1949

The President's Page

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**Recommended Citation**

Wallace, Leon H., "The President's Page" (1949). *Articles by Maurer Faculty*. 2804.
https://www.repository.law.indiana.edu/facpub/2804

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The President’s Page

Among the great gray buildings of the Canadian Government, at Chateau Laurier in Ottawa, the 29th General Convention of Phi Delta Phi met after two years’ skillful administration under the leadership of Dean William L. Prosser. Its post-war revival long since complete, the Fraternity had reached its greatest strength in both its assets of individual membership and of money.

During the two years between Glacier Park and Ottawa, the under-graduate members of the Fraternity (who are the alumni for the next two generations), by their own overwhelming choice, had reduced the requirements of membership to the simple and unassailable standard that the individual man be a competent and congenial student of law.

With this standard, the Fraternity might continue to base its reputation on the achievements of its Inns, and their members, in the leading law schools of our continent, and on the individual achievements of the members after they have graduated. However, our Fraternity, by the unanimous vote of the delegates at Ottawa, decided that this was not enough.

In other words, it was decided that we must continue not only to have Inns which are composed of the most competent men currently in law school (which has been the fact for almost a century), but also that we must project this principle beyond, so that we may not leave our alumni members with the nostalgic sentiment that, “I belonged to Phi Delta Phi when I was in law school.” It was decided that it is not enough for us to hoard our new found wealth, and regard it only as a problem of investment, and, consequently, of accumulation of unproductive wealth. We must decide also what to do with this accretion, without dissipating the principal, and without dissipating it on some
ephemeral project, or projects, which would reduce the Fraternity to its former relative impotence.

Accordingly, the Ottawa Convention provided for the appointment of an interim committee to investigate the possibilities of the future scope and purpose of the Fraternity. The present Council believes that this is its greatest problem in the next two years. The Council is proceeding, cautiously, in the project of selecting a committee of men in our profession whose minds are mature, but not embalmed, to report recommendations to the next Convention on what the future scope and purpose of the Fraternity should be.

Another mandate of the delegates of the Ottawa Convention was the appointment of an interim committee on Inn Programs. This implied that the Inns, the undergraduate membership, should do something more than some of the Inns are presently doing. This committee has been appointed by the Council with a Province President, as chairman (as a co-ordinator) and the other members as undergraduate Inn members. The Council hopes for a report from this committee during the present school year, trusting that this report will be a distillation of a majority of the views of a majority of each of the Inns.

Because of technical questions which have arisen, the Council has decided to submit two proposed constitutional amendments to the Inns.

One has to do with the distinction between Barrister members (those initiated as undergraduate law school members) and Honorary members (those initiated after they have graduated from law school).

The Constitution presently provides that all general officers of the Fraternity, including Province Presidents, shall be Barrister members. At Ottawa, it was discovered that three of the Fraternity’s Province Presidents, all of whom had served four years or more, were Honorary members, and had been constitutionally ineligible to serve at
all. The lateness of the discovery precluded the possibility of Convention action. The proposed amendment removes the ineligibility of Honorary members to serve as Province Presidents, and provides that any Honorary member who has served the Fraternity for four years shall then be eligible for any office. Since the three Province Presidents involved are or have been law teachers, some confusion has arisen over the question whether the present Constitution distinguishes between law practitioners and law teachers. The short answer is that it does not. Many law teachers are Barrister members; many practitioners are Honorary members. As a matter of fact, both Dean Prosser, the immediate Past President, and I, the Present President, have been active practitioners, are now law teachers, and are Barrister members. The Council was of the unanimous opinion that the services of qualified Honorary members should not be forever denied to the Fraternity, and that, if an Honorary member gave four years of faithful service to the Fraternity, any further implication of illegitimacy, as far as the Fraternity is concerned, should be barred. The decision is yours.

The other proposed amendment refers to the proposition that $7.50 of the initiation fee be allocated to the cost of a key, instead of $5.00, as expressly provided in the Constitution of the Fraternity. This change was recommended by the appropriate committee at Ottawa; the report was unanimously adopted. By inadvertence, however, the recommendation was not referred to the committee on constitutional amendments, and the Constitution was not amended. The Council believes that the Constitutional amendment proposed should be adopted to carry out the desire expressed by your representatives in the Convention. Again, the decision is yours.

All of the Provinces have been defined, and the Province Presidents appointed. With one exception, all appointments
have been accepted. The present Council is determined that every Inn shall have at least one annual personal contact with the international organization. To achieve this, some changes have been made. If this is not accomplished, the present Council agrees that some Inns may question reasonably the price of international affiliation.

The Council is acutely aware of the general problem of the advantage, if any, of affiliation of any local group with a national or international organization. The question posed is a reasonable one. We propose to meet it.

Speaking for the present Council of the Fraternity, I can say only that the Fraternity has acquired a potential power in the affairs of law students, and in the affairs of the legal profession, which necessarily implies a power in the leadership of the American and Canadian society. We must do the things necessary to insure that this acquired power is projected into the future to accomplish the results most desirable for the peoples for whom our profession strives to secure, ultimately, equal justice under law.

That is our objective.

As the new President, there is little more that I can say to such a Fraternity, except to express my personal greeting and gratification. In the long run, our Fraternity is no stronger than the cumulative achievements of its individual members. Achieving membership is not enough; we must earn, individually, and in the future, the privilege extended to us. If we strive for this ideal it will be immaterial whether, at the end, we are enshrined in the amber of the history of our time, or lie in unmarked and forgotten graves. In either event, we shall have made our contribution to our Fraternity, our profession and to society.

—Leon H. Wallace