

Historical Sketch

LOWCOUNTRY PHI BETA KAPPA ASSOCIATION

The Lowcountry Phi Beta Kappa Association was organized at The College of Charleston on October 23, 1996. Local members of the Society adopted a constitution and a set of bylaws at that time, electing Rosemary Reisman President, Andrew Abrams and Mary K. Favaro Vice Presidents, and Catherine Postek Secretary-Treasurer. In December of that year our Association was recognized by the Phi Beta Kappa Senate, and in February 1997 we hosted our first event, a formal reception and banquet for National Secretary Dr. Douglas W. Foard.



E.L. Powers, Rosemary Reisman, Douglas Foard and Andy Abrams at the Phi Beta Kappa membership dinner at the College of Charleston on April 2

Figure 1. Charleston Post & Courier 1997

During the 1997 – 98 academic year we initiated two traditions that continue to this day. In September President Reisman represented us at the 38th Triennial Council in Chicago, and in April we held our first scholarship banquet, recognizing outstanding graduating seniors from The College of Charleston, The Citadel, and Charleston Southern University.

During the 1998-99 academic year the number of annual functions was increased to four – a fall speaker, a holiday party, a winter speaker, and a spring banquet – establishing another tradition that continues to the present. New officers were elected: President George Tompkins, Vice Presidents David Churchill and Elizabeth Rittenberg, and Secretary-

Treasurer Cornelia Carrier.

President Tompkins petitioned The Society for chartered status on August 31, 1999. Our charter was granted on December 9, 1999, with a membership of 68. A complete list of officers, from 1996 to 2021, is available here [[officers](#)]. Our most recent constitution and bylaws, approved on April 19, 2004, is available here [[constitution](#)] [[bylaws](#)].

Although the Lowcountry Phi Beta Kappa Association has no formal relationship with the College of Charleston, The College provided secretarial assistance and meeting space from our 1996 organization through our formative years. Our membership was very much involved in a 2000 effort to bring a PBK Chapter to The College, which was justifiably unsuccessful. In 2010 our charter was removed from Randolph Hall without notice. Relationships were further strained in 2016, when the president of our association was banned from the campus of The College of Charleston for a Woodrow Wilson quote.

Since 2011 the Association has housed its charter at the Charleston Library Society, a vibrant library and cultural institution founded in 1748. We currently hold at least one our annual activities in the historic Library Society building on King Street.

It was also around 2011 that we began inviting alumni from various Ivy League institutions to join us at our holiday gala, loosely depending upon the affiliations of our Board. This practice grew and expanded to include Harvard, Yale, Princeton and Penn. In 2017 the “Lowcountry Ivy League Alumni” was formed as an umbrella group to connect all eight of the local alumni



The Lowcountry Phi Beta Kappa Association held its scholarship banquet April 23. From left are Will Andersen, Tabatha Blevins, Jamie Huff, Lenna Walker and Laura Tonks.

Figure 2. Charleston Post & Courier 2007

associations, and a mutually-beneficial relationship followed, LILA inviting us to their diverse and exciting events, and we inviting LILA to our holiday party.

Since our founding, the Lowcountry Association has served the ideals of Phi Beta Kappa by annually presenting scholarships to recognize excellence in the liberal arts and sciences. Initially the Association awarded scholarships to outstanding graduating seniors from the three colleges in the Charleston area.

In 2003 we received a small grant from the South Atlantic District to enhance the society's visibility in local high schools, supporting presentations at National Honor Society meetings at 15 targeted schools. This outreach effort, together with our longstanding scholarship programs, won us national recognition for excellence in the category of associations with fewer than 100 members at the 2003 Triennial Council.



Figure 3. Post & Courier January 14, 2012

In 2008 we added scholarship recognitions for graduating high school seniors. From 2013 – 2019 we awarded scholarships exclusively to high school seniors to promote their further studies in the liberal arts and sciences. In addition to formally recognizing each of these students at our annual banquet, we arranged for Association representatives to present scholarship checks at the senior awards ceremonies of the High Schools themselves.

The national office assisted with the launch of an association website in October of 2016. Rob Dillon stepped forward as webmaster in November of 2016, in which post he continues to the present day.

In 2020 we returned to the tradition of recognizing college students in the liberal arts and sciences, although rising seniors, rather than graduating seniors, were selected for scholarship honors. Our scholarship banquet was canceled that spring because of coronavirus, however, as were in-person activities through the entire 2020-21 season. We did soldier on with a variety of virtual events, including our first "Key Connections" event to welcome new members in October and a virtual recognition for our scholarship recipients in the spring of 2021.

We reopened for in-person events in the fall of 2021, hosting a successful Key Connections social in October.