

Every October, we recite the story that has been told for the last 153 years. An inspiring story of two young women walking across a bridge on the campus of Monmouth College, engaged in thoughtful conversation about their aspirations, dreams, and the potential for creating something meaningful in their lives and the lives of others. They likely were also discussing the limited opportunities available to women at the time and the desire to create a space where academic excellence, friendship, personal growth, and service to the community could thrive.

To the modern eye and ear, that setting, with the stream flowing beneath the bridge, is symbolic of their desire for this new sisterhood to be a source of constant growth and renewal. The stream's flow is the ever-changing nature of higher education and our world, and the bridge is a solid mission and the continuous progress they hoped to achieve. Throughout our history, thanks to the bold footsteps of our Founders, Kappa has been at the forefront of changing social, political, and economic times.

At the turn of the century, many Kappas were involved in the suffrage movement, helping to found the League of Women Voters, walking in protests, and even participating in hunger strikes. During World War II, Kappa took an active part in the war effort by opening Kappa Service Women's Centers that were staffed by 1,200 Kappas throughout the states and assisting more than 225,000 women.

During the turbulent '60s and early '70s, the purpose and need for Greek-letter organizations were under attack on many fronts while, at the same time, women fought for equal rights and equal pay, Black Americans fought against racial disparity, and pacifists rebelled against the Vietnam War. Kappa's leadership held its membership together at a time when misunderstandings and emotions ran high by strengthening relationships with university administrations through honest communication, listening to its members, and bolstering alumna support to chapters.

Kappa continues to navigate diverse viewpoints and social unrest on college campuses across North America today through impactful programming that addresses mental health and well-being, sexual assault, and substance abuse. Kappa's commitment to diversity equity and inclusion ensures a wide range of perspectives and ideas and highlights Kappa's adaptability and resilience. On October 13, 1870, our Founders stepped outside of the roles that society had predetermined for them and boldly declared themselves in a world where they were not always welcome. Our Founders' bold dreams and willingness to pursue them still resonate in our Kappa sisters. Today, our members continue to courageously blaze trails and break barriers and stereotypes just like our Founders did when they walked into chapel.

On this day, Kappa Kappa Gamma is **153 years old** and proudly claims **140** active chapters, **225** alumnae associations, and more than 320,900 initiated members since our founding in 1870. Our collegiate chapters donated more than \$1.6 million to support our mental health and well-being philanthropic efforts. In turn, the Kappa Kappa Gamma Foundation has continued to preserve our archives and provided over \$1.2 million in scholarships and more than \$286,000 in

confidential aid this year, addressing the needs of our members. The Kappa Foundation continues to give to sisters in need who are affected by natural disasters, such as the most recent fires on Maui. Furthermore, the Foundation continues to support the ongoing education of all members.

In the words of former Fraternity President Jean Hess Wells, *Georgia*: “Whatever the future may hold, the Fraternity of Tomorrow will reflect the University of Tomorrow. For, by our very nature, we are inseparably bound to institutions of higher learning. Kappa will remain sensitive to the changes in these parent institutions and responsive to the needs of its members. For Kappa — as a vital, living organization — is ever-changing and ever-growing. We shall continue to seek the finest caliber of members within the spirit of friendship, to uphold the highest standards in social, moral and intellectual conduct, and to promote excellence in all that we endeavor.”

We each carry with us the pioneering spirit of our Founders and of those who have come before us. Our lives become more significant when we commit ourselves to something that will live beyond us. Let us commit to making our mark on the living history of Kappa Kappa Gamma and continue to lead with integrity, cherish our sisterhood, and seek to live up to all that is fine in life and thought and character. Happy Founders Day!

*Written by Denise Rugani, UC Davis, Ritual and History Director.*