

Why Cheese Curds?

Should anyone someday compile a list of unique traditions of Phi Beta Kappa chapters, Xi of NY's penchant for cheese curds should surely take an honored place among the quirkiest. For decades the reception following the induction ceremony has featured a plate of the pale tidbits, and this has meant that a chapter member has had to provide them. Some years the search has been easy, and some years it has required last-minute calls, but the parade of cheese curds has not faltered for decades.

To borrow a song, how long has this been going on? According to one in a position to know, it dates to the cocktail parties of the 1960s. Now there's a magical phrase, taking one immediately to the glossy sophistication of the parties on *Mad Men* or *PanAm*. Don't go too far down that road, though, since we are, after all, talking about Aurora.

This does not mean that cocktail parties in Aurora had to be without new delicacies. On one such occasion in the sixties, Prof. of Chemistry Mac (C. Macgregor) Delaney served cheese curds, one of those foods so humble in origin that it has had to be rediscovered by connoisseurs from time to time. Prof. of Classics Lynn Kirtland, a member of Xi of NY (and for many years chapter historian) was very taken with the snack and brought some to the next induction - and the one after that, and the one after that. Eventually, cheese curds became as closely identified with the occasion as Prof. Kirtland himself and his sonorous pronunciation of *Philosophia Biou Kubernetes*, always delivered glancing over his half-glasses as if to be sure we got it.

So there it is: that's the story. It's a short one but a good one, blending as it does historical continuity, the desire to discover good things and share them, and friendship across disciplines. May these qualities always remain characteristic of both Wells and Phi Beta Kappa.

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