

Welcome

Welcome to the Delta Gamma Oxford Historical Sites Tour! Today, we return to the place where our organization began. We will travel the streets of Oxford, Mississippi, to reflect on and celebrate 150 years of Delta Gamma. Although now paved, these are the very same streets our Founders and earliest members walked.

Together with our archivist and the Executive Offices communications team, the 2022-2024 Council gave significant thought to contextualization on this historical tour. It was created with a guiding focus to present our history as honestly as possible in the limited time we have. In giving a tour of the places and spaces that our Founders knew and are important to our history, we want to recognize the truth of where we come from in all of its complexity. As the University of Mississippi has said of their own contextualization project, "the past merits scrutiny, even as it commands respect."

On this tour, we will provide the context of the time of our Founding to the places that we will visit. Slavery as an economic system was the core issue in a bloody conflict that impacted the birthplace of Delta Gamma and the lives of our Founders and early members directly. Slavery, the Civil War, Reconstruction and the ensuing Black Codes and Jim Crowe all impacted the physical spaces, the structures, the people and the culture from which Delta Gamma was born. We want to both respect our past, as well as bring the added context that helps us understand it more fully, even if that context is difficult.

And we want to acknowledge that while some of us can see ourselves in Eva, Mary and Anna; others of us cannot. For some of our sisters, picturing themselves in this period means picturing themselves in oppression

and/or bondage. We are holding space Sunday morning for any sisters who are experiencing these feelings for reflection and support from 8 a.m. to noon in the Cockrell room at The Peabody.

The main tour will take you to the Oxford Train Depot, site of the Lewis School, the church where our Founders worshipped, the Alpha Psi-Mississippi house and Oxford Town Square. There are many more historic sites related to the early history of Delta Gamma that you are welcome to visit. If you wish to explore beyond the main guided tour, you will find a list of them on the map that has been provided.

Each bus will drop off at a different location on the tour. Trolleys are available to transport you to each stop and you may go to the sites in any order.

At 2 p.m. the trolleys will begin to take all attendees to The Depot in preparation for departure back to Memphis. Please remember to be back on your bus promptly by 2:45 p.m. in order to return to Memphis by 5 p.m. and get ready for the Sesquicentennial Gala.

Now, let us explore the context of the place and era in which our Founders grew up.

Anna, Eva and Mary were born and lived most of their lives in Mississippi. Receiving statehood in 1817, it was one of the 15 states where slavery was both legal and the foundation of the economy until the ratification of the 13th amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

The Founders were ages five and six when the Civil War began in 1861. Slavery had grown rapidly in the 1850s and by 1860 the census counted in Mississippi there were over 430,000 enslaved men, women and children compared to the white population of 350,000. In that census, each of our Founder's families were recorded as owning between one and four enslaved people. The Founders' ancestors are also recorded as owning enslaved people in earlier censuses. For example, Eva's great-grandfather owned 21 enslaved people and willed them to his children upon his death.

The Founders were from large, affluent families and all the Founders had several siblings. After serving in the Confederate Army, Anna's father served

in the Mississippi legislature as a representative of Attala County. Mary's father was a pharmacist, then referred to as a druggist. Eva's father was a merchant and served as sheriff, treasurer and circuit clerk of Attala County.

By 1873, Mississippi was in a state of reconstruction and grappling with economic, social and political challenges that arose from the military defeat of the South and the end of slavery. After the full withdrawal of Union troops, Mississippi passed a series of regressive laws informally called, "The Black Codes," laws meant to restore the hierarchy, bodily control and economic advantages whites experienced during the period of slavery.

Education was also not a right for women of any race at the time, nor was it accessible for poor women. But for families such as our Founders', it was a mark of social class and gentility to have their daughters receive schooling. It is within these times of great social unrest, inequality and economic downturn that our three Founding sisters stepped off the train in Oxford, Mississippi.

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