

The Road to Bagdad

Part II

Although time has a way of getting jumbled in the mind when regarded over a space of more than twenty years, still it seems to me that it must have been something over a month from the time of the Fourth of July picnic and its near-tragedy, of which I told in the last chapter of this informal history, to the precipitate exodus of the only existing unit of the Iota Tau Kappa Fraternity from its rooms, of which mention was made earlier. The night when our landlord sent one of his clerks into our rooms to put a damper on the hilarity that attended upon an initiation almost spelled our doom. There is no telling what that clerk may have told Thad Butler, the landlord, when he made his way down the stairs. A much-paddled, and perhaps a wiser man, but what Mr. Butler told us is still fresh in mind. He was sententious to say the least, and directed us to pack up our moth-eaten furniture and move without further ceremony.

But where to move? That was the principal problem that confronted Iota Tau Kappa on that desolate summer day. We had canvassed the town in the search for rooms before we were finally admitted to Mr. Butler's upstairs warehouse, and deep in our hearts we knew that only a miracle could provide us with other quarters. Besides, the treasury had been sadly depleted and there was no money with which to pay another month's rent in advance. Of course, this same problem would have arisen had we remained above the music store, but it had been given no thought. However, we set out bravely on our quest for new quarters, but to no avail. We might have had better luck in Zanzibar or Timbuctu.

Mr. Butler had said move, and move we did. The furniture was divided, some of us taking certain pieces while others took what remained, and it was put into storage. I know our stable got a lot of it, and there were some odds and ends in the attic. Jim Reed had made a table on the mission style, which was our particular pride and joy, and that table, by the way, was still rendering active service as late as four years ago, if it isn't still in use. But our fraternity with its club room had, even in the short space of something more than two months, brought a tangible and lasting result. It had created a bond of warm brotherhood, especially among the members of the little group that had brought the organization into being that night on the high school steps. Ray Neal and Gilbert Bainbridge had been initiated and were destined to be among the founders of Phi Delta Kappa. So, despite the fact that we continued holding occasional meetings in the homes of the members, and forming a little clique of our own in those down-town places where boys of our age were accustomed to gather.

That autumn became memorable in the history of the Marion high school, for it had a football team that won the undisputed high school championship of Indiana and Kentucky. I returned to boarding school a little later than usual that fall, so had the pleasure of seeing several of the games which attracted the attention of sporting writers throughout the entire middle west. Iota Tau Kappa was particularly proud of the fact that several of its members were on the team, George Nottingham was not only the center-and what a sturdy center he was- but he also managed the team, arranging all the schedules and giving close attention to every business detail. Gilbert Bainbridge, Walter Tukey, Ward Davis, Paul Gage, Earl Virtue, Harry Mook, Horace Myers- all of these were on the team either as regular players or substitutes.

It is impossible for me to relate what happened during the winter that followed. I spent most of that time away at school, as did Zach Sanderson, and as I remember the correspondence that passed between some of the members and myself, I don't believe there was any great amount of activity; but the summer of 1903 brought a renewal of interest. Several of us had jobs that summer, and, with a little money of our own, we could aspire to heights undreamed of before. In fact, we were so rich collectively, that, after some deliberation, we rented a room in the Glass Block, at that time Marion's finest office building.

The room, to say the least, was small. In fact, it must have been the smallest room in the entire building, for it couldn't have been more than eight feet wide by twelve feet long. A little of our furniture was brought from storage and installed, and then, by crowding, it was possible to assemble most of our chapter at one time. But this room was of little use to us, for it was impossible to use it even as a meeting place in the heat of the summer, and after paying rent for a couple of months we gave it up. Then came another period of

what may be called active inactivity, by which I mean that while we did not function as a chapter we retained a common interest and most of us remained close together.

Summer soon slipped into autumn and back to school went Brother Sanderson and myself. Shortly before the Christmas holidays I had a letter from George Nottingham informing me that the boys who were still in Marion had been holding meetings, as several of them had joined a newly formed national guard company and at certain times were able to get privacy in a sort of ante-room at the armory.

“We hope to put the Fraternity back into an active condition,” he wrote, “and have made the acquaintance of some new fellows who have recently come here whom we believe would make good members. We also have one or two who were never in our crowd but with whom we have become friendly. When you and Sanderson come home for the holidays we plan to give a smoker at which you can meet these fellows, and we can talk things over.”

In due time both Sanderson and myself reached Marion and the smoker was held according to plans. Each of us was provided with a corn cob pipe, the stem of which was decorated with red and black ribbons. There were refreshments and we all had a good time. Interest in Iota Tau kappa was greatly revived and I went back to school filled with ideas.

Perhaps my interest in making something more of Iota Tau Kappa than it had been before was stimulated by the fact that among my Kappa Sigma brothers at college was a young man named William E. Marsh the son of a newspaper publisher at Columbus, Indiana. “Bill” Marsh was a prominent member of the Kappa Alpha Phi Fraternity and at that time was its national secretary. I was profoundly impressed with the fact that he was frequently busily engaged in Kappa Alpha Phi business, writing letters to this chapter and that, giving the general appearance that Kappa Alpha Phi was only a little less important than Kappa Sigma, the big college fraternity into which both of us had just been initiated.

Naturally, I did considerable talking about Iota Tau Kappa, and surely, according to my story- and I stuck to it Iota Tau Kappa was just as large, just as active and just as important in every way as Kappa Alpha Phi. After our Christmas smoker in Marion and the subsequent talks that I had with the brothers during the holiday season, I made up my mind to make good on my words and to put my shoulder to the wheel in the effort to nationalize Iota Tau Kappa. After my return to school I devoted hours to studying out plans. I realized that the nonsensical ritual we had would never do if we expected to make anything of Iota Tau Kappa. Besides, we were all older than we were when we invented that nonsense and naturally our minds took a more serious turn. And so I devoted myself to the task of engineering things in some way, until the first thing I knew spring had arrived and departed, and it was time to go home for the summer vacation.

Just why or how it all happened I can't say, but on a hot June day- Iota Tau Kappa was born in the heat and so was Phi Delta Kappa- an idea suddenly came into my mind. The Greek letters Iota Tau Kappa looked just like the English letters I. T. K. I thought that on emblems something more distinctly Greek would be more imposing. I had studied Greek for several years and the word for which our letter Phi stands came to mind and suggested itself as being appropriate for the first word of a motto. Likewise came Kappa, but Kappa in Greek also looks like English. I needed a third letter and couldn't think of anything suitable to fill in the motto. Then I turned to my book shelves and took down a copy of White's "First Greek Book." It had a vocabulary, alphabetically arranged, in the back. Delta seemed a promising letter and I glanced through a list of words beginning with the letter. I found what I wanted, and there was the name of our new Fraternity- Phi Delta Kappa.

With a name which was likewise a good motto, Phi Delta Kappa had made a start that was promising. This name came by miracle, and there is reason to believe that it was little short of inspiration that brought the ritual into being. It was in June, 1905, that the idea which had been in my mind for months took definite shape, and to me this will always be the birthday of Phi Delta Kappa- a sort of Pentecost which I shall privately celebrate every time mid-June rolls around. It is a source of deep regret that there are no existing records showing the exact date, but like so many other documents connected with the early days of the fraternity, this has been lost. Had we known then what we know now- had we realized for a moment that an organization which was destined to be nation-wide was being founded, we would have treasured every

memorandum that contained even the slightest reference to our activity.

After the vocabulary in the back part of my Greek book had completed the name I sought, it was less than an hour until I was seated at my desk in my room, writing the ritual. As I remember it now, there was never a moment of hesitancy. I have written considerable fiction since then, not to mention enough fact articles to fill a good many large volumes, but I never wrote anything as easily as I did that ritual. It unfolded itself step by step in my mind, and I don't believe that I found reason to make a single change in it before I submitted it to the others who were perhaps surprised to learn that they were about to cease being Iota Tau Kappas, and to become Phi Delta Kappas.

The first draft of the ritual was written in long hand on newspaper copy paper, a supply of which I always kept on hand. Its writing consumed the greater part of one morning, and that afternoon I copied it on the typewriter. Filled with enthusiasm, I could not bear the thought of delaying before I submitted it to the leading members of Iota Tau Kappa. I thought it entirely to good to keep, and just as soon as the typewriting was finished, which was about mid-afternoon, I rushed down to find some of the fellows. To James L. Reed belongs the distinction of being the first person, after myself, to have a look at this ritual. I found Brother Reed busily engaged in doing nothing in the cigar store in the Indiana Theatre building. I called him to the sidewalk and confided what I had done. Brother Reed was as much interested as I was, and failing to find any more of our crowd, we went over to the Elks Club on Boots Street, to which I has entry by right of membership, and in the absolute privacy of the lodge room on the second floor of this building, I read the ritual aloud to Brother Reed.

This was the first time that I had heard it aloud, and I got a new thrill as I solemnly declaimed its more solemn parts. Brother Reed was profoundly impressed and agreed with me that we had what we long wanted- a serious ritual which would make an ideal foundation for a fraternity which we could nationalize. We determined to submit it to the remainder of Iota Tau Kappa chapter at the first opportunity, and I told Brother Reed that in the meantime I would write a tentative constitution which would form a basis for our future action. That night I kept my word, and the constitution which governed Phi Delta Kappa up to the time the first meeting of the Supreme Executive Committee which was held in Marion at year later, was written much in the same fashion as had been the ritual itself.

It seems strange that I cannot recollect any meeting at which this ritual and constitution were submitted to the others. However, some such meeting must have been held at which we formally resolved ourselves into the Phi Delta Kappa Fraternity and at which the constitution was adopted. This constitution, it may be remarked here, was written to meet the emergencies of the moment. The Alpha Grand Chapter, as the charter members were to be called, and absolute power, with the chapter officers designed as the national officers. This made Brother George Nottingham the first national president, Brother Zack Sanderson the first national secretary, Brother Walter Tukey (since resigned) the first national treasurer, Brother Gilbert Bainbridge the first national sergeant-at-arms and myself the first national master-of-ceremonies.

It was only natural that the Alpha Chapter should have monarchical power during the pioneer days of the fraternity. In the first place, there were no other chapters when that constitution was drafted and adopted, and, in the second place, it was the better part of wisdom to centralize all executive and legislative power with-in the chapter group until after the chapters which were to spring up had demonstrated their fitness to participate in the general affairs of the fraternity. For this same reason the constitution provided that, when a chapter was admitted to the fraternity, it should first be granted a temporary charter which was to be good for six months. If in that length of time the chapter became established, a permanent charter was to be confessed, however, that this article of the constitution was an after-thought and was written into the constitution just before the first outside chapter was installed. It was inspired in part by the fact that the Alpha Grand chapter did not have money enough in the treasury to have permanent charters printed or to buy a seal. By means of the "temporary charter" we could make shift with a typewritten document.

I have already referred to William E Marsh, who had been one of my college mates and who was the national secretary of the Kappa Alpha Phi fraternity. I had, with the consent of the Iota Tau Kappa members, taken Marsh into this organization as what we called an "honorary member". Now, although he was absolutely loyal to Kappa Alpha Phi, Brother Marsh was of the opinion that his own chapter of this

organization, which was located at Columbus, Indiana, was gradually dying, because its members had nothing to stir them up. He concluded that the one thing that would give life to the chapter was opposition, and that there was plenty of room at Columbus for two flourishing high school fraternities. I was not exactly surprised then, when, after Phi Delta Kappa had been in existence something less than two months, to receive a letter from Brother Marsh informing me that he had lined up a likely group of boys in Columbus who were anxious to become members of Phi Delta Kappa.

We accepted this proposition without delay and a few days later plans of our own materialized, for we had come to the conclusion that, as none of our original chapter was in the Marion high school, it would be a good plan to restrict the membership of Alpha Grand chapter, making it purely a national governing body, and to install a second chapter in Marion, this to consist of younger boys who were students in the high school. It took only a short time to get together a group that was promising. Our medium of action was Arthur Birely, better known as "Young Shy", who was a live wire and had lots of friends. So we slated the Columbus group to be Beta Chapter and the second Marion group to be Gamma chapter. And Alpha Grand, which by this time was beginning to feel venerable, contemplated its prospective off spring with a feeling of great satisfaction.

The old saying "It never rains but that it pours", certainly held good in the case of Phi Delta Kappa. No sooner had we made arrangements to install the Columbus and the second Marion chapters, than there came to me like a lightning bolt from the sky, a letter from George Forler of Portland, Indiana. George Forler had at one time lived in Marion and we had been close friends. He was likewise known to most of the Grand chapter men. Just how Mr. Forler knew anything about the fraternity has slipped from mind, but he had learned of it some way and wrote to tell me that several of his friends at Portland were anxious to establish a fraternity in their high school and that, although they had examined Beta Phi Sigma and Kappa Delta Kappa.

This is as good a place as any to make a confession. Neither Marsh and his Columbus crowd nor Fowler and his Portland crew had any idea that phi delta Kappa was only an infant which at that time had installed no chapters except Alpha Grand. Marsh thought that Phi Delta Kappa was merely a revised edition of Iota Tau Kappa and that Iota Tau Kappa had been a flourishing organization, which could rank with Kappa Alpha Phi. Forler knew nothing except that we had a fraternity, and took it for granted that it had several chapters. So it became necessary for us to do some plain but judicious lying, which we did with a bold front.

We explained to both those gentlemen that no time could be better than the present for their entrance into Phi Delta Kappa. That we had just effected a reorganization, having thrown out several chapters which were not as active as they should have been, with the result that, under the reorganization plan, new chapters were to be received and given seniority. This seniority was to depend on the time their application for charter was received by us. Thus the Columbus chapter would be the second on the list, the Marion chapter third and the Portland chapter fourth. All of which was quite satisfactory to those concerned, and the members of Alpha Grand Chapter of Phi Delta Kappa prepared for its first real activity, the installation of a new chapter.

With three chapters of Phi Delta Kappa ready for installation, it is small wonder that those of us who comprised Alpha grand chapter- and with a few additions and one or two subtractions these charter members of the newly founded fraternity were the same as those who had subscribed to the simple rules of Iota Tau Kappa on the steps of the Marion High School about two years before felt a thrill we had never experienced in all our lives. We were about to realize a dream which at times seemed impossible of realization. But again, I want to stress a point I have made several times during the course of this narration, and this is that the original group had been imbued with a strong feeling of brotherhood and we had always been optimistic.

Those who have come into the fraternity during what may be called its palmy period, who have known it only as a live and going organization, little realize what it meant in the early days to hold a single purpose when we had so little to encourage us. I take pride in the belief that our ritual and the entire spirit of Phi Delta Kappa teaches a number of lessons which will be of benefit to any man as he meets the affairs of life,

provided, of course, that his motives are honest and sincere. But of all the sources from which we may draw our lessons, none is of greater import than the example set by the group of boys who brought the organization into being from nothing, and who persevered in their purpose until they had accomplished a definite and tangible result. If this hastily written history accomplishes no other end, I hope that it will at least serve to impress this one fact upon those to whom heretofore our days of struggle have been a closed book.

By reasons of circumstances, the first chapters to be received into the national body were not installed according to the order in which they had made application for admittance. Naturally the Columbus chapter should have been first and the second Marion chapter next, while the Portland chapter should have been third. However, for some reason which has escaped my memory, it was more convenient to install Delta chapter at Portland first, and, as National Master-Of-Ceremonies, it was my duty to supervise the installation.

By dint of typing, I had prepared a sufficient number of rituals (seven was the number required) to supply the new chapter, and I took these together with what ritualistic paraphernalia was required, to Portland. George Forler, who was responsible for the chapter, met me at the train and with him were several of the boys who were to form the Delta chapter list. Among these was Durbin Fitzpatrick, who was later to become one of my Kappa Sigma brothers; his brother Loman, Clyde Nichols and Orva Drake. George Forler's father was the proprietor of the Merchants Hotel at Portland., and it was there I was to stay as a guest. Of course, several of the boys in Marion were anxious to attend this installation, and I was no sooner in Portland than there came a telegram heralding the fact that brothers Nottingham, Reed, Jones, and Elliott would arrive the next day.

Portland proved to be a cordial place and, through George Forler and the prospective Phi Deltas, I met many of its boys and girls the first afternoon I was there. The original plan had been to install the chapter without ceremonies, merely reading the ritual to those having the right to hear it and receive their obligations. The paraphernalia was to be shown to them so that they could prepare similar impedimenta for their own use. I had intended doing all of this on the first night I was there, but the arrival of reinforcements from Marion changed this plan and I determined to wait until they reached the scene of action. This they did the next day, their trip having been made possible by a raid upon Brother Tukey, who was National Treasurer, and their depletion, which against his will, of the little stock of money on hand. This was sufficient to pay the modest railroad fare from Marion to Portland and return, and, as for the rest, they were willing to trust their luck. Their trust was well placed, for they were received with open arms and each became the guest of one of the Portland candidates.

The Merchants Hotel was the scene of the installation, and, despite the arrival of the Marion contingent, there was not enough of us to install the chapter with the ritualistic work. We assembled in the dining room of the Merchants Hotel where, behind locked doors, the chapter was installed according to the original plan. This on a Saturday night, and we remained in Portland over Sunday, where a number of social events were held in our honor, and returned to Marion on Monday.

It had all been wonderfully successful, Phi Delta Kappa, with one outside chapter actually installed, at last had the right to call itself a national, rather than a local, organization, and the future presented a roseate aspect when viewed from our optimistic standpoint. It has always been a source of great pride to me that this Portland chapter, the first to be installed by Phi Delta Kappa, has always remained loyal, that is has had a continuous existence and that it has produced a number of men who, as fraternity leaders, have reflected great credit upon their own chapter and the fraternity at large.

In the meantime, the boys who were to form the nucleus of Gamma chapter at Marion, had not been idle. As I have explained before, Alpha chapter had long been without a fraternity room, and we all realized that the time was ripe to remedy this defect. A national fraternity without something that could be called a national headquarters, could not hope to get very far. It was decided, therefore, that Alpha and Gamma should share the same quarters and a committee chosen to represent both of these chapters procured a large room in a building on Boots Street, just south of Fourth. It was in this room that Gamma chapter was installed in much the same simple fashion as had marked the installation of Delta chapter. But the event

was not without its picturesque element. The electricity had not been turned on as yet, and I read the ritual to these interested young men by candle light.

(To be concluded next month)