

Around 1913, Founder Frederick Moore Whitney decided to survey the other Founders and collect their memories of the founding in order to preserve it for posterity. The results of his efforts were so contradictory that he gave up the effort. In a letter he wrote at the end of the effort he stated that if they had been able to all get together in a room for an afternoon that they would have been able to work it out back out but, since they were never going to do that, "we will never know how Delta Chi was founded."

Here is the letter that he had received from Founder Peter Schermerhorn Johnson:

Tulsa, Okla. June 14, 1913

Hon. Fred M. Whitney,  
Rochester, N.Y.

My dear Whitney,

Answering yours of May 15<sup>th</sup> in regard to the early days of Delta Chi, I would say that I believe if the facts were all known that the first idea of a new society to protect the non frat (sic) students grew out of the appointment of the First Law School Sun Editor in the fall of 1889.

You recall, after much trouble we had gotten the board to give the Law School one of the editors; and promptly on the news being known a lot of the Phi Delta Phi fellows assembled the senior class and elected Dan V. Murphy editor as aforesaid.

We juniors made a lively row and got Murphy out and someone else in, but the attention of our boys was called to the lack of organization; and I remember several of us called attention to the fact that we needed a new club to keep anything of the sort from occurring in the future.

You recall that we of Delta Chi had always been pretty chummy, and while the club idea was dropped, the idea of a new law society kept getting stronger and stronger from that time. While I do not say that Delta Chi grew out of a class election dispute, I believe that the first seeds of the organization were planted at that time and sprouted with the starting of Delta Chi a year later.

As to the early meetings I am all in a fog. I believe I was at some and missed some, but I do recall the confabs we had in classrooms and in the corners of the library between classes and I believe Stillman used to carry sections of the ritual in his pockets which he would read to us in a mysterious manner when chance gave us a few moments. But from the time we began getting the society in shape in Dec/ and Jany (sic) 1891 when I began to do some work on committees, I am pretty clear.

The name Delta Chi was suggested by Sweetland as I remember it. No motto was adopted at the time and the matter was left to the future as there was no one who had one ready. In Feby (sic) 1891 the matter of a motto was brought up and I

was appointed to find a suitable motto and report at the following meeting. I did so and suggested a sentiment \_\_\_\_\_. We talked the matter over and they thought we should have a something shorter and I condensed the sentiment into the present motto of the fraternity, with the sentiment as explanatory. I wrote a short explanatory essay regarding the motto at the time and will try to find a copy, as I think the society motto should be impressed on the novitiates more than it is, and probably the reason is that the initiating officers do not know what the motto really means themselves. If I succeed will send you a copy.

The colors too were mine. The red as the foundation color occurred to me at once as being the color of Cornell, and I recall trying out several combinations without getting something original and harmonious, till I saw a brand new law book with a bright red label and noticed how well the light yellow harmonized; so when we met again I got the book and took it right in (sic) meeting and the boys fell for the colors at once and they were adopted then and there.

The Delta Chi chain was suggested by you or Wilkinson, I am not sure yet and was first tried out at the little spread we had, given by O'Malley and Gibbs to celebrate the first victory of members of the society, a the time O'Malley won second on the Oratorical stage for the Law School prize in speaking, and Gibbs won the First Essay prize. We had a lot of schools asking for information; and when the time came to break up I recall that someone said that there should be some way of terminating the meeting and the chain was explained and formed.

It is possible it has been used before, but that was the first time I recall it.

You of course recall the fact that the first house we had was not the one pictured in the prospectus for the new one, but the old Alpha Tau Omega house at the corner of Heustis and Dryden Road.

The one pictured in the prospectus is the second. The first one was furnished and several of the boys roomed there. I recall O'Malley was one of them for the rest told a tale of there being a light in the hall and one of the others woke up in the middle of the night and saw Ed sitting bolt up in bed. On being asked if he was sick he said he was not, but the bed was so hard and he had been sleeping so long, that he thought he would sit up and have a rest. Queer how a thing of that sort sticks in ones memory. Marquis was one of the others I think.

When it came Cornelian time, we decided to have a plate in the annual and wrote for sketches. As a consequence we had the usual lot of lamps, snakes and owls submitted, Tom Sullivan said the one with the owl was owld (sic) and we cracked some other mature jokes. One showed the wall with the streamer, I suggested that we add the hand of humanity reaching for the key of knowledge, which was over the gateway of the Alhambra at Granada. The idea took and that was our first plate. I had intended coming back for my masters degree and had expected to elaborate the idea into a regular coat of arms for the society, but financial reverses made me give up returning and I am ashamed to say it, I have never been back since. But when the new house is dedicated, I am going to be there. Just you note that.

The first Honorary members was Prof. Charles R. Pratt of Elmira, N.Y. – who filled a chair during the spring term of 1891. We took him in at sight, and initiated one of the boys the same evening to show the professor how it was done. (snip)

Stillman I think wrote a large part of the ritual, though I am of impression that Wilkinson had a substantial part of it. (sic)

I remember Bagley said that Stillman was a Mason and had done such good work as he had more experience than the rest in line of secret societies.

The sentiment against taking other fraternity men came to the front at the time that we wanted to take Harry Burr Saunders in. He was a Delta Tau Delta. It was argued strongly that we did not want men of other societies, but as I recall we passed Saunders on the ground that he did not belong to the Cornell chapter and was not active. I may be mistaken in this last.

When it came time to have recognition in the Cornelian, we found that Sigma Chi and Sigma Phi had been given place ahead of us. Bagley and I were appointed to see the editors, but they refused to place us ahead of them on the ground that the standing of each society dated from the time it was reported to the faculty (?) and we had failed to do so and as a consequence lost two places in the book.

Our organization antedated both of the some months. In looking over the rolls of the society I fail to find one name that I am sure should be there as an honorary member. Do you recall that fine fellow Rogers of Elmira, who was with us in the Junior class and was for some cause compelled to drop out in senior year? At a meeting in the spring of 1891 we brought his name up and I am sure we elected him to honorary membership, but I do not see any trace of it in the catalogs. He was one of my warm personal friends and that makes the incident more clear.

We made the first start for a library in the fall of 1891 when the boys moved into the new house. Each one of the members was asked for \$5 and Prof Collin and Prof Finch (?) gave some books.

We had a group picture of the Frat. Made by Howes (I think) I lost mine in the fire, but would give \$10 for one now. If you still have yours, give me the name of the photo man and I will try to induce him to dig up the plate and make me one.

I still have all the photos, with autograph, of the boys I knew at Cornell.

Wilkinson, I believe, originated the grip, and I am quite sure you suggested the pass word. The permanent one.

I do not recall the first candidates, but I think Watkins, Nall, Bagley and Gibbs.

I cannot recall who was the pin committee, but I think Sweetland suggested the idea of a monogram pin.

Do you recall that you and I were on the first song book committee? When they were getting ready the new book, I found a couple of the songs I wrote then and rewrote them and possibly they have been included though I have not seen one.

You went to Oregon about the time we got started, and I was hard at it on the Crescent Pipe Line and we got out of touch before much was done, but really Delta Chi started right in to be something in the way of society right from the start, and now we are within two years of attaining our first quarter century, I can say she is standing strong by her landmarks, though now after twenty years I think I may call them traditions.

Since writing the boys I have been looking for data and what do you think I found, one of the napkins we had at the farewell spread on the night on June 18, 1891, with the autographs of all the boys on it, the date and a large D.X. in ink.

[Note: this napkin is on display in the entryway at the headquarters office] I have also found a copy of the first catalog issued in 1894 and an almost complete set of the quarterly going back to 1904. With an assortment of invitations, the catalog of 1899, and a request to subscribe to the house we now own on Buffalo street. A catalog of 1904, the address list of the students in 1887, and some songs, that have never seen the light of publication. I think you are guilty of one or two, as is John Francis Tucker, that bully little organizer of the New York Univ. Chapter. I have carted this stuff all over the U.S. for years for my Frat. stuff always went right into my trunk and stayed there, so I had more than I thought.

I had a pin made on the Heggie design right after I left college and have worn it all these years, and was unfortunate enough to lose it a couple months ago. I felt bad about it as the stones too were garnets and had formed part of an earring of my mother's wedding jewelry.

I have the Cornellians starting with that of the class of 1891 complete to 1903 and some scattering ones since then. The old ones are unobtainable and if the chapter has no set, I will give them mine a little later as they will assist in keeping the names of the members of the chapter correct. Also they can see the evolution of the frat, designs, and membership, as well as list of the college honors, and it is a long one as I find when I came to look it over not long ago. I may take a day off and compile it before sending them in, as I think our showing is something fine.

While I have never been back, I have been able to do some work for Delta Chi. When the matter was still uncertain at Dickinson, as to applying for a charter, I was there in the course of my business on the pipe line and called on an old school friend in the arts course there, Fred E. Downs, '93 formerly from Claverack College that prep school where Bagley and I prepared. In the course of the day I made mention that I had been connected with Delta Chi at Cornell, "why" he said "some of my friends here are thinking of applying for a charter but they don't know anything about the society, and don't seem able to find out much." A little later he called in a couple of the chief ones, Andrew J. Lynch and a couple more whose names do not occur to me now, and for a couple hours I talked, explained and laudated (sic) Delta Chi, while they showered me with questions, soon after they applied for a charter and I have always felt as if I had had a little part in starting that old and prosperous chapter.

The chapter at University of West Virginia I was more closely connected with, as Dorr C. Casto one of the founders of the chapter and I were warm personal friends and when he contemplated entering W. Va. I had him well talked into organizing a chapter there with several men before the One Frat rule came into effect. Casto was a Phi Delta Theta but not a member of the Chapter at W. Va. He was formerly from Ohio University an old school at Athens, Ohio, a few miles from Parkersburg. I should like to see the West Virginia Chapter restored at some time in the future, if it can be made to conform to the standards of the present fraternity. It is going to be a great school in the future.

Oklahoma Univ. is too new to be a good field yet, but I hope we can get an application from a good chapter at Univ. of Colo. While the law school is not large, the standard of the men is excellent, and as I lived in Colo. / and still spend many of my summers there have a direct interest in getting the Colorado Chapter started. In fact

my Mother and I are going out to La Jara, Colo. where I used to live, next month, and if I can get in touch with some good material will try to start a petitioning body. The course is three or four years and about a hundred students are in the school aside from men in other courses taking law. Many of the mining engineers study it in connection with their work.

We should have more southern chapters, Tulane, Vanderbilt, North Carolina, Alabama; are all fine schools, well endowed and every year we delay entering them militates against us. We are a national fraternity, and I think our ambition should be to have one chapter in every state. The southern field is a growing one, we are fast getting over the war, and the bloody shirt will not wave often in future; it is a great field for young men, and the law is of first importance in most parts of the south where the resources are mineral. So let Delta Chi stir herself and enter this field and grow with it as she has in the east. Who in our day would ever have thought of Cornell with 5000 students, but lots of big state universities out here have two or three thousand.

The more I think of it the more I think I will rewrite the essay on the motto and send a copy to you and one to Bro Bride. I recall enough of it to fix the rest.

Fred it has been almost all day to write this letter and I can assure you I have enjoyed it. It has brought back thoughts of things that had partially passed from memory, and really as I finish this I can almost think that I am a boy again at Cornell and the eight o'clock bell will call me out to meet professor Collin in regard to torts, and personal damages. But when I look at my Diploma which hangs on the wall of my office and see that the red of the ink has faded so as to almost illegible, I can well believe that the coming Wednesday marks 22 years since I graduated at Cornell. But it is a fine thing to think that you are still remembered there and that we still figure on the list of Delta Chi as honorable members.

I think I have covered the field as outlined in your letter but if there is anything further do not hesitate to call on me, for as you say the fraternity needs a good history for the future, and the time to get the primary data is when the founders are still alive and ready to give the facts.

So good bye, I hope the world is using you well and you will find time to write me a personal letter.

Yours ever in D.X.

(signed)

P.S. Johnson

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I do not do my own work on letters as a rule so excuse looks of this.