

## Founder Benjamin Piatt Runkle

The first of the Seven Founder's Monuments to be erected by the Fraternity was dedicated at the Arlington National Cemetery on September 29, 1923, seven years after his death, June 28, 1916.

We attribute courage with his name and at the 1895 Grand Chapter, Brother Runkle said, "By courage I do not mean the savage animal instinct that makes a man insensible to danger - a bulldog has that - but I mean that strong conviction which keeps ever before the mind the true aim of life, and unswerving loyalty to that conviction." He goes on further by saying, "...A man is not strong because of what he knows, or thinks, or says, or does, but because of what he is..."

### Background

In 1921, Brother John G. Harlan, Beta Theta (Pittsburgh) and Epsilon (George Washington) 1918 was Epsilon's delegate to the thirty-fifth Grand Chapter at Cleveland, called attention to the condition of Founder Runkle's grave at Arlington National Cemetery where only a small government marker indicated the spot where General Runkle was buried. Brother Harlan's suggestion was to erect a monument for Runkle and Grand Consul Joseph Miller proposed that the program be broadened to include an identical monument for each of the seven founders.

### Monument Construction and Cost

The completed monuments are made of one solid piece of granite weighing approximately eight tons produced from an approximate fourteen ton monolith and quarried with great care in order to avoid flaws. A small flaw was detected in the original stone, so work was stopped and an entirely new piece of granite was quarried. The monument is made from Dummerston granite from the Presbrey-Leland Company. The cost of the Runkle Monument was \$2662.00.

### Monument Symbols

The Sigma Chi badge appears on the front; the Runkle's Military insignia on the rear; the Sigma Chi coat-of-arms on one end and the family coat-of-arms on the other end.

In a speech from Charles Townsend at Founder Bell's dedication:

"It is fitting that his monolith should have been carved from the everlasting granite of our Sierra as a symbol not only of the lofty ideals of Sigma Chi, but of the solid permanence of the Fraternity through the ages to come; its own encircling emblems typifying the chain of friendship which links our membership around the world."

### Dedication

The distinguished Sigma Chi gathering for Founder Runkle's dedication included the Governor of Virginia, the Post Master General of the United States, the Assistant Attorney General of the United States, the former Mayor of Cincinnati, and the Director of the National Parks.

Dr. Joseph C. Nate, Alpha Iota (Illinois Wesleyan) 1890, Past Grand Consul and Grand Historian, pronounced the invocation. "Sigma Chi Auld Lang Syne," was then sung.

Past Grand Consul Joseph T. Miller of Pittsburgh, under whose administration the Sigma Chi Founders Monument Commission began its great work of properly marking the graves of our illustrious founders, spoke:

"Today, brothers, we stand on holy ground. Ground consecrated by supreme sacrifice and baptized by divine patriotism. We are here not so much to honor this Founder by his monolith wrent

from the breast of the everlasting hills, as to again dedicate ourselves to the service of our humanity and to the practice of the ideals we profess.”

“We stand at the closed doorway to eternal life, of him, who in part at least, caught a vision of divinity and taught by his example the God-like virtue of courage and the vicarious offering of his life for his principles and his country. In the words of the immortal Lincoln, ‘it is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.’ Therefore, we here in the last home of the Nation’s great, uncover this beautiful remembrance of him, whom we’ve loved and lost; whose memory we revere - Benjamin Piatt Runkle. All honor to his name. Though dead, he yet speaketh to you and to me, that we follow in his path; practice friendship; do justice; seek learning. Were I to inscribe his epitaph, it would be ‘A preacher of patriotism; a lover of his country,’ since to me that was the keynote of his life. As he served so let us serve. As he sacrificed, so let us sacrifice...

“...Today we place this monument of our affection on the grave of our Founder. Let it ever symbolize our pledge renewed to the principles for which he lived and to the faith in which he died, and let us say with reverent hearts and reawakened souls: Runkle, you led! We follow.”

Postmaster General and Grand Consul Harry S. New, accepted the monument in behalf of the Fraternity and the United States, and said:

“It is well that we, the living, should meet to pay tribute to the memory of the illustrious dead. We are met to memorialize one whose active life, although spent upon the field of battle yet had in his heart the true conception of the brotherhood of men; whose thought for the honor of his country and the glory of its flag was shared by his great desire for the promotion of the true spirit of fraternity among his kind. It was the fine conception of a clean and wholesome mind that prompted the college boy in June 1855 to found this fraternity whose purpose it was, and is, to aid worthy and ambitious youth to inspire the confidence, respect, and mutual esteem of its membership throughout life’s journey.”

“Few native born Americans of his contemporary period could boast of a more distinguished lineage than Benjamin Piatt Runkle. His grandfather, Jacob Piatt, served as a Colonel of the line in the Continental Armies in the War for Independence and was distinguished as a member of the Staff of General Washington. A great uncle, Colonel John H. Piatt, served with distinction in the army of the west during the war of 1812, while another, William Piatt was on the staff of General Jackson at the Battle of New Orleans. Another gave his life at the defeat of St Clair. During the great war between the States, nine members of the immediate family fought with the armies of the North, while an equal number followed the flag of the Confederacy. With the outbreak of the war, General Runkle entered the army of the Union as a volunteer soldier, Captain of the Douglas Guards of Urbana, Ohio, and at its close stepped from it with a Major General’s Brevet bestowed upon him after four years of active participation, “for meritorious and distinguished service.” He served in West Virginia under General Rosecrans and the records of the engagements of that campaign bear testimony to his valor. So, too, in Tennessee under Buell, and again with Bragg in Kentucky. At the battle of Shiloh in which he participated as a Colonel, he was so severely wounded that he was left on the field as dead, and he was for months recovering; but even while convalescing he served as staff officer and confidential aide to Governor David Tod. When able to report for active duty he returned to the field and took part with the Army of the Ohio in the campaigns against Atlanta, leading the advance in the assault at Resaca, May 14, 1864 and until July of that year was in command of a brigade in General Ammen’s division.”

“A recital of the record of his rapid rise in rank during the period of the war, carries with its own proof of his quality as a Soldier. Entering the Union Armies as a Captain of the 13th Ohio Volunteer Infantry, April 22, 1861, he was promoted Major November 8 of that year; to a Lieutenant Colonelcy in May, 1862, and Colonel of the 45th Ohio Volunteer Infantry in August, 1862. On November 9, 1865, he was breveted Brigadier General in the Armies of the United States, and

Major General of Volunteers “for meritorious service.” He reentered the Regular Army as Major of the 45th Infantry July 28, 1866, and was later again breveted in March 1867, “for gallant and meritorious services at Shiloh.”

“Retiring from active service December 15, 1870, at the age of thirty four the recipient of higher honors than are usually bestowed on men twice his age, General Runkle turned his talents to the pursuits of peace and embarked upon a career in civil life which was to bring him further honors. As journalist, teacher, publicist he proved himself endowed with great ability and many years later was elected Grand Consul of the fraternity in the founding of which he took the leading part. He passed to his reward June 28, 1916 - the sixty first anniversary of the founding of Sigma Chi.”

“It is as members of Sigma Chi that we are here assembled - a Fraternity which was born of his inspiration to do a helpful thing for men; a Fraternity which has no other purpose for its being than is included in that phrase; a Fraternity in which no other spirit enters or can find a place. It is in itself a monument to its creators and in that spirit of amity and abiding love in which it found its being, Sigma Chi accepts and will keep inviolate this monument to a gallant soldier, a worthy gentleman, a fine American placed here by those who wear the White Cross of Sigma Chi as their tribute to his memory.”

Following, Governor E. Lee Trinkle, Sigma Sigma (Hampton-Sidney) and Psi (Virginia) 1896, made an address in behalf of the State of Virginia.

Then a dedicatory prayer by Dr. Radcliffe was performed, wreaths were placed at the base of the monument in memory of General and Mrs Runkle by the Sigma Chi Fraternity, Epsilon Chapter, and the Washington Alumni Chapter.

Remarkably, a squadron of aeroplanes, under the direction of Lt. Col. James E. Fechet, Alpha Epsilon (Nebraska) 1890, then dropped flowers upon the grave.

The beautiful rites came to a close with the singing of “America”, followed by the benediction.

### *The College Days and beyond*

During their college days, Runkle wrote, “Isaac M. Jordan, together with a number of other youths...came to Miami from Geneva Hall, a Covenanters academy of the strictest sort, where we were drilled in the rudiments of a classical education six days of the week...Jordan and I were “hayseeds” of the pronounced type, green country boys whose fitness for a first-class fraternity would not in these times of wealth and style be considered for a moment.”

This friendship between Jordan and Runkle was further confirmed by Caldwell at Sigma Chi’s 50th Anniversary in 1905 by saying, “It is pleasing to reflect that two of our original number (foremost among us and leaders from the beginning) - the lamented Jordan, and Runkle here present - were privileged to share the honors of our renaissance.”

Furthermore, in a document called “We Seven” that Runkle wrote in 1908, he said, “...It was different in that bygone time. We had the little brick college with its limited faculty, wretchedly poor in money but wonderfully rich in the treasures of human sympathy, in the love of their fellow-men, and in rich the beautiful classical culture of the olden time. Oh, my comrades and brothers, those were men that a boy could love. Those were meant whose spirits filled the very air that we breathed in stirred within us mighty hopes and ambitions which even if never realized, made us better, stronger, and more useful men. Not one of us ever ceased to feel that mighty molding influence. If any strayed away from those high and noble teachings he came back again, my brothers, with a penitent but earnest heart, to walk in the good old path again.”

## Sigma Chi

As for Sigma Chi, Runkle wrote in the Sigma Chi Quarterly in 1897 - "We had very little chance for ceremony, meeting in any out of the way place we could find, and always keeping the time and place of meeting a secret. It was considered a great thing to find out where another fraternity held its meetings; they were held by moonlight or by no light at all. Whatever there was in the way of ceremony is contained in that old copy of the Constitution, which has been saved, only that we would extemporize such performances as would fit the time and place.

"Someone will ask what, since we were so unlike, held the little band together. The answer to this question is another....I answer: The spirit of the order - the spirit of fair play and a square deal, fraternal sympathy within the fold and an even opportunity for all outside."

Runkle further states, "This carries me back to the olden and perhaps primitive times when we has an essay, and a supposed poem at every session of the chapter, and prepared our brothers of the literary codify work and the college debate - when the question asked about a prospective brother was 'How does he stand in the classes, and can he write and debate?' This is where Jordan was made an orator, Cooper a preacher, Bell a college president, and Caldwell and Scobey were trained for writers."

Pride in one's fraternity during this time was fierce as stated by Cooper at a Grand Chapter, "Lest Brother Runkle failed to give it, I might mention a little scene enacted in chapel the morning he first wore his society pin. A fellow-student put his thumb to his nose and waved his hand in derision and Brother Runkle went over and gave him a good trouncing..."

Finally, "To those men we, the founders of this order, owe it that our ideals were pure and that we reached, in our imperfect way for the true, the beautiful, and the good."

"But let us not, while thinking of those who founded the order we love so well, forget what is due to the earnest, faithful, able brothers who preserved it in the days after the war and who developed it to its present magnificent proportions. Let their names appear, also, in the memorial which you erect. Let it be a hall of Sigma Chi fame, and let the names of those who have worked, and given, and toiled through all these years stand together, so that all that come after me know that it is worth while not only to labor and to wait but to labor and to love."

All honor to his name...