



Elizabeth Wilson, Pi



Ask Elizabeth. Those words solved all the problems of the Sorority whether it was to get a list of Chapter Presidents, a pattern for a robe, or advice on ordering pins. They are the words uttered constantly by the 32 staff members of the National Organization during her time.

Elizabeth Wilson's activities were divided into three parts. She was first of all the devoted daughter of Mrs. Ralph Wilson with whom she lived in Glendale, Missouri, a suburb of St. Louis. There she relaxed with her knitting, books, and friends. Her knitting was more than a hobby because she had donated many items to the St. Louis Alumnae Chapter and to Conventions to sell for social service projects. In the summers, she enjoyed traveling and visiting the Shakespeare Festival in Stratford, Ontario, a number of times – on one occasion with Mary Alice Peterson and two St. Louis alumnae ... on the way to Convention, of course!

Second, she was a professional. She obtained her A.B. degree from Harris Teachers College in 1936 and her M.A. from Washington University in 1946, and she had done graduate work at universities in Wisconsin, Kentucky, Denver, and Boston. She was a trained remedial reading teacher employed by the St. Louis Public Schools and a member of professional organizations.

Her third activity was directing the Central Office and answering questions for Alpha Sigma Tau. As a collegiate member of the Pi Chapter, initiated in 1934, she became interested in the aims and activities of the local and national organizations. She was Treasurer and President of the Pi Chapter, attending her first National Convention in Pittsburgh as a collegiate delegate.





When Dorothy Bennett Robinson became National President in 1949, the Central Office Headquarters was moved from Columbus, Ohio, to St. Louis, Missouri. Elizabeth was always a key figure in the Central Office during her years as Alumnae Secretary and later as National President. She became the Director of the Central Office and a member of the National Council for a second time in 1974.

In 1964, at the 15th National Convention in Detroit, when Mary Alice Seller Peterson retired as National President, there was a question about her successor and someone said, "*Ask Elizabeth.*" Tearfully but firmly, Elizabeth assumed the responsibilities of the office and continued until August 1972. During those years, she did double-work acting both as National President and as Director of the Central Office.

Presiding as President at the Cincinnati Convention in 1966, Elizabeth opened the first meeting with her address "Key to the Future." She said:

"The key to the future of sorority growth lies in the acceptance and responsibility by all members. Too few members, both collegians and alumnae, are doing their part. Only when all members share in the interests and duties will we have a vigorous and dynamic group. You are familiar with the quotation: 'I am only one, but I am one. I cannot do everything, but I can do something. What I can do, I ought to do. And what I ought to do, by the Grace of God, I will do.' No better philosophy for a growing organization was ever expounded."

In 1968, at the 17th National Convention in New Orleans, she continued with a similar theme "Will Fraternities Accept Responsibilities?" She said:

"We cannot afford to be obstinate in a changing world, yet changes must be made without compromising our principles and purposes."

The responsibilities which she emphasized were to promote academic excellence, define and demand high standards of moral and social conduct, and to provide leaders for service in the college and the community.

At the Toronto Convention in 1970, Elizabeth used as a theme for the keynote address "Seven Decades Later." She outlined the Sorority's growth in each decade beginning with a quotation from Woodrow Wilson: "*We are trying to do a futile thing if we do not know where we came from or what we have been about.*"

She closed by saying:

"You, who are here today, will write the story of Alpha Sigma Tau for the coming decade. Let us hope that each of you will find a way to contribute your share, remembering a thought from Dag Hammarskold, 'You have not done enough, so long as it is still possible that you have something of value to contribute.'"

Her final address was delivered at the National Convention in Virginia Beach, Virginia, in 1972, based on the theme "Think on These Things." She mentioned the fact that the object of all fraternities was the *"social, intellectual and moral improvement of its members."* Elizabeth stressed the fact that "social" did not now mean partying and socializing: *"It refers to the development of good personal relations - the ability to communicate with and serve others, the improvement of human relationships."*

She also stressed the basic needs of sororities like recruitment, officer training, and programs that emphasize sorority values. Staff members, chapter delegates, and visitors were impressed with their President as she advised them to "Think on These Things."

Besides making speeches at Conventions, Elizabeth helped install chapters, inspected chapters, and wrote the Central Office Bulletin. Later as Director of the Central Office, she was also the business manager of *The Anchor* because it was published in St. Louis. She directed the mimeographing and distribution of the Constitutions, the Chapter and Staff Handbooks, and what was then called the Pledge Manual. She also found time to work with Carrie Staehle and Beverly Bollard on a history of Alpha Sigma Tau and wrote the third section of the book, "National Expansion." She got things done because of her relaxed philosophy. Once Mrs. Staehle said, "I write so fast you might not be able to read my letters." Elizabeth responded, "Don't worry. I read fast."

When Lillian Schippers introduced Elizabeth as National President in *The Anchor*, she stated:

"Miss Wilson's outstanding characteristic is her quiet, efficient, hard-working service. She shuns the limelight, and her tremendous contributions to Alpha Sigma Tau generally are not realized."

Her leadership was reflected in her addresses at National Conventions; her efficiency in the smooth-running Central Office; her dedication to four decades of continuous service. She was only one but has done the work of many.

"If the readers of our history have questions that have not been answered, they will find the correct information if they write to the Central Office and 'Ask Elizabeth.'"

- Carrie Washburne Staehle

Positions held: Recording Secretary and President of St. Louis Alumnae; Chairman of the National News Agency (1944 - 1949); Business Manager of *The Anchor* (1949 - 1951); National Alumnae Secretary (1949 - 1964); National President (1964 - 1972)

Honors received: Ada A. Norton Alumnae Award (1964)