

## **Form of Initiation**

**May 26, 2010**

*The Chapter is sequestered behind closed doors. The Guide orders the robe candidates in alphabetic order, and verifies correct pronunciation of names. When the candidates are assembled, the guide raps on the door and awaits a return rap. The guide then opens the door. The president gives a short speech followed by the guide's introduction of the candidates to the Chapter by their diploma name, one by one. The candidates take their place in the front row as they are introduced.*

**President:** "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 the Chapter, desire to be admitted to its privileges and opportunities. The Guide will introduce the candidates."

**[Guide leads in and introduces each candidate by name]**

**Guide:** Mr./Ms. 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 our initiation.

**President:** 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 in the College, you have been selected as worthy of becoming members of Phi Beta Kappa. Your names have been submitted to the scrutiny of the Constitutional elections of the Chapter by the Phi Beta Kappa members of the Wells Faculty 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 society.

Before formally inducting you into the Society, I shall speak in interpretation of the ideals of the Society and the responsibilities of membership. To this end, I shall quote from an address by *former Chief Justice of the Supreme Court Charles Evans Hughes at the 100th anniversary celebration of the Alpha Chapter of Rhode Island:*

“The unique position of Phi Beta Kappa, and its usefulness, can be safeguarded only by unremitting attention to what has become the law of its being. The prestige of the Fraternity is due to the fact that it is an association of individuals of scholarly attainments who have proved their merit according to the accepted standards of college discipline. The best proof of the utility of the Fraternity is the esteem in which the election is held. Whatever may be said of the value of various activities proposed for the organization, the essential thing is to hold to the theory of the Society as a fellowship of scholars, admission to which is an honor conferred by reason of demonstrated worth. *The success of Phi Beta Kappa continues to lie in what it is, rather than in what it does.*

The particular interest in Phi Beta Kappa is in liberal education. Whatever debate there may be as to its exact definition, or its prerequisites, it persists as an ideal. Intensive critical study of educational aims and methods has found nothing to take its place. It means the development by careful training of the capacity to appreciate what has been done and thought, the ability to make worthwhile appraisals of achievements, doctrines, theories, proposals. *It is liberal because it emancipates; it signifies freedom from the tyranny of ignorance, and, from what is worse, the dominion of folly.”*

The president of the chapter reads this particular passage every year, as our Chapter members well know, some having heard it probably for decades now, and its presence in our induction ceremony has reached the level of the sacred. This year, I thought I would do a little research into the passage. I discovered that there is actually more to that last paragraph, so for the sake of completeness and to add something new for those who have this passage virtually memorized and because I think there is something of real value, particularly at this time, in the remainder of that paragraph, please bear with me as I read out the last three sentences:

“Learning is not its aim, so much as intelligence served by learning ... *At this time, when the world stands in need of every influence which favors intellectual discipline and achievement, the service of Phi Beta Kappa is of heightened value.* It holds aloft the old

banner of scholarship; *to the students who have turned aside from easier paths and, by their talent and fidelity, have proved themselves to be worthy, it gives the fitting recognition of a special distinction.*"

I think these final words have special meaning and significance to us here at Wells. Again: "At this time, when the world stands in need of every influence which favors intellectual discipline and achievement, the service of Phi Beta Kappa is of heightened value." May you always focus your sights and train your mind on critical inquiry and thought. Use your gifts – not only those you came to Wells with, but those you gained while you were here – the gifts of critical thinking, wise reasoning, and humane and compassionate actions – to make the world a better place and to not let the folly of uncritical thinking win over. To paraphrase Hughs, a liberal education "emancipates; it signifies freedom from the tyranny of ignorance, and, from what is worse, the dominion of folly." With emancipation comes responsibility however; do not shirk from that responsibility and do not be afraid of it. People and the world will be counting on you not to and your pledge to serve requires it of you.

The other item of news that I learned from my research is that the Alpha Chapter of Rhode Island was installed in 1830. We've always heard only that Hughs' comments were made 'at the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Alpha Chapter of Rhode Island', so now know that these remarks were made in 1930...

In a few moments you will be asked to pledge to uphold the responsibilities of the Society membership. You may wonder, and rightly so, what the responsibilities of Phi Beta Kappa membership are that you will soon be upholding. Toward that end, I would like to enter a few remarks of my own as I reflect upon the 'interpretation of the ideals of the Society and the responsibilities of membership'. I quote from the National Chapter: The Phi Beta Kappan "*stands for freedom of inquiry and expression, disciplinary rigor, breadth of intellectual perspective, the cultivation of skills of deliberation and ethical reflection, the pursuit of wisdom, and the application of the fruits of scholarship and*

*research in practical life. We champion these values in the confidence that a world influenced by them will be a more just and peaceful world.”* I think that this final clause resonates well with the Wells College Mission Statement that it is every Wells’ alum’s responsibility to share the privileges of their education with others in order to create a more just and peaceful world. Finally, you should know that it was not enough to simply achieve academic excellence to be admitted into this prestigious Society. You cannot simply be ‘smart’ or perform well in the classroom, you cannot simply achieve distinction in your major, you cannot simply have a high GPA. The Latin honors of cum laude, magna cum laude, and summa cum laude recognize those achievements. But to achieve Phi Beta Kappa status is something beyond that: you must also hold to a high standard of personal excellence which includes evidence of a strong character and a breadth of personal and scholarly interests. And here is where it becomes personal: This is the reason why I personally am proud but also humbled to be a Phi Beta Kappan. I am proud of my accomplishment and more so today than the day I was inducted because I have increasingly come to appreciate what it stands for. I am humbled to belong to a group such as those you see in the row behind you, people who responded to the Phi Beta Kappa call to excellence and the call to responsibility, to continue to excel as individuals and as scholars, and finally, to share that gift with others, to better the world. I hope that as you look to your left and right, you too feel humbled to be among such peers of your own, but also very proud of yourself for being deemed by the other Phi Beta Kappa members to be worthy for inclusion among them.

Without further delay: By the rules of this Chapter, each initiate must personally pledge her or his allegiance to the Society and sign her or his name in the Roll Book. I am instructed to administer the following promise, at the end of which you may answer, "I do." After this the Guide will call the roll, and each of you will in turn then sign the Roll Book. I would like to point out that our Roll Book was begun on May 7, 1932, at the founding of the Wells Chapter of Phi Beta Kappa. In the 78 years since that date, all newly inducted members have signed their names in this book. As you reflect upon your induction into this Society, it is worthwhile to consider the historical continuity of which

you are now a part. As the Roll Book is a historical document of record, I would implore each of you to write your name legibly, so that future generations may discern and affirm your membership.

Will you please stand? I shall now administer the 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?"

**[Initiates respond "I do" and the Guide calls the roll]**

The initiates will now be seated. A brief historical statement with an explanation of the key, mottoes, and signs of the Society will now be given by the historian of the Chapter.

**[Historian ends with "...at the end of this ceremony of initiation"]**

I shall conclude in the words of the Ritual of 1779:  
 "You all at this moment experience in yourselves the heartfelt satisfaction which I do at this, our valuable acquisition. Friendship herself, pleased with her success, now smiles at this addition to our Society. Let it be our joint care to extend the friendship which has ever been exercised by this Society to these new members, that they hereafter become veterans in her service."

The initiates will rise. By election of the Chapter, and by your assent to its pledge and the placing of your signatures in the Book, the Society's requirements for initiation are fully satisfied. I therefore, in the presence of these members of the Society, declare you members of the Chapter Xi of Phi Beta Kappa in the State of New York, authorized to wear its key as a badge, and to participate actively in its meetings.

There is one more item of business and three Wells-specific traditions to share before the ceremony is officially over. First, please be sure to see our Secretary, Professor Tom Stiadle, immediately after the ceremony and before the wine to fill out

your official registration form and 'settle up' your once-in-a-lifetime dues. An issue of the Key Reporter will be provided as an example of the newsletter that will follow you for the rest of your lives. As for the traditions: What would Wells be without traditions? The first is that there is this odd tradition of always serving cheese curds at the reception – don't ask me why; something to talk about over cheese curds at the reception. The second is that I invite you to look over the Wells induction signature book that you all have just signed, to see the names of those who preceded you. Names like Macmillan, Weld, Koch, Clugston, Carter Woods. On the back of the third page you will see that the Chapter has only had five honorary inductees in its entire history and one of them is with us today: Provost/Dean of the College Leslie Miller-Bernal. The final tradition is the welcoming of our new members by current members of the Society through demonstration of the official -- and secret -- Phi Beta Kappa handshake. So with that, let me be the first to welcome to you to Chapter Xi of New York, to Phi Beta Kappa, and to invite you please turn to the Chapter member directly behind you so that they may welcome you into the Chapter themselves with the official handshake. Congratulations and may you always appreciate the honor you have just earned.