



## EDITORIAL

# The Early Days

When Founder E.H. Williams Jr. established our little Society at Lehigh University in 1885, he had no idea after 125 years passed how many members would eventually be attracted to Tau Beta Pi's rock-solid concept of distinguished scholarship and exemplary character. Activity during the early days was critical, but slow. Eight years passed before the third chapter was established and the first Convention could be held. All three chapters sent delegates to Cleveland, OH, on May 28, 1895, and these delegates elected themselves as the first Executive Council. Now our local society could become an Association.

The next Council, the 1896-97 team, used a copy of the Founder's and Pennsylvania Alpha's 1888 original Constitution to prepare a draft Constitution and Bylaws for the May 1898 Convention. This document "was taken up in committee of the whole; after much discussion and modification the Constitution, as drafted by the Council, was adopted by the committee and then by the Convention by the necessary three-fourths vote." Ratified quickly by all five chapters in 1898, the original Preamble states: "To mark in a fitting manner those who have conferred honor upon their Alma Mater by a high grade of scholarship as undergraduates, or by their attainments as alumni, and to foster a spirit of liberal culture in the Technical and Scientific Schools of America; we do hereby ordain and enact the following ...." Note that *exemplary character* was not included. The Preamble's "Technical and Scientific Schools of America" was replaced with "Engineering Schools of America" by the 1907 Convention and adopted in 1908.

Prepared by the Founder, a simple, brief Ritual appears under Bylaw IV in the original 1898 Constitution and Bylaws printed for the five chapters. A handshake was included in the ceremony. The 1901 Convention adopted a highly detailed and thoroughly defined "grip" and decided that it should not be recorded as part of the Ritual, but should be considered as part of the "secret work." Consequently, we have not yet determined when (or if) the grip was ever eliminated.

Eventually the co-requirement of *exemplary character* was added to the Preamble by the 1926 Convention, 41 years after Irving A. Heikes became the first member. That same Convention realized the necessity of stating exactly what Tau Beta Pi stands for, and delegates adopted the Eligibility Code that remains unchanged to this day.

The 1926 delegates representing 49 chapters were a visionary group. They directed the Executive Council to consider the division of Tau Beta Pi into geographical districts and suggested that district *conventions* be held at a

time midway between the regular national Conventions. A mere 49 years later, a specific plan containing these basic elements was presented to the 1975 Convention, approved for a three-year trial, and then formally adopted by the 1978 Convention.

Tau Beta Pi President A.D. Moore was a leader in organizing the Association of College Honor Societies in October 1925 with representatives of five other well-established honor societies. One fundamental objective of ACHS was to eliminate undesirable duplication of honor societies. Subsequently, the 1926 Convention considered the matter of a possible merger with Sigma Tau, founded in 1904 by "parties who felt that it was impossible to obtain recognition at that time of colleges in the middle and far West."



The 1926 Convention expressed a favorable attitude toward merger and authorized the Executive Council to investigate "methods for reducing the number of such organizations occupying the same field." The 1927 Convention approved a proposed merger with Sigma Tau, "with the understanding that future members are to be elected in the manner now employed in Tau Beta Pi," and authorized the Council to arrange the necessary details. That work was accomplished in partnership with Sigma Tau leaders. After intense debate, the 1928 Convention vote on a merger failed by only seven votes (32 for, 20 opposed,  $\frac{3}{4}$  required), despite the recommendation of both governing boards in an effort to eliminate "undesirable and destructive competition." The seven votes meant that the merger would not be completed until 1974, when conditions and personalities were favorable and Sigma Tau had 40,000 members.

So here we are 125 years later—a united thriving Association of 450,000 living members—the world's largest engineering society. We are preparing to return to Lehigh for the 2010 Convention, which we do every quarter century. Growth is resuming. The number of initiates is increasing. Our 234 active collegiate chapters will add two more during the next three months. The number of alumni making donations has reversed its decline and is rising. Our website *tbp.org* experienced a record two million hits last year. We are ever grateful for Founder Williams and the other early leaders with vision who built the rock-solid foundation of this amazing Society.

J.D.F.