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Three Different Perspectives Of History

**Jim Wilson, Executive Director
Summer 2022**

Over the past 80 years, our organization has produced more than 55,000 members, more than 300 active and former chapters, and tens of thousands of students who transitioned to professionals in the media industry or who took their skills into allied fields. In the process, our name has changed nine times and our organization has continually evolved as media has evolved.

Thanks go to thousands of chapter advisors, academic professionals, and practicing media professionals. A special acknowledgement goes to our organizational leaders over the years. In the early 1940's, our founder, Sherman P. Lawton, believed that there should be an organization to educate and recognize future radio professionals. The hundreds of leaders who followed him have grown his vision into an entity where students better understand and commit to their ethical role and responsibility in informing and entertaining people through today's diverse media.

G. Richard Gainey – National Vice-President
March 16, 1998

The National Broadcasting Society - Alpha Epsilon Rho, is a student and professional society of over eighty-five chapters on college, university, community college and high school campuses. Through the years, NBS-AERho has had as its purpose the goal of encouraging and rewarding scholarship and accomplishment among students of broadcasting, to establish meaningful communication between student and professional broadcasters and to foster integrity in the use of the powerful instruments of radio, television, film, cable and its' many associated businesses and industries. The National Broadcasting Society - Alpha Epsilon Rho... a reflection of the diverse and complex industry it serves... changing, developing, expanding.

The Society as we know it today had its beginning in the early 1940's on the campus of Stephens College in Columbia, Missouri. From a small Radio Honorary Society called Beta Epsilon Phi in 1941 we have seen many changes in the name of the organization from Alpha Epsilon Rho - The National Broadcasting Honor Society to the National Broadcasting Society - Alpha Epsilon Rho. In May 1943, when it was officially announced that AERho had been organized, there were four chartered chapters including Stephens College, the University of Syracuse, Michigan State University and Ohio State University. By March of 1993, the number has increased to over 120 active chapters on campuses nationwide. Over 30,000 individuals have been initiated into the society since its founding. The future looks very bright for the National Broadcasting Society - Alpha Epsilon Rho...

Alpha Epsilon Rho -- An Expanding Viewpoint
by Donel W. Price - National Executive Secretary (1963-1968)
(Written for Signals, 1968)

Alpha Epsilon Rho: a reflection of the diverse and complex industry it serves... changing, developing, expanding. In May 1943, when it was officially announced that Alpha Epsilon Rho had been organized, there were four chartered chapters; by June 1966, the number had increased to 35 active chapters on college and university campuses and two alumni chapters. Over 6,000 individuals have been initiated into the fraternity since its founding. In its early years the fraternity emphasized recognition of outstanding scholarship in broadcasting; this purpose has been expanded throughout the years to include service to parent broadcasting departments and institutions, cooperation with the broadcasting industry in projects of mutual interest, and continual self-improvement in work and study on the part of fraternity members.

Originally the fraternity met annually in National Convention with the Institute for Education by Radio in Columbus, Ohio; since 1962, National Conventions have been held in many major cities--Miami, Kansas City, Los Angeles, Houston and in 1966, Boston. The practice of holding the convention in a different city each year provides Alpha Epsilon Rho members with the opportunity to increase their understanding of many broadcasting operations throughout the United States. Delegates to the convention are first of all, of course, students of broadcasting, and while in attendance they are able to hear panel discussions and talks by local and national broadcasters, an excellent supplement to regular classroom instruction. In addition, delegates meet and discuss common problems with other students of broadcasting from throughout the nation, enabling them to learn more about radio and television activities at many colleges and universities. Each year the National Convention becomes more comprehensive and varied in scope, giving those who attend more activities in which to participate.

Alpha Epsilon Rho is both an honorary and a professional fraternity. The honorary nature of the fraternity is reflected in its active chapters, which are located on college and university campuses and are composed of students of broadcasting. The term "honorary" is not limited to recognition of high scholastic standing, but also includes recognition of above-average ability in broadcast production activities: outstanding scholarship and outstanding production ability are inseparable in the broadcasting student who qualifies for membership in Alpha Epsilon Rho.

The professional nature of the fraternity is reflected in these same students once they have completed their college work and enter the broadcasting profession. While students, they strive to acquire those qualities that are considered necessary in responsible broadcasting practitioners. As working members of the broadcasting profession, they become true "professionals" by retaining those qualities and applying them to their work.

Providing services to the broadcasting profession has long been a major undertaking of the fraternity on a national, regional and local level. Producing radio and television programs for local stations and organizing annual "Broadcast Day" events are typical projects carried on by individual chapters. Region VI-VII of the fraternity has developed an excellent relationship with the Western Radio and Television Association. At the Association's annual conference, the Region--in the name of the fraternity--regularly organizes and presents one of the regular conference panels. At the 1966 Western Radio - TV Conference, which was held in San Francisco, Alpha Epsilon Rho sponsored a panel on "Broadcasting and the Watts Riots," featuring representatives from a Los Angeles television station, the San Francisco Human Rights Commission, and the Los Angeles Police Department. It is hoped that as more professional-alumni chapters are established and more and more members of the fraternity begin to fill positions of responsibility in broadcasting, the professional and the fraternity will be able to develop additional areas of cooperation.

In May 1968 Alpha Epsilon Rho will be 25 years old. Perhaps a brief review of people and events during the period since the founding of the fraternity would not be too much out of place at this time, only two years prior to that 25th anniversary year. The history of Alpha Epsilon Rho really begins with one person--Dr. Sherman Lawton, now the Director of Broadcasting Instruction at the University of Oklahoma, but in the early nineteen forties on the faculty at Stephens College. In 1941, Dr. Lawton founded a small radio honorary fraternity, Beta Epsilon Phi, and by Spring of 1943 had contacted student radio groups at other colleges who were interested in forming a national fraternity. In May of 1943, student delegates from Stephens, Syracuse University and the University of Minnesota met under Dr. Lawton's guidance at the Ohio State Institute for Education by Radio in Columbus; at that time the fraternity was officially founded and its name was changed from Beta Epsilon Phi to Alpha Epsilon Rho as a special gesture to the Association for Education by Radio, a professional organization of radio educators known informally as "AER." Betty Girling, the Honorary National Advisor of Alpha Epsilon Rho since its founding, attended that meeting in Columbus and has written the following about the official name of the fraternity:

"In adopting the same "call letters," Alpha Epsilon Rho acknowledged the support and assistance given many of its beginning chapters by the AER members of the various college faculties, plus the interest and concern of the national Association for the sprouting fraternity during its formative years."

Throughout the nineteen fifties and into this decade the fraternity has continued to grow, both in terms of numbers of chapters and members and in the activities undertaken nationally and locally. The individual members of the fraternity naturally deserve most of the credit for the continued successful growth of Alpha Epsilon Rho; however, many educators have maintained an active and indispensable interest in the fraternity over the years. Many hours are spent by faculty advisors, for example, in helping local chapters with their projects and problems. Such people as Gertrude Broderick of the U.S. Office of Education, Sherman Lawton, Betty Girling, and Cal Watson of Washington State University have given an extraordinary amount of time and energy to the fraternity; Cal Watson alone served nine years as Executive Secretary.

The future of Alpha Epsilon Rho depends to a great extent upon the willingness of members and officers to assume the responsibility for developing and carrying out projects of national, regional, and local scope. One challenge that faces us now, and has for some time, is that of an increasing desire to undertake many projects involving large financial expenditures, with as yet no concomitant plan for increasing income. Expansion of the fraternity's activities, and the resulting expansion of benefits to the membership; will demand greater financial resources, in addition to the freely given and thankfully received voluntary service that members and officers have always contributed to Alpha Epsilon Rho.

The history of the National Broadcasting Society - Alpha Epsilon Rho is a story forever in the un-finished stage. It is a story that evolves from year to year, from annual convention to annual convention. Through this brief historical overview, it is hoped that the past of the Society is a preview of the future... a future of promise, a future of success.