

# Lewis School

Although no longer standing, a proud historical marker is posted on the corner in front of the site where Delta Gamma was founded. If you stand near the marker, facing the apartment buildings and looking down at the sidewalk, you will see an additional Delta Gamma bronze marker.

In 1873, women from privileged families in the South commonly attended female seminary schools like Lewis School. Its main purpose was to teach ladylike qualities. Eva recalled, "It was not much more advanced than a high school." In 1873, only 25 percent of colleges in the U.S. accepted women, and nearly all of the women admitted were white. The nearby University of Mississippi only accepted men at this time.

In most cases, Lewis School prepared women for work as schoolteachers, which two of our Founders later became. In the early 1800s, female education focused on domestic skills, social polish and parlor savvy. An advertisement for the school from 1849 shows that basic topics such as spelling, reading, writing and arithmetic were taught and more advanced topics like the history of the United States, rhetoric, botany and moral philosophy. In 1871, Sallie Lewis took charge of the school and under the direction of "lady principal" Mrs. Hays, coursework was elevated. Mrs. Hays' son, Arthur, was a student at Ole Miss and living at Lewis School, and after seeing his astronomy and Greek books, the Founders were aware that they were not learning as much as their male peers.

The building was a small, two-story structure with a large porch and held accommodations for 25 lodgers known as "boarding pupils." It educated 30-40 students, and their ages ranged from 12-18. The unintended consequence of coeducation came as more universities admitted women. All-female institutions, like Lewis School, were no longer viable. In 1889, as a result of continuous low

numbers, the charter for Psi I-Lewis School was withdrawn. The building stood until the 1960s, and these one-story apartments now standing were built shortly after. Artifacts from the building like pieces of wood, old nails, a railing and a doorknob, are preserved in the Frances Lewis Stevenson Archives at Executive Offices.

We've all heard about the moments of our Founding. But while here at the site where it began, let's imagine it together. As homesick guests of the lady principal, the three girls remained at Lewis School during the winter holiday. After hearing Mrs. Hays' son and his friends speak so enthusiastically about their fraternity at the University of Mississippi, they thought, "Why not us?!" and decided to form their own club. They received no help from the men and were unaware of any other female fraternities at that time.

In their shared bedroom, they sat on a four-poster bed Anna nicknamed "Old Father Noah," and they excitedly began plans for Delta Gamma Fraternity. Anna snuck into Arthur Hays' room to briefly borrow his Greek grammar book, and they chose the letters Delta and Gamma. The bed was seated next to a chest of drawers nicknamed "Mother Noah," and from it Anna retrieved a pad of paper and pen, and they went to work. It was in those early days that the three wrote the first Constitution and bylaws and selected our motto: "do good." And it was here on these grounds that our more comprehensive Constitution was later written, our H and anchor badge designed, as well as more than 15 years of meetings were held and minutes were recorded in the first minute book. According to a 1930 Convention speech given by Lillie Wohlleben, who had served as Fraternity President from 1881-1883, it was in this yard in 1877 that anchor badge designer, Corinne Miller, ran across the grass and up to Lillie, enthusiastically showing her the sketch



of our current anchor badge design. In January of 1874, the Founders initiated four of their classmates who had returned from winter break: Idelette and Lucy Lyons, Mary Skipwith and Anna Towns.

The structure of meetings was very different from today and their purpose was largely to supplement the women's education. A letter was chosen for each

meeting and members would present their research on a literary or historical figure whose name began with that letter. For example, according to the minutes for the first meeting held on February 7, 1874, Anna spoke on the life of Mark Akenside a 17th-century English poet and physician and Mary related the life of Alexander the Great.

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**Consider the following questions and discuss them with your tour group:**

- How is access to education different today than it was in 1873?
- Did you ever feel homesick while at your university campus? What did you do to cope?
- How do you think being given an education affected the rest of the Founders' lives?

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