

Komo Klub: Founders Celebrate 70th Year



Union-Tribune / RONI GALGANO

Old times: Ruth Held (left) and Ruth Sperry tell stories as they plan a 70th anniversary party for their sorority.

1923 lunchtime turns into a lifetime

By **JEFF RISTINE**
Staff Writer

A King Tut craze was sweeping America; William Jennings Bryan was stirring up controversy over evolution; the Dow Jones industrial average was creeping toward the 100 mark.

And at San Diego State, a small group of women who enjoyed each others' company at lunchtime told one another they would stay in touch.

The golden girls of Kappa Theta have proved they can keep a promise — they have kept their circle active for seventy years, meeting each and every month for lunch.

"We're just really good friends," explained Ruth Held, the group's historian. "We just wanted to keep together."

Now part of a multiyear alumni group, the friends will celebrate their enduring association Tuesday with a private lunch and exchange of memories at a Harbor Island restaurant.

Of the eight founding members, three are expected to attend the 70th anniversary event. The only other surviving founder lives in Bakersfield.

With some members within a year of turning 90, the friends have surprised even themselves with their staying power.

"I think we probably thought we'd all be dead by now," Held, a member of the class of '28, said with a laugh. "Or we didn't look forward to having lasted this long."

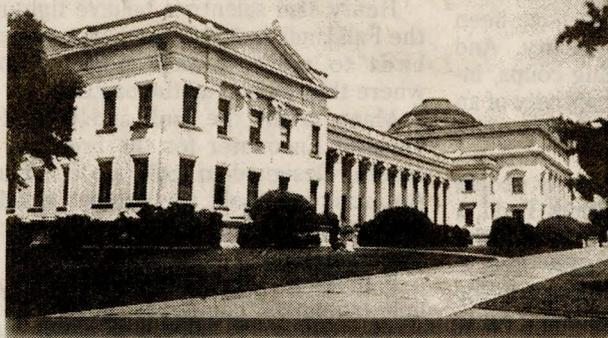
In 1923, the institution was San Diego State Teachers College with a two-year junior college branch. It was located on what was then the east edge of town — at Park and El Cajon boulevards.

"A friend and I were the ones who conceived the idea to have a club," said Ruth Sperry, its first president. "We ate lunch together out in front of the old campus, and we decided to call it the Komo Klub because 'como' means 'I eat' in Spanish.

"It wasn't really intended at first to outlive our lives at the university," Sperry ad-

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Ruth Held
of the class of '28



Above, a yearbook photo of the Komo Klub. Left, the old San Diego State Teachers College on Normal Street.

ded. "It was a bond, a friendship. We liked each others' company and enjoyed the comradeship. So we decided to keep it up."

The club took in new members and, in 1931, transformed into a campus sorority, Kappa Theta, that remained independent until its 1949 merger with a national Greek-letter organization.

The Kappa Theta name is the one that has stuck for the veterans, although it func-

tions more as a mini-alumni association than as a sorority.

"We were all the same sort of girls," said Helen Long, active in the group for 60 years. "We weren't the flashy, society-type girls."

They adopted colors — orange and black

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Komo

Founders will celebrate club's 70th anniversary

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at first, because the club was formed around Halloween — then changed to lavender, green and silver. They designed pins, Sperry recalled, with jewels representing the founding members and “some very worthwhile facet of life.”

“Mine stood for tolerance,” Sperry said. “There was another for purity and another for beauty — that sort of thing.”

Several members became teachers, although it was not everyone's first choice. “I wanted to go into engineering,” said Sperry. “I was good in math, (but) an engineering professor said, ‘Oh, no, that (isn't) a field for a woman.’”

Sperry began her education career with Coronado schools but much later, after the death of her first husband, proved her mettle as a senior engineering aide at Scripps Institution of Oceanography.

The group remains active in charity work, with the San Diego Center for Children, the Make-a-Wish Foundation and the San Diego Hospice as main beneficiaries.

“For a long time, until we found it wasn't going to what we wanted it for, whenever anyone died we sent money to the state college for a needy senior girl,” said Sperry. “We gave thousands of dollars to State College for seniors, then (it) got to a point where that was going into a general fund.”

Of the 22 active members, 12 to 16 tend to show up for the monthly luncheons, a tradition inaugurated in the '30s. Special events in May and at Christmastime provide the biggest draws.

At Tuesday's lunch, Held will use her

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skills as a volunteer with the oral-history group at the San Diego Historical Society to create a lasting archive of the Komos and Kappa Thetas.

“We're going to tape-record the memories of about a half-dozen of the girls, from different eras of the sorority,” said Held.

With so many months upon months in the 70 years, what's left to talk about?

“We celebrate each others' birthdays. We talk about grandchildren, of course, and trips,” said Held. Most meetings also include time for swapping jokes.

“It's really more than a social group,” said Long. “It's a family.”