DELTA KAPPA EPSILON

ETA Chapter H
University of Virginia
1852-2002

- Friends from the heart forever -

MEMORIES
THE UNIVERSITY FROM 1855 TO 1860.

BY L. M. BLACKFORD, Eتا 1857 M. A.

I was a student of the University from 1855 to 1860. These, with 1860-61, were the years of its largest numbers—558, 645, 633, 625, 606—the average being 611 students. The Virginia students averaged 346; Alabama, with 46, and South Carolina, with 39, coming next. Being under the necessity of earning my way by teaching during two of them, I accomplished in five years no more than the work of four; completing the full academic course, with some extras, and securing the only two academic degrees then conferred.

Until the opening of the railroad in 1859, travel from Lynchburg, where I lived, to Charlottesville, was either wholly by coach, or by canal to Scottsville and thence by stage-a journey of twenty-four hours. Beside my brother, the only other prospective student in the coach, as far as I remember, was Wood Bouldin, (Eتا 1855) Jr., of Charlotte, who has been my friend ever since. He lived in a room on West Lawn, between the houses now occupied by Prof. F. H. Smith and N. K. Davis—then by Prof. Gessner Harrison and J. S. Davis—a region known as “Parnassus Block.” My brother and I lived in a small house in the court behind, in a room occupied by my father’s sons for eleven consecutive years. The only rooms in college in which it was then possible for a student to live singly were those in “bachelor’s block” at the south end of West Lawn.

Greek letter fraternities increased rapidly in my time and were near a score by 1860. At first the Delta Kappa Epsilon, Phi Kappa Psi, Beta Theta Pi and Phi Kappa Sigma were the prominent ones, but the Kappa Alpha and Epsilon Alpha rose later. Absolute secrecy in all such organizations was a more prominent feature then than now. The only convivial club I remember was the D.E.D.I.L. The Jefferson and Washington Literary Societies—whose initiation fee was then $10—though strong, were not the only ones, as the Columbian, meeting in Temperance Hall, was pretty well sustained. Intermediate celebrations were then held February 22nd and April 13th, when each of the older societies had an orator and Washington’s Farewell Address and the Declaration of Independence, respectively, were read. I presided over the Jeff. on one of these occasions. In 1857 debaters’ medals—the only society medals previous to the war—were inaugurated. Thomas C. Nelson, (Eتا 1854) of Hanover (who died the following autumn) got it in the Jeff, and Given Campbell, (Eتا 1855) of Kentucky, in the Wash. The V.U. Magazine was established in 1856, and the magazine medal, founded the following year, was taken first in 1858 by John Johnson, (Eتا 1857) of South Carolina, the Jeff. valedictorian twelve months later. The Young Men’s Christian Association was organized in October, 1858, with John Johnson (now rector of St. Philip’s Church, Charleston, S.C.) as President; L. M. Blackford and Thomas Hume, Jr., as Secretaries; and J. William Jones as Treasurer. The meetings were in Temperance Hall. This year the following a catalogue, with constitution, list of officers, etc., was published, from which it appears that the numbers grew from 112 the first to 175 the second session.

The commencement of 1860, July 4th, the last before the war was among the most brilliant ever known at the University. Mr. D.W. Voorhees, of Indiana, was the orator of the societies, and he addressed an overflowing and enthusiastic audience. The number of M. A.’s, who averaged less than ten during my five years, was eleven, the largest in the history of the institution. At the head of the list stood the name of its facile princeps—William Allan—the late lamented head of McDonogh School in Maryland. We were all invited to the alumni dinner in the library in the rotunda, which was a delightful affair. Mr. B. Johnson Barbour presided, and among the speakers were Mr. Voorhees, Mr. John Randolph Tucker and Dr. Gessner Harrison. Few who heard them will forget the humorous passages between the last named, when the great lawyer and wit, amid shouts of merriment, openly admitted that his old professor might “take his hat.” That commencement and alumni dinner will be long remembered by those fortunate enough to be present. It was many sad years before there was one of either again, and neither, probably, has since been equalled in interest.

There are, surprisingly, very few hard-and-fast rules in the world of fraternities, but one of them is this: if a chapter has a good, involved, active alumni association, it will be a good chapter. The reverse is not always true, but without a supportive group behind it, a chapter labors under an immense disadvantage. A dedicated alumni group can step in when problems occur and help straighten things out. It’s happened at virtually every DKE chapter, time after time.

Get to know your alumni. Make them feel welcome when they drop by— it’s their house, too (possibly more so than yours, as in many cases they own it). As a pledge your main responsibility is simply to get to know them.
MORE OF A HISTORY OF UVA
BY CHARLES M. KINSOLVING, ETA ’15

Few southern universities have remained unchanged since the turn of the century and in the category of those which still hold to the traditions of the “antebellum” days-and “antebellum” in the southern vernacular means pre-Civil War-the University of Virginia is perhaps an outstanding example. Not that the university has not flourished; nor that its equipment and attendance have not practically tripled in the last three decades; but it still remains Mr. Jefferson’s University and still retains idiosyncrasies peculiar to the institution it was-in the days when Edgar Allen Poe received his early inspirations there.

Perhaps no university in the country can boast a more beautiful campus or a more romantic geographical setting. Few intellectuals realize today that prior to the Civil War the State University of the “Old Dominion” had a larger student attendance than either Harvard or Yale. The explanation for this condition lies in the fact that in the “antebellum” days the “Old Dominion” was a national criterion of tradition and was nearly twice as large as it is today, to say nothing of having the reputation of being the most aristocratic of any of the original thirteen states. It was natural-then, that southern planters and the empire builders engaged in developing territories which had once been Virginia, should send their sons to Charlottesville on the eastern slope of the Blue Ridge Mountains, surrounded by a community which embraced the homes of such founders of the Republic as Madison, Monroe and Jefferson.

Although the University of Virginia is a state university, endowed in part by the state, the greater part of its support emanates from private endowment so that it is never known as a state institution in the sense that state universities are known elsewhere. There are older colleges in the State of Virginia; for instance, William and Mary College, and Washington and Lee, which was known as Liberty College before Mr. Jefferson made “the” University “the child of his old age.” Jefferson’s ideas on religious freedom and personal liberty together with the old Virginian concept of gentlemanly conduct are still intangibly imbued in the present day spirit of the place which boasts an elective system as far as studies are concerned and complete freedom of action outside of the classroom with one restraining feature which is perhaps the great moral influence in the lives of the student body—the honor system.

At Virginia the honor system is really what the name connotes. It has always been taken seriously. Unfortunately undergraduates have fallen back on the perfection of Virginia’s honor system to excuse other deficiencies and vagrancies in their student activities.

No matter how much alcoholic content a student’s diet may require in order to stimulate a proper degree of application to the course he is taking, and no matter how gregarious may be his nocturnal wanderings, strict adherence to the principles of the system keeps him “in the fold” as long as his self-indulgence is moderate. Cheating in examinations and questionable work at cards mean expulsion, not by the faculty of the university, but by the culprit’s fellow students.

Critics of the university have affirmed the belief that southern laziness and shiftlessness together with the accepted tenet that “a gentleman can do no wrong” have lowered the standards at this institution of learning and have developed a “laissez-faire” policy which prevents the average student from placing any great importance on achievement. It is true that the country around Charlottesville abound with lovers of sport, admirers of good living, and hospitable homes, with here and there a pack of hounds which horse-loving undergraduates may follow.
Associations of student formed for the sake of viviality abound in plenty. Drinking is a common pursuit amongst the undergraduates except that the average Virginia student holds his liquor like a gentleman. Inebriation and obvious intoxication in the presence of women is decried. An individual who makes a public spectacle of himself will find himself taboo. This is however not the case with groups of individuals. “If we are going to get drunk let’s all get drunk together,” seems to be the battle cry whenever conviviality is sought at gatherings. Various drinking societies have existed and become extinct. One of the most notorious was disbanded after an all-night vigil with John Barleycorn when the faculty awoke to find that the natural history museum had been broken into, and stuffed dinosaurs and mastodons had been grouped upon the lawn in somewhat exotic postures. Three students were expelled to the horror of their fellow students who counted the exploit highly original. The aftermath of the famous theft of the hand of the library clock has just come to light. Only last year an old graduate who left the university 40 years ago, wrote to the president for permission to return some stolen property provided he would not be prosecuted for the theft. In due course the parcel post brought the hands of the “Rotunda” clock removed on a wild and wintry night nearly half a century ago.

These pranks are common in all colleges, but, however disturbing some of the precedents at the university may be, patrons agree that perhaps no institution turns out its graduates more free from the collegiate stamp of an alma mater. Many colleges and universities pattern their men to a certain mold after four years of training so that one can almost spot them as having gone to this or that university or college five or ten years after graduation. This is not the case at Virginia. Non-sectarian, non-denominational, and freethinking, it has turned out almost as many prominent clergymen as it has statesmen, doctors, and educators. Although the atmosphere at Charlottesville is highly provincial, the university’s sons have invaded the foreign field through church missions, medical research, diplomacy, and the army. This same university which gave Walter Reid, the isolator of yellow fever, to the U.S. Army, gave Woodrow Wilson his law degree. The alma mater of Oscar W. Underwood also gave us our present ambassador to the court of St. James. Present day celebrities include former Virginia men such as S. Clay Williams of North Carolina, William Holland Wilmer of Baltimore, Justice McReynolds of the U.S. Supreme Court, Claude A. Swanson, Secretary of the Navy, Richard E. Byrd, explorer and aviator and John Stuart Bryan, President of William and Mary College.

As far as fraternities are concerned the university reaped its harvest in the days before the Civil War when most of the now better known national fraternities were establishing southern chapters and the Charlottesville institution was perhaps the leading university in the south. There are some 35 odd fraternities in the college, practically all of which area national in scope. Of these, Delta Psi, Chi Phi, Kappa Sigma (founded at Virginia), Delta Kappa Epsilon, Beta Theta Pi, Phi Kappa sigma and Phi Kappa Psi have perhaps the oldest traditions.

If one goes to Virginia one is not compelled to get an education in the commonly accepted sense of the term. One cannot, however, leave there without some degree of culture. One can elect to take out of the place what he most wants, but if he takes advantage of everything that is offered he can obtain as perfect a grounding intellectually as can be obtained in the western hemisphere and perhaps the finest training for convivial and mannerly social intercourse to be found anywhere in the world. The “cavalier” spirit still predominates even on the athletic field. Virginia’s athletic policy still remains unsullied by the inroads of professionalism which have made the athletic departments of other universities their chief advertising weapons. Nor does the Hollywood influence for show prevail. The American penchant for parades and dramatic exploitation has affected this self-centered little arena only slightly.

In the final analysis, Mr. Jefferson’s theories of education, which were based on his observations of the systems employed in continental universities rather than those of Oxford and Cambridge, have worked pretty well. The institution has done its part by the “court, camp, church, and vessel, and the mart” and Virginia’s sons have “offered in exchange, pride, fame ambition” to their alma mater.

Two tablets bearing the names of Virginia’s sons who sacrificed their all for their principles in time of national stress, are to be found on the walls of the “Rotunda” the Pantheon-like library which is the architectural center of the university. It is notable that the roster of Virginia’s sons who died in the service of the Confederacy is far greater than that of the greatest of our northern colleges whose sons were sacrificed for the Union.
1952 Officers

Front Row: Gordon Jones - Intramural Manager, Jack Clarkson - Vice President, Rufe Barkley - President, Norris Broyles - Secretary, Tom Compton - Treasurer. Back Row: John Garland - Rush Chair, Doug MacKall - Social Chair, Davant Latham - Alumni Secretary, Gil Hooper - IFC Rep.

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