

The Association

The Tau Beta Pi Association, national engineering honor society, was founded at Lehigh University in 1885 by Dr. Edward Higginson Williams, Jr., "to mark in a fitting manner those who have conferred honor upon their Alma Mater by distinguished scholarship and exemplary character as undergraduates in engineering, or by their attainments as alumni in the field of engineering, and to foster a spirit of liberal culture in engineering cultures." - *Preamble to the Constitution*.

An honor society is an association of primarily collegiate members and chapters whose purposes are to encourage and recognizes superior scholarship and/or leadership achievement either in broad fields of education or in departmental fields at either undergraduate or graduate levels.

The honor society has followed the expansion and specialization of higher education in America. When Phi Beta Kappa was organized in 1776 no thought was given to its proper "field", since all colleges then in existence were for "the training of men for "the service of the church and the state." With the expansion of education into new fields, a choice had to be made, and the society elected to operate in the field of the liberal arts and sciences. Although this was not finally voted until 1898, the trend was evident years earlier, and 1885 saw the establishment of Tau Beta Pi .

Founder Edward H. Williams, Jr., was born at Proctorsville, Vermont, on September 30, 1849; he died at Woodstock, Vermont, on November 2, 1933. A member of Phi Beta Kappa, he was head of the mining department of Lehigh University when he determined to offer technical men as good a chance of recognition for superior scholarship in their field as that afforded by the other society in the liberal arts and sciences.

Working alone, he conceived an organization, gave it a name, designed its governmental structure, drew up its constitution, prepared its badge and certificate, established its membership requirements, and planned all the necessary details for its operation including the granting of chapters and the holding of conventions.

Thus, with only a paper organization, he offered membership to qualified graduates of Lehigh and received their acceptances and enthusiastic endorsement. Late in the spring of 1885 he invited the valedictorian of the senior class, Irving Andrew Heikes, to membership and he accepted, becoming the first student member of Tau Beta Pi ; but there was no time to initiate the rest of the eligible men from the class of 1885.

Mr. Heikes returned for graduate work, however, and in the fall of 1885, he, Dr. Williams, and two alumni who had earlier accepted membership, initiated the eligible men from the class of 1886 and organized the chapter. The parent chapter, Alpha of Pennsylvania, existed alone until 1892 when Alpha of Michigan was founded at Michigan State University.

A detailed account of the founding and the early history of Tau Beta Pi was written by Edward S. Stackhouse, *Pennsylvania Alpha '86*, after years of painstaking research work (*THE BENT*, April 1941). Records of essential dates were lost, but Mr. Stackhouse deduced that June 15, 1885, was the day on which the first

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undergraduate student was initiated. Subsequent evidence, in the form of Mr. Heike's original invitation to membership, discovered in 1943, confirmed this date.

Since the founding of the Michigan Alpha chapter, Tau Beta Pi has grown steadily; there are now collegiate chapters at 220 institutions, chartered alumnus chapters in 59 cities, and a total initiated membership of 423,324[+].

The Association was incorporated under the laws of Tennessee on December 1, 1947. The official name of the society is The Tau Beta Pi Association, Incorporated. It is a not-for-profit, educational organization with no stock-issuing power. Its assets are held in its corporate name or in trust. The Association is classified under Section 501 (c) (3) (not private) of the United States Internal Revenue Code, and gifts and bequests to it are tax deductible.

Tau Beta Pi is a founding member of the Association of College Honor Societies, an association member of the American Society for Engineering Education, an associate member of the American Association of Engineering Societies, and an affiliate of the American Association for the Advancement of Science and the Junior Engineering Technical Society.

The official badge of the Association is a watch key in the form of a bent of a trestle, engraved on the reverse side with the member's name, chapter, and class. The colors of the Association are seal brown and white. The official quarterly magazine is *THE BENT* of Tau Beta Pi. The name of the Association, its badge, and the title of its magazine are registered in the United States Patent Office.

The word *key* describes the insignia of many organizations. It comes from the fact that it was first designed, in the late eighteenth century, to include a pocket watch winding feature, hence *key*. The bottom stem, added to the basic insignia, had a tapered square hole fitting the common sizes of watch-winding shafts. The top stem and ring were added so that the key could be worn as a pendant from a chain, rather than as a pin of badge, this easily used to wind watches. When the "stem-winder" watch was introduced in the late nineteenth century, it replaced the key-winder. But the insignia *key* remained, although with a vestigial hole now round for manufacturing ease and economy.

The national headquarters of Tau Beta Pi are located on the campus of The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Tennessee, and have been there since R.C. Matthews went to the University as a young instructor in 1907. R.C. Matthews served as Tau Beta Pi's Secretary from 1905 to 1912 and Secretary-Treasurer from 1912 until his retirement in 1947. Before he assumed office in 1905 the headquarter offices had been moved to wherever the offices of the Secretary were located. Professor Matthew's long service to Tau Beta Pi and the University of Tennessee has made the University the permanent headquarters of the Association. In 1963, the headquarters staff moved into a suite of offices designed specifically for Tau Beta Pi in the then-now Nathan W. Dougherty Engineering Building.

(excerpt taken from: Information About Tau Beta Pi)