

THE FOUNDING OF THE BETA EPSILON

FOR a brotherhood like the Beta Epsilon, just as the genesis of any living organism or a dynamic invention, there must be the confluence of conditions and circumstances to touch off the germination and subsequent birthing of the idea. There is that matrix of various elements out of which develops, and, in its own time, emerges a lustrous gem, a shining creation.

In the case of the Beta Epsilon, there were the milieu of the U.P. College of Engineering, the personae in an active faculty member and student leaders, a climate of indifferent activities, and a catalytic influence that hastened the coalescence of ideas and motivations.

The year was 1929, first semester of the school year. In the Ermita campus of the University of the Philippines, the engineering block consisted of a quadrangle of one-story concrete buildings facing Florida (now Maria Y. Orosa) Street towards Isaac Peral (now U.N. Avenue) end of the block. The three-story engineering building alongside on Florida had not been constructed yet. (The contract for its construction was bidden and awarded in October of that year.) Alejandro Melchor had been teaching engineering for five years; as a student, and afterwards a faculty member, he had been very active in extra-curriculars. He used to take charge of student participation in such activities as the engineering smoker, the engineering cooperative, and the University Day and National Heroes' Day celebrations. Among the student leaders were: Severo A. Tuason, Valeriano L. Pantoja, Dominador Cepeda, Horacio Morales, Conrado Ledesma and Ciriaco Mirasol. They were active in athletics;

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they formed the core of the engineering basketball team. And they used to take snacks after basketball practice at Pargas Store along Florida Street. It was there in that one-door refreshment parlor that the eight founders pledged themselves to be bound by fraternal ties and to invite others to the fold. The date: June 15, 1929.

However, weeks before this date, while the group and Professor and Mrs. Alejandro Melchor were supervising the decoration of the Engineering float for the University Day parade, Professor Melchor tossed the idea of having an exclusive engineering fraternity (he belonged to the Rizal Center Fraternity himself, a university-wide group which was founded in 1913). He made the suggestion on noting that college activities were not well-participated in on account of the absence of an integrated group of students bound by common aims and purposes as obtained in a fraternity. It so happened also that a movie serial, "The Collegians," starring George Lewis and Dorothy Gulliver, was having a run at the Empire Theatre on Echague (now Carlos Palanca) Street in Manila. One of the episodes featured an open fraternity initiation in which the neophytes were asked to do errands and chores, like rolling peanuts on the sidewalk by means of their noses. It was seeing this movie that prompted members of the group to act on the suggestion of Professor Melchor. (The late Orbit Diaz Sr. said that there were nine founders, the ninth was Cesar Quisumbing from Capiz. However, the late Dom Cepeda was sure that there were only eight.)

The eight Honorable Founders: Dominador Cepeda, Conrado Ledesma, Ciriaco V. Mirasol, Horacio Morales, Gil Y. Ocampo, Valeriano L. Pantoja, Gerardo Samson, and Severo A. Tuason.

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The drafting of the Constitution and the application for recognition by the University authorities followed in due time and on August 23, 1929, the Beta Epsilon Fraternity was officially established and this has been adopted as the foundation date of the BETA EPSILON-- Brotherhood of Engineers. Valeriano L. Pantoja was elected the first Most Exalted Brother and Professor Alejandro Melchor was the first Adviser. There were twenty-one brothers among the charter members. The Constitution provided for a Fraternity Sweetheart. As many of the brods wished that his own G.F. would be the frat sweetheart, the happy choice was Miss Mary Morales, a popular coed, a cousin of Horacio Morales and a friend to many of the members of the brotherhood.

(The details of the above narration were related by the late Brods Dominador Cepeda, Orbivitano Diaz Sr., Alberto Morillo Sr., and Mrs. Catalina B. Melchor.---DII)