

Shield

The

of Theta Delta Chi



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Men of Character: From Humble Origins



by Mark K. Brewer
Γ^Δ '80 (Michigan)

Andrew Green stepped gingerly from the train to the platform. His stiffness, collected on his morning trip from Syracuse, slowly dissipated as he walked under Grand Central Station's soaring canopy toward the light of midday.

Abel Beach was at the end of Green's journey to New York City. Beach was an old and dear college friend. So his was a journey inspired by reunion: a reunion not just with a college friend, but also with his youthful passion and ideals — the passion and ideals that gave

birth to a college fraternity. Green and Beach were to be the guests of honor at the 50th Annual Theta Delta Chi Convention.

Exiting Grand Central, Green turned right on 42nd Street and walked west. His mind momentarily departed from the present.

Green's last convention was in 1854. It was a modest affair. A dozen or so students from various Theta Delta chapters, or charges as they were now called, assembled in an Eastern city. They transacted some business. A brother gave an oration. Another read a poem written for the occasion. The brothers shared anecdotes of college and fraternity life on America's most elite campuses. Green, being a founder, was called upon in 1854 to provide some extemporaneous remarks on the origins of Theta Delta Chi.

In 1854, Green needed only to reach back seven years into his young memory to tell the story. Today, in 1898, the details from 51-years ago are obscured by the mists of time. Yet, the essential story of the fraternity was as fresh to him now as it was in 1847.

Pondering this unchangeable essence was amusing for Green. So much of life and society had changed since his college days.

**I feel that our
fraternity must
endure and be
a noble and
useful institution
for all time.**

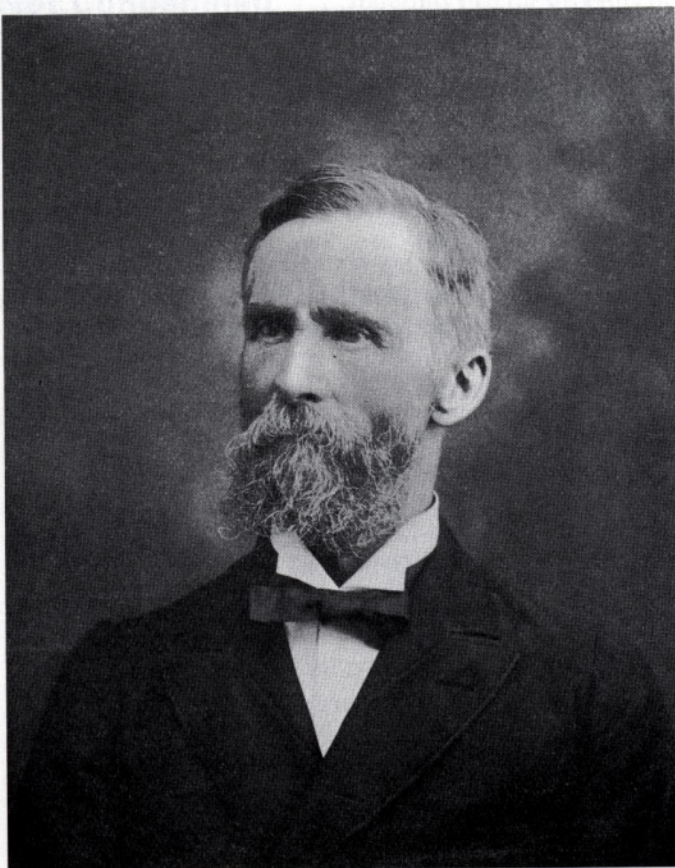
— Andrew Green,
Alpha 1849

Andrew Green's America

Andrew Green entered Union College as a sophomore in 1846. His America was pre-industrial, agrarian and on the cusp of revolutionary changes.

New technologies blazed a trail of new thinking. Boundless resources lay to the west. At the intersection of these untapped resources and new ideas lay incredible material wealth for enterprising capitalists. The plowshares of agrarian society were beaten into steam-powered machines of industrial America. These machines would be tended by armies of immigrants pouring over the eastern shores of North America in search of opportunity. Eastern cities began to bulge at the seams while Western Civilization pressed harder and faster toward the Pacific Ocean.

When Green stepped into Union College, he stepped into a new world. Behind him in history lay American independence, revolution and a nascent national identity. Before him lay dramatic social changes,



**Andrew Green, Alpha 1849,
guest of honor in 1898.**

fantastic economic growth, war and reconciliation, and the transformation from a backwater upstart colony into a powerful nation. In 1846, Union College lay at the leading edge of change and innovation in higher education.

College in the Age of Infinite Possibilities

In 1846, the U.S. college was part Sunday school and part success school. Colonial colleges prepared the sons of Puritan aristocracy for civic, social and religious leadership. In the 19th century, the aristocratic tradition gave way to the tradition of opportunity. America became synonymous with opportunity. The tradition of opportunity was fueled by an unbounded faith in man and the belief in eternal progress. While America pressed ahead, some felt that colleges straggled behind, their heads buried in Hellenic texts and Latin conjugations, outside the emerging industrial future.

The basic 1840s college curriculum had evolved only moderately since colonial days. Based on the English model, it stressed Greek philosophy. All courses were prescribed; there were no electives. Students learned logic, rhetoric, natural philosophy, metaphysics and moral philosophy. They studied Latin, Hebrew and Greek. Languages were not learned for their own sake, but were the living languages of study. Most texts were in Latin. Greek was the language of Homer, humanism and the New Testament. Hebrew was the language of the Old Testament.

In colonial times, and in much of American history, college was not a search for truth. The truth was already in the Bible. Its truths were interpreted by theologians and neatly packaged for consumption by college students. Education was based on revealed Christianity and deduction from known truths. Reason, inquiry and em-



pirical research lay at the margins of academic life.

The large universities with expansive scholarly faculties of 1898 did not exist in Green's college days. A large college in 1846 had 300 students. The college president was most certainly a Protestant minister and usually preached at a local church. He taught moral philosophy to upperclassmen. He was known personally by students, and he knew his students by name.

Progressive Changes at Union College

Union was America's first nonsectarian college when it was established in 1795. Other colleges were under the control of a specific Christian denomination. Union was the product of three denominations, hence its name, Union.

The president of Andrew Green's Union College was Dr. Eliphalet Nott, a visionary who saw that the future demanded more of college education. Nott blazed new trails in higher education in parallel with the covered-wagon real estate pioneers of the West. Dr. Nott led Union from 1804 to 1866.

Under Dr. Nott, Union was a place of discovery. Students were encouraged to think for themselves and ask questions. Teachers were encouraged to

17 Front St., Schenectady, N.Y.

The three-story brick building, above, was for many years considered the birthplace of Theta Delta Chi. According to the minutes of the meeting held here on June 5, 1848, "It was unanimously resolved that a secret society be formed." Twelve people were present. Eight founders were listed: Akin, Beach, Brown, Green, Hyslop, Wile, Jesse Fonda and Theodore Fonda.

Confusion and questions about founding and founders reigned for years. Some catalogues list eight founders. The 1891 catalog lists 12. The founding story, as told by historian Franklin Burdge Z 1856 (*Brown*), in Volume I (1884) of *The Shield* describes the story of six founders in 1847. The title pages of Volume I show the founding as 1846. The 50th anniversary was celebrated in 1898.

In the early 20th century, an ad hoc committee was formed to quell the controversy. After a thorough analysis of the facts, including testimony by Andrew Green, the committee determined that six men established the fraternity in the fall of 1847.

Andrew Green always maintained that 1847 was the founding year and had no recollection of June 5, 1848 as having any significance. He never included the Fondas as founders in his writings and speeches about the foundation of the fraternity. According to Beach, the status of "founder" was offered to the Fondas as inducement to get Jesse Fonda to join. Beach concurred with Green that the constitution, form of the badge and basic ideals and precepts of the fraternity were formed by six founders in various meetings held throughout 1847. The original badges are engraved with the year 1847.

The building was the home of New York Governor Joseph Yates. The Fonda brothers were grand nephews of Governor Yates and they lived in his home while attending Union College. The small building attached at the left was Governor Yates' office.

Commitment to Secrecy

The Masonic-inspired secrets of Phi Beta Kappa were revealed by the Harvard chapter under pressure from the evangelically inspired anti-secret society movement. By the 1840s, Phi Beta Kappa was an honor society.

Secrecy had two purposes: cement the oath of friendship and keep intruders out. The same forces that brought Phi Beta Kappa to its knees were active at Union College. Anti-secret society supporters yearned to undermine any fraternity and attempted to infiltrate. Uncharitable college presidents could easily find a "bluenose" student to volunteer their services to, if they could bluff their way in, report back on the nefarious goings on, including card playing, consumption of alcoholic beverages and loose talk about women.

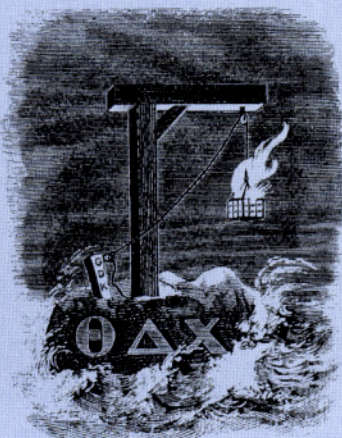
It was Union's President Dr. Eliphalet Nott's liberal and tolerant approach to student conduct that allowed the modern fraternity system to take root at Union College. Andrew Green wrote that the liberty and hospitality afforded by Dr. Nott's Union College made it possible for Theta Delta Chi to prosper. "[Dr. Nott,] vigilant for the promotion of everything of good report and the repression of

evil, if he had thought it best for the young men under his charge, ... would have forbidden [the] creation or continuance [of fraternities]. Yet he allowed them, saw their influence extend, witnessed their effect on their members and on the college, knew the needs that called them into being and doubtless knew ... their actual nature, yet [he] never withdrew [his] tacit permission. For 40 years [fraternities] grew up and prospered before his eye and under his jurisdiction." (*The Shield*, Vol. 24, Page 210.)

The Kappa Alpha Society was formed at Union in 1825. Sigma Phi, Delta Phi, Psi Upsilon and Chi Psi followed. The birth of Theta Delta Chi in 1847 was the culmination of fraternity foundings at Union.

While Dr. Nott no doubt understood the nature of fraternities, the secrecy of fraternities has been viewed with suspicion by many. Perhaps they don't understand the nature of the secret — the secret cradled in the heart of every person: the secret that friendship and fellowship are the seeds of temporal happiness — the secret that Theta Delta Chi chartered, cherished and continues to protect.

The Gamma Charge at the University of Vermont endeavored to be the most secret of secret societies. They never divulged the existence of the charge to anyone. Their attitude stifled recruitment and led to a short life: 1852 to 1857. Gamma was recently rechartered.



provide thoughtful answers. Seeing the need for educated leaders in an industrial society, Dr. Nott had integrated science into the regular curriculum by 1828. This bold experiment led Union to become one of the most influential colleges in the United States and third in enrollment behind Harvard and Yale. Yale had already attempted to implement a science curriculum, but the course did not lead to a regular Yale degree. Yale's experiment fizzled. Union's did not.

Union proposed another new concept: elective courses in revolutionary new subjects. The modern language, French, was offered, as were American history and constitutional government. Another innovation was the use of English texts for these new courses.

Dr. Nott's innovations were planted squarely on the foundation of traditional college life. The waking bell rang at 5:30 a.m. It rang again for prayers at 6 a.m., where roll was taken. From prayers, the students dispersed to morning recitations and then to breakfast, generally in town since the college food wasn't very good. Morning and evening prayers were required, as was chapel. Two students shared one room and one bed.

Social Life at Union

Socially, Union was somewhat subdued compared to its sister colleges, notably Harvard and Yale. Union students were generally from families of modest means and were not prone to the excesses of aristocracy, for whom college was a place to network, socialize and avoid responsibility. The campus unrest and horseplay (freshmen hazing) prevalent on other campuses withered under the leadership of Dr. Nott. He had the deepest admiration and respect from his students — a respect that flowed from his tremendous ability to speak, persuade and lead. Green later wrote that Nott

"was [Union's] attracting force and able governor, governing most by the persuasive influence of his own personality and the large liberty he allowed his students." (*The Shield*, Vol. 24, Page 208.) Dr. Nott appealed to students' manliness and good sense to keep order. This liberal style of governing was aided "by a prevalent opinion that the good doctor was somehow advised of pretty much all that transpired within the college walls."

Dr. Nott had a reputation for taking in other colleges' expelled students and graduating them with credit. On one occasion, Yale's president got wind that Union was taking a student who had been expelled for persistent violations of Yale regulations. He wrote Dr. Nott asking "if he meant to take that scoundrel into his college," to which the good doctor replied, "Yes, and make a man out of him." Dr. Nott surmised the student to be of good character, but a victim of "mismanagement." After a rough start, the student prospered and graduated at the top of his class.

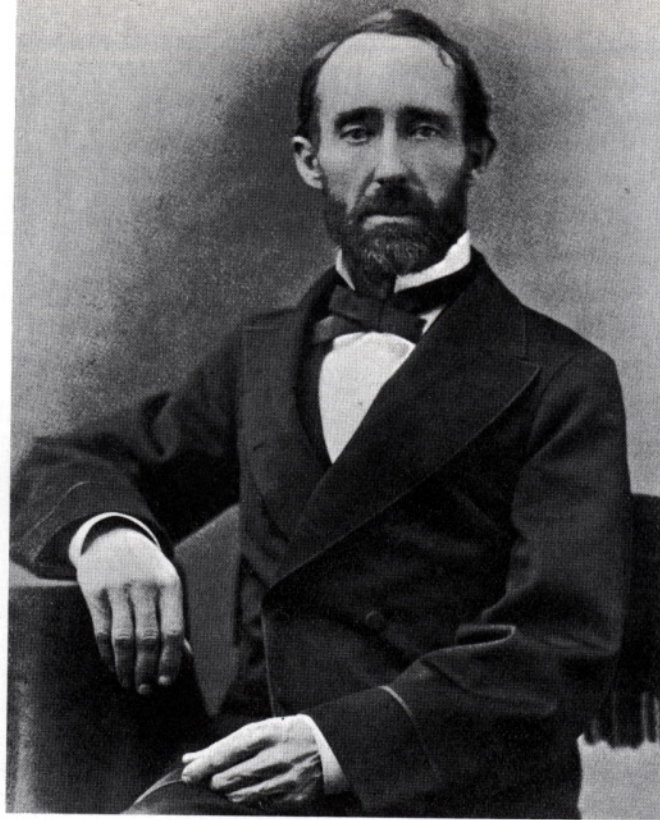
Union was subdued, but not boring. West College, where underclassmen roomed and recited, was a good mile from the center of campus and "Old Prex." Green and his classmates had no adult supervision other than the janitor. Life at West College was correspondingly lively. Shenanigans included getting a horse or a cow into the recitation rooms and trapping tutors in their rooms just before class.

Another favorite trick was tying up or stealing the bell that called students to prayers and recitations. Green managed to pull this one off with the help of some friends. He stored the bell in his room for two days, then returned it to the attic belfry. "I suppose," he later wrote, "Dr. Nott knew it all, ... but he punished no one." (*The Shield*, Vol. 28, Page 313.)

When things got particularly dull, students would set an outhouse on fire to witness

We wanted to place it upon the very best basis that could be devised, and one was ... the principle of love and geniality and good fellowship with one another.

— Abel Beach, Alpha 1849



the spectacle of firemen alternately fighting a privy fire and chastising the immature students for being immature students.

Green's train of thought momentarily returned to the present as he turned north on Fifth Avenue. He was thankful that Abel Beach would be at this convention. He had always cherished his fraternity friendships, especially with his fellow founders. But alas, all but he and Beach had passed away. William Akin, Theodore Brown, Samuel Wile and William Hyslop entered Omega, the ultimate charge, early in their lives.

The Founders

In college, William Akin took more interest in the ladies of Schenectady than his studies. Akin, pleasant and well-mannered, was also brash. Green feared Akin's quick temper and questionable judgment would get him in trouble. But under pressure, Akin manifested an unexpected strength of character. His passion eventually got the best of him. As a physician in Chicago during a cholera epidemic, Akin was distraught over his inability to

save a particular patient. Tired and overworked from this patient load, he began to fear he might come down with the dreaded disease himself. He took an overdose of preventive medicine and was attacked by malarial fever. Two weeks later, he died at age 24, two hours before his wife arrived from the East.

Theodore Brown was the son of devout Presbyterians. His behavior was above reproach. He was studious, delicate and his friendships were heart-felt. He graduated third in the Class of 1849 behind Hyslop and Green. When the Southern Rebellion broke out, his frail constitution prevented him from joining the fight. He supported the Rebellion by taking on his brother's duties in the family manufacturing business while his brother took up arms. In 1864, Brown, overworked from the burden of two jobs, succumbed to a low fever.

The only clergyman's son, Samuel Wile, was by all accounts the only wild one of the bunch. At age 17, Wile transferred to Union from New York University. Wile and Green, also a sophomore transfer, frequently played cards in the eve-

nings. Wile was temperate with drink. Likewise with his schoolwork. Green recommended Wile to the fraternity feeling that his light and cheerful manner fully compensated for his not-so-studious nature. In fact, Wile had high marks. After college, he captained his own trading vessel in the Australian seas and settled in New Zealand. He later moved to a small town in South Carolina where he set up a small store. He died suddenly in 1872 while tending his shop.

Another physician, William Hyslop, was appointed valedictorian by Dr. Nott. He and Beach were considered the best mathematicians in their class. Green remembered Hyslop as the originator of the Theta Delta Chi idea. He died four years after college while attending a family stricken with typhoid fever, which he contracted.

As Green approached 46th Street, his train of thought was derailed by commotion in front of the Windsor Hotel. Police had stopped traffic in both directions on Fifth Avenue. A huge crowd, at least 100 men, were assembled on the sidewalk. More men spilled out onto the hotel's balcony. A huge

Literary Societies

The literary society was a forum where students debated current events and other subjects outside the scope of the classroom. Their activities were strictly monitored by the college president. It was his job to ensure that no unsavory subjects were discussed and that civility reigned. Membership was open to any student. To stay abreast of current thought, the societies started libraries of English-language books. These libraries are the predecessors of the modern college library.

Many presidents attempted to have only one harmonious society. The lone societies never survived intact. Factions inevitably formed. To keep the peace, most colleges had two literary societies. Union College had three.

Literary societies had a long and enduring history until the late 19th century when they started a gradual decline. Factions, in-fighting, political maneuvering and intrigue marred the harmonious proceedings. Elections became complex ordeals with several factions running their own slates. Some factions were college fraternities. Other factions became fraternities. Eventually, fraternities flourished and literary societies vanished.



The 50th Annual Convention in 1898 drew almost 250 Theta Delts from across the country. Andrew Green is seated in front, left of center with crossed legs and hat.

American flag hung from the balcony. Next to it hung the unmistakable black, white and blue banner of his beloved Theta Delta Chi.

A photographer emerged from the crowd and crossed the street to set up a shot. Someone recognized Green, no doubt from photos published in the fraternity magazine, *The Shield*. Others congregated around him.

Green was astonished — astounded. A hundred, maybe 200 Theta Delta Chi men assembled in one place. Unbelievable. Andrew Green stepped up into the crowd and was directed to a place of honor hastily carved amongst the Grand Lodge. Andrew Green was just in time for the convention group photo.

As the crowd's impression was exposed onto film, Green wished he had written a real speech.

A Milestone

At the appointed time of 6:30 p.m., the brothers of Theta Delta Chi assembled in the

parlors of the Windsor Hotel in anxious anticipation of a milestone event: the semi-centennial banquet. The ballroom doors flung open at 7:15. Men, young and old from coast to coast, marched into an awesome display of fraternal splendor. No one was more surprised than the planning committee, who were so unorganized that it was a miracle a date had been set. They unwittingly took the credit for the work of Mr. Leland, the hotel proprietor who provided the abundant decorations as his own expense.

Immense electric chandeliers illuminated four walls adorned with bunting. Hung alternately among the four walls were the fraternity shield and the black, white and blue fraternity flag. The 243 brothers seated themselves by charge at elaborately decorated tables with flowers, greens and candelabra. At each place was a boutonniere and an elegant souvenir envelope containing a commemorative ticket and engraved dinner menu. Punch was served with a small silk

American flag.

Dinner was peppered with song, volleys of college yells and the seemingly endless pleasantries of social discourse. A small Theta Delta Chi flag, hand-painted on ribbon, accompanied dessert. Of course, cigars were distributed with coffee.

And as the smoke of 200 cigars drifted heavenward, founder Abel Beach took center stage.

Beach clearly showed his age. Since college, he had been burdened with ill health, sorrow and mixed success in business.

Blessed with three sons, all died, two of illness, one in a railway accident. Andrew Green, drawing on his college recollections had described Beach as the jolliest of the founders, a cheerful companion, masculine and well-knit — an excellent man with a pleasant voice. Beach was to Green a sort of elder brother.

Beach addressed the assembly.

"When I was a member of Union College, we had the wisdom and forethought to form an institution which should live, not only for a few years, but through all time, and become one of the glorious institutions of our land. ... It was of humble origin, and we hardly knew what we were doing at the time, for I was a mere lad of 17 or 18 years of age, and I hardly know how it was that I should have been inspired, along with my other friends in college there, to conceive the idea and form an institution with principles as grand and glorious as have proved to be in this our beloved Theta Delta Chi.

"[The principles of the fraternity] were, in a measure, talked over for a year or so before we organized the fraternity ... we wanted to place it upon the very best basis that could be devised, and one was ... the principle of love and geniality and good fellowship with one another, that we should cherish the kindest regard for one another in all respects and that Theta Delta Chi should be our first care and of the first importance. And I will say that that foundation ... has stood through the years and still survives and holds us up to a higher atmosphere and to higher acquisitions."

As Abel Beach returned to his seat, Rev. Mahlon N. Gilbert, Ξ 1870 (Hobart), introduced Andrew Green saying, "I have the pleasure of introducing to you one who has shown himself worthy of confidence and respect in every position in life — Andrew H. Green." Green addressed the assembly.

"I confess that I have not always thought that the founders were entitled to such great credit for the part they took in the foundation of this fraternity. It came upon them unawares; it was not a very deep design in the beginning, and though we gave as much attention to it as we could, it was something we did not look forward to as the great matter it has become.

"I am therefore proud tonight, more proud than I ever thought I could be, of having participated in the foundation of the greatest of all fraternities. ... When I look into the faces of these young men today, and when I look into the faces of the older ones here about me, I feel that our fraternity must endure and be a noble and useful institution for all time. ... I hope it may never be said otherwise than that the founders were always worthy of their successors, and that is all that we ask to be.

"I sometimes have been asked how was it that the Theta

Delta Chi fraternity came to be started. Why, gentlemen, I cannot answer that question. How comes it that some particular bright star shines in the heavens? How was it that Shakespeare illustrated the days in which he lived? Some thought, some power, mysterious or otherwise, directed these six young men to the same class in the same college at the same time, and carried them through its course to their graduation. Whatever it was, it was responsible for the existence of the Theta Delta Chi fraternity.

"And then, there was something in the air at Union College at that time that perhaps shared the responsibility. Dr. Nott, ... the greatest president that ever ruled over any college in this land, was then at the height of his power. He was somewhat venerable and old, and his voice tremulous; but there was an inspiration in his high character, in his presence; there was an exalting spirit in being taught and ruled by such a man. Perhaps that had something to do with it."

As he addressed the crowd, Green could plainly see the fruits of the founders' ideals. Theta Deltas from coast to coast had gathered to toast the Old Lady for, in her infinite wisdom, bringing together men of character into the fellowship of unbridled friendship for generations. Green now understood that as a mere lad, he and his colleagues Beach, Hyslop, Wile, Brown and Akin had tapped into this wisdom by founding a fraternity based on mutual esteem and dependence. A friendship that acknowledged the faults of each and endeavored to improve and reform. That friendship, in its perfect state, was balanced by moral uprightness, scholarship, tolerance for ideas, mental acuity, physical health and the acknowledgment that forces greater than ourselves orchestrated the universe.

The semi-centennial was a grand success. It properly celebrated a robust history. Few events would be as defining as this.

Among those few events were those of 1847 — the events that brought six young men together to frame the guiding principles of an organization that would touch thousands of lives.

The Founding

Toward the end of his sophomore year, Theodore Brown was approached by Akin, Beach and Hyslop about the possibility of forming a new society. Brown assented and the first organizing meetings commenced.

At first, the group intended to create a study group to improve their writing and debating skills. But such a group was a needless duplication of effort. Union already had three literary societies with the same purpose. Besides, all but Akin were academically superior.

Improvement was their goal. But in what form should this improvement take?

Perhaps the simple matter of a strong and abiding friendship would be the road less traveled, but most meaningful for them. Through the mirror of close relationships, they could improve their social intercourse, and in so doing, become more effective and productive citizens.

The group authorized Brown to secure his roommate, Andrew Green. Brown, when approaching Green on the subject, vouched for the group's social promise. Green was delighted for that. He found college life lonely. He had belonged to Philomathean [Literary] Society which met twice monthly to read papers and debate. Green found the literary society dull. He made no friends there and decided his time was better spent studying.

At Green's first meeting, he suggested adding Wile to the group, and they authorized

Green to secure him. They discussed the possibilities of success. The Class of 1849, of which they were all members, had 134 men, a third larger than any previous class. The five existing fraternities pledged less than 40 from each class, which in the past was one third of the class. In their discussion about a new society, they reasoned that there was room for a sixth fraternity at Union.

On an evening in May, 1847, the six held another founding meeting around a small pine table in the room of Hyslop and Beach. There, and at several subsequent meetings that term, the framework of the fraternity was constructed. At the end of the term, each person was assigned a task to complete over the summer.

In the fall of 1847, their junior year, the group adopted the constitution, written by Green, the motto, written by Beach and the form of the badge. The founders signed the constitution. Upon their breasts they placed their blue shields with glittering gold edges, and proudly, and perhaps nervously, displayed them after morning recitations.

Theta Delta Chi flourished at Union. When the Class of 1849 graduated, there were 20 initiates. Theta Delta Chi flourished elsewhere. Within 15 years nearly 20 charges were established at other colleges.

Civil war broke the rhythm. Both Theta Delta Chi and Union College would see hard times.

