

# PHI BETA KAPPA INITIATION CEREMONY

April 21, 2012

PRESIDENT, ALEX FEINGOLD:

Welcome to the Phi Beta Kappa initiation ceremony. The following ceremony is very old, as you will be able to tell from its language. Phi Beta Kappa itself was founded in 1776, and the initiation of new members continues to follow some of the original script.

Fellow members of Phi Beta Kappa: We are assembled for the purpose of receiving into the membership of our society certain persons who, having been duly elected by this chapter, desire to be admitted to its privileges and opportunities.

GUIDE, SECRETARY/TREASURER, JOHN STARKS:

Mister President and members of Phi Beta Kappa, I have the honor to present the following persons who, agreeably to our invitation, here present themselves for initiation as the class of 2012.

PRESIDENT, ALEX FEINGOLD:

In accordance with the rules of this chapter, and in consequence of our good opinion of your intellectual and moral character, supported by your record of high attainment at the university, you have been selected as worthy of becoming members of Phi Beta Kappa. Your names have been submitted to the scrutiny of the constitutional electors of the chapter and have met with their approval. You have been formally notified of your election and by your presence here you signify your desire to be enrolled as members of this ancient and honorable fraternity.

By the rules of this chapter, each initiate must personally pledge allegiance to the society and sign the roll book. I am instructed to administer the following promise:

Do you solemnly promise that you will be true and faithful to this society, that you will obey the laws thereof, and that in the election of

members you will have paramount regard for moral character and scholarly attainment?

The candidates will please respond “I do.” (They respond)

As your name is called, please come forward and sign the roll book.

(From the microphone, the guide calls candidates’ names; each comes forward and signs, with President overseeing signing and congratulating each using the society’s handshake. Other members form a receiving line, congratulating candidates, who pick up the membership handbook and key order forms as they leave the stage.)

PRESIDENT, ALEX FEINGOLD:

A brief historical statement, with an explanation of the key, mottoes, and signs of the society, will now be given by our Historian, Professor Gerald Kadish, Department of History.

## HISTORIAN, GERALD KADISH:

On December 5, 1776, a group of young men, students of the College of William and Mary in Virginia, meeting in the Apollo Room of the Raleigh Tavern in Williamsburg, formed the Phi Beta Kappa Society, which they dedicated to high purposes with eighteenth century eloquence. In the Phi Beta Kappa handbook you will find a brief account of the early days of the society in Virginia, and of the establishment at Yale in 1780, and at Harvard in 1781, of the chapters which ensured the perpetuation and propagation of the society when the parent chapter became inactive. During the following half-century, four more chapters were founded: At Dartmouth in 1787, at Union in 1817, at Bowdoin in 1825, and at Brown in 1830. At the end of a second half-century of growth, twenty-five chapters had been founded.

The need for a closer unity and a greater uniformity of practices led, in 1883, to the organization of the national body, the United Chapters of Phi Beta Kappa. At present there are about 270 chapters.

In 1875 the society extended the privilege of membership to women. In 1926, the 150th anniversary of the society's birth was made the occasion for raising an endowment fund and for exploring ways of encouraging scholarship in the educational institutions of this country. It now continues, well into its third century of existence, as the beacon of academic excellence and the symbol of scholarship in the liberal arts. In 1971, the United Chapters approved the chartering of this chapter, Psi of New York. In 2011, we celebrated the 40th anniversary of our chapter as the premier honorary organization on our campus.

The original Phi Beta Kappa at William and Mary was a secret society, and the oath transmitted to the first six northern branches contained a promise to “Preserve inviolate the secretes” of the fraternity. As a result of anti-Masonic agitation in the 1830’s, however, most of the chapters followed the lead of Harvard and repealed that injunction of secrecy. They retained, however, the medal or key with its symbolic engraving, and the interpretation of these symbols and the other signs of the society has continued to be part of the initiation. (Show pictures of the key.)

The present key, except for its smaller size and the lower stem added by the branch at Yale, is substantially the same as the original medal of the initial chapter at William and Mary. It bears, on the obverse, the Greek letters,  $\phi\beta\kappa$ , the initials of the words *Philosophia Biou Kubernetes*, meaning “The Love of Wisdom is the Helmsman of Life.”

In the upper left corner three stars symbolize the aims of the society: Friendship, Morality, and Literature. A pointing hand symbolizes Aspiration.

On the reverse, the letters S P represent the second name of the society, *Societas Philosophiae*, The Society of the Love of Knowledge. Below them is the historic date of the society’s founding, December 5, 1776; Above, the name of the member is inscribed.

Tradition has preserved two signs of the society. When members met, they greeted each other by drawing the backs of the index and middle fingers of the right hand across the lips from left to right, apparently symbolizing the secrecy of the organization. They followed the sign with a handshake, the traditional form of which has been revealed to you as you signed the roll.

DISTINGUISHED GUEST, DEAN DONALD NIEMAN (Optional Remarks):  
Announcement of the Award of the Hohauser Scholarship

On behalf of the officers and members of Phi Beta Kappa, I congratulate you, students, on your fine academic achievements at this university. Congratulations, parents, and thank you for coming to Binghamton for this Induction Ceremony. You can be very proud of your children. Today we honor both students and parents, because we know both worked hard to get to this point. Good work habits, focusing talent to achieve goals, will serve you well in the future. Your bright futures will reflect back on us, and make us proud to have been your teachers and mentors. We hope your election to Phi Beta Kappa today will be remembered and treasured as a high point in your educational experience at Binghamton.

PRESIDENT, ALEX FEINGOLD:

I shall conclude with the charge in the words of the ritual of 1776: You all at this moment experience in yourselves the heartfelt satisfaction which I do at this invaluable acquisition. Friendship herself, pleased with her success, now smiles on this addition to our fraternity. Let it be our joint care to extend the friendship that has ever been exercised by this society to these new members, that they may later become veterans in her service.

THE INITIATES WILL PLEASE RISE. (they rise)

By election of this chapter, and by your assent to its pledge and the placing of your signature on its book, the society's requirements for your initiation are fully satisfied. I therefore, in the presence of these members of the fraternity, declare you members of the Psi Chapter of Phi Beta Kappa in the State of New York, authorized to wear its key and badge and to participate in its meetings.

(President then announces reception and closes meeting.)