In 1912, a Pi Phi collegian wrote of the Cookie Shine, "The term itself, and the occasion for which it stands, has become an inseparable part of the social life of our Fraternity that will always be held in unquestioned and loving regard by all of us." Nearly 100 years later, that statement still holds true. After all, what is so fine as a Cookie Shine under the wine and blue?

History
The history of the Cookie Shine is intertwined with the beginning of the Kansas Alpha Chapter. In April 1872, SARA RICHARDSON became a charter member of the Iota Chapter of I.C. Sorosis (later known as Illinois Beta) at Lombard College in Galesburg, Illinois. Sara's home was in Lawrence, Kansas. She had three sisters, Alma, Florence and May, who were students at the University of Kansas. In the spring of 1873, Sara heard a few University of Kansas men had formed a chapter of Beta Theta Pi. She encouraged her sisters to follow in her footsteps and form an I.C. Sorosis chapter at Kansas. The Kappa Chapter was chartered on April 1, 1873.

The chapter held its first social event that June. Its purpose was to honor Sara and her help establishing the chapter. The party was held at the Richardson's home, and among the guests was John Fraser, the University’s chancellor. Fraser was a native of Scotland, and "Cookie Shine" was his name for any kind of informal social gathering brought together by accident or necessity.

Crunchy or soft, iced or plain, to dessert-lovers, cookies seem like edible works of art. But to a Pi Phi, cookies are more than sprinkles and frosting; they are a symbol of a sweet and genuine tradition of Pi Beta Phi — a Cookie Shine.

Here’s to the Friendship True!
A Tribute to the Pi Phi Cookie Shine

BY: WENDY WOOLARD DROCHELMAN, MISSOURI ALPHA
AND FRAN DESIMONE BECQUE, NEW YORK ALPHA
design. Upon seeing the delightful refreshments, Fraser called the feast a “Cookie Shine.”

By 1885, nearly every chapter had adopted the Cookie Shine as a genuine Pi Phi tradition. Even today, each of the 131 chapters and many of our 330 alumnae organizations continue to hold Cookie Shines to celebrate Bid Day, initiation, Founders’ Day and sisterhood. It is a celebration of Pi Beta Phi’s heritage and can be as diverse as our members.

A Cookie Shine is the one tradition in Pi Phi that is different, yet the same. The first Cookie Shines resembled picnics with each member bringing a contribution. A sheet, serving as a table, was spread on the floor. Among the foods at early Cookie Shines were peanuts, cheese, gingersnaps, crackers, pickles, bananas and apples. Cookie Shines have continued to be a part of Pi Phi celebrations at alumnae organization meetings, conventions, leadership academies, anniversary celebrations and installations.

A New Look at an Old Friend

Cookie Shines began as a time for sharing sisterhood. They were an opportunity to savor each other’s company and to strengthen the bonds of wine and silver blue. And although they are different now than in 1873, they are like friendship — ever-changing and growing. A University of California-Los Angeles study on friendship among women suggests what we already know as Pi Phis — friendship among women is special. Friendship shape who we are, and is most importantly during our college years, who we are yet to be. They fill emotional gaps and help us remember who we really are. “Learning Friendship,” a recent article by Frank Shushok, Jr., called the strong bonds of friendship tools for learning, retention, graduation and participation. In this regard, the Pi Phi Cookie Shine represents much more than a sweet memory. These friendships among women and this shared memory will transcend the college experience.

KAREN EMBERTON, Kentucky Beta, recalls her chapter experience in the early 1970s as a very special and moving time. Karen joined Pi Phi as a junior, and Cookie Shines were a time of helping one another and sharing an old Pi Phi tradition. “Something in those two years developed deeply within me that instilled in me a lifetime commitment to work and serve the Fraternity, which I have done in some capacity for more than 35 years.” She adds, “Was it tradition? Maybe. But I think it was more about the organization … what it stood for and how it made me feel as an empowered woman who could go out and achieve anything I desired. Along the way I would have friends to stand by my side.”

Pi Phi sisters are bound together by traditions and experiences, one being the Cookie Shine. And although only a small portion of Cookie Shine memories could be featured in this article, it is apparent sisterhood, much like homemade cookies, is good for the soul.

California Gammas at the University of Southern California gather at a Cookie Shine to celebrate their newly initiated members.

The Arkansas Alpha Chapter at the University of Arkansas prepares a Cookie Shine for the new initiates.

The members of Pennsylvania Beta at Bucknell University enjoy a Cookie Shine in 1903.

Illinois Deltas celebrate a Cookie Shine at Knox College in 1908.

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“We know we have made a friend when we can say to the other, ‘What, you too?’” — C.S. Lewis

Today’s Cookie Shine

Cookie Shines remain unique to each chapter or alumnae organization. Some include cookies, candies and other sweet treats laid out on a sheet on the floor. The setup is large enough for everyone to gather around. Many times the placement of the goodness is in the shape of an angel, arrow, Greek letters or other Pi Phi-specific symbols or words. Once all the Cookie Shine attendees have gathered around, “The Cookie Shine Song” or another favorite Pi Beta Phi song is sung. Sometimes a large cookie is passed around the room. Each member breaks off a piece while expressing a memory or some sort of gratitude that ties to Pi Phi. As the piece of cookie is broken off, a wish is made as she rubs the bottom of the cookie sheet. Once the singing and sharing of memories has taken place, participants can dive into the goodies and grab as much candy as possible.
“Cookie Shines are one of California Gamma’s favorite Pi Phi traditions,” says DIANA HUNT, California Gamma. “Cookie Shines provide a special space for all of us to share memories with our sisters in a sacred environment.”

It isn’t just the Cookie Shine itself that is sacred. Many of the items used for a Cookie Shine have been used for decades. Chapters may use the same sheet year after year with members’ names embroidered on it. The Texas Epsilon Chapter, founded in 1976, still uses the same tin of red hot candies used during its very first Cookie Shine. LINDSAY and ASHLEY, Texas Epsilon, recall, “At each Cookie Shine the tin of red hots is placed in the middle of the room with other candy and treats, and the Pi Phi crest is outlined using them on sheets for everyone to see. There is always one during sister who eats a few, and we all have a good laugh.”

The unique qualities of each chapter and alumnae organization Cookie Shine transcends the food and set-up. Some are kept secret, while others are a time for friends and family. The Virginia Eta Chapter keeps its Cookie Shines very secretive. The Richmond, Virginia, Alumnae Club provides baked goods, candy and even hot chocolate and bottled water for the chapter to use during and after a Cookie Shine. Nebraska Gamma, on the other hand, holds a Cookie Shine for parents during parents’ weekend. “This gives our parents the opportunity to experience and participate in the part of our life that includes Pi Phi and its traditions,” says Nebraska Gamma VICTORIA PARK. Chapters may hold a Cookie Shine a few times a semester, whenever something important is happening, in celebration of a big accomplishment, to celebrate Pi Phi’s founding or just for fun! Pi Beta Phi recently installed its newest chapter, Massachusetts Gamma, at Massachusetts Institute of Technology. A Cookie Shine was held during its Installation weekend where all the parents were invited to attend. “Cookie Shines are a great introduction to the Fraternity,” says Headquarters Director of Member Services ERIKA BREEDLOVE, Missouri Alpha. “It shows the heritage and sisterhood we have had for more than 141 years.”

And That’s the Way the Cookie Crumbles
“No Cookie Shine is the same,” says MAUREEN LICURSI, Ohio Beta. “The homemade cookies are never the same shape or texture, the candies never taste quite the same and the smiling faces surrounding the Cookie Shine cloth change with each ceremony that passes. What does remain is the sisterhood this tradition represents. It reiterates the fact we are part of something bigger, and that Pi Phis new and old are all united by the bond of sisterhood,” says Indiana Beta ELIZABETH SCHRADER. Whatever the chapter or alumnae organization’s traditions may be, the term “Pi Phi Cookie Shine” is one that brings memories back into focus. It offers wonderful opportunities to savor the special sisterhood shared by Pi Phis all over the world. Singer James Taylor said it best with, “How sweet it is to be loved by you.”

“My favorite Pi Phi memory was my very first Cookie Shine! I remember my mother, Florida Beta EDNA JAMES TICHENOR, always telling me she was going to a Cookie Shine when she went to a Pi Phi alumnae meeting. She would giggle when I would ask her about it. I was in my teens then so I really never knew what this meant until I went to my own Cookie Shine. What a surprise! She saved that special time for me to enjoy!” — CYNTHIA TICHENOR HERRIN, Florida Beta

“Just yesterday I experienced what was my last time sitting in the center of the Cookie Shine, a bittersweet moment of course. I laughed, clapped and sang with my fellow seniors, grabbing my own messy piece of the arrow cookie I’ve watched passed around so many times before. We each grabbed our own needle and thread and one by one added our names to the tapestry of Ohio Beta. We laughed at the sewing prowess, or lack thereof, of ourselves and the women who came before us. Regardless of our skill with the needle, we are now a permanent part of this special tradition. More names will be added with each passing year, but we know that we will have left our mark. A part of us will always share this ceremony, and all it represents, with the women who follow in our footsteps.” — MAUREEN LICURSI, Ohio Beta

The night before my wedding, after my rehearsal dinner, two of my Pi Phi sisters, my best friend MICHELLE MAYO FISH, and my little sister, SARAH SHOEMAKER DOLES, asked me to take them to the grocery store. They wouldn’t let me tag along inside, and they asked me to go to my room when we got home. After waiting quite awhile, they finally led me to my living room, where they had prepared a beautiful Cookie Shine for me! Needless to say, I was so surprised and extremely thankful for my Pi Phi sisters making my pre-wedding night so special. On my wedding anniversary, 14 years later, my husband told me he had thought about enlisting my daughters, ages 4 and 2, to help him prepare a Cookie Shine in my honor, but he didn’t know how to do it.” — ROBIN HINTON HOPKINS, Missouri Alpha

“I will never forget how excited I was flying to Austin, Texas, from Hong Kong for my best friend’s, ROBIN HINTON HOPKINS, wedding. I had been there for work, and the entire 23-hour flight I was awake trying to come up with something I could do, as her maid of honor, that would be extra special for Robin. I thought back to how we met on Bid Day, the fun times we always had together at Mizzou and the friendship we shared. Of course that brought me back to Pi Beta Phi! I thought a Cookie Shine would be perfect and how special that would be on the night before her wedding. Robin’s little sister, SARAH SHOEMAKER DOLES, and I surprised Robin that night with a huge Cookie Shine with all of her favorite treats. I think we probably shed a tear or two, but it really symbolized so much. As the song says, ‘the joy of friendship true, the joy of having knowing you, will last your whole life through.’ And it has … Robin and I just met for homecoming at Mizzou in October this past year and talked about all of our wonderful memories of Pi Beta Phi! Her friendship means the world to me and even though we don’t live in the corner room at 511 Rollins anymore, I know she is just a phone call away!” — MICHELLE MAYO FISH, Missouri Alpha

“The Pi Phi Cookie Shine is one of my favorite Arkansas Alpha traditions. To see pure joy on each girl’s face as the first Cookie Shine is revealed is like watching a kid in a candy store. The Cookie Shine always makes me feel like a child. Now that I am a junior, I love to help make the Cookie Shines and sing to the younger girls so that they may have as wonderful of an experience as I did.” — MEGAN SHEL, Arkansas Alpha

“I love Cookie Shines … and not because of those delicious arrow cookies with the perfect icing, although those are irresistible. It is because of the very special memories Cookie Shines create with our sisters. It is not exactly how a Cookie Shine is executed that makes them so special but rather the unique, intimate experience created by the Cookie Shine that make them so memorable for us all.” — MARI LOU PSIHOGIOS DIAMOND, Oregon Alpha