

**Omega-Wisconsin**

**Fast Facts:**

* Installation date: October 9, 1881
* Location: Madison, Wisconsin
* Region: 5

**History:**

In 1838, the territorial legislature passed a bill to establish a university in or near Madison, Wisconsin. Ten years later, Wisconsin’s first governor approved the University of Wisconsin through an incorporation act on July 26, 1848. In 1866, UW was designated as the Wisconsin land-grant instruction. The first bachelor’s degrees awarded to women in 1869.

The idea of a chapter at the University of Wisconsin originated at the Phi Delta Theta Convention in 1880 at Indianapolis, when Lillie Vawter, Phi-Franklin, a guest of George Banta at the Convention ball, met Dan McArthur of Wisconsin, a friend of George Banta. Through Mr. McArthur, Lillie corresponded with Eloise Johnson and a chapter of Delta Gamma called Omega was established in the spring of 1880. The new members chose not to make the chapter public until they received their charter.

Omega was installed on October 8, 1881 when the charter was presented to charter members Margaret Allen, Eloise Johnson, Alice Lamb, Mary Lamb, Maude Remington, Maybelle Remington, and Elizabeth Wing. In the spring of 1881, Kittie Ainsworth and Florence Hathaway were added to membership. Just before the 1881 graduation, it became a topic of discussion of whether to continue the chapter or giving up the charter. The freshman and sophomore girls felt they weren’t strong enough to keep up the chapter, but instead of immediately giving up the charter, the group wrote to Psi-Lewis and asked for the charter to be held in abeyance for a period of time. Eloise Johnson and Margaret Allen joined Psi in order to be in a position to reorganize if possible.

Eloise Johnson continued to correspond with Phi and Psi chapters but was concerned she was not getter her mail. She advised her sisters to not put Fraternity signs on the envelopes, and finally resorted to having the mail appropriated to the box of Dan McArthur.

In November of 1881 another group of girls applied for a charter of Delta Gamma and held secret meetings because of anti-fraternity feelings by the faculty. A second charter was requested by Kittie Ainsworth, Isabel Brown, Florence Brown, Rose Fitch, Florence Hathaway, Clara MacCartney, and Minnie Truesdale. These girls were considering another Greek group, but when they saw pictures of the two pins, they chose the anchor. Taking into the consideration the expense of Initiation and the length of time it would take them to get started, falling in love with the pin as it was “a little beauty,” they decided almost immediately to drop Kappa Alpha Theta and anchor their hopes in Delta Gamma. These women signed the Omega charter in 1881.

Omega was elected the Grand Chapter at the 1883 Akron Convention and hosted the third Convention in 1885. It was at this Convention that the Delta Gamma decided to call itself a fraternity instead of sorority, the cream-colored rose became the flower, and no more men were to be initiated. They hosted the sixth convention in 1889 as well, during which the Psi-Lewis charter was withdrawn.

The Catalogue of Delta Gamma, the first director of members, was published by Omega chapter in 1888.

Few cities can share the claim of three Delta Gamma Conventions (1885, 1889, 1903).

June 1906 marked the reunion and banquet in honor of the 25th anniversary of Omega. The chapter had 28 members and the support of 50 alumnae within the city.

Women were becoming more independent and involved. Omega joined with others and signed a petition to prevent the building of a concrete road through Devil’s Lake and petitioned the Regents for the use of Lathrop Hall for dances. Sororities held bazaars for the developing YWCA and Panhellenic sponsored more campus events. Some of the faculty and students considered the segregation of women in 1908.

The Omega minutes provide examples of the growth of social welfare awareness during these years. Ten dollars was donated to the Chinese famine fund in 1911, and a quarter per week was collected from each woman for the feeding of Belgian children. A Christmas party was held for children in the community.

Women’s actions were as yet limited by the social custom of the day, university rules, and the chapter censor. It was determined by a chapter vote not to allow weeknight dates for Freshman “with the exception of those allowed them by the Fraternity,” and “to dance only the waltz and the two step at downtown dances.” Each meeting included a Censor’s report. Action was taken for “inadequate study” and a member’s social privileges might be limited by grade average.

The first World War found Omega women pledging two hours per week to war work at the French Relief Shop. Two presents were provided per DG for the soldiers. An orphan was adopted in 1918 for three years, and each member was taxed ten cents for her support. Liberty bonds were purchased and in 1917, the Delta Gamma War Relief Project was started to help the children in occupied Belgium. The country was divided into seven districts to raise a mile of dimes. Agnes Merrill Scott, Omega-Wisconsin was one of the district captains.

College life at UW provided opportunities for recreation and partying with open houses after football games, vaudevilles, bowling, faculty receptions, subscription parties, sleigh rides, picnics, baseball, and informal dancing at the area dance clubs. When a fraternity had a formal weekend, the men moved out, and the men’s dates and extra maids (for pressing all those frocks) moved in.

Transportation transitioned from carriage to automobile, and in 1916, it was agreed that the automobile could be used for rush. The riding rule was changed to refer only to “men and women driving after nine.” That did not pose a problem as the front porch light was put out at the unheard-of hour of ten, with the front door locked.

Activities had changed little. Picnics, teas, dances, faculty dinners, vaudevilles, the Ice Carnival, Easter egg hunt, Sophomore Stunt, the “camp” retreat, the Christmas party, and Senior Swingout continued to be favorites. Bowling and other intramural sports dominated the athletic pursuits, while community involvement focused on the Relief Shop and the YWCA. A Victrola was given to Bradley Children’s Hospital in 1920 and the chapter purchased tickets for the Madison Dog Show for the Benefit of the Madison Baby Clinic.

Collegians and alumnae of Omega celebrated the chapter’s 50th anniversary on May 28th, 1932. One hundred and fifty Omegas attended the reunion luncheon and banquet held at the home of Margaret Cummins Brittingham, Omega-Wisconsin. A breakfast was held the following day at the Maple Bluff home of Jean Frederickson Schuette, Omega-Wisconsin.

Social functions were limited during World War II, but members stayed involved with volunteer work and defense program activities as they had done in World War I. After the war, the Delta Gamma Memorial Fund was started, which was the precursor to the Omega Foundation.

During the late ‘60s and early ‘70s, fraternity and sorority life was in jeopardy at the University of Wisconsin. Despite very negative feelings, the tension eventually abated in the mid ‘70s and recruitment regained popularity.

In 1984, Omega held its first Anchor Splash®.

Omega chapter has the highest number of Fraternity Presidents: ten. It is also the second oldest Delta Gamma chapter.

The first permanent place of residence for the Omega chapter was a house a 250 Langdon Street. Prior to moving in, the house was remodeled, and additions were added. On February 24, 1906, the Omega chapter held a house warming party. At the time, Omega had 28 members and was assisted by 50 area alumnae. Mrs. Catherine Coleman spoke to the chapter in 1920 about a lot on Langdon Street for a future house. A joint picnic was held with the proceeds going to the fund for the purchase of the lot.

When the house at 250 Langdon Street was sold and the profits used to by the present lot, the chapter members lived in rented houses in the first block of Langdon while the new house was being completed. Mrs. Catherine Head Coleman was the chairwoman of the committee in charge of building the house. The committee worked with Mr. DeGolyer of Chicago, who designed the house of native stone, patterned after a Pennsylvania farm house style of architecture. The chapter moved into its beautiful new home at 103 Langdon in September 1927.