you today?
- ❖ In her 1871 college essay, Hannah Fitch offered advice to young women of her day on choosing an occupation. Read the selections from her speech. Does the same advice apply today?

The photographs and artifacts reproduced in this piece are from the Kappa Alpha Theta Fraternity Archives. The Archives preserves the records of the Fraternity in order to share the organization's rich history with its members and with the community at large. The archives activity is funded in part by a grant from the Kappa Alpha Theta Foundation.