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History of the Knickerbocker Fraternity (KHN)

by Michelle Brinkman

What's in a Name?

The Knickerbocker Fraternity of Hope College has a history that spans 100 years. The fraternity was founded in 1909 by twelve men who wanted a group that would create a place where all the men of Hope's campus felt welcomed and accepted.

The name originated in the Netherlands, but was given wide exposure by the Dutch settlers in New Amsterdam (New York). It was noted for the below-the-knee breaches worn by the men of the colony. Today, we see evidence of the Knickerbocker influence in baseball uniforms, the New York "Knicks" basketball team, the high-toned Knickerbocker Club (still in a Neo-Georgian mansion on Fifth Avenue in New York), and on the campus of Hope College. The first organized team in baseball history, which played under organized rules, was the "New York Knickerbockers," in 1846. Casey Stengel, when he took over as manager of the newborn New York Mets baseball team in 1961, is quoted as saying, "It's great to be back as the manager of the Knickerbockers."

The Emblem

The emblem of the Knickerbocker Fraternity contains several parts. In the upper corner of the emblem's shield is an anchor, which signifies the close relationship and interdependence of the Knickerbockers and Hope College. It also symbolizes the fact that the group was founded on the principles of Hope College.

Originally, there were twelve rubies that surrounded the shield in honor of the founders of the fraternity, and signified the persistence with which a Knickerbocker must hold to his faith and convictions. Today, the picture of the emblem does not show the twelve rubies, but the memories of the original members still live on.



The Greek letters on the ribbon below the shield are Kappa Eta Nu. *Kappa* stands for the Greek word, Kouvwvla (knoo-non-iah), which means Fellowship. *Eta* stands for the Greek word Houkos (hathukos), which means Moral. *Nu* stands for the Greek word Novs (noose), which means Intellect. These represent the three important parts of manhood.

The emblem of the fraternity has a great symbolic meaning. A good Knickerbocker continually strives to uphold its values.

100 Years and Counting

1909-1942

For the first six years, the Knickerbocker men worked hard to gain recognition on the college's campus. In 1914, World War I began, and many of the Knickerbocker men enlisted. Only seven members remained on Hope's campus during this time. At the end of the war, there was a resurgence of Kappa Eta Nu.

In 1918, the men of KHN purchased a Liberty Bond, a war bond that was sold in the United States to support the Allied cause in World War I. Subscribing to the bonds

(Continued on page 2)

From the Director



This summer in Holland has been less “summer like” than we would all have liked, but the lakes and lawns are looking splendid, just the same. This issue features the history of the Knickerbocker Society/Fraternity at Hope College, as they plan to mark their centennial anniversary in September. Researched and written by our summer archival assistant, Michelle Brinkman, this is the most in-depth history written on the Knickerbockers. We hope you enjoy reading about this Hope College fraternity.

Geoffrey Reynolds

Knickerbocker Fraternity (continued from page 1)

was a symbol of patriotic duty. By purchasing this bond, the Knicks showed their love and dedication for their country.

In 1920, the Knicks began renting what was hoped to be their permanent home – a house on the corner of 12th Street and Central Avenue (formerly the Holland City Hospital). This location was also the scene of the famous Knickerbocker banquets. For the next 19 years, the Knicks dedicated their time to “stags,” occasional guest dinners at the Knick Grille, and several informal open house nights to grow awareness of the fraternity on Hope’s campus.

In 1939, the Knicks did extremely well in campus activities. They won the Homecoming decoration contest and participated in inter-fraternity sports. Unfortunately, at the end of 1939, the Knicks had to leave their house on the corner of 12th and Central, so that the city could convert it into the Netherlands Museum. The men moved to the Temple Building, located across from Centennial Park on Tenth Street.

In 1941, a few days after Pearl Harbor, the Knickerbockers suspended all activity until the end of the school year out of respect for all the soldiers who died or were fighting in the war. In 1942, once activities had been reinstated, KHN took second place in the annual Homecoming decoration contest. The spring semester began with a pleasant meeting with the Knick’s sister society, Sibylline, at the Knickerbocker club room. Later in the semester, the men and women went on a riding party at Evergreen Stables and had a roast on the beach. To top off and complete the year, the Knicks threw an informal dinner party for its local alumni at the Dutch Mill.



From the 1942 Milestone: Not least in the experience of a Hope fraternity man are the “bull sessions,” which are integral in his daily life. After lunch or dinner, after literary meetings, after closing hours at the girls’ dormitories, fraternity brothers may group together; spontaneously the “bull session” is begun.

It is here that members learn to know one another most intimately. For to these discussions the men bring their personal problems in order to gain advice. Here, too, personal experiences are exchanged; sometimes an especially lively session will take on the character of a confessional.

A view into the complete informality of the ‘bull session’ is afforded by this picture of these Knickerbockers gathered around the fraternity radio.

1943-1952

The most famous chaplain of the war was a Knickerbocker named Clark V. Poling. The heroic action of Reverend Poling, who along with a Jewish Rabbi, a Catholic Priest, and a Protestant minister, gave up their life preservers to other sailors when their ship, the U.S.S. Dorchester, was torpedoed in the North Atlantic. Of the 902 men aboard the Dorchester, 672 men lost their lives, including the four chaplains. A posthumous Special



Clark V. Poling

Medal for Heroism, never before given and never to be given again, was authorized by Congress and awarded by President Dwight D. Eisenhower on January 18, 1961. The special medal was intended to have the same weight and importance as the Medal of Honor. Poling was also posthumously awarded the Purple Heart and Distinguished Service Cross.

After World War II was over, the Knickerbockers worked hard to regain normalcy in their lives and in their fraternity. In 1947, a dinner at the Marque was the first event in the social calendar; smokers followed later in the semester. The fall term was completed by the formal Knickerbocker party held at the Warm Friend Tavern.

The second semester was filled with inter-fraternity basketball and bowling, All College Sing, and a spring informal dance party. Not only were the social traditions upheld during 1947, but so were the intellectual and moral sides. Devotions and prayers were presented at each meeting, and a chapel service was led by members from the fraternity.

The years 1948-1951 had the yearly date night, where each member invited a friend to a regular meeting out at Miller's. They also had the annual winter formal party, held at the Morton Hotel in Grand Rapids. The fraternity did well in basketball, bowling, softball, and track. The highlight of 1950 was when the Knicks helped raise money to adopt Eliftherios Sfachtos, a Greek war orphan, who was known to the men of the fraternity as "Butch."

In 1952, the men of KHN came together and mourned the loss of Dave DeForest, an active brother, who was killed in a car accident on his way back to college. In honor of Dave, the Knicks built the Dave DeForest Memorial Trophy Case in Van Raalte Hall, which burned down in 1980, destroying the trophy case.

1953-1979

In 1953, KHN did well in football and won softball for the seventh year in a row. They also had a spring party in Spring Lake. The year 1954 brought the usual activities of the Knickerbocker men. They participated in the Homecoming decoration contest (where they won a trophy), and they had 24 new members join the fraternity.

For the first time, the formal party was held in Muskegon at the Occidental Hotel. Sadly, KHN lost another brother in 1954. Majid Tadayon, a former brother, was killed in a tragic car accident.



Paper drive, with proceeds going toward the Tadayon Memorial, 1957

In 1955, the KHN membership grew to over 50 members. As a part of the fraternity's charity work, they planned to

revamp a portion of the basement in Graves Library for more effective use by the college community. Then, in 1956, the membership grew to over 60 members. During this time, the Knicks held a blood drive and completed the study room in the basement of Graves Library. A sum of the money raised was donated by the fraternity to Graves Library in order to establish the Tadayon Memorial Fund, which was used to purchase books concerning the Near and Middle East.

In 1958-1966, the Knicks worked together in inter-fraternity sports (winning the All Sports Trophy), the All College Sing, and a host of fraternity parties, which the Knicks are most known for. As for projects, the men devoted several afternoons to work at Prestatie Huis [Achievement House], continued the operation of their walking Blood Bank, and repaired the radios in the clinic donated by the brothers in 1942. In 1958, the Knickerbocker men were excited to finally move into Knickerbocker Hall (which is the present Lichty Hall.)



Annual formal, 1958

The Knicks participated in many different service projects from 1966-1970. In 1966, the entire fraternity participated in the Muscular Dystrophy Drive, contributed to the people of Madras, India, and made final plans for the adoption of a Chinese orphan, which took place in 1967. The frat basement was rejuvenated as a result of a strong fraternity effort in raising funds. In 1968, the men of Knickerbocker raised money to purchase a new pool table, and they raked leaves on the weekends to help beautify the college campus. KHN also worked with the Muscular Dystrophy Association and the Easter Seal Drive. During the second semester in 1969, the Knicks worked with Herman Miller to redecorate their basement with new furniture and wall coverings. The highlight of the year 1970 came when the Knicks sponsored Detroit's MC-5 at the Holland Civic Center. Finally, the year closed with a Leukemia Drive in honor of the late Knick, John Witzel, who died in November 1970.



Known as a "walking blood bank" by Red Cross officials, when a call for blood donors went out, virtually the entire fraternity volunteered

In the next few years, the Knicks had two major residence changes. In 1972, a decline in membership forced the fraternity to move into Columbia Cottage. Then, in 1976, the Knickerbocker men found themselves in the middle of a housing mix-up. Housing contracts had to be in the day after pledging was finalized. The Knicks' contract was placed in front of the Deans office, but because of some mix-up, he didn't receive it. As a result, KHN lost Columbia Cottage. In 1977, the Knicks found a house at 166 E. 14th Street. This was subsequently torn down as part of the construction of the Dow Center. They then moved to 47 E. 13th Street. Finally, in 1979, the Knicks petitioned the Campus Life Board, and many independents came to a special meeting to help the Knicks get their house back. In the fall of 1979, they were allowed to move back to Columbia Cottage.

Even though KHN was having trouble with their housing situation, they still found time to have fun and serve their community. In 1978, the Knickerbocker Fraternity and the Sigma Iota Beta sorority collected \$300 for muscular dystrophy. The event was called "Shamrocks for Muscular Dystrophy." They stood outside of banks, stores, and restaurants in downtown Holland. Each person donating to the cause was given a "Shamrocks for Muscular Dystrophy" pin. Also, in 1978, the Knicks held a "Drinking for Dystrophy" party. The money was raised by having an off-campus party, at which guests brought their own drinks and then donated their empty bottles and cans, which the Knicks later returned for the deposit. The Knicks raised \$35 from this event.

1980-1993

Due to certain activities in 1980, the 71-year-old Knickerbocker Fraternity was no longer recognized as a

Hope College affiliated organization. The Knicks had been taking part in activities that Hope College deemed as not suitable for the character of the college's campus. Then, in 1981, after appearing in front of the Campus Life Board, the Knickerbocker Fraternity received their charter back. After reinstatement, the Knicks added amendments to their constitution, including fines and suspension for students who break the campus and fraternity rules.

During the summer of 1981, Columbia Cottage was torn down and the Maas Center was built. In the spring, the fraternity moved off campus to the "Black and Red House" on 13th Street, which was later torn down and replaced with Vennema Apartments.

Even through all the obstacles the Knicks faced, they still dedicated time to help others who were less fortunate. In 1981, they raised \$300 for the Muscular Dystrophy Association.



Columbia Cottage

Once again, the Knicks moved. In 1982, they moved to Gibson Cottage. Then, in another twist of fate, the Gibson Cottage caught fire in 1983, due to faulty electrical wires. Much of the Knickerbocker archives suffered smoke and water damage. Gibson Cottage was torn down and became the Peale Science Center parking lot. Even though KHN lost their cottage due to the fire, they still banded together and raised \$150 for the American Cancer Society.

In 1984, the Knicks moved into their new house at 54 East 13th Street. Once the Knicks moved into their new house, they had a celebration with alumni so that they could reminisce and meet new members.

In 1987, the Knickerbockers participated in the American Cancer Society's "Great American Smoke Out." The Knicks put coin drops downtown and in several campus dorms to raise money for cancer research. The idea behind the "Smoke Out" is for smokers to quit for the

entire day, and hopefully for good. The Knicks handed out buttons and brochures to promote this idea. The day was a personal success for the fraternity members, who raised a record \$219.50.

The year 1988 was filled with tremendous controversy and left a tainted, yet lasting image of the Knickerbocker men. In October, the Knicks stirred debate by distributing condoms from their Homecoming float in support of safe sex practices. As a penalty, the Knicks were required to perform community service in the form of promoting awareness of the AIDS epidemic. From this service ultimately came the AIDS Reality Series that the Knicks sponsored throughout the mid and late '90s.

In 1988, the fraternity had grown so much that they now maintained both an on-campus house and an off-campus house, located on East 15th Street, known as the "Broke Down Palace." In 1989, since most of the members of the fraternity were upper classmen, the fraternity had to leave the on-campus house and moved off campus into 110 East 15th Street, which was retained for many years.

In the spring of 1990, rush and pledging started extremely well with ten rushees accepting bids; however, after the first week, six pledges dropped out. Soon after, the fraternity lost its charter due to hazing violations. There was no New Member Education for two and a half years.

In 1992, the Knicks once again held rush and New Member Education programs. In 1993, KHN moved into an on-campus cottage, located at 116 East 13th Street, while also maintaining the off-campus house at 110 East 15th Street. The off-campus house was occupied until 1997.

1996-2007

In 1996, several activities kept the Knickerbocker men busy. The group kicked off the year with a can drive to



Can drive to raise money for the annual Labor Day Telethon, 1996

raise money for Jerry's Kids and the Labor Day Telethon. They also took part in the National AIDS Rally.

For almost 60 years, the Knicks were linked with their sister sorority, Sibylline. Due to conflicts and fitting better with the sorority Alpha Gamma Phi, the Knicks and Alpha Gamma Phi voted to create an official bond. The vote passed, and the

former sister sorority to the Arcadians became the sister sorority to the Knicks.

In 1998, the Knicks went with alumni on their annual canoe trip. They also interacted socially on campus with annual parties such as "Knick or Treat" and "Paddy Murphy." The Knicks helped with a service event called AIDS Reality Concert and the Multiple Sclerosis can drive.

The years 1999 and 2000 were rewarding for the Knickerbocker men. They continued their traditional social events, such as "Knick or Treat," watching the Pull from their raft on the Black River, the spring canoe trip, and they also started a joint canoe trip with Alpha Gamma Phi. During this time, the Knicks maintained their positions as leaders of the campus community. In 2000, the Knicks secured the on-campus house, Mast Cottage. They also kept their off-campus house at 51 West 15th Street.

In the summer of 2001, Hope's maintenance department, doing routine maintenance in their house basement, discovered some photos of fraternity activities that did not reflect well on the college. After review by the college, the Knickerbocker charter was suspended for five years. During 2002-2005, an ad hoc committee of nine alumni, headed by Scott Mancinelli, worked on reinstatement. The hard work and dedication of the committee resulted in the Knickerbocker Fraternity being allowed to hold fall rush and New Member Education in 2006. It was completed with four strong individuals comprising the Class of 2009 - the first Knickerbocker NME class in 5 years.

In 2007, the men won four awards during the annual Greek Week. Included in these awards was the highest GPA among all the fraternities, as well as the highest participation rate during Greek Week.

On to the Future

Even though the Knickerbocker Fraternity has faced many challenges over the years, it is clear that they have regained their footing and are stronger than ever. The men of KHN are determined to change the college's view of their fraternity. They want to be known for being outstanding moral, social, and intellectual members of society. What the future holds for the Knickerbocker Fraternity is unknown, but if they stick to the path they are on now, they can expect to have a bright future ahead of them. Thought is being given to focusing on leadership development in conjunction with the Hope College Faithful Leadership program, emphasizing and discussing values for living, service projects, international assistance and social life.



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Knickerbocker Banquet, 1912