

Marcus Libby Urann (1873-1963) spearheaded the establishment of the honor society as an undergraduate at University of Maine. Trained as a lawyer, he gained further renown as a cranberry farmer, innovator and magnate who organized cranberry cooperatives that became Ocean Spray. His aims crystalize tenets of Phi Kappa Phi, a name adopted on June 12, 1900.

The Ideal Behind Phi Kappa Phi

By Marcus L. Urann, Founder

In 1897 I was a student in the University of Maine and certain phases of university life and the after usefulness of the students interested me. With rare exceptions I did not, nor do I now, believe in the natural fitness of anybody for anything but I do believe that anyone can do anything that he really desires to accomplish.

An analysis, however, of the men in my class convinced me that some of our brightest men were in danger of contributing less to society, to the university and to the state, than their ability justified us in expecting.

I remember of one afternoon when I sitting in my room, which overlooked the campus and the path over which the men were walking to and from their recitations and, as I recall, here are some of the thoughts that came to me.

The state of Maine has given and should continue to give able men and women to the nation.

The university must do more for the young men and women of the state if it is to do its duty and if they are to be fitted to step into the positions of responsibility and usefulness demanded by the increasing education and the multiplied complexities of life.

Neither the state in general nor the student body respects rank and scholarship as it should. Even the class leaders do not respect themselves as they should. The baseball man, the football hero, the loud talking man, the rich man, and even the peculiar man are given attention and respect for something, while the man who concentrates on books too often is looked upon as having single ideas, and as being impracticable and unable to apply his knowledge.

It seemed to me desirable:

That the bookworm should respect himself and win the respect and confidence of other students and of the taxpayers of the state.

That the state should look to the university for more than muscle farmers, and to appreciate the fact that the farmer, to successfully farm needs education of the first order and, also, that many a farm boy is worth more on some other job or can contribute

more to the farm from the laboratory with a test tube than on the land with a plow.

That the high-rank man should advertise his wares—make known the fact that he has a valuable stock of goods in his head and intends to expose them for sale on Main Street instead of in Back Alley.

Rank simply means a little more midnight oil in the student lamp and it is well worth getting.

Frequently these high-rank men, for various reasons, do not mix as much as others and a lone man attracts less attention than several lone men united; hence, it occurred to me that if we could get them together their numbers would command the respect of others and increase their own confidence in their ability to apply their learning.

The organization of such a group would add another goal for which to work, one which would be within the reach of some who are not interested in becoming heroes in athletics or other college activities.

It would furnish an opportunity for the association of kindred minds, which would render their habits of thinking more malleable and the application after graduation more practicable and certain.

To sum up all of this: I wanted the ability of the high-rank man to be made most useful to society; also, I was looking for something which would be an inspiration to all students to work for high rank and I believed that uniting those men who were interested would be helpful.

I did not expect to become a member of such an organization myself, for I had been out of college to earn money. However, I prepared and submitted a constitution to Professors Rogers and Estabrook, and I think Dr. Stevens especially approved my plan of making eligible to membership

each year, not more than ten members of the senior class whose rank for the four years was above 90 percent.

I do not now recall consulting any students except Leroy Folsom and William Holyoke, my roommate at the time.

I think someone suggested electing the members but I still believe my plan of appointment, simple notification by the faculty, is better. These were the requirements—if a man had the rank he was in—if not, he was out.

It did not occur to me that this might spread to other colleges. My definite object was that Maine should be enabled to use the ability then present, and to provide a natural stimulant to cultivate more ability

and the means of applying it in channels of usefulness.

The faculty records should show the first appointments and the archives must contain the original constitution and by-laws in my handwriting. I did not know who would be members until the list was shown me by Professor Rogers.

From the day I was graduated I have known little of the society—have never even owned one of its pins. I think when I was in the university it had no society pin or emblem.

I knew the organization prospered but had no idea that it was the original chapter of Phi Kappa Phi until so informed by Dr. E. E. Sparks, who asked me for the reason of its organization.

I have often wondered if the society had helped along the lines originally intended but was always so afraid that the painter might in some way detract from the picture that I have been satisfied to keep quiet. Even now, I hesitated a long time before answering the request for information about the formation of this original chapter. ●



As a student at the University of Maine, Marcus L. Urann believed that an honor society recognizing academic achievement would elevate scholastic leaders in the eyes of their classmates and the state.