Phi Omega Chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc.

Phi Omega Chapter was founded on February 14, 1924 as the first alumnae chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated, in North Carolina. Alpha Kappa Alpha, the oldest Greek letter organization established for African-American women, began on the campus of Howard University in 1908. Phi Omega was founded by Adelaide Smith, Audrey Williams, Maude Young Ray, Mamie Williams, and Marguerite Adams. The historic marker is located on Martin Luther King, Jr. Drive, near the site of Maude Young Ray’s home at Thirteenth Street and Ridge Avenue. Early meetings were held in the homes of members, and Ray’s home was also used as a hospital by her second husband, Dr. Alexander Hamilton Ray.

As only the third chapter in the South Atlantic Region, Phi Omega’s members came from Charlotte, Greensboro, Durham, and Winston-Salem. With a mission of “Service to All Mankind”, fourteen of the fifteen early members of Phi Omega worked in education. The women set a goal to institute a Chapter scholarship, which was achieved in 1934 with a $100 scholarship for high school students. Chapter support for education continued with the establishment of scholarships for students at Winston-Salem Teacher’s College, now Winston-Salem State University, and the Kate Bitting Reynolds Memorial Hospital School of Nursing. Today, Phi Omega awards Pearl Scholarships to young women attending historically black colleges and universities and unrestricted scholarships to other worthy women.

In the 1930s, members of Phi Omega began a chapter tradition of holding leadership positions in the regional and international administration of AKA. Clarissa Dillard, a teacher at Winston-Salem Teacher’s College, served as First International Vice-President from 1934-36. She also served as South Atlantic Regional Director from 1946-49. Charter Member Marguerite Adams had held that position in 1940. Barbara K. Phillips, a Winston-Salem native, was Mid-Atlantic Regional Director from 1970-74. She was elected First International Vice-President in 1974, and she served as International President from 1978-82. Dr. Phillips is also notable for serving as assistant superintendent of Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools. During Dr. Phillips’ tenure as International President, Vivian Burke served as the International Membership Chairman. From 1994-98, Constance Holland served as International Parliamentarian.

Members of Phi Omega have also played key roles in local and state government, holding seats on the WS/FCS School Board, Winston-Salem City Council, and serving in the NC House of Representatives and Senate. In 1960, Dr. Lillian Lewis, a professor of biology, became the first African-American elected to the local school board. Her swearing in was covered by Jet in its December 29, 1960 issue. Dr.

Dr. Barbara K. Phillips, 1979
Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc.

Dr. Lillian Lewis
CB Hauser Photograph Collection at Winston-Salem State University
Geneva Brown opened Moore Laboratory School in 1971 and served as principal for nineteen years. After her retirement, she held a seat on the school board for over eighteen years. Vivian Burke, an educator and guidance counselor by profession, was elected to the Winston-Salem Board of Alderman, now the City Council, in 1977. Ms. Burke and Dr. Virginia Newell were both elected that year and were the first two African-American women elected to City government. Ms. Burke was elected Mayor Pro Tempore in 1989, a position she held until her retirement in 2020. Earline Parmon served as a Forsyth County Commissioner for twelve years before her election to the NC House of Representatives in 2002, a seat she held until her election to the NC Senate in 2013. Renee Phillips was appointed as the first African American City Secretary in Winston-Salem, a position she held from 1997 until her retirement in 2015.

Phi Omega’s members helped grow Alpha Kappa Alpha’s collegiate presence locally. In 1949, Phi Omega sponsored the chartering of Gamma Lambda, the undergraduate chapter at Winston-Salem Teacher’s College. Phi Beta chapter at Wake Forest University was sponsored by Phi Omega in 1990.

Members of Phi Omega addressed the need for quality, affordable housing by developing the Ivy Arms Apartments in Winston-Salem’s East Ward. Planning for the complex began in 1986, and Phi Omega Inc. – the chapter’s development corporation – was established. Phase I included 20 units at a cost of $750,000, and Phase II added 24 units for an additional $1.1 million. On August 17, 1991, the Ivy Arms Apartments were dedicated. The complex also includes a community center that is available to groups for use as a meeting space.