

# Phi Beta Kappa Granddaddy of Greeks

By PAULA EVANS

The granddaddy of Greek letter organizations — Phi Beta Kappa — will have a premature birthday party on the OU campus tonight. Area Phi Beta Kappas and friends will celebrate the society's 183rd anniversary at a Founder's Day Dinner at 6:30 p.m. in Dining Room 1 of the Union Building.

The organization, now synonymous with scholarship began as a literary and debating society at William and Mary College, Williamsburg, Va., on Dec. 5, 1776.

The young Virginians who founded it were a lively group, meeting regularly to debate issues from the advantages of "theatrical exhibitions" to states and dangers of a standing army in peacetime.

Fraternal spirit was fostered by social meetings at the Raleigh Tavern, now restored in Colonial Williamsburg.

The group introduced such fraternity characteristics as secret oaths, Greek and Latin mottoes and a special handshake to the American scene.

Later, as Phi Beta Kappa changed from an active organization with social overtones to an honorary organization, these characteristics were abandoned to be adopted by the fraternity system.

But the society, which soon included chapters at Harvard and Yale, and stands at 164 chapters today, kept the original badge. Today's Phi Beta Kappa key differs from the original only in that it is gold instead of silver, and has a stem (added for watch-winding).

The Greek letters of the society standing for "Love of wisdom the guide of life" are centered on one side of the square badge. Three stars and the finger pointing upward symbolize the young scholar's principles — friendship, morality and literature (learning). The student's Latin learning came into play on the other side with an engraved SP (Societas Philosophiae) and the founding date.

By the time "Oklahoma Alpha" (the OU chapter) was chartered in 1920, secret oaths had been abolished, activities had simmered down to election and initiation meetings, and women were admitted to membership.

Now, society publishes "The American Scholar," a non-technical journal, and the "Key Re-



**KEYED TO THE FUTURE**—A member of the first group of Pi Beta Kappas initiated at OU gives teaching tips to the top-ranking undergraduate Phi Beta at the University. Lucille Searcy, English teacher at Norman High School, was initiated in 1920. Pat Shubert, senior government major from Oklahoma City, was initiated as a junior last spring with a 3.963 grade average. (Transcript Photo)

porter," a news magazine for members. Phi Beta Kappa Associates, a contributory group, sponsor a national lectureship program.

OU joined the ranks of institutions with Phi Beta Kappa chapters after one refusal and a deferment period. This is not to the University's discredit, explained Grace E. Ray, professor of journalism who was a member of the first group initiated at OU.

"A university must have a certain number of scholars who have been initiated into Phi Beta Kappa at other universities, to obtain a charter," she said.

OU's chapter is the only one in the state.

The petition for membership is a yellowed little booklet dated Nov. 15, 1915. It prefaces the application with "Since Oklahoma is comparatively new and unknown, some explanation of conditions may be desirable."

The petition shows OU's rapid increase in enrolment, which rose from 793 in 1911-12 to 1,687 in 1914-15. Sepia-colored photographs display the "newer campus buildings of modified

Collegiate architecture" — the Administration Building, Science Hall (now Drama Building), the "new law building," Monnet Hall, and architects' plans for the Chemistry Building.

Signatures on the petition, headed by Stratton Brooks, OU president, include two deans, nine department heads and five other instructors.

These men were charter members of Oklahoma Alpha, but they soon had company. At the first installation, May 24, 1920, 106 students and alumni joined the ranks.

Since that time, approximately 45 members have been elected each year, so there are an estimated 1,500-1,700 members from OU. The Phi Beta Kappa handbook lists living membership in the country at 155,000.

"Voting members" (dues-paying faculty) at OU elect new members in the spring. A maximum of 10 per cent of the senior class, with no one to have an average below 3.4, can be elected. Forty-seven members were initiated last spring, including the top five per cent of the junior class. They are Patricia Shubert and John T. O'Neal, both from Oklahoma City, James Walton Bruce Jr., Ardmore, and Judith Wynn, Bartlesville.

Grade averages are computed mathematically and election is practically automatic, although it is possible to vote out someone of poor character.

Approximately 125 key recipients live in the Norman area. This includes 85 OU faculty members, 24 area residents and 16 students and graduate students. Figures are not exact because members don't always declare themselves, John Alley, secretary-treasurer and associate professor of modern languages, said.