



## Mary Alice Seller Peterson, Iota



Mary Alice Seller Peterson became a part of Alpha Sigma Tau through her association with the Iota Chapter when she was initiated as their faculty adviser in 1926. Although not a collegiate initiate, few members have contributed more to the growth and development of Alpha Sigma Tau than Mary Alice.

Though born in Iowa in 1895, Mary Alice considered herself a true Hoosier, having lived in Indiana since she was two years old. She received B.A. and M.A. degrees from Indiana University followed by guidance work at the University of Southern California. After teaching several years in Indiana high schools and at McKinley High School in Honolulu, Mary Alice accepted an assistant professorship in Latin at Kansas State Teachers College in Emporia. She was also a girls' counselor at Roosevelt Laboratory High School on campus, an early indication of her endless energy and interest in guiding young women.

As President of the Western District from 1937 to 1940, Mary Alice conducted the first Alpha Sigma Tau district meeting held at the Iota Chapter house in Emporia. She then served as President of the Central District, conducting a district meeting in Macomb, Illinois (home of the Alpha Epsilon Chapter). Following the 1952 Convention, she was appointed National Standards Chairman, an office she held until 1955 when she was elected National President.

As the first Ritual Chairman, Mary Alice was responsible for writing the Creed, the meaning of the symbols on the Sorority shield, and the design of the official candleholder. While serving as National Standards Chairman, she researched the Greek robe designs and was responsible for much of the lovely ceremonial equipment in use now.



After leaving KSTC, Mary Alice returned to Ash Acres, a large working farm near



Crawfordsville, Indiana. Following her husband's death in 1950, she managed the farm and taught in a nearby high school. She found great satisfaction in keeping busy with interesting and worthwhile activities, helping others whenever she could. She had always taken an active part in church, civic, club, and community activities. Reflecting this active involvement throughout her busy life, she found time for extensive travel, including a trip around the world in 1962.

While living in Crawfordsville, her lovely home housed a beautiful collection of early American pressed glass in the Daisy and Button pattern and always a few kittens to enjoy her special love. She presented talks to local groups on Early American pressed glass; each talk usually culminated with a visit to her home to examine her collection of more than 200 pieces.

Mary Alice and Honey Bun, her loving and constant companion for the past twelve years, lived in Cherokee Village, Arkansas, enjoying some gardening, occasional travel, and service to others. Her interest focused on Ronnie Morrison, a young American Indian Sioux whose education she financed through World Changers. In 1972, Alpha Sigma Tau established the Mary Alice Peterson Social Service Award (later changed to the Mary Alice Peterson Grant) in appreciation of her capable, dedicated, and tireless leadership during her presidency as well as recognition of her continued interest, compassion, and empathy in helping others. An annual contribution is set aside to augment Mary Alice's sponsorship of Ronnie Morrison.



In a 1964 interview, on her retirement as National President, Mary Alice summed up her attitude about her lifestyle:

*I echo the sentiment of Edna St. Vincent Millay who expressed so beautifully her attitude towards life in these lines:*

*"My candle burns at both end,  
It will not last the night.  
But oh my friends, and oh my foes,  
It makes a lovely light."*

Mary Alice Seller Peterson passed away on November 25, 1985.

---

*Positions held:* Sorority Growth & Development (1938 - 1940); National Vice President (1944 - 1949); National President (1949 - 1955); Central Office Executive Secretary (1955 - 1960)

*Honors received:* Ada A. Norton Alumnae Award Recipient (1960)