

Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated: From Alpha to Mu Omega and Beyond

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On January 15, 1908, Howard University student Ethel Hedgeman (Lyle) and eight other student leaders established Alpha Kappa Alpha (AKA) Sorority, the first intercollegiate African American sorority in the nation. The organization incorporated in 1913. Upon graduation, most early initiates became working professionals, including educators. There were no actual club houses. Members gathered at homes, hosting teas and social activities. Their mission was to “be supreme in service to all mankind.”¹

One of the charter members at Howard was Beulah E. Burke, who graduated with an education degree.² In addition to the Alpha Chapter at Howard, Burke helped found three other undergraduate chapters before taking a teaching job in Kansas City, Kansas, at the Sumner School. In 1920, she was one of several charter members of AKA’s newest chapter—Lambda Graduate Chapter, in Kansas City, Missouri. It was renamed Beta Omega in 1922, the year Burke served as chapter president. Two Sumner School connections—teacher Mary Clifford and Ethel Jones Mowbray, wife of instructor George Mowbray and one of the early members of the Alpha Chapter at Howard University—were also charter members.³

Two years later on May 10, 1924, Burke, Sumner teacher Frances Kealing (Hayden), and others helped charter Mu Omega, the eleventh graduate chapter, in Kansas City, Kansas.

According to Martha A. Carpenter, the current historian of the chapter, the community in which the early members served was ripe and ready for Mu Omega. The women felt it was time as a race to be reckoned with and to achieve fuller participation in all phases of social advances: city, county, and state democracy.⁴

By year’s end, Mowbray transferred membership from the Beta Omega Chapter, and Scottie Primus Davis joined as a new initiate.⁵

Alpha Kappa Alpha’s mission centers around service, scholarship, and sisterhood. It has grown to 320,000 collegiate members and alums, with 1,038 chapters in forty-two states, the District of Columbia, one territory, and ten international chapters.⁶

Its signature program mentors students in their efforts to enter college, providing information on historically Black colleges and universities, awarding scholarships, and supporting students as they begin their college careers. Chapters raise community awareness about critical health issues and building wealth, as well as exposing students to arts enrichment and culture.⁷

Locally, in 1922, Eta Chapter was chartered at the University of Minnesota, and in 1948, a graduate chapter—Delta Phi Omega—was established.⁸ Today, many members from Delta Phi Omega also belong to the Minneapolis-St. Paul (MN) Chapter of The Links, Incorporated.⁹

NOTES

1. “History,” Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated, accessed December 7, 2021, <https://aka1908.com/about/history>.

2. “Beulah Elizabeth Burke,” accessed December 12, 2021, <https://aka1908.com/about/founders>. According to the national website, Beulah Burke is credited for developing the Alpha Kappa Alpha name (the first three letters of the three Greek words that form the sorority’s

motto); its motto (“By Culture and By Merit”); and its colors (salmon pink and apple green).

3. “History;” “Quick Facts,” Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated, accessed December 7, 2021, <https://aka1908.com/about/quick-facts>; “Founders,” Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated, accessed December 7, 2021, <https://aka1908.com/about/history>; “Beta Omega Chapter History,” AKA Beta Omega Chapter,

accessed December 2, 2021, <https://akabetaomega.org/page-18083>.

4. Early History of Mu Omega,” *Ivy Leaf* 18, no. 4 (December 1940): 12; Martha A. Carpenter, email correspondence with author, March 21, 2021, and editor, January 7 and 10, 2022.

5. “Chapter History,” Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated, Mu Omega Chapter, accessed December 7, 2021, <https://www.akamuomega.com/chapter-history>.

6. “Quick Facts.”

7. “2018 to 2022 International Program Overview,” Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated, Mu Omega Chapter, accessed December 7, 2021, <https://www.akamuomega.com/programs>.

8. “Eta History,” Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, In-

corporated, accessed December 7, 2021, http://www.exquisiteeta1969.org/chapter_history. Eta Chapter dissolved in 1964. A new Alpha Kappa Alpha chapter—Mu Rho—chartered at the University of Minnesota in 1979; “History of the Mu Rho Chapter,” Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated, Mu Rho Chapter, accessed December 7, 2021, <https://www.begreekumn.org/alpha-kappa-alpha-sorority-inc>.

9. “About Delta Phi Omega Chapter,” Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated, Delta Phi Omega Chapter, Minneapolis-Saint Paul. For more information on The Links, Incorporated, see Marion Jones Kennon’s article in the Winter 2022 issue of *Ramsey County History*, beginning on page 1.