A TRIBUTE TO DONALD B. HOFFMAN

Over the last 50 years three historical organizations in Pennsylvania have from time to time buttressed each other. Our Pennsylvania Historical Association (PHA) is proud to have been a part of this cooperative trio. It has worked effectively with the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission (PHMC) to advance scholarship and public history and with Phi Alpha Theta, the international honor society in history, to recognize academic excellence and attainment among students and faculty.

Both PHA and PHMC are "creations" of the 1930s. Before either was founded, Donald B. Hoffman, while still an undergraduate at Muhlenberg College, was elected national treasurer of Phi Alpha Theta. Continuously since 1931, although his title has been modified several times, Don has stood eminently in the forefront of the honor society's growth. So pivotal has his role been that his peers in the organization have dubbed him "Mr. Phi Alpha Theta."

When he first assumed his national duties, the society recorded its financial standing in three digits of red ink, but today, with Don about to retire, it proudly
services its 730 chapters with an annual budget of approximately a half million dollars. Throughout these 60 years Don has been at the financial helm, and under the current title of international secretary-treasurer, he has placed Phi Alpha Theta in a strategic position to make valuable contributions in the field of history. In this period it has become the nation's largest honor society devoted to the study of a single discipline and is second only to Phi Beta Kappa in scholastic standing.

Spectacular scholarly attainments have accompanied this financial achievement. With only eight active chapters in 1931 when Don first assumed national office, the organization grew under his watchful eye at the rate of 12 new chapters annually over these 60 years. By 1938 it was so financially established that it successfully launched The Historian, a scholarly journal of its own. Beginning with a modest circulation of 800, the list of subscribers has expanded to 15,000 at present, and during the intervening years it has provided a scholarly outlet for the research endeavors of hundreds of faculty members and a few highly-talented students.

Just as The Historian adheres to a faculty focus, Phi Alpha Theta, at Don's urging, developed a counterpart for the enrichment of student research. Through the conduit of annual regional meetings, both undergraduate and graduate students are invited to meet, read, and criticize each other's papers, and such sessions have afforded many students their introductions to the world of scholarship. These meetings, in turn, have been supplemented by sessions held in conjunction with conferences of other historical groups across the country. PHA has profited directly from this particular practice. For the last two decades or more a Phi Alpha Theta session has complemented the regular PHA annual programs, and Don has generally conducted a breakfast session for members of the various chapters to inform them about Phi Alpha Theta's activities.

The Pennsylvania Historical Association would also like to salute Don for his many contributions to academe beyond his monumental effort in behalf of Phi Alpha Theta. He has served his alma mater, Muhlenberg College, with distinction: as a past president of the Alumni Association, as an Annual Giving Fund chairman, and as a Life Trustee since 1961. His energies have also been directed to the Association of College Honor Societies; he served as a member of its executive council since 1945 except for the years that he held the vice presidency and presidency.

PHA is pleased to join with other leading American historical organizations in acknowledging the retirement of Donald B. Hoffman. With admiration and gratitude we salute these 60 years of dedicated service by one of the profession's unheralded heroes.

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