

Plaque at Lafayette College honoring the Founders of Alpha Phi Omega

Alpha Phi Omega



In The Beginning

IN THE BEGINNING

The crack of the gavel seemed to fill the room. The court martial was over. Another life had been changed. And the First World War went on.

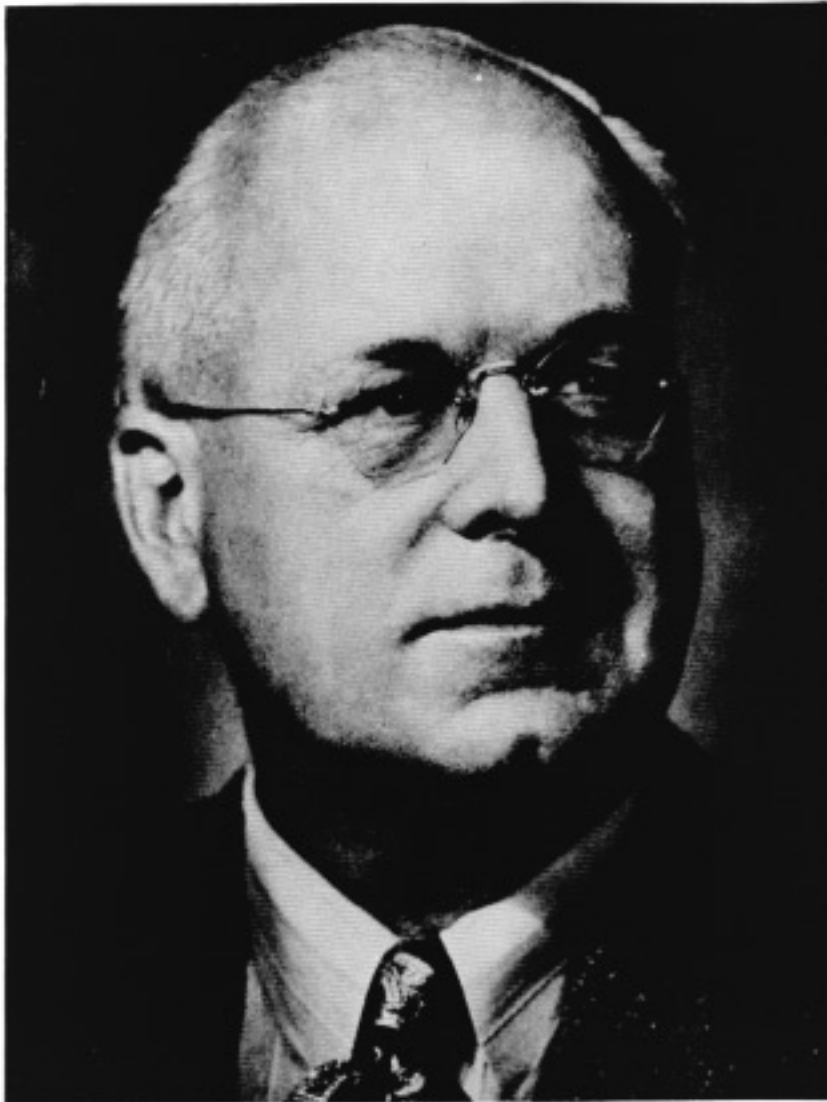
Frank Horton, a young naval officer, was one of those in the court room. He had seen a lot of the War and many of these trials — too many. They, or more precisely their cause, had begun to bother him. 'We have let our young men down,' he thought. 'We defend them when they come to trial, but there's got to be something we can do before that happens.' He told a friend later that this was when he had made himself a promise: "If I get through this war, when I get back to the United States, I will do my utmost to help young men get the right start in life by holding before them a standard of manhood that will withstand the test of time."

The days of intense boredom and hours of high danger which are common to war, the alternating periods of life on a ship and hours in a courtroom, continued. Eventually, however, the War ended and Frank Horton returned to college life. Lafayette College wasn't the same as his studies at Boston University, but it was peace and it was home. He wanted to put the past behind him and become a part of the present, so, like many of his veteran colleagues, he joined organizations. Clubs or societies of many types had been formed. In Frank's case, he joined the American Legion and Sigma Alpha Epsilon Social Fraternity: the Legion to renew old acquaintances and (selectively) relive old memories, and SAE to become an integral part of the Lafayette College social life.

He was happy, but not completely satisfied. Again, some of what he saw began bothering him. America in the early twenties was, indeed, "Roaring"; but it was also internally troubled. The Ku Klux Klan was powerful and spreading. Jews were quietly ostracized, Catholics suspect, and both were avoided by "polite" Protestants. Blacks either had no rights or were treated as if they were not there. And Frank Horton kept remembering his promise.

There were divisions within his college life as well. SAE was no different. As in all social fraternities, the separation between "pledge" and "active" was both pronounced and emphasized. One day, Frank saw one of his fellow actives doing a job that was a pledge's responsibility. This, of course, was "wrong", and Frank tried to correct the matter by reprimanding the active. The active explained that he was a Scout and that Scouts were expected to "do a Good Turn daily", no matter the circumstances. Frank had never been a Scout and didn't understand; but the active didn't pay any attention to his continued protests, so he left, upset, wondering, and challenged by his Brother to learn more of Scouting.

Later that year he attended an American Legion banquet and met someone who, although unrelated, had the same last name — Herbert G. Horton. By another coincidence, Herbert had also been a naval officer in World War I. They began talking, and Frank discovered that Herbert was the local Scout Executive in the Easton area. Due to Herbert's persuasiveness and commitment and their developing friendship, and in part to the remembered challenge of his SAE Brother, Frank became a Deputy Scout Commissioner. He liked what he saw, and he liked what he was doing. Later, when one of the troops needed a leader, he became a Scoutmaster as well.



Frank Reed Horton
the Founder of Alpha Phi Omega

Thus, Frank Horton learned more and more about Scouting: primarily from Herbert Horton, but also from a classmate and friend Everett Probst (an Eagle Scout with Gold Palm). And, of course, he learned from being a Scoutmaster and a Scouter.

He was taught by those he led, and never more importantly than in the summer of his Junior year. That summer he was an Associate Camp Director at the Easton Scout Reservation, and that summer was to add the final piece, the answer to his still-puzzling promise. As he explained later to a friend: "Here (at camp), I saw Jewish, Catholic, and Protestant boys living and playing together in a spirit of tolerance and harmony (which was) so uncommon with their elders . . . Scouting activities were indeed fun for boys, but it was the Scout code that led (their) adult leaders to respect one another religiously and personally . . . The Scout Oath and Law were what I had been seeking. Here was that 'Standard of Manhood' that had stood the test of time."

When camp was over and he had returned to his room at the SAE house, Frank Horton thought more deeply about what he had seen and experienced. He looked at the lives of his SAE Brothers. He noticed that those who were respected leaders on campus, those who were noted for their unselfish service to others, those who were known for their high ideals, were all former Scouts. Of course, there were young men who hadn't felt this influence because they had never been Scouts; that would remain a problem. But wasn't there a way to strengthen men who had been or were Scouts?

This, he thought, could very well be the answer to his promise: "I felt that there ought to be a college organization (in) which former Scouts could get together (and) pursue activities like they had done in Scouting . . . It would follow on the heels of the Boy Scout movement, and would be an organization which would continually strengthen men in the high ideals they had learned as Scouts, so that when they (graduated) they would be fully prepared to meet, and withstand, the challenges and temptations which could constantly confront them."

These were idealistic words, but the idea of a Scouting-based college organization was pragmatic as well. He had learned that, nationwide, fifty percent of the men then in college had been former Scouts. That meant that at Lafayette, where there were 1000 men, there was a possibility of 500 former Scouts, quite a good potential for a new organization.

He had made up his mind. This was the answer. Over the summer of 1925 he drew up the philosophy and organization of a new Greek-letter college fraternity which would be composed of men with prior Scouting affiliation, and which would be dedicated to serving others.

As the organization took shape in his mind, it seemed to form around three principles:

"This shall be an organization which will give its members an opportunity to demonstrate that they can, by deed, word, and action, lead others;

"This shall be an organization in which former Scouts can get together (to) form and mould life-long friendships;

"This shall be an organization where the members, working together, can render assistance where it is needed the most, in the spirit of the 'Good Turn' and the 'troop community spirit'."

In other words, an organization in which its members could
"Be a Leader, Be a Friend, Be of Service!"

When school began again that Fall, Frank Horton learned two more, important things: First, that his SAE Brothers who had been Scouts liked his idea and would be happy to be charter members of such an organization (if they could belong to both it and SAE); and Second that there already was an organization of former Scouts on campus: "The Fraternity of Mound Builders", began by his classmate (and earlier advisor about Scouting) Everett Probst.

Ev's Mound Builders, a small but officially recognized group, already had several members including Ellsworth Dobson and other members of the local Crescent Fraternity (a future chapter of Kappa Delta Rho). They already had a constitution, by-laws, rituals, membership pins, and other fraternal pre-requisites as required by the College. Unfortunately they had also gained a certain amount of notoriety on campus and had become known, obviously but disparagingly, as "The Pilers".

As "Dobby" Dobson related it years later, when Frank approached Ev with his idea of a Scouting Fraternity dedicated to leadership, friendship, and service, Ev acknowledged that Frank's philosophy was more wide-reaching than his own. The Mound Builders organization was abandoned and Ev, Dobby, and many of their friends promptly joined with Horton, bringing some of their organizational ideas with them.

Dobby Dobson, the only one with a typewriter, was "volunteered" to type, re-type, and re-re-type the Constitution, By-Laws, and Rituals which Frank was writing and Gordon Looney (another of their Scouting friends) compiled. Frank also decided, after the many long hours of research necessary to assure no conflict with existing fraternities, that "Alpha Phi Omega" should be the name of their new organization. This name was particularly fitting, he thought, since the new fraternity would be the "Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ultimate of a Scouting Service Fraternity for the campuses of collegiate America".

While the necessary paperwork was making its way through the approval process of the college (helped in no small manner by Prof. Harry Spengler, a member of the faculty and Frank's professor and friend), informal meetings were held in either the SAE house or Ev's off-campus room. At one of these meetings, Frank asked Ev to design the pin, key and coat-of-arms for the new fraternity since he had already done the same for the Mound Builders. Ev decided to base the coat-of-arms design on that of the college and the Lafayette family. Thane Cooley, soon to be the treasurer of the new fraternity, suggested the handclasp. All of these suggestions were enthusiastically adopted.

Three basic questions remained to be answered: First, should the Fraternity be secret or non-secret? Second, should the Fraternity be small and honorary, or large and inclusive? Third, what was the Fraternity's principle goal?

Much discussion went on among all of the original members (and their newly appointed advisors: John MacCracken, President of the College; Dean Donald Prentice; Professors D. Arthur Hatch and Harry Sprengler; and Scout Executive Herbert Horton). It was finally decided that, because of possible religious objections on the part of some of the members, the Fraternity rituals should be private but not "secret". No "mysteries" would be involved.

It was also decided that the Fraternity should be as large and as inclusive as possible, hence its first title as an "honorary, professional, educational, and service" fraternity. And, finally, it was decided that the main goal would be to "influence college men to be of service to campus, community, and nation".

Many important decisions had been made and many important steps taken, but the most important was yet to come. In early December, 1925, just before the Christmas recess, Frank, Ev, Dobby, Thane, Gordon, and the others received an early Christmas present: the faculty and administration had approved their petition. Alpha Phi Omega could be more than a dream, it could be a reality.

And so, on the afternoon of December 16, 1925, on the second floor of Brainerd (now Hogg) Hall, the first formal initiation ceremony of Alpha Phi Omega was conducted by Frank Reed Horton. Fourteen men were present (8 men from SAE, 5 from the Krescents, and one independent - Lewis Blair).

The candles were lit; the words were spoken. At the close, the crack of the gavel seemed to fill the room. The ritual was over. Lives had been changed. And Alpha Phi Omega was born.



FRANK REED HORTON, born at Sewickley, Pa. (near Pittsburgh) on July 17, 1896. Ensign on U.S. Minesweeper, USS Whipporwill during World War I. A.B. degree, Lafayette College, 1926. M.A. degree in History from Lafayette College in 1938. Studied law in law office; also student at Boston University Law School; LL.B. degree, LaSalle Extension University, 1937. Taught history, government and English at Cedar Crest and Muhlenberg Colleges, Allentown, Pa., for three years. Industrial accountant, Ingersoll-Rand Company. American Legion, VFW, Mason. Author of college text, *Poetry Writing and Appreciation*. Numerous Scouting and APO honors, and awards. Passed away August 28, 1966.

EVERETT W. PROBST, born at Jersey City, N.J., on June 22, 1905. One of the founders of the "Krescents" social fraternity (now Kappa Delta Rho). Twenty years of age when he became a charter member of APO. Served in every Scout office from Assistant Patrol Leader to Scoutmaster. B.S. degree in chemistry, Lafayette College, 1926. M.D. degree in 1940 from New York University. Deceased.



THANE S. COOLEY, born at Chicago, Ill., on January 1, 1905. Twenty years of age when he became charter member of APO. Scout in Oak Park, Ill., 1917-1922. Captain of soccer team; B.S. degree in 1927 from Lafayette College. Law degree, J.D., Northwestern University, 1930. Deceased.



WILLIAM T. WOOD, born at Penn's Grove, N.J., on November 4, 1905. Twenty years of age when he became a charter member of APO. Scout before going to Lafayette College, from which he received a B.S. degree in 1927. Lives in Hockessin, Delaware.



GORDON M. LOONEY, born at Sedalia, Mo., on October 10, 1905. Twenty years of age when he became charter member of APO. Member of Boy Scouts in Oak Park, Ill. A.B. degree, Lafayette College, 1927. M.B.A. degree, Harvard University, 1929. Deceased.



E. M. DETWILER, born at Lansdale, Pa., on October 19, 1904. Twenty years of age when he became a charter member of APO. Played football, and was captain of Lacrosse team, at Lafayette College. B.S. degree, 1927. Deceased.



LEWIS B. BLAIR, born at Tyrone, Pa., on April 10, 1906. Member of BSA in Tyrone. Enrolled in electrical engineering at Lafayette College in class of 1928. Deceased.

DONALD L. TERWILLIGER, born at Lakewood, N.J., on July 13, 1907. Member of BSA in Orange, N.J. Eighteen years of age when he became charter member of APO. Editor, College Year Book, at Lafayette College, from which he received A.B. degree in 1928. Basketball player at Lafayette College. Resident of Englewood, Florida.



WILLIAM W. HIGHBERGER, born at Pittsburgh, Pa., on April 9, 1905. Member of BSA in Pittsburgh. Member of swimming and football team at Lafayette College, from which he received B.S. degree in 1927. Twenty years of age when he became a charter member of APO. Deceased.

DONALD H. FRITTS, born at Washington, N.J., on March 13, 1905. Member of BSA in Washington. Twenty years of age when he became charter member of APO. B.S. degree, Lafayette College, 1926; M.A. degree, Columbia University, 1931. Deceased.



GEORGE A. OLSEN, born in New York City on February 2, 1904. Manager of baseball team in college. B.S. degree, Lafayette College, 1928. BSA. Twenty-one years of age when he became a charter member of APO. Deceased.

ROBERT J. GREEN, born at Brooklyn, N.Y., on October 6, 1905. Scout in Richmond Hill, N.Y. Later became a Scout Commissioner. Twenty years of age when he became a charter member of APO. B.S. degree in mechanical engineering, Lafayette College, 1929. Deceased.



ELLSWORTH S. DOBSON, born at Detroit, Mich. BSA. B.S. degree in electrical engineering, Lafayette College, 1928. Resides in Collbran, Colorado.

HERBERT HEINRICH, born at New York City on January 18, 1906. BSA in Leonia, N.J. Nineteen years of age when he became charter member of APO. B.S. degree in electrical engineering. Lafayette College, 1927. Resident of Honolulu, Hawaii.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This account would not have been possible without the help of many Brothers, past and present. Chief among my sources were the words of Brother Frank Horton as recorded in the Pledge Manual and the Ritual Book; the booklet "Our Heritage" by Ralph Widener, Jr., based on his interviews with our founder; and the History of the Lafayette 1928 Banner as presented by Brother Ellsworth "Dobby" Dobson.

We must always be thankful for the dedication these and other Brothers have shown to the birth and life of our beloved Fraternity. Any error of interpretation or explanation of the events in which they participated is, of course, entirely my own.

Earle M. Herbert
November 7, 1982

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Coat of Arms of Lafayette College and Lafayette Family



One window in the Lafayette College Chapel has this Lafayette College Coat of Arms. It was this window in the chapel that inspired Everett W. Probst to draw the Alpha Phi Omega Coat of Arms.



Alpha Phi Omega
The Coat of Arms