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**AKA’s Archives: A Crown Jewel of Howard’s Moorland-Spingarn Research Center
\$1 million gift and historic digitizing capability make Collection unrivaled**

Chicago, Illinois – January 4, 2010 - Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority’s Archives at Howard University’s Moorland-Spingarn Research Center have emerged as one of the Center’s “crown jewels” because of its size, scope and stature. Hailed as one of the largest, fastest growing and most visited of all the Collections, the Sorority’s recent \$1 million award to the Center and historic decision to digitize the Collection, mean that it will be a lasting legacy of Alpha Kappa Alpha’s greatness.

According to Barbara A. McKinzie, international president, “The Collection represents a treasure trove that chronicles AKA’s 102-year history, preserves its legacy and dramatically tells its story of sisterhood and service that began right at Howard University in 1908. It will increase awareness and enlighten visitors to the rich heritage of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority.”

McKinzie added that “because Alpha Kappa Alpha was birthed at Howard University under Alpha chapter, Alpha Kappa Alpha has a special connection to the institution and always will.” She added that the \$1 million award is an investment in protecting Alpha Kappa Alpha’s proud tradition. Because Alpha Kappa Alpha’s collection is the first at the Center to enter the digital age, our archives are unparalleled and unrivaled.”

Howard University President Sidney A. Ribeau has praise for the Collection. “As one of our most significant treasures, the AKA Archives continues to provide unique, scholarly resources for its membership and other researchers.” He added that the Sorority’s recent “generous donation” will broaden the scope and accessibility of the AKA Archives.”

According to Joellen ElBashir, curator of manuscripts at the Center, “The Archives of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. are an integral part of the Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, one of Howard’s major research facilities for more than 94 years, and internationally recognized as one of the world’s largest and most comprehensive repositories for the preservation and study of Black history and culture in the United States.

ElBashir said that AKA’s Collection represents one of the most extensive, exhaustive, dynamic, most visited and most researched of all those safeguarded at the Center.

Noting the diversity and historic dimensions of the Collection, ElBashir added, “The contents combine hard copy manuscripts and original letters, with digitized versions of many of its documents, including

some that date back to 1908, the year AKA was founded. This foray into the digital era makes it the first Collection to do so. Because of this, the Alpha Kappa Alpha Collection is the most cutting edge, globally-relevant, and dynamic of all the Collections we house.”

A veritable treasure trove of information, the AKA archives trace the Sorority’s journey from its humble beginnings on the campus of Howard University in 1908, with 16 members in one chapter, to its rise as one of the world’s most powerful organizations. Today, it boasts 225,000 members in 975 chapters worldwide including in Japan, Canada, Germany, the Bahamas and on the continent of Africa. Among its members are some of the most influential women worldwide, including the late Rosa Parks, the late Coretta Scott King, Phylicia Rashad, Dr. Mae Jemison, Alicia Keyes and a host of government officials, including Melody Barnes, who serves on President Barack Obama’s economic team.

McKinzie declared that because Alpha Kappa Alpha was founded a mere 43 years after slavery, she sees parallels between the Sorority’s growth and that of the nation.

“As the Collection will attest, Alpha Kappa Alpha’s incredible journey is indelibly woven into the history and progress of America.”

Dr. Earnestine Green McNealey, international chairman of AKA’s Archives Committee, who at McKinzie’s charge has elevated the Collection to its current world-class status, says the Collection was first launched in 1978 with a \$50,000 contribution. Hailed as a “significant event” at the time, it began with eight boxes of materials from two past international presidents. Today, it takes up over 500 linear feet of space.

Among its highly-heralded possessions include:

- papers from three founders, Beulah and Lillie Burke and Anna Easter Brown;
- documents from incorporator and first national president, Nellie M. Quander;
- records of the Cleveland Job Corps, which was founded during President Lyndon Johnson’s administration and is credited with training thousands, who landed viable employment and launched meaningful careers;
- audio and videotapes of the AKA Oral History Project;
- files of past presidents Barbara K. Phillips, Faye B. Bryant, Bernice Sumlin, Mary Shy Scott, Eva L. Evans and Norma S. White;
- materials documenting the growth of the Mississippi Health Project, which was founded in the 1930s as a vehicle for providing health services to the underserved in rural Mississippi.

The Collection also provides a repository for the Sorority’s publications including the *Ivy Leaf*, the Sorority’s official publication; *Along the Ivy Vine*, a newsletter distributed by the national presidents, and the Heritage Series. The minutes and materials from the national and regional conferences are also included as well as an extensive clippings file that documents Alpha Kappa Alpha’s programs and the achievements of its leadership and members.

Under the direction of corporate liaison volunteer, Anne Mitchem-Davis, a steady flow of materials continues to be added to the Archives each year, from the national office, regional officers, chapters and individual members, and include photographs, artifacts, corporate documents, national projects and

committee materials. A major and recent thrust is the acquisition of undergraduate and graduate chapter records.

Cognizant that the world is in the Global Age, which demands that materials be digitally accessible, Alpha Kappa Alpha took the historic and unprecedented step of having portions of its Collection digitized. While maintaining many documents in their original formats, the Sorority first converted its *Ivy Leaf* magazines by meticulously computer scanning the issues to digital. This is the first phase in an overall effort that is embraced under the title, **“The Moorland-Spingarn Digitalization Project.”** This is being underwritten through the \$1 million award. In this Project, funds will be allocated for this non-endowed Fund to be used by Howard University’s Moorland Spingarn’s Research Center to develop an online portal to more widely disseminate the historical and current contributions of the Sorority. An importance phase of the Project is the maintenance of the Collection.

ElBashir applauded the history-making effort by noting that the AKA Archives Digitization Project is the first of its kind at the Center, as far as scope is concerned.

Said ElBashir, “Many of our prints and photographs were digitized by a vendor a few years ago, but that project cannot compare to the magnitude of the Alpha Kappa Alpha project, whose primary objective—at least in the initial stages—is to provide enhanced subject access to the AKA Archives through the development of a searchable database of selected items, including Sorority publications and other documents.”

Green McNealey revealed that the *Ivy Leaf* digitization project was unveiled at the Centennial celebration held in 2008 and that the Sorority plans to expand its digital offerings. “We are going to have a digital index of everything we have. This unparalleled and unique project will allow visitors to search more quickly and access documents on the World Wide Web. This allows Alpha Kappa Alpha to preserve our cultural heritage in the era of digitization.”

“Ultimately,” declared Green McNealey, “the \$1 million award allows Alpha Kappa Alpha to solidify, strengthen and catapult the Collection to unheralded heights.”

The \$1 million gift, which was made as a lead-up to the Sorority’s Centennial, also included the awarding of scholarships named in honor of Nellie M. Quander, and another scholarship named in honor of the Sorority’s Founders. Former international president Faye Bryant and Wenda Weeks Moore, a member of the Alpha Chapter Celebration Committee, spearheaded the effort.

ElBashir said that visitors include schoolchildren, prospective pledgees, researchers and “historyphiles.” She said that upon entering the Alpha Kappa Alpha Collection area, they are awed by the history and vastness of the Collection and the magnificence of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority.

In reflecting on the significance of the Archives and their importance to America’s history, McKinzie said: “This Collection is a monument to Alpha Kappa Alpha’s history and emergence as a world power. Within its volumes, documents and its digital images are a testament to a proud legacy that is rooted in sisterhood and service.”

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