

A History of Sigma Chapter of Alpha Gamma Delta, 1917-2006

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This history was produced as part of the Society for the Preservation of Greek Housing's Greek Chapter History Project. The Society was founded in 1988, with the goal of preserving the historic buildings that embody the history of the nation's largest Greek system, and educating the public about the historical significance of fraternities and sororities on the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign campus. Dues paid by member fraternity and sorority chapters and donations from chapter alumni fund the Society's work. In keeping with their mission, the Society began the Greek Chapter History Project in May 2000 in conjunction with the University of Illinois Archives. The GCHP aims for nothing less than producing a complete historical record of fraternities and sororities on the University of Illinois campus by employing a graduate assistant to research and write histories of campus chapters. Making the work possible are the extensive collections of the University of Illinois Archives, especially its Student Life and Culture Archival Program. Supported by an endowment from the Stewart S. Howe Foundation, the heart of the SLC Archives is the Stewart S. Howe collection, the world's largest collection of material related to fraternities and sororities.

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The National Organization

Alpha Gamma Delta, a fraternal organization for women (“sorority”), was founded at Syracuse University in 1904. At the time of its founding, there were sixteen “national” fraternities for women, although only twelve of them had more than one chapter. Georgia Dickover, one of the undergraduate founders of Alpha Gamma Delta and later a historian of the organization, noted an increase in fraternity formation – for both men and women – in the early years of the twentieth century, and attributed this minor explosion to a corresponding increase in college and university enrollment.¹ At Syracuse, as at other institutions of higher learning, young people gathered to be educated not only intellectually but also socially. Social and honorary fraternities played an integral role in the collegiate experience, and higher enrollments brought the need for even more organizations designed to present students with a set of appropriate peers and social activities. Alpha Gamma Delta’s founding helped to fulfill this need.

Along with Georgia Dickover, sisters Marguerite and Estelle Shepard, Jennie Clara Titus, Ethel Brown, Grace Mosher, Edith MacConnell, Mary Louise Snider, Georgia Otis Chipman, Emily Butterfield, and Flora Knight Mayer are hailed as the founders of Alpha Gamma Delta, and indeed these young women were the moving force behind the birth of the society – even Edith MacConnell, who contributed her energies from a hospital bed while she recuperated from injuries sustained in an accident “on the ice!”² The initial suggestion to form a new fraternity for women at Syracuse, however, came from Dr. Wellesley Perry Coddington, head of the department of philosophy and psychology. Dr. Coddington, a native New Yorker and a graduate of Wesleyan University, was a “fraternity man” himself – he was involved in Eclectic Fraternity,

¹ Georgia A. Dickover, ed. *Alpha Gamma Delta Quarterly (January 1931, History Issue)*. Menasha, Wisconsin: George Banta Publishing Company, pg. 1.

Phi Nu Theta, and Phi Beta Kappa as a student. He was also one of the first five faculty members of Syracuse when it was founded in 1871, and seems to have taken a keen interest in both the intellectual and social development of its students, both men and women. Coddington's own college experience led him to look very favorably on fraternities in particular, and Georgia Dickover reported that he encouraged many Syracuse students to take the initiative to form new societies.³ By 1900 there were seven national fraternities for men and six for women on the Syracuse campus, but Coddington believed that the university's steadily growing enrollment could support more. He worried especially that the six existing women's fraternities could not absorb the rising women's enrollment, and that many promising young women were being prevented from experiencing the attributes of fraternal life that he himself had so enjoyed.

Georgia Dickover soon had the opportunity to see Dr. Coddington's encouragement at work first hand, when she was one of the first three undergraduate women to become involved in the effort to found a seventh women's fraternity at Syracuse – the society which would eventually become Alpha Gamma Delta. Dr. Coddington first broached the subject in the spring of 1904 with Marguerite Shepard, a member of the class of 1905 who was not currently involved with a social fraternity. Marguerite responded hesitantly at first, but when her younger sister Estelle caught wind of Dr. Coddington's proposal, she proved much more enthusiastic and recruited her close friend Dickover to the cause. Dr. Coddington suggested that they also invite one of his students, Jennie Clara Titus, to attend planning meetings. Eventually this small group assembled for meetings in Coddington's home, and it was in his study that the purpose and spirit of Alpha Gamma Delta began to truly take shape.

² From www.alphagammadelta.org, accessed July 3, 2006.

³ Dickover, pp. 2.

The early meetings actually proved something of a shock to the undergraduate women who had been hand-picked by Dr. Coddington to undertake this project, because his vision of “the project” was more ambitious than they had originally guessed. Coddington’s proposal to the Shepard sisters, Dickover, and Titus was certainly motivated primarily by his desire to provide Syracuse University women with additional outlets for camaraderie and social interaction, but he believed that their efforts could result in something much larger. As he told the women at the first meeting, he was confident that with much hard work and planning on their part, they could create a new *national* fraternity for women, not just a local organization confined to the Syracuse campus. Dickover’s history of this period, written in the 1930s, continually references the apprehension with which she and the other founders received Coddington’s suggestion, although the exact sources of their hesitancy are not entirely clear. There is some indication that Marguerite Shepard in particular feared that the competition among women’s fraternities on the Syracuse campus was already too great to allow an “upstart” society to break into the social arena, and perhaps this difficulty at the immediate local level made the prospects for eventual national expansion and organization seem very slim indeed. Many years later, Shepard remarked, “Would any group of college girls today think they could successfully launch a new fraternity without a single party dress or a dance?”⁴ Whatever their reservations were, the founders were able to put them aside and set themselves to work under Dr. Coddington’s direction.

In May 1904, three more women joined the founding group: Ethel Brown, Grace Mosher, and Edith MacConnell from her bed in the Homeopathic Hospital. The entire group continued to hold regular meetings in Dr. Coddington’s home and hammered out such details as the fraternity motto, the colors (red, buff, and green), and the badge (“a monogram of the three letters with the

⁴ Dickover, pg. 10.

Alpha chased and a little larger than the other letters, the Gamma plain, and the Delta set with half pearls”).⁵ Georgia Dickover confessed in her history, however, that at times nothing very concrete was accomplished at these meetings, as during one when “the girls listened while in his own fascinating style Dr. Coddington spent an hour or more telling anecdotes of college and fraternity experiences.”⁶ Dickover’s description of Dr. Coddington “holding court” in his study gives us a glimpse into what must have been the rather complicated dynamics of Alpha Gamma Delta’s founding, a process that seems to have been closely shepherded by a man with genuine interest in empowering and enriching his female students but that still played out, as might be expected, within a very traditional paternalist framework.

Despite their continuing hesitancy about the potential success of their endeavor, the women were “inspired with purpose, courage, and fraternity spirit enough to remove mountains if necessary,” and their hard work came to fruition on May 30, 1904, which is recognized as the formal founding date of Alpha Gamma Delta.⁷ The meeting took place in Dr. Coddington’s study, as had the previous ones, but at this special gathering the chapter constitution and by-laws were read and adopted, fraternity badges were first worn, and officers were elected for the coming year. Jennie Clara Titus, the student who had been especially recommended by Dr. Coddington himself, was elected as the first president of the group. A brief note in the *Syracuse Daily Orange* announced Alpha Gamma Delta’s founding to the university community shortly afterwards. Organizational meetings continued to be held in the fall of 1904, and Dr. Coddington remained closely involved with the new fraternity and its members, suggesting

⁵ Dickover, pg. 281. Georgia Dickover described Alpha Gamma Delta’s *first* badge in this way, but also noted that after a few months the fraternity “disapproved” of this design because of the prominence of the Delta. In 1905, Alpha Chapter selected the present badge from a design submitted by Mr. J.F. Newman, a jeweler in New York. The second, and current, badge features a plain Delta, a chased Gamma, and an Alpha set with pearls or diamonds superimposed on the other two letters.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

changes to the pin design and offering his wife and her friends as “patronesses” for the group. His most important contribution in this early stage, however, was his offer to write to friends and colleagues on other college and university campuses in an effort to interest them in supporting Alpha Gamma Delta’s national expansion. One year later, Beta Chapter was founded at the University of Wisconsin, and Alpha Gamma Delta’s expansion phase was launched. The first national convention was held at the Alpha Chapter house in Syracuse in 1907, and for the following two years the fraternity enjoyed a robust expansion, doubling both its chapter roll and its total membership. This expansion period culminated in Alpha Gamma Delta’s admittance to the National Panhellenic Congress in 1909, and Marguerite Shepard served as the group’s first delegate.⁸ In the 1930s, Georgia Dickover wrote that,

“ . . . the pioneer spirit, the daring, courage, and vision that characterized our forefathers and urged them to seek their homes in a new territory and to spread the ideals of young America even to the far West, was the same spirit that has enabled our fraternity to expand its influence throughout so many universities and colleges on this continent.”⁹

In the spring of 1918, this “pioneer spirit” would extend from upstate New York to the heart of the Midwest, with the founding of Alpha Gamma Delta’s Sigma Chapter at the University of Illinois.

1917-1918: Delta Epsilon Phi to Alpha Gamma Delta

In February 1917, a conversation sparked by a piece of jewelry set in motion the process which would eventually lead to the founding of Sigma Chapter at the University of Illinois. Florence Downend, a sophomore music student, admired the pin worn by her classmate Marquerite Keck, who had recently transferred to the University of Illinois from Illinois Wesleyan University in Bloomington. Marguerite explained that the pin was a sign of her

⁸ Dickover, pp. 26-29; 87.

membership in Alpha Gamma Delta's Xi Chapter, and her ensuing conversation with her classmate convinced her that Florence "had the desire and spirit to start a new organization," so she encouraged her to gather other friends, recruit new ones, and begin the process of founding a new chapter for Alpha Gamma Delta.¹⁰ An initially small but enthusiastic group of women met at the home of Viña Freitag and discussed ideas and plans for the organization, where Florence Downend served as moderator and passed on the knowledge about general fraternity life that she had gained from her conversation with Marguerite Keck. An early member, Mabel Osburn, recalled that at this meeting, "the opportunity of such a sisterhood to provide better environment; to promote higher ideals to its members; to encourage higher scholastic standing; to encourage participation in college activities; and to educate socially was explained."¹¹ Over the next several weeks more meetings were held at the homes of university women who were already friends of Florence Downend, Viña Freitag, and Mabel Osburn, but by the third meeting several "new girls" were invited to join the planning group, probably in order to gauge whether wider interest in the idea existed on the campus. This interest did in fact exist, and the planning process moved forward rapidly.

After several of these more informal meetings, the group began to meet more regularly in the Women's Building on campus, and Marguerite Keck explained the University's rules and regulations governing fraternities for both men and women. These meetings likely led in turn to an important meeting with Dean of Women Fanny Cook Gates to discuss the founding of a new local sorority, who responded by asserting that she was "heartily in favor of it" and "promised

⁹ Ibid., pg. 95.

¹⁰ History of Delta Epsilon Phi, from the Petition of Delta Epsilon Phi to Alpha Gamma Delta, 1917, Record Series 41/72/7, Box 2, University of Illinois Archives.

¹¹ Ibid.

her support and influence.”¹² This support was essential to the success of the venture, because all student organizations had to eventually petition the University’s Council of Administration in order to exist as recognized bodies. Even more importantly, the Council of Administration required that any group wishing to affiliate with a national fraternity had to exist as an unaffiliated “local” fraternity for a specified period of time before the University could allow affiliation.¹³ Since Marguerite Keck’s ultimate goal for the group that she was shepherding was, most decidedly, eventual affiliation with Alpha Gamma Delta, it was essential for her friends to cultivate a positive relationship with Dean Gates, as well as with Dean of Men Thomas Arkle Clark, a champion of Greek life at the University.

A pivotal meeting was held on April 16, when fourteen women declared their intention to join the new group. Florence Downend was elected President, Viña Freitag was chosen as Recording Secretary, and Vallie Fallon served as the first Treasurer. At Marguerite Keck’s suggestion, the group chose Delta Epsilon Phi as the name of the sisterhood, and they also called on her to design a pin, a small arrow with the letters ΔΕΦ superimposed on it. With these essentials settled, the first initiation ceremony of Delta Epsilon Phi took place on April 23.

Mabel Osburn described the experience:

“The thirteen of us dressed in white and blindfolded walked downstairs tremblingly, not knowing exactly what was going to happen to us. Our nerves were calmed somewhat by hearing the music of the Victrola from an adjoining room. After we declared our wish of becoming true and lawful members of Delta Epsilon Phi, the blindfolds were removed, and a lovely and impressive initiation service followed...After initiation, we felt that a bond of friendship and a true feeling of sisterhood existed.”¹⁴

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Jonathan S. Coit, *Beta Alpha of Alpha Phi*, Record Series 12/8/50, University of Illinois Archives.

¹⁴ History of Delta Epsilon Phi, from the Petition of Delta Epsilon Phi to Alpha Gamma Delta, 1917, Record Series 41/72/7, Box 2, University of Illinois Archives. Osburn mentions thirteen initiates in this remembrance – one of the fourteen women who met on April 16, Virginia Miller, was actually initiated into Delta Epsilon Phi at a later date.

The service and ritual were written and planned by Marguerite Keck, and she enlisted the services of several local Alpha Gamma Delta alumnae to help her read the service and initiate the new members, including Mrs. Louise Englis (Xi Chapter) and Mrs. W.H. Hyslop (Beta Chapter). These two women, among others, would serve as patronesses of the young fraternity in the coming months, hosting meetings and social events in their homes. The first thirteen members initiated into Delta Epsilon Phi were:

Florence Downend	Viña Freitag
Marjorie Llewellyn	Mabel Osburn
Amy Weir	Mary Jane Weir
Pearl Weir	Jane Butler
Maud Butler	Nellie DuVall
Vallie Fallon	Hazel Linton
Geraldine Daly	

On April 24, Delta Epsilon Phi petitioned the Council of Administration at the University of Illinois for the right to exist as a local organization. The petition was immediately granted on the recommendation of Dean Gates, and the new women's fraternity was free to conduct business and social activities. One of the first group activities was a trip to Bloomington, Illinois, where Delta Epsilon Phi members "were guests of the Alpha Gamma Delta girls there."¹⁵ The occasion was a chapter dance at Xi Chapter of Illinois Wesleyan University, and the trip was likely orchestrated by Marguerite Keck.¹⁶ Mabel Osburn reported that the two groups enjoyed a matinee theater party and a lovely luncheon together, and it is likely that they also discussed Delta Epsilon Phi's petition to become a chapter of Alpha Gamma Delta, which they were to present at the fraternity's upcoming national convention in Louisville, Kentucky in July. In the remaining weeks of the 1917 spring semester, Delta Epsilon Phi held several business meetings, social events, and additional initiation ceremonies, eventually bringing the

¹⁵ History of Delta Epsilon Phi, from the Petition of Delta Epsilon Phi to Alpha Gamma Delta, 1917, Record Series 41/72/7, Box 2, University of Illinois Archives.

roll of members to twenty-four. Officers were elected for the 1917-1918 academic year, rose and old gold were chosen as the fraternity's colors, and the rose was adopted as the official flower. Three patronesses were chosen and announced: Mrs. Bertha Trautman Hyslop (Beta Chapter), wife of Professor of Music William H. Hyslop; Mrs. Louise Strickle Englis (Xi), wife of Professor of Chemistry Duane T. Englis; and Mrs. Katharine Macy Noyes, wife of Professor of Chemistry W.A Noyes. Of these three, Katharine Macy Noyes would prove to be particularly influential to the fortunes of the fraternity in the future, especially in her capacity as House Association President in the 1920s. She spearheaded and guided the campaign to construct a new house for Alpha Gamma Delta and continued to be actively involved with the Alumnae Association until her death in 1963.

All of these activities, from the picnic breakfasts and social hours with "gentlemen friends" to the business meetings at Mrs. Hyslop's house, were essential evidence of the current vitality and future growth potential of Delta Epsilon Phi, and they were highlighted in the formal petition that the members prepared for the Alpha Gamma Delta national convention. Contained in an impressive leather-bound book, the petition opened with a message from newly-elected president Amy Weir '18 and secretary Geraldine Daly '18:

"To the Alpha Gamma Delta Fraternity:
The Delta Epsilon Phi fraternity of the University of Illinois, organized according to the plans and ideals heretofore set forth, believing in the solidarity of the University of Illinois, the efficiency of its faculty, and the ability of its graduates; and believing that the ideals of the Delta Epsilon Phi fraternity are of such a standard as to meet the commendation of the Alpha Gamma Delta fraternity, we the representatives of the Delta Epsilon Phi fraternity, do hereby petition the Alpha Gamma Delta fraternity to grant a charter to the Delta Epsilon Phi fraternity of the University of Illinois together with all the honors and privileges ascribed thereto.

The Delta Epsilon Phi fraternity for women is endeavoring to govern itself according to Pan-Hellenic rules, to maintain a high standard of scholarship, to do

¹⁶ Dickover, pg. 147.

its share of campus activities, to give its members a home in which there is an atmosphere of culture and refinement and to forward social life. If the Grand Council of Alpha Gamma Delta fraternity grants this petition Delta Epsilon Phi will endeavor to make itself a chapter having the ideals and standards of Alpha Gamma Delta”¹⁷

The book was designed to acquaint outside observers with the current members of Delta Epsilon Phi, and each member was assigned her own page on which to display a photograph, hometown and high school information, and University of Illinois activities and honors. Delta Epsilon Phi women were involved in YWCA, Choral Society, University Orchestra, the Chemical and Mathematical Clubs, the Athenian, Gregorian, and Jamesonian Literary Societies, the Women’s Athletic Association, and athletic teams such as baseball, basketball, and bowling. The petition also included Mabel Osburn’s history of the founding of Delta Epsilon Phi, a series of candid photographs of the group (many showing them engaged in athletic pursuits!), and letters of support and recommendation for individual members as well as the fraternity as a whole.

These letters, written by university administrators, professors, ministers, and family friends, are especially intriguing both for what they reveal about the early members’ individual personalities and interests and for how they illuminate common ideals about womanhood, class, and education. Many of the letters praise the Delta Epsilon Phi girls’ Christian virtues and devotion to church activities and principles, as did one from the Reverend Martin S. Bryant, who served as pastor to several Delta Epsilon Phi members at University Baptist Church. Reverend Bryant wrote that “five or six of them are among the strongest and choicest girls of my church . . . They are also possessed of that Christian charm and culture which only the church can give.”¹⁸

Eugene A. Greer, a longtime family friend of Delta Epsilon Phi member Antoinette Heidler,

¹⁷ Petition of Delta Epsilon Phi to Alpha Gamma Delta, 1917, Record Series 41/72/7, Box 2, University of Illinois Archives.

¹⁸ Letter from Reverend Martin S. Bryant, May 30, 1917, Petition of Delta Epsilon Phi to Alpha Gamma Delta, 1917, Record Series 41/72/7, Box 2, University of Illinois Archives.

assessed her character in a similar fashion, writing, “Of Miss Heidler herself [I] will say that I have been associated with her in church Sunday school and social activities . . . and know her to be a Christian girl, true to the best principles of womanhood and always a lady.”¹⁹ Thus an explicit connection is made between “proper” womanhood and Christian behavior and activities, especially church attendance and church-centered activities.²⁰

Several letter-writers also made reference to the position or reputation of fraternity members’ families by way of illustrating their own acceptability for an organization such as Alpha Gamma Delta, and these descriptions inevitably hinge on social class, even when the category is not specifically referenced.²¹ When W.W. Henry, pastor of First Methodist Episcopal Church in Le Roy, Illinois, wrote in support of Hazel Linton, he noted that “She is a young lady of excellent parentage, and of the very highest attainments of character herself.”²² Olen R. Clements, Clark County State’s Attorney and family friend of Delta Epsilon Phi president Amy Weir, wrote of Weir that “She comes of a good family – of people who are social and industrial leaders in their communities . . . and from my observation, as a fraternity man, is

¹⁹ Letter from Eugene A. Greer, May 28, 1917, Petition of Delta Epsilon Phi to Alpha Gamma Delta, 1917, Record Series 41/72/7, Box 2, University of Illinois Archives.

²⁰ It is also noteworthy that, at least in these early years, “church” for Delta Epsilon Phi women meant one of the various branches of Protestantism – there are no letters from Catholic priests or nuns, and Jewish students at the University of Illinois were only allowed to join “Jewish” fraternities and sororities, a situation that existed for the University’s African-American students as well. Although Delta Epsilon Phi’s original constitution clearly states that “The membership of this organization shall be composed solely of women of the Caucasian race, regularly registered in some college in the University of Illinois. . . .” there is no similar provision concerning religion. The fact that the early members seem to have been exclusively Protestant probably resulted not from any official prohibition against Catholic members but instead from the fact that many of the women were already acquainted with each other from campus church activities and tended to look in these existing social networks for new fraternity members as well.

²¹ Potential fraternity members’ family and social backgrounds were considered to be very important in determining whether they would “fit in” with a certain group and a certain lifestyle, and whether they and their parents would be able to afford the at-times extensive costs of fraternity living, activities, and an appropriate wardrobe, not to mention the usual monetary outlay associated with attending a university. These considerations continued to be important for membership recruitment, as is evidenced by Alpha Gamma Delta rush recommendation forms from the 1930s and 1940s which specifically inquire about “Father’s name and business,” “Financial status,” and “Social standing of parents (clubs, etc.).”

²² Letter from W.W. Henry, June 4, 1917, Petition of Delta Epsilon Phi to Alpha Gamma Delta, 1917, Record Series 41/72/7, Box 2, University of Illinois Archives.

the type of woman that the sororities are more and more choosing for the backbone of their organizations.”²³

Several of the letters of support also mentioned the Delta Epsilon Phi members’ academic achievement, since scholarship was one of the areas to which the group needed to demonstrate commitment in order to be considered for inclusion in Alpha Gamma Delta’s national structure. As college women in the early twentieth century, the Delta Epsilon Phi members were already somewhat extraordinary in terms of their intellectual goals and opportunities when compared with their peers who did not or could not attend institutions of higher education. Even in this exceptional group, however, some women stood out. R.B. Howell, Professor of Chemistry, wrote a glowing letter about Nellie Du Vall, describing her as “one of the strongest students that I have ever had in my classes,” and adding that she had “the sincere endorsement of both Mrs. Howell and myself.”²⁴ This praise for a female student, coming from a professor in a subject generally thought to be beyond the capabilities of the “average” woman, must have constituted quite a compliment. Another letter from Ernest B. Lytle, Professor of Mathematics (a subject, like Chemistry, thought to be rightfully the domain of men), praises the “excellent work” of Virginia Miller and reports that she “has proven herself a student of unusual ability.” The letter goes on to offer insights into Miller’s character as well, and Professor Lytle reports that she is “selfreliant (sic) and forceful without being unpleasantly self assertive.”

The implied subtext of this letter is that while Virginia Miller certainly stands above her peers as an exceptional woman due to her intellectual gifts, she still remains “true to the best principles of womanhood” and behaves in the acceptably demure manner of “a lady” by not

²³ Letter from Olen R. Clements, June 1, 1917, Petition of Delta Epsilon Phi to Alpha Gamma Delta, 1917, Record Series 41/72/7, Box 2, University of Illinois Archives.

being “unpleasantly self assertive.”²⁵ It is revealing, though unsurprising, that Professor Lytle felt it necessary to include this qualifier in his letter of support for Virginia Miller, a decision that can be seen in the same light as Professor Howell’s assertion that both he and his wife supported Nellie Du Vall, giving a respected woman’s stamp of approval to the younger lady. The letters included in the Delta Epsilon Phi petition all sought to illustrate that the twenty-four original members of the fraternity were striving, by their scholarship, social activities, and comportment, to live up to the goals of Delta Epsilon Phi (and, by association, Alpha Gamma Delta) that were stated in Article II of the fraternity’s constitution, written during the planning stages in 1917:

“The object of ΔΕΦ shall be to foster the attributes of sisterhood and perfect womanhood, to cooperate with college authorities in all efforts to improve social and scholarship standards, and to maintain a homelike environment for our members.”²⁶

Delta Epsilon Phi’s petition to become a chapter of Alpha Gamma Delta was accepted by the national organization that summer, and the fraternity embarked on its one-year trial period before the formal founding in June of 1918. During the 1917-1918 academic year Delta Epsilon Phi, led by president Amy Weir, continued to sponsor the normal fare for women’s social fraternities, including parties, teas, picnics, and dances. The fraternity also began to rent a house, located at 1103 West Oregon Street in Urbana, in which some of the members could live and in which chapter meetings could be held. Members who wanted to live in the house were required to pay their own room and board, in addition to the regular fraternity dues of \$2.50 per month.²⁷ Georgia Dickover noted in her 1931 national history that this house’s successful operation, along with the group’s high record of scholarship and community service, made Delta Epsilon Phi a

²⁴ Letter from Professor R.B. Howell, May 24, 1917, Petition of Delta Epsilon Phi to Alpha Gamma Delta, 1917, Record Series 41/72/7, Box 2, University of Illinois Archives.

²⁵ Letter from Professor Ernest B. Lytle, May 15, 1917, Petition of Delta Epsilon Phi to Alpha Gamma Delta, 1917, Record Series 41/72/7, Box 2, University of Illinois Archives.

²⁶ Constitution of Delta Epsilon Phi, 1917, Record Series 41/72/7, Box 1, University of Illinois Archives.

strong and desirable candidate for inclusion in the chapter roll of Alpha Gamma Delta.²⁸ Finally, on June 12, 1918 – the university’s Commencement Day – a morning pledging ceremony at the Delta Epsilon Phi house introduced twenty women into Alpha Gamma Delta. Later in the afternoon, they were formally initiated and installed as Sigma Chapter of Alpha Gamma Delta, with Mary Louise Brown, President of Alpha Gamma Delta’s Beta Province, as the installing officer.²⁹ An initiation banquet was held at the Inman Hotel in Champaign, and several local alumnae attended all of the day’s festivities, including Sigma Chapter’s patronesses and their professorial husbands.³⁰ The following day, June 13, Professor and Mrs. Noyes hosted a reception at their home in Urbana, where Sigma Chapter was “introduced to the faculty and other fraternities.”³¹ One of Sigma Chapter’s other early “official” appearances in the university community was also the last mention of Delta Epsilon Phi, and came in the 1919 edition of the *Illio* yearbook with a picture of twenty-seven members and a sketch of the fraternity’s house. The *Illio*’s publication obviously lagged behind real-time events in these days, as Delta Epsilon Phi had been incorporated into Alpha Gamma Delta nearly a year before. Nevertheless, the hard work and dedication of the original members, as well as the guidance and support of people like Marguerite Keck and Dean Fanny Gates, had finally come to fruition. From June 1918 on, Sigma Chapter of Alpha Gamma Delta would be a strong presence in the University of Illinois Greek community.

²⁷ Constitution of Delta Epsilon Phi, 1917, Record Series 41/72/7, Box 1, University of Illinois Archives; <http://www.agdsigma.com/index.php>, accessed July 24, 2006.

²⁸ Dickover, pg. 147.

²⁹ *Sigma Sidelights*, January 1963, Record Series 41/72/7, Box 1, University of Illinois Archives. Alpha Gamma Delta’s province system was established at its first national convention in May 1907, according to a geographical division of the United States. Each province would elect officers (whose presidents in turn served as national officers), and would have its own constitution. Illinois fell under the jurisdiction of Beta Province.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*

The 1920s: Building for the Future

The first full decade of existence for Sigma Chapter, the 1920s, was a time of intense activity, especially the latter years of the decade which saw the planning for and construction of a grand new chapter house on Lincoln Avenue in Urbana. One of the most important moments in the history of this momentous project was actually the founding of an Alumnae Association in 1919, only one year after the formal founding of the chapter itself. This step proved especially crucial because it provided a vehicle for enthusiastic and influential alumnae to become more involved in the activities and concerns of the active collegiate chapter, and it was these women who spearheaded the financing, fundraising, and building campaign that eventually brought the new house into being. As mentioned previously, the most important figure in this project was Katharine Macy Noyes, and the Alumnae Association and the later House Association greatly benefited when, in 1919, she was named an honorary alumna by the active chapter, in appreciation for her efforts as one of the chapter's patronesses.³² She was formally initiated by Alpha Gamma Delta's Grand President, Louise Leonard, during the President's visit to Sigma Chapter. With her honorary initiation, Noyes was transformed from an interested "outsider" into a true member of the sisterhood, and over the next nearly fifty years she would devote countless hours and energies to the promotion and improvement of Sigma Chapter. Another noteworthy alumna of this period was Viña Freitag Kilby '18, one of the original founders of Delta Epsilon Phi. Kilby served as Alpha Gamma Delta's Second Grand Vice-President from 1922 to 1925 and in this position was recognized for her work to calculate accurate ratings for fraternity scholarship averages.³³

³² *Sigma Sidelights*, January 1963, Record Series 41/72/7, Box 1, University of Illinois Archives.

³³ Dickover, pg. 59.

For most of the 1920s, Sigma Chapter of Alpha Gamma Delta was housed in several different locations – first 1103 West Oregon and then 807 on West Nevada Street in Urbana, and after 1923 in a house that the fraternity purchased at 806 South Fifth Street in Champaign.³⁴ It was at one of the Urbana houses that the following noteworthy event occurred on April 4, 1921, as reported by the *Daily Illini*:

“After awakening the women of the Alpha Gamma Delta house a half hour serenade, the Ag Club quartette was set upon at 2 o’clock yesterday morning by the Urbana police...the Ag Quartet is one of the best known combinations of vocal artists on the campus. The Alpha Gamma Deltas are said to have been duly thrilled and appreciative; they applauded loudly although not noisily, just enough so as to not overreach the bounds of lady-likeness.”

The *Daily Illini* article went on to report that another, less enthusiastic, neighbor had called the police, finally bringing an end to the serenade.³⁵ This amusing vignette provides a peek into at least *some* of the activities in which Alpha Gamma Delta found itself involved in the early 1920s. In 1926, Sigma Chapter played host to a decidedly more formal and dignified event when it hosted Alpha Gamma Delta’s Beta Province convention in the spring. And even before the chapter had designs on building its own new home, Sigma members helped the University of Illinois football team build theirs. In 1922 the chapter reportedly pledged \$1,000 to purchase a marble column for the new Memorial Stadium, and each member made an individual pledge of between \$50 and \$200 to meet the collective goal. According to chapter lore, however, Milly June Goelitz Musselman’s father Adolph Goelitz paid the entire \$1,000 pledge himself and arranged for Alpha Gamma Delta to be credited.³⁶

³⁴ http://www.agdsigma.com/page.php?page_id=752. Accessed July 28, 2006.

³⁵ Roger Ebert, ed. *An Illini Century: One Hundred Years of Campus Life* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1967), pg. 113.

³⁶ *Sigma Sidelights* “From the Archives,” October 1964, Record Series 41/72/7, Box 1, University of Illinois Archives.

By the latter part of the decade, both the active and alumna members had a strong desire to design and build a new house, one that would better meet all of the specific social and housing needs of a growing women's fraternity, including a large living and dining area with space for dances, a chapter room for meetings and initiations, and plenty of bedrooms and bathrooms. In preparation for an eventual move, the House Association purchased a new lot at 1106 South Lincoln Avenue in Urbana, directly across the street from the McKinley Hospital. Alpha Gamma Delta was not the only University of Illinois fraternity to have expansion on the brain in the late 1920s – in fact, Sigma Chapter carried on a friendly competition with its new Lincoln Avenue next-door neighbor, Kappa Kappa Gamma, to see which group could complete their new house first.

After several years of planning and discussion, the process to construct the new house officially began in the spring and summer of 1927, with House Association president Katharine Macy Noyes leading the way. In early June, the House Association received a set of General Specifications from George E. Ramey, who had previously been chosen as architect for the new chapter house. These specifications were then passed on to nine local contractors, who were given roughly a week to prepare their bids for labor and materials. On June 13, the contractors were invited to present their bids to the House Association, and the men wrote their estimates in a hand-drawn chart that allowed the bids to be compared easily and quickly. Later that evening, Walter J. Villard's bid – the third lowest of the nine – was selected. On June 22, the contract for construction of the new chapter house was signed between the House Association, Walter J. Villard, the father of Leona Villard Williams, Sigma '27, and George E. Ramey. The original

cost estimate was \$51,938 (later reduced to \$49,968 after some changes to the plan) and the estimated completion date for the project was January 1, 1928.³⁷

Most of Katharine Noyes' earliest efforts in the building campaign centered on securing proper financing for the project, and her work began immediately after the contract was signed. Part of the agreement authorized Mr. Villard, the contractor, to take over ownership of the fraternity's house and property at 806 South Fifth Street in Champaign, with equity of \$15,444. The remaining portion of the cost had to be borrowed, and a 1934 narrative financial statement from the House Association indicates that \$65,000 was loaned by the Twin Cities Building and Loan Association, an amount that would cover construction costs as well as \$11,000 for the lot. Some additional funds were loaned by Alpha Gamma Delta's national organization, which made available to all chapters a small fund for precisely this purpose. In the coming years a second mortgage would be taken out on the house, in order to "protect jointly and equally all notes issued by the House Association for the purchase of stock and the reduction of the first mortgage indebtedness to the Twin Cities Building and Loan Association..."³⁸ Noyes and House Association treasurer Mabel Howard managed all of these financial transactions and kept careful records of their work, providing a fascinating portrait of the "building years" of Sigma Chapter.

The volume of correspondence between Katharine Noyes, Mabel Howard, and various contractors and sub-contractors in 1927 and 1928 is a testament to the enthusiastic involvement of these alumnae in the affairs and fortunes of the active chapter. Their interest in and involvement with the undergraduates, however, was not limited only to concerns about financing and construction, and their correspondence reveals this fact as well. Katharine Noyes lived in Urbana and was therefore in a position to be a close observer of both the activities and the

³⁷ Record Series 41/72/7, Box 1, University of Illinois Archives.

character of the “Alpha Gam” undergraduates, and, interspersed with complaints about construction delays and anxieties about costs, she remarked on these issues in her frequent letters to Mabel Howard, who lived in Chicago. Although Noyes wrote in mid-September 1927 that the fall rushing period had netted nine or ten pledges who were “just darling,” by the end of the month she expressed some exasperation with these girls and their active sisters over their choice of Mrs. Ella Bemis as house chaperone, writing testily that she was “not consulted about it at all.”³⁹ Mabel Howard seemed to share Noyes’ concerns about Mrs. Bemis and wrote on October 4 that she was “very much disappointed” in the undergraduates’ choice, noting that Mrs. Bemis’ “record” with Alpha Chi Omega, another sorority, had not been outstanding. Howard also bemoaned the small size of the pledge class – now reduced to eight – and expressed a sentiment that was to crop up from time to time throughout the construction period: “I’ve been so thoroughly disgusted with that chapter I didn’t care much whether we ever finished the house.”⁴⁰ Still later in November, Howard wrote to Noyes to inquire incredulously whether it was true that only one of the pledges had “made her grades,” and lamented that grades were a continuing problem for the entire chapter. Noyes agreed, expressing her belief that the actives “look for everything else first in pledging girls” and that “they put too much emphasis on outside activities in the chapter.”⁴¹ Other problems included the “dirty” state of the current house (which both Howard and Noyes agreed was really Mrs. Bemis’ fault, since she was the person who employed

³⁸ Sigma of Alpha Gamma Delta House Association Financial Statement of November 11, 1934, Record Series 41/72/7, Box 1, University of Illinois Archives.

³⁹ Letter from Katharine Macy Noyes to Mabel Howard, September 30, 1927, Record Series 41/72/7, Box 1, University of Illinois Archives.

⁴⁰ Letter from Mabel Howard to Katharine Macy Noyes, October 4, 1927, Record Series 41/72/7, Box 1, University of Illinois Archives.

⁴¹ Letter from Katharine Macy Noyes to Mabel Howard, March 1, 1928, Record Series 41/72/7, Box 1, University of Illinois Archives. Lest Katharine Noyes be painted as a woman who did not support community or philanthropic activities, she clarified her understanding of the kind of “outside activities” that did not enhance the reputation of the sorority by continuing, “Then the real time consumer is dates. I am glad Dorothy Hillebrand is gone to California with her flame for she was doing nothing but run around him morning noon and night. I suppose some of the rest are about as bad.”

and directly supervised the maid!) and the vague charge that the girls needed to be “more refined,” since they were constantly being judged by those outside the fraternity whose opinions, in the words of Mabel Howard, “count most.”⁴²

Despite Katharine Noyes and Mabel Howard’s seemingly low opinion of Ella Bemis, the house chaperone shared many of their concerns about “the girls,” and she committed them to paper in a letter to Mabel Howard in early January 1928. At this point the house construction was inching toward its completion and the move into the new house, highly anticipated by all concerned, was being contemplated. In light of that fact, Mrs. Bemis expressed her hope that the move to the more “formal” environment of the new house would inspire the girls to be “more refined,” and specifically that they would improve their table manners, greet her when she entered a room, and refrain from late-night phone calls with young men.⁴³ Noyes and Howard shared Mrs. Bemis’ hope that living in a beautiful new home would produce the desired behavior in Sigma Chapter’s active members, and because of this hope they paid careful attention to not only the outside but also the inside of the house, ordering sensible yet elegant furnishings and hiring a professional interior decorator, both chosen to fit into the house’s “French Chateau” theme. All parties involved continued to be wary of the whims of the “college girls,” however, and Mabel Howard’s letters to Katharine Noyes in the spring of 1928 contain the suggestion that a set of house rules be drawn up and strictly adhered to, including a specific prohibition against “moving the furniture,” since the hired decorator had placed it in a certain arrangement, and also against “lounging in the living room,” which was supposed to be a formal space.⁴⁴ When the

⁴² Letters from Mabel Howard to Katharine Macy Noyes, November 16 and 20, 1927, Record Series 41/72/7, Box 1, University of Illinois Archives.

⁴³ Letter from Ella Bemis to Mabel Howard, January 4, 1928, Record Series 41/72/7, Box 1, University of Illinois Archives.

⁴⁴ Letters from Mabel Howard to Katharine Noyes, February 28 and March 8, 1928, Record Series 41/72/7, Box 1, University of Illinois Archives. The March 8 letter contains the line, “What is the matter with Priscilla? Can’t she

new house rules were actually published they were distributed on “Sigma of Alpha Gamma Delta House Association” stationary, reaffirming the jurisdiction of the alumnae over the undergraduate chapter, at least where the house was concerned. There were several additions to the rules originally suggested by Mabel Howard, including a prohibition against studying in the dining room and a provision that house residents must “use back stairs” when “not properly dressed.”⁴⁵

In all likelihood, the undergraduate members of Sigma Chapter in the late 1920s were no more or no less “unrefined” and concerned with issues other than their grades than other fraternity women of their era at the University of Illinois. Katharine Noyes and Mabel Howard’s often-exasperated reaction to the younger women to whom they served as mentors and patronesses is also not surprising, given that the house construction represented an enormous outlay of both time and money. These women naturally wanted to protect Alpha Gamma Delta’s investment and ensure that those who were to enjoy the fruits of their labor were “worthy” of it, hence the intense concern about grades, social activities, and “reputation.” A certain amount of inter-generational suspicion is evident in Noyes and Howard’s concerns about the younger women’s behavior and values, and this suspicion often influenced their decisions about the house. In an October 1927 letter from Howard to Noyes, for instance, Howard mused that central light fixtures, though more expensive, might be a better choice for the new house than floor lamps, which would have to be cleared away when dances were held in the formal living areas. She realized, however, that this situation would plunge the girls and their dance partners into near-total darkness. At the risk of being, in her own words, “rather outspoken,” she

act like ladies should?,” which, while cryptic, hints at some of the issues with which we know Howard, Noyes, and Mrs. Bemis to have been quite concerned.

⁴⁵ Rules for New House, c. 1928, Record Series 41/72/7, Box 1, University of Illinois Archives.

informed Noyes that this situation was likely to “please *some of them* but !!!...”⁴⁶ While Howard’s primary intention in relating this fear about proper lighting to Noyes was surely to highlight the vast gap between “the girls” and “women” like themselves, at the same time she cannot deny that *she* was the one who had imagined the consequences of the dimly-lit dance in the first place. Howard’s letter indicates that perhaps she, Noyes, and other alumnae were worried about “the girls” not because they found them so different from themselves at the same stage in their lives, but because they indeed found them rather similar!

All anxieties aside, by the late spring of 1928, the new Sigma chapter house was ready to be inhabited, although “finishing touches” continued to be added over the spring and summer months. Cletis Westall Tallman ’28, who along with her sister Alyene Westall Prehn ’27 would remain a very active alumna, had the distinction of being the first president to serve in the new house. In May 1929 Katharine Noyes wrote approvingly to Mabel Howard that Mrs. Bemis’ suite in the new house was “the envy of all the chaperones on campus,” and more positive press in local newspapers generated feelings of pride among both the actives and the alumnae.⁴⁷ In addition to local acclaim, the “French Chateau” on Lincoln Avenue garnered attention in wider Alpha Gamma Delta circles, and Georgia Dickover’s history of the national organization reported that Delta Delta Chapter’s house at the University of Oregon was rumored to have been inspired by a description of Sigma Chapter’s house in the *Alpha Gamma Delta Quarterly*.⁴⁸ This description informed readers that inside the house,

“A French gallery presents a view of the entire first floor which contains a living room, spacious and charming, a cheery dining room, library, music room, coat room, reception room, kitchen and servants’ quarters. The living room, library,

⁴⁶ Letter from Mabel Howard to Katharine Noyes, October 19, 1928, Record Series 41/72/7, Box 1, University of Illinois Archives.

⁴⁷ Letter from Katharine Noyes to Mabel Howard, May 18, 1929, Record Series 41/72/7, Box 1, University of Illinois Archives.

⁴⁸ Dickover, pg. 213.

and music room open onto a terrace and sunken garden...The furnishings of the house are in keeping with loveliness of the house itself.”⁴⁹

By all accounts, Alpha Gamma Delta’s members, both actives and alumnae, were intensely proud of their new house and were especially grateful to those who had helped to make it a reality, an indication that perhaps the elegant new surroundings *were*, as the chaperone Mrs. Bemis hoped, “inspiring the girls” toward more “formal” living. After the intense and at times frantic activity of the 1920s, Alpha Gamma Delta entered its next two decades in a much more secure and prominent position on the University of Illinois campus, by virtue of its beautiful new home but also, increasingly, due to the accomplishments of its members and alumnae.

The 1930s: “One of the Leading Sororities”

By the beginning of its second full decade, Sigma Chapter of Alpha Gamma Delta was blooming on all fronts, with over two hundred active and alumnae members – many of them very accomplished – and a beautiful new house as a showplace. By 1931, Sigma Chapter could count six Phi Beta Kappas among its ranks (one of whom was Katharine Noyes, an honorary alumna), and its alumnae had also made a mark in the national Alpha Gamma Delta organization, including Mabel Howard, who served as Beta Province president and was also awarded the Crescent of Epsilon Pi, one of the fraternity’s highest alumnae honors.⁵⁰ These alumnae certainly provided the active members with positive role models and proved that Alpha Gamma Delta had made a wise choice when it incorporated Delta Epsilon Phi in 1917.

The glowing house description from the national *Alpha Gamma Delta Quarterly* was repeated in miniature “handbooks” that Sigma Chapter produced in the mid-1930s, likely

⁴⁹ Dickover, pg. 203.

⁵⁰ Ibid., pg. 148, 276. The Honors of Epsilon Phi (Arc, Crescent, Circle) were initiated in 1919 in order to recognize especially outstanding members of the fraternity.

directed at either interested alumnae or prospective members. While the still-new house featured prominently in these pamphlets and was intended to serve as an attraction, the handbooks also focused on Sigma Chapter's active members and their accomplishments, giving evidence to the contention that Alpha Gamma Delta was "one of the leading sororities on the campus of the University of Illinois."⁵¹ In fact, especially given that Sigma Chapter's members were "Illinois girls," they likely serenaded themselves and others with a popular Alpha Gamma Delta song from the 1930s, "Just What:"

Just what White Sox means in baseball,
Just what Tiffany means in rings,
Just what "home-made" means in piecrust,
So with Heinz in pickled things.
Just what Hershey means in nutbars,
Just what Stetson means in hats,
Just what Sterling means in silver,
Alpha Gamma means in "frats!"⁵²

In 1934, Sigma Chapter president Dorothy Kerr was women's editor of the *Illio* yearbook, a member of the senior honorary society Mortar Board, vice-president and former business manager of the Women's Glee Club, and vice-president of Gamma Alpha Chi, an honorary advertising sorority. Other members, such as freshman Evelyn Laurence and Betty Blair, were recognized for their outstanding scholarship, and Jean Parks and Becky Lydy drew praise for their "aquatic accomplishments" and their membership in Terrapin, a swimming society. Still other members were hailed for their participation and leadership in music societies and productions, the *Daily Illini* student newspaper, and organizations such as the Women's League.⁵³

⁵¹ *Sigma of Alpha Gamma Delta Handbook*, 1934-1935, Record Series 41/72/7, Box 1, University of Illinois Archives.

⁵² *Alpha Gamma Delta Manual of Fraternity Education*, 1935, Stewart S. Howe Collection, Record Series 26/20/30, University of Illinois Archives.

⁵³ *Sigma of Alpha Gamma Delta Handbook*, 1934-1935, Record Series 41/72/7, Box 1, University of Illinois Archives.

In any fraternity, the rushing process was essential for maintaining not only the desired size of the group (a point which became even more important when a large house had to be maintained) but also the desired character, and Sigma Chapter of Alpha Gamma Delta sought to fill its cohort with young women whose accomplishments and aspirations were similar to those of Dorothy Kerr, Evelyn Laurence, and Becky Lydy. Therefore the chapter's "Rushing Recommendation Blank" from the 1930s, which was circulated to all alumnae, asked the recommender to comment on "Scholastic average and rating in class," "Activities," and "Special Talents." A potential member's "personal appearance" and "personality" were also important points of reference, and the recommender was asked to describe each aspect "in detail." A member's family background was considered very relevant to her future success as an Alpha Gam, just as it had been in 1917 when Delta Epsilon Phi prepared its petition to incorporate with Alpha Gamma Delta. Recommenders were asked to provide such information as "Father's name and business," "Financial status," "Social standing of parents (clubs, etc.), and "Family Fraternity and College Affiliations." Throughout the 1930s, alumnae were strongly encouraged to recruit as many new undergraduates as possible from their hometowns in order to keep the chapter's membership healthy, but they were also cautioned to "not over-rate the girl recommended. It is an injustice to her as well as an injustice to us."⁵⁴ The rushing recommendation forms provide an interesting glimpse into what Sigma Chapter's alumnae, at least, desired for their fraternity's character in the 1930s.

In the 1930s, Sigma Chapter also began to publish an occasional newsletter, *Sigma Sidelights*, in order to report on happenings in the active chapter as well as allow alumnae to keep in touch with one another after graduation. To this end, the newsletter usually had two

⁵⁴ Rushing Recommendation Blank, Sigma Chapter of Alpha Gamma Delta, 1930s, Record Series 41/72/7, Box 1, University of Illinois Archives.

editors, an active member and an alumna. *Sigma Sidelights* quickly became an important source of information for the chapter, and the earliest existing edition, from January 1935, reported that three undergraduate members had to be taken to McKinley Hospital with diphtheria, and that the entire chapter was quarantined for forty-eight hours afterward as a precaution.⁵⁵ Quarantine due to illness was not an unusual occurrence at this time, and the January 1936 edition reported another instance, this time for scarlet fever. It is possible that Sigma Chapter actually benefited from these enforced seclusions, however, as *Sigma Sidelights* also proudly reported, in May 1936, that Alpha Gamma Delta was second on the campus in scholarship, with an overall GPA of 3.71!⁵⁶ Alpha Gamma Delta members continued to be active in a variety of campus organizations and honoraries, and one issue reported that several members regularly participated in weekly radio broadcasts on the campus station, WILL, as members of Phi Beta, a professional music and dramatics society. Another member, Hilda Mae Livengood '40, won her second Illinois state golf tournament in 1937. *Sigma Sidelights* explained that her interest in the game “was fostered when she caddied for her mother,” but that “strange as it may seem, Hilda’s father has taught her most of the golf she knows.”⁵⁷ Other items in the newsletter confirm that Alpha Gamma Delta members continued to be active in all facets of university athletics open to women, perhaps a continuation of the strong athletic tradition present in Delta Epsilon Phi. A note from the March 1939 issue indicates that the Alpha Gams were supporters of a wider university athletics scene as well, as they invited legendary Illinois football coach Bob Zuppke to one of their faculty teas. *Sigma Sidelights* reported that the four-time national champion coach, only a

⁵⁵ *Sigma Sidelights*, January 1935, Record Series 41/72/7, Box 1, University of Illinois Archives.

⁵⁶ *Sigma Sidelights*, May 1936, Record Series 41/72/7, Box 1, University of Illinois Archives.

⁵⁷ *Sigma Sidelights*, October 1937, Record Series 41/72/7, Box 1, University of Illinois Archives.

few years away from his retirement, said the tea was “the first he had been to in five years,” and that he “really seemed to enjoy himself.”⁵⁸

Throughout the 1930s, Sigma Chapter continued to be involved not only with University of Illinois activities but also in upholding the traditional rituals and festivities of Alpha Gamma Delta. Sigma Chapter had an active Mothers’ Club that was heavily involved, as many such clubs were, in helping to furnish and decorate the new house as well as stock it with essentials such as silver, china, and the occasional luxury such as a Victrola or radio. The first Alpha Gamma Delta Mothers’ Club had been organized in 1915, at Delta Chapter at the University of Minnesota, and the organizations had been a staple of fraternity life ever since. The members of Sigma Chapter organized events to recognize and thank the members of their Mothers’ Club, often linking these celebrations with other university-wide events honoring mothers. These gestures were certainly appreciated by Sigma Chapter’s mothers, but an interesting letter from Mabel Howard to Katharine Noyes reported that some of the Alpha Gam *fathers* were miffed that their own contributions to the fraternity (often financial in nature) seemed to be overlooked by their daughters, and specifically noted that “the girls” never planned any events for Dad’s Day, which was also a campus-wide event. Howard suggested to Noyes that the fathers should form a club to serve as a foil to the Mothers’ Club, and while later records from the 1960s and 1970s mention a “Dad’s Club,” it is not clear when this suggestion was finally acted upon.⁵⁹

Sigma Chapter also celebrated Alpha Gamma Delta’s traditional Founders’ Day and “Feast of Roses” with special rituals and ceremonies, usually including a banquet and dance. Founders’ Day was traditionally celebrated on May 30, but university schedules frequently required individual chapters to observe this holiday at alternate times. The “Feast of Roses,”

⁵⁸ *Sigma Sidelights*, March 1939, Record Series 41/72/7, Box 1, University of Illinois Archives.

sometimes simply referred to as the “Rose Banquet,” was another traditional event that was originally held only during national conventions but grew to have different significance for individual chapters. During the 1920s and 1930s, Sigma Chapter often held this event in March as an evening of singing and toasting in order to recognize the initiation of new members.⁶⁰ A poem written for Sigma Chapter’s Rose Banquet in 1939 by original founder Amy Weir Bauer draws upon the theme of gardening to highlight the strengthening tradition of the chapter:

As a gardener pauses to arrange his
 roses with care
He sees more than green leaves
 and buds growing there
He sees them whole as dreams
 come true
Designs traced in with dreaming
 as gardeners do
Red and buff roses he would keep
 for the best
To afford a rich accent against
 all the rest.
So – as the rainbow’s pattern comes
 and goes
It leaves “spotlighted” in sunshine
 his loveliest rose.
Likewise did Delta Epsilon Phi
 gardeners design
Sigma’s garden, with such
 color, form and line
That *her* roses should also
 highest accent be
Among the many chapters of
 our fraternity.
Sigma Rosebuds – as the rainbow
 comes and goes
I am sure it will find you
 *each a lovely rose.*⁶¹

⁵⁹ Letter from Mabel Howard to Katharine Macy Noyes, December 29, 1929, Record Series 41/72/7, Box 1, University of Illinois Archives.

⁶⁰ Dickover, pp. 260-264; Dance Programs, 1927-1936, Record Series 41/72/7, Box 1, University of Illinois Archives.

⁶¹ Amy Weir Bauer, Rose Banquet Poem, 1939, Record Series 41/72/7, Box 1, University of Illinois Archives.

On the philanthropic front, several Sigma Chapter members in the 1930s volunteered at Alpha Gamma Delta's summer camps for "underprivileged and undernourished" children in Jackson, Michigan and Welland, Ontario, Canada. The summer camps, first authorized by the fraternity in 1919, were the crown jewel of the group's philanthropy and provided the children with not only summer recreation and companionship but also nutritious meals and free medical examinations and care. The permanent camp in Jackson, built in 1922, was designed by national founder Emily Butterfield, a Michigan native and an architect who was posthumously inducted into the Michigan Women's Hall of Fame, recognizing her work as the "first woman architect in Michigan."⁶²

Overall, the 1930s seem to have been a time of stability and comfort for Sigma Chapter – the active membership of the fraternity remained steady at around forty women per year, the alumnae remained devoted and involved, and the beautiful house continued to see improvements in furnishings and accessories every few years. Although it is hard to imagine that Sigma Chapter, its active members, and its alumnae were *not* affected by the Depression and its accompanying economic and social hardships, there is little mention of these issues in any surviving material, such as the *Sigma Sidelights* newsletter or House Association correspondence. This seeming isolation from events happening in the "real world" in the 1930s serves as a stark contrast to Sigma Chapter's next decade, when concerns about World War II touched nearly every aspect of university and fraternity life, as well as the lives of Sigma Chapter's alumnae.

⁶² www.alphagammadelta.org, accessed July 31, 2006.

The 1940s: Wartime and Recovery

The earliest mention of World War II in Sigma Chapter's records from the 1940s is both flippant and innocuous, and does not give much indication about the years of rationing, heartbreak, and anxiety that would lie ahead for the fraternity, the university, and the nation. In this case the Alpha Gamma Delta members' first contact with and attitude toward the war was not very much different than most Americans', as many people found it easy to forget about the war in Europe before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor drew the United States directly into the conflict. In the March 1940 issue of *Sigma Sidelights*, the alumnae news section reported that Mary Eleanor Holme '35 had just received a Master's Degree from Oxford University in England (a notable accomplishment!), and that she and a fellow Alpha Gam had enjoyed a trip around Europe "in spite of the gathering war clouds" and "dashed for the last sailing of the Normandie before the war was declared."⁶³ Nestled amidst news of alumnae marriages, rushing rule changes, and victories in the Homecoming Stunt Show, this item reinforces the idea of the war in Europe as a distant, somewhat thrilling drama that had yet to really touch the United States but certainly made for an exciting anecdote.

For the next two years this attitude toward the war, at least in the pages of *Sigma Sidelights*, would remain largely the same. An item in the June 1941 issue alerts active and alumnae members to the fact that "national defense will undoubtedly influence adversely University enrollment next fall," but this information is offered only to highlight the fact that alumnae need to be even more aggressive about recruiting and recommending suitable girls for rush, given the projected shortage.⁶⁴ It was essential for Sigma Chapter to keep an active membership of around forty members, who would live in the house and support its daily

⁶³ *Sigma Sidelights*, March 1940, Record Series 41/72/7, Box 1, University of Illinois Archives.

⁶⁴ *Sigma Sidelights*, June 1941, Record Series 41/72/7, Box 1, University of Illinois Archives.

operation and mortgage payments with their room and board fees. The housing situation at the University of Illinois became a hot-button issue, especially for Greek houses, in the midst of the war years. In 1942, the University's Housing Division, under authority from the Board of Trustees, proposed a new set of housing standards that would, among other things, require fraternities and sororities to limit the number of people who could live in their houses, thereby causing the groups to lose these much-needed funds.⁶⁵ All University-affiliated housing was surveyed as a prelude to the formulation of these standards, and many of the Greek houses, including Sigma Chapter's, were found to be deficient in terms of "personal space." The new standards mandated that 500 cubic feet of air space and 63 square feet of floor area was required for each student in a study room, and that in sleeping areas 400 cubic feet of air space per person was required, a figure "well supported by expert opinion...based upon carbon dioxide elimination and air movement necessary to keep the chemical composition of the air normal."⁶⁶ Other violations outlined by Jean Hoskins, the Assistant for Women's Housing, included study lamps with 40-watt lightbulbs instead of the recommended 100 watts and paper wastebaskets instead of metal models. After an assessment of Sigma Chapter's house according to the guidelines for personal "airspace," Ms. Hoskins recommended in May 1942 that the capacity of the house be gradually reduced from forty-three to thirty-seven over a period of eighteen months.

Sigma Chapter of Alpha Gamma Delta was merely one of many groups that received such recommendations for adjustments and scaling-back at the end of the 1942 academic year, and the debate over housing standards raged bitterly over the summer, with particular opposition emerging from the Greek community. Greek organizations and their alumni/ae worried that

⁶⁵ Record Series 41/72/7, Box 1, University of Illinois Archives. These standards, *Standards for Approved Student Homes*, were "compiled after a study of minimum figures allowed by various scientific and medical groups such as the American Public Health Association, the Medical Corps of the United States Army, etc....," according to Jean Hoskins, the Assistant for Women's Housing.

reducing house quotas when the war had already brought about a huge dip in enrollment would have several negative financial consequences, including possibly causing them to default on their house notes and driving up the room and board in the houses to such high rates that fewer people would be able to join in the first place. Fraternities and sororities organized themselves into committees to oppose the Division of Student Housing's plan, and several "stormy" meetings ensued, including one at which representatives of a fraternity committee angrily denied charges that their houses were "lower than the flophouses in Chicago."⁶⁷ It is not clear whether active or alumna members of Sigma Chapter participated in these committees or attended these meetings, but some concerned alumnae did prepare a list of "talking points" challenging the premise of some of the housing standards prior to a meeting with Helen M. Grigsby, a member of the Board of Trustees. The talking points objected to, among other issues, what Sigma Chapter alumnae felt was the Housing Division's misapplication of Illinois State Board of Health standards designed for hotels, boarding houses and other lodging run for profit to sorority and fraternity housing, which was not run for profit. The memo also noted that any increase in house bills to cover renovations or changes would be "most inadvisable at this time. May cause parents to remove daughters from house, or school."⁶⁸

Sigma Chapter actives and alumnae, along with their counterparts in other University of Illinois fraternities and sororities, likely exhaled a sigh of relief on July 25, when the Committee on Student Welfare and Activities, chaired by Helen Grigsby, recommended to the Board of Trustees that it "reaffirm in principle that living conditions in student houses of all types must be

⁶⁶ Letter from Jean Hoskins to Mary Hoke, Alpha Gamma Delta President, May 9, 1942, Record Series 41/72/7, Box 1, University of Illinois Archives.

⁶⁷ *Champaign News Gazette*, July 25, 1942, Record Series 41/72/7, Box 1, University of Illinois Archives. The 1942 housing "crisis" received extensive coverage in both the *Daily Illini* student newspaper and the local *News Gazette*. The public debate over housing standards and their application to Greek houses in particular can be followed in these newspapers from July 21 through July 28, 1942.

⁶⁸ Housing Memo, n.d., Record Series 41/72/7, Box 1, University of Illinois Archives.

maintained on a basis that insures the health and safety of the students,” but also noted that “the Board realizes that the housing program of the University must be a long term one to be realized gradually and with due regard for existing conditions and financial programs, as well as the requirements of an all-out war effort.”⁶⁹ The announcement went on to say that the Board of Trustees and the Housing Division commended the efforts of houses that had already attempted to address the recommendations given to them by the Division’s initial inspections, but that houses that did not feel financially able to make substantial changes in the present climate would not be penalized. This pronouncement effectively ended the 1942 housing “crisis,” a fact that was reaffirmed for Sigma Chapter when Earl Thompson, the acting director of the Housing Division, wrote to Alumna Advisor Mrs. M.J. Dorsey in August to inform her that the Board of Trustees’ statement “gives us more leeway in this matter than we have previously had.” Mr. Thompson informed Mrs. Dorsey that the Housing Division was “now in a position to make adjustment of study room and dormitory capacities outlined in our earlier letter,” as long as these adjustments did not endanger the health of the students.⁷⁰ Sigma Chapter was thus saved from either expensive renovations or forced reduction of the house quota, although the general climate of war austerity was already making the quota hard to fill.

Although the United States’ official entry into the war received no mention in *Sigma Sidelights* or other official Sigma Chapter materials, by 1942 the war effort clearly touched almost every aspect of “normal” University and Greek life. One of the most notable changes was the drop in general enrollment (the December 1943 *Sigma Sidelights* estimated the decrease as 49 percent from October 1942!) and the vastly increased ratio of women to civilian men. In

⁶⁹ Report of Committee on Student Welfare and Activities, July 25, 1942, Record Series 41/72/7, Box 1, University of Illinois Archives.

⁷⁰ Letter from S. Earl Thompson to Mrs. M.J. Dorsey, August 13, 1942, Record Series 41/72/7, Box 1, University of Illinois Archives.

this environment, the undergraduates in Sigma Chapter largely replaced their social engagements with USO work, raising money for the campus War Chest Fund, writing to Illini in the service, and buying war savings stamps, but in October 1942 they also entertained twenty ensigns for dinner at the chapter house, an activity that must have seemed much more familiar, and therefore somewhat comforting.⁷¹ Alumnae were urged to help keep some of the traditional elements of university life from becoming victims of war austerity, and they were especially urged to help with recruiting and recommending new members for Rush and to attend the Homecoming festivities.⁷² Homecoming in particular took on extraordinary importance as a morale-boosting event, and the September 1942 issue of *Sigma Sidelights* suggested that the “war Homecoming” could be even more exciting than a peacetime one:

“It is a good thing for national morale to relax at Homecoming, so make your plans to attend . . . The campus has taken on a war-like garb with naval training schools occupying the Old Gym, Illinois Field, the Illini Union Ballroom, and Women’s Residence Halls, and then new Men’s Dorm. Numerous army units are training here as well. All this will blend with the Homecoming colors and excitement and make the occasion even more worthwhile.”⁷³

The war’s treatment in *Sigma Sidelights* could not continue to be so lighthearted, and as early as 1942 the alumnae pages contained the sad news that Pat Braun Webb’s husband had been killed in action in Australia.⁷⁴ Over the next few years alumnae updated their sisters on the status of their husbands and increasingly their own war activities as well. *Sigma Sidelights* editor Mary Lou Hayes ‘38 wrote in the March 1943 edition that she was compelled to relinquish her duties, having “yielded to patriotism” and joined the Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps. In late 1943, Eolyne Nichols was “one of fifteen feminine pilots” at Camp Stewart’s Liberty Field in

⁷¹ *Sigma Sidelights*, December 1942, Record Series 41/72/7, Box 1, University of Illinois Archives.

⁷² The May 1943 issue of *Sigma Sidelights* included guidelines for alumnae to help with Rush, and noted that it was “absolutely necessary for every Sigma Alumna to respond immediately when asked for recommendations because of war-time restrictions on telegrams and long distance telephone calls.”

⁷³ *Sigma Sidelights*, September 1942, Record Series 41/72/7, Box 1, University of Illinois Archives.

⁷⁴ *Sigma Sidelights*, December 1942, Record Series 41/72/7, Box 1, University of Illinois Archives.

Georgia, and by 1945 she would rack up over 4,000 hours of flying time, mostly cargo runs and operational testing missions from the B-24 and C-54 aircraft. Cletis Westall Tallman came to visit the chapter house in 1944 and reported on her “interesting experiences as a working girl in the Douglas Aircraft Factory.”⁷⁵ While undergraduate members supported the war effort on campus through fundraising and volunteer work, some alumnae members participated directly in a variety of capacities.

Despite the large decrease in university-wide enrollment, Sigma Chapter fared reasonably well during the war years, as it kept a steady membership and was able to operate with no notable financial difficulties. In 1944 the chapter pledged twenty-one new members, a class that was considered to be a great success in the wartime environment. *Sigma Sidelights* reported happily, “We pledged three Marilyns, and now have also two Peggs, two Barbaras, and two Rosemarys!”⁷⁶ The chapter was therefore in good shape when peace was finally declared and the atmosphere at the University of Illinois returned to normal. The chapter’s photograph in the 1945 *Illio* shows a very robust group, with fifty members, and for the first time they are pictured in identical outfits: light-colored sweaters, skirts, and pearl necklaces. The 1945 edition also included a summary of the chapter’s activities, awards, and accomplishments – another first for the *Illio* – and the yearbook reported that Sigma Chapter’s women were involved in such varied pursuits as the Shi-Ai Sing (in which they won first place in 1944!), the Homecoming Stunt Show, Theater Guild productions, the “Cheering Illini,” Shorter Board, Torch honorary, YWCA,

⁷⁵ *Sigma Sidelights* December 1943, May 1944, October 1945, Record Series 41/72/7, Box 1, University of Illinois Archives.

⁷⁶ *Sigma Sidelights*, October 1944, Record Series 41/72/7, Box 1, University of Illinois Archives.

Terrapin, Orchesis (a dance group), and several academic honoraries, including Sigma Delta Phi (Spanish), Theta Sigma Phi (Journalism), and Sigma Alpha Iota (Music).⁷⁷

One of the big events of 1945, other than the end of hostilities, was the dedication of the University's new 700-acre "ultra-modern airport" during the Homecoming weekend.

Distinguished Sigma Chapter alumna and pilot Eolyne Nichols participated in the dedication ceremony as a special guest of the University and accompanied University President Willard (for whom the airport would later be named) on his inspection of the new facility and its aircraft.⁷⁸

Sigma Sidelights would continue to report proudly on Nichols' accomplishments as a pilot in the post-war period, and both her chosen career and her inclusion in the dedication ceremonies for the new airport serves as an interesting symbol of the coming generations of "modern" fraternity women. Increasingly, Sigma Chapter members and alumnae were being recognized for their talents in areas that might have been closed to their predecessors in Delta Epsilon Phi and other women's fraternities of the early twentieth century. As for many other American women, the particular demands of wartime opened up new avenues for Alpha Gamma Delta's women, and many of them took advantage of the opportunity.

There is little archival source material covering the period from 1946 through the beginning of the 1950s, although the formal *Illio* photographs show a healthy group seemingly unaffected by the enrollment issues during the war years. In 1946 *Sigma Sidelights* had alerted alumnae to a "rushing emergency" due to yet another housing requirement, this time a University rule stating that all incoming freshmen must have a housing contract *before* beginning their study in the fall. This rule would prevent new members of Greek organizations from moving into their

⁷⁷ *Illio* 1945, Record Series 41/8/805, University of Illinois Archives. Shi-Ai was a group composed of two sophomore members of each sorority on campus, elected by their own sorority.

⁷⁸ *Sigma Sidelights* December 1945, Record Series 41/72/7, Box 1, University of Illinois Archives.

houses, so most Greeks opted to shift Rush to the spring semester instead of the fall, and to invite high school seniors and transfer students to visit the campus then.⁷⁹ Alpha Gamma Delta alumnae were urged to step up their recruitment and recommendation functions in advance of this spring Rush period, and the plea must have been successful, as Sigma Chapter's membership remained between forty-six and fifty-five members for the remainder of the 1940s and early 1950s. The student population of the University as a whole rebounded as well, as an estimated 6,000 veterans enrolled after the war. On the whole, Sigma Chapter's wartime and immediate postwar experience seems to have been, while not without some sacrifice and heartbreak, largely positive and productive. The fraternity was able to weather housing crises, low enrollment, and strained finances to remain viable and active in the University of Illinois community. In 1994, alumna Jean Hoffman recorded some of her memories of the "war years" for *Sigma Sidelights*, and her experiences bring this assessment to vivid life:

"50 years ago – I remember brussel sprouts, seemingly every other day, overdone and tasteless . . . I remember the nun-like week until the airmen came down for the weekend. Many marriages, romances, heartaches as the war got fierce. Most of all, I remember faces, forever young and lovely."⁸⁰

The 1950s: A Solid Tradition

The 1950s can be characterized as a decade of outward motion for Sigma Chapter of Alpha Gamma Delta, as the fraternity's concerns and influence increasingly radiated beyond the house on Lincoln Avenue and even beyond the University of Illinois. Evidence of this greater awareness can be found in a new emphasis on philanthropy, in the chapter's involvement with international Alpha Gamma Delta personalities and conventions, and in its role in fraternity

⁷⁹ *Sigma Sidelights*, March 1946, Record Series 41/72/7, Box 1, University of Illinois Archives.

⁸⁰ *Sigma Sidelights*, Spring 1994, Record Series 41/72/7, Box 1, University of Illinois Archives.

colonization, the latter of which truly illustrates the growth and development that the group had undergone since it was first formed as Delta Epsilon Phi in 1917.

Although Alpha Gamma Delta and Sigma Chapter had certainly always included philanthropic projects among their priorities, in the 1950s Sigma Chapter's efforts garnered more recognition from the University of Illinois community. While it is possible that the chapter's philanthropic activities actually increased in the more prosperous 1950s, such a growth is impossible to quantify. What *is* evident from archival materials, however, is that Sigma Chapter gained two important sources of publicity in the first postwar decade that had not existed before: the new *Illigreek* newspaper (founded in 1956) and a weekly column on Greek affairs in the *News Gazette*, written by Sigma Chapter alumna Fran Myers. The *Illigreek* was created by the University's Greek organizations specifically to enhance the reputation of the Greek system, which its members often felt was unfairly maligned in the pages of the campus' official student newspaper, the *Daily Illini*. An anonymous Letter to the Editor published in the *Illigreek* in 1957 alludes to reasons for the increasing stakes of a "good reputation" for Greeks on a changing campus, urging fellow Greeks to widen their view of the world and their activities in order to become less insular. In the writer's view, the Greeks at Illinois were in danger of being "shoved right off campus with this integration business cropping up" if they did not "start producing wholesome, worthwhile projects."⁸¹ Although the letter writer's personal opinion of integration can be only imperfectly assumed from this brief missive, what is clear is an astute awareness of the fact that the social and political environment of the late 1950s and the coming decades would compel Greek organizations to defend their worth and existence in a way that they had not been forced to do since perhaps the turn of the century. In this effort the Greek houses at the University of Illinois enjoyed the support of the university's administration in the 1950s, which

Sigma alumna Patricia Holm Smith describes as “very tolerant and supportive.”⁸² Penny Peterson ’62 seconds this assessment, noting that Assistant Dean of Women Joan Cochran (who worked with the Panhellenic Council) and Dean of Students Fred Turner often looked to Greek members for campus leadership and governance.⁸³ The *Illigreek* therefore, was primarily focused on improving the Greek system’s reputation among its fellow students, not the university’s administration.

With this positive mission in mind, the *Illigreek*’s first issue, published on October 8, 1956, included an article entitled “AG Deltas Help Cerebral Palsy,” giving recognition to the longtime work that Sigma Chapter had done with local children suffering from the disease. Along with “a board of doctors and parents of cerebral palsy children,” Sigma Chapter’s members had developed a comprehensive philanthropic effort that included a baby-sitting program, an Easter egg hunt, and Christmas parties given in conjunction with a men’s fraternity, Phi Sigma Kappa.⁸⁴ Over the next several years, the *Illigreek* newspaper took a leading role in highlighting all aspects of Greek life on the Illinois campus, and Sigma Chapter often appeared in its pages – most frequently when an “Alpha Gam” was listed as a member of the paper’s editorial staff. This first issue of the new paper also reported that six different Sigma Chapter members had been selected as beauty queens for various men’s fraternity formals and charity contests, and – in an article dedicated to “unusual atmospheres” at pledge dances – that Sigma Chapter pledges and their dates had danced the night away at the “Bug Bounce” the previous Saturday.⁸⁵ The overall goal of the early *Illigreek* issues seems to have been to paint a picture of

⁸¹ *The Illigreek*, Letter to the Editor, December 19, 1957, Record Series 41/62/807, University of Illinois Archives.

⁸² Personal Communication with Patricia Holm Smith, August 2006.

⁸³ Personal Communication with Penny Peterson, August 2006.

⁸⁴ “AG Deltas Help Cerebral Palsy,” *The Illigreek*, October 8, 1956, Record Series 41/62/807, University of Illinois Archives.

⁸⁵ “AG Deltas Help Cerebral Palsy” and “Pledge Dances Create Unusual Atmospheres,” *The Illigreek*, October 8, 1956, Record Series 41/62/807, University of Illinois Archives.

Greek life that was appealing both for its dedication to community philanthropy and for college's carefree joys, which it made accessible to its members.

Fran Myers, who was also appointed as Alpha Gamma Delta's national Information Director in 1955, often highlighted Sigma Chapter in her *News Gazette* columns and greatly increased the visibility of one of the University's oldest women's fraternities. One of the earliest Myers columns preserved in the Sigma Chapter records is an extensive report on the 50th anniversary convention of Alpha Gamma Delta, held in Quebec in 1954. The event commemorated the founding of the sorority with meetings, receptions, and speeches, and several Sigma Chapter members, including Myers, attended. The column succeeds in painting an impressive picture of both Alpha Gamma Delta and Sigma Chapter, and it especially highlights the international presence that the group has been able to build in its fifty-year history.⁸⁶ In 1955, Myers reported on the visit of national founder Emily Butterfield, the architect who had designed Alpha Gamma Delta's summer camp in Michigan. Butterfield came to the University of Illinois to help Sigma Chapter celebrate International Reunion Day, and while in town she gave a talk entitled "The Amber Trails," tracing the history of the fraternity's early years, to active and alumnae members. Since Myers herself was a very active Alpha Gamma Delta alumna and attended many national and international fraternity events, she was able to report on such adventures as the 1957 National Convention in California, which she attended as one of several Sigma Chapter representatives, and the International Convention in French Lick, Indiana in June 1959. Sigma Chapter was honored to be chosen as one of the official hostesses for this event, and several active and alumnae members made the trip to the convention, including Penny Peterson '62.⁸⁷ Over the next decade, Fran Myers would continue to use her weekly column to

⁸⁶ *The Champaign News-Gazette*, June 30, 1954, Record Series 41/72/7, Box 1, University of Illinois Archives.

⁸⁷ Personal Communication with Penny Peterson, August 2006.

showcase Sigma Chapter and its strong connections to Alpha Gamma Delta's national organization, emphasizing that national leaders thought highly of the chapter and its contributions as a member of the Illinois Greek community.

In 1957, Sigma Chapter of Alpha Gamma Delta participated in a ceremony that powerfully signified just how far the fraternity had evolved in the nearly forty years since its founding as Delta Epsilon Phi. In the fall semester of that year, a team of Sigma Chapter members helped to initiate members of Nu Delta Sigma, a local women's fraternity at Southern Illinois University in Carbondale, as Beta Eta Chapter of Alpha Gamma Delta. When Sigma Chapter celebrated its own forty-year anniversary in 1958, three of the original founders of the local chapter were in attendance for a special dinner and history program at the chapter house, and must have taken great pride in the knowledge that their small group had flourished so decidedly in the meantime.⁸⁸ In 1960, another Sigma Chapter group would travel to Eastern Illinois University in Charleston to initiate a local sorority as Beta Iota Chapter. Just as Marguerite Keck and her sisters in Xi Chapter had served as mentors and guides to Delta Epsilon Phi in 1917, in the 1950s the active and alumnae members of Sigma Chapter were in a position to help fledgling chapters on other campuses.

Although the 1950s for Sigma Chapter are notable for these wider concerns, for the undergraduate members the University of Illinois campus continued to form the center of their day-to-day interests and activities. Social activities included fraternity exchanges, formals in the fall and spring, serenades and pinning ceremonies with fraternities, and football cheering blocks, which Patricia Holm Smith remembers as particularly popular in the late 1950s.⁸⁹ Sigma Chapter members continued to be involved in a number of campus-wide events, both traditional

⁸⁸ *Champaign News-Gazette*, n.d. 1958, Record Series 41/72/7, Box 1, University of Illinois Archives.

⁸⁹ Personal Communication with Patricia Holm Smith, August 2006.

ones such as the Homecoming Stunt Show (in which Sigma Chapter was a finalist in 1956, with a skit entitled “Manhattan Mayhem”) and new ones such as “Sheequon,” a 1958 revival of the “Spring Carnival” that had been held in the earlier years of the century but subsequently discontinued. Sheequon, which the March 3 *Illigreek* described as “an Indian word meaning spring,” was an initiative of the Greek community, but the event sought to involve the entire campus with parties, contests, and a parade. The newspaper reported that the event would be kicked off by simultaneous “tom-toms” across campus, and that the University’s mascot, Chief Illiniwek, would serve as Master of Ceremonies.⁹⁰ In 1959 Alpha Gamma Delta and Tau Kappa Epsilon combined to produce the prize-winning Sheequon parade float in the “Indian Incidents” division with a float entitled “Golden Age of the Incas.” In the July issue of *Sigma Sidelights*, undergraduate Penny Peterson described the elaborate float for alumnae, which “featured a huge golden 25 foot idol atop a series of authentically decorated platform(s). Gold-clad native Incan girls ceremoniously danced up the stairs and around the foot of the image as 25 chanting slaves urged on by slave drivers pulled the float through the streets.”⁹¹ While Sheequon’s brand of pageantry likely would meet with some protest in today’s campus community (and doubtless disturbed some in the 1959 university, which was growing increasingly more diverse), Peterson’s description vividly conveys the kind of spectacle that characterized many Greek events in the 1950s and 1960s, and brings to life an activity that Peterson later remembered as one of her personal favorites in Greek life: parade competitions.⁹² Sigma Chapter also participated in another new event in the 1950s that was much more staid: a joint meeting and celebration with Alpha Phi and Gamma Phi Beta, two women’s fraternities founded at Syracuse University in 1872 and 1874, respectively. The three groups came together to form the “Syracuse Triad” and

⁹⁰ *Illigreek*, March 3, 1958, Record Series 41/62/807, University of Illinois Archives.

⁹¹ *Sigma Sidelights*, July 1959, Record Series 41/72/7, Box 1, University of Illinois Archives.

periodically held meetings and events to celebrate their common origin. The first mention of this celebration is in the February 1959 issue of *Sigma Sidelights*, although it is possible that similar events were held prior to this date.

Sigma alumnae who were undergraduates in the 1950s have been able to provide valuable information about one of the most important undertakings of any group in the Greek system: Rush. The annual recruiting season for Greek houses brought both anxiety and excitement to all those involved, from the active members and alumnae to the high school or freshmen girls just arriving on the University of Illinois campus. Patricia Holm Smith remembers that in the early 1950s Rush was held in May for high school seniors who would enter the university in the upcoming fall semester, and that “rush” was *precisely* the adjective to describe the experience. Speaking from a few years later in the decade, Penny Peterson agrees that Rush was “a huge event” where rushees were initially required to visit all of the houses for “something like a 10 minute impression.”⁹³ Rushees were housed in vacant dorm rooms for a three-day weekend which initially included visits to all twenty-six women’s fraternities, followed by several more rounds of “winnowing down” by both the rushees and the houses themselves. Notices related to rush were sent to all rushees by mail, whether they were invitations to pledge or notifications that the rushee had been “cut.” Although receiving a “cut” letter was certainly heartbreaking for a girl who had indicated Alpha Gamma Delta as her top preference, Patricia Holm Smith’s Rush experience proves that such a letter was not necessarily the end of the road. After receiving a letter during spring Rush in 1956 indicating that she had not been invited to pledge Alpha Gamma Delta, Smith had the opportunity to go through “informal rush” in the fall after Sigma Chapter did not meet its Rush quota of twenty-five pledges. After this process she

⁹² Personal Communication with Penny Peterson, August 2006.

⁹³ Ibid.

was pledged into Sigma Chapter of Alpha Gamma Delta's class of 1960, and moved into the chapter house in January 1957.⁹⁴

The 1950s also brought two important moments in the life of the house at 1106 South Lincoln Avenue. In 1953, the house was finally paid off and Katharine Macy Noyes, still a very active honorary alumna, "had the pleasure of burning the mortgage at a gay celebration held at the house on April 10, 1953."⁹⁵ This milestone came just in time for some much-needed renovations and interior redecoration. In December 1956, Fran Myers reported in her *News Gazette* column that Sigma Chapter's house had not only undergone an extensive renovation characterized by "elegance, simplicity," and an "España motif," but that earlier in the year the fraternity had "installed a new gas furnace and two automatic hot water heaters; one 85 gallon and another of 35 gallon capacity, the latter for use in the kitchen."⁹⁶ These practical modernizations allowed the fraternity to rededicate the former coal room to another innovation: automatic laundry equipment. Katharine Noyes' hard work in the 1920s had resulted in a comfortable and adaptable home for Sigma Chapter, one that proved able to change with the times and still accommodate a healthy fraternity. Alumnae who were undergraduates in the 1950s recall a committed group of alumnae who acted as their role models and with whom they interacted in occasional social events. Penny Peterson mentions her mother's friend Margaret Clemons and Mollie Mowrer, the wife of her psychology advisor Professor O. Hobart Mowrer, with particular fondness. Peterson believes that both women "adopted" her in a certain way, because their own daughters had decided against pledging Alpha Gamma Delta despite their

⁹⁴ Personal Communication with Penny Peterson, August 2006.

⁹⁵ "History of Sigma Chapter of Alpha Gamma Delta" by Alyene Westall Prehn '27, published in *Sigma Sidelights*, January 1963, Record Series 41/72/7, Box 1, University of Illinois Archives.

⁹⁶ *Champaign News Gazette*, December 16, 1956, Record Series 41/72/7, Box 1, University of Illinois Archives.

family connections.⁹⁷ Betsy Hendrick, whose own mother Mary Lee was an active alumnae during her daughter's time in Alpha Gamma Delta, believes that the alumnae of her day were perhaps more active socially than those of today, many of whom now work outside the home and have less time to devote to chapter events.⁹⁸ Hendrick, herself very much a "working woman," carries on the tradition of these earlier alumnae by serving as the current president of the Sigma Alumnae Association. Patricia Holm Smith, who has served Sigma Chapter as an alumnae at the local, province, and international levels, seems to have been inspired partly by the example of the "ten to twelve" very active alumnae who were involved with the chapter during her years as an undergraduate member. She notes that she did not necessarily keep in touch with these alumnae until many years after graduation, when her own service to the fraternity renewed her ties with some of the women who had been her mentors.⁹⁹

Partly due to the encouragement and support of its committed alumnae, Sigma Chapter's membership remained steady again in the 1950s. The group's formal *Illio* pages from the decade often showed its members relaxing in and around their home, such as a 1950 photograph of officers Rosemary Paulsen (treasurer), Nancy Brue (second Vice-President), Jean Muth (president), Elma Miller (first Vice-President), and Janet Forsythe (former president) grouped smilingly around the house's record player.¹⁰⁰ The *Illio* photographs from the 1950s point to a trend that, interestingly, does not emerge from any other archival records. In the years between 1950 and 1959, the formal photographs include five different housemothers – Miss Emily Reitzel, Mrs. Hayes, Mrs. Wimmer, Mrs. Tyrrell, and Mrs. Bruns. Without other documentation it is difficult to speculate about why there was so much turnover in the housemother position,

⁹⁷ Personal Communication with Penny Peterson, August 2006.

⁹⁸ Personal Communication with Betsy Hendrick, August 2006.

⁹⁹ Personal Communication with Patricia Holm Smith, August 2006.

¹⁰⁰ *Illio* 1950, Record Series 41/8/805, University of Illinois Archives.

although we can assume that the housemothers of the 1950s might have shared some of the same frustrations that prompted an exasperated house chaperone Ella Bemis to write to Mabel Howard in 1928: late-night phone calls, girls lounging in their pajamas in the formal living areas, poor table manners! Patricia Holm Smith, who lived in the Sigma chapter house while Mrs. Tyrrell was housemother, remembers her as “strict but nice,” and recalls that meals at the house were still very regulated and often formal affairs, especially on Monday evenings and Sunday afternoons, when lunch was “a big social event with men and women guests.”¹⁰¹ Penny Peterson, who joined Sigma Chapter a few years after Patricia Holm Smith, remembers Mrs. Bruns as the housemother. As a “town girl,” Peterson did not live in the house until her senior year, when her parents moved to Washington, D.C. She recalls this last year with special fondness, as Alpha Gamma Delta and her Sigma sisters became her “family;” in her words, “loving me, guiding me, standing by when times were difficult for me.”¹⁰² Both Peterson, Smith, and Betsy Hendrick ’61 recall extensive rules during their time in Sigma Chapter, some of which were set by the house (phone duty, room cleaning) and others which applied to all women across the university (dress codes, closing hours). Women at the university in the 1950s had a curfew of 10:00pm on weeknights and midnight on weekends, and all women’s residences observed closing hours to comply with this rule. The dress code for women, which was strictly enforced both around campus and in the chapter house, outlawed jeans and pants of all kinds. Penny

¹⁰¹ Personal Communication with Patricia Holm Smith, August 2006.

¹⁰² Personal Communication with Penny Peterson, August 2006. Some of the benefits of group living, expressed so positively here by Penny Peterson, are feared lost by another alumna, Patricia Holm Smith. In a personal communication, she wrote that “Many girls now want single rooms or apartments and miss that special bond developed among sorority sisters.” Smith also worries that the Alpha Gamma Deltas of the twenty-first century are “ignoring the less obvious skills of entertaining, hostess finesse, and manners,” due to the fact that activities utilizing these traditional skills occur with much less frequency than in her era.

Peterson remembers that she and her Sigma sisters braved the winter with an assortment of tights, boots, and long coats!¹⁰³

For all of the outward momentum and concerns outside the immediate confines of 1106 South Lincoln in the 1950s, in some ways Sigma Chapter's experience in this decade remained rather sheltered from the political and social currents of American life. When asked about how much Sigma Chapter members were aware of or interested in events happening elsewhere in the university or the world, Patricia Holm Smith replied very honestly that, "Greek life revolved around the 50+ fraternities and 26 sororities and the accomplishments of the members."¹⁰⁴ For instance, even though an article in the December 18, 1958 *Illigreek* reported on a "controversial" bill put before the Student Senate that would require all new campus organizations to present charters free of discriminatory clauses, Sigma Chapter's archival records contain no discussion of this proposal and how its approval might have affected Alpha Gamma Delta and other Greek groups, which were still segregated not just by race but often by religion as well.¹⁰⁵ Another interesting, though rare, insertion of the "real world" into the fraternity universe is illustrated in an alumnae news item in the May 1955 issue of *Sigma Sidelights*, when Sarah Thornton Higgins '53 shared that she had to sign a paper "swearing that I never joined a Communist organization" when her husband reported for Civil Engineer Corps training school in Port Hueneme, California.¹⁰⁶ This oblique reference to McCarthyism and the Cold War is practically the only mention of outside political events in the Alpha Gamma Delta archival record for the 1950s, but an intriguing anonymous editorial in the March 24, 1958 issue of the *Illigreek* demonstrates that at least some members of the Greek community had serious issues on their minds. In the

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Personal Communication with Patricia Holm Smith, August 2006.

¹⁰⁵ *Illigreek*, December 18, 1958, Record Series 41/62/807, University of Illinois Archives. The article also reports that the bill did not get the required 2/3 majority vote in the Student Senate, and was not passed.

editorial, entitled “Are We Beat?,” the author attacks stereotypes of his or her generation as “lost” and somehow lacking the “vigor, initiative, and ambition that our alums and parents talk about everytime they get to reminiscing.”¹⁰⁷ In defense of the college generation of the late 1950s, the author asserts that,

“ . . . students today have a few more worries than those a generation ago. Atom bombs, hydrogen bombs, germ warfare and Sputniks were unknown to them. War was a glorious thing and when the boys went marching away the bands played, the girls sang and everyone had a wonderful time. Now, reserves, including many college students, may be put on twenty-four hour call, as they were in the Suez crisis, never knowing where they will be sent or if they will ever get back.”¹⁰⁸

The author’s grasp of the contemporary political climate is impressive and insightful, as is his or her conviction that the 1950s college students “will have the responsibility of getting the world out of the mess that this generation has gotten us into.”¹⁰⁹ This responsibility in turn demands, in the author’s opinion, a seriousness and sense of purpose that many critics did not think the “beat” generation could muster. It would be fascinating to be able to determine how this small, anonymous article was received in the Greek community, and whether it was ever discussed in the study rooms or dormitories of the Alpha Gamma Delta house. Whether or not it was, as the 1960s dawned it would become more difficult for Sigma Chapter to remain removed from social and political events that brought great changes to American universities and the diverse communities that they housed.

¹⁰⁶ *Sigma Sidelights*, May 1955, Record Series 41/72/7, Box 1, University of Illinois Archives.

¹⁰⁷ “Are We Beat?,” *The Illigreek*, March 24, 1958, Record Series 41/62/807, University of Illinois Archives.

¹⁰⁸ “Are We Beat?,” *The Illigreek*, March 24, 1958, Record Series 41/62/807, University of Illinois Archives.

The 1960s: Leading the Way

One of Sigma Chapter's first activities in the new decade was its role in the installation of Beta Iota Chapter at Eastern Illinois University, so the chapter continued the regional leadership role that it had assumed in the 1950s. The chapter's colonization efforts were reported favorably in the *Champaign News-Gazette* throughout 1960, and in March of that year Grand International President Lou Vogelsang visited the University of Illinois.¹¹⁰ Local media coverage of all Greek organizations on campus seems to have been heightened during these years, and this trend may be attributed in part to Fran Myers' position as University Editor of the *News-Gazette*. Betsy Hendrick '61 also held a staff position at the *News-Gazette* during her junior and senior years and worked as much as twenty-five hours a week in addition to her academic responsibilities.¹¹¹ These media contacts certainly must have helped Alpha Gamma Delta to raise its profile in the Greek, university, and town communities.

Sigma Chapter news sources from the early years of the decade are filled with personal accomplishments, both from active undergraduate and alumnae members. While traditional milestones such as pinnings, engagements, marriages, and births were still reported with enthusiasm, many of the items also reveal quite a bit about the ways in which the world was changing for American women in the second half of the twentieth century, both within the university environment and beyond. Just as they had in the wartime period, Sigma Chapter's women were taking advantage of the various opportunities presented to them and were becoming involved in new activities in addition to their "traditional" ones. For instance, in 1960, Audrey Gronert '61 attended the National 4-H Congress in Washington, where she met President Eisenhower and attended a session of Congress. Joy Katharine Straka Rice '60 wrote to the

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ *Sigma Sidelights*, March 1960, Record Series 41/72/7, Box 1, University of Illinois Archives.

Sigma Sidelights Alumnae Editor in 1963 and reported that she was pursuing a Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology, and another alumna shared the news that she, her husband, and their children had moved to Kuala Lumpur as Peace Corps volunteers.¹¹² Sigma Chapter members in the 1960s also achieved notable positions on campus – Penny Peterson was named one of the most outstanding Greeks on campus during Greek Week in 1960 and served as Panhellenic Council President in 1961, Janet Day served as Student Director of the Illini Union, the Union’s highest student position, in 1965, and in 1966 Judy Taylor became the first Illinois Alpha Gam to be chosen as an Illini cheerleader. In 1969, Betsy Elich was elected to Phi Beta Kappa and won a prestigious Fulbright Fellowship to Germany, to study modern German literature and drama. Even Mrs. Mildred Kottke, housemother from 1966-1971, gained a leadership role when she was elected president of the Greek housing directors on campus in 1967.¹¹³

Sigma Chapter achieved collective accomplishments throughout the 1960s as well, particularly in the area of scholarship. In 1962, the chapter’s official *Illio* page included a short paragraph designed to quickly acquaint the reader with the group, and the text primarily concerned itself with ways in which Sigma Chapter members were encouraged to concentrate on their studies. All members with 5.0 averages received a cash prize of \$25, and the pledge “mother” and “daughter” with the highest combined all-university average each semester enjoyed a steak dinner courtesy of the chapter. Perhaps as a result of these incentives, Sigma Chapter often ranked in the first scholarship quartile for Greek houses, and in 1964 it ranked third nationally out of ninety-three Alpha Gamma Delta chapters.¹¹⁴ In 1966, the pledge class had an average of 3.929, which was considered quite passable for a group of first-year students

¹¹¹ Personal Communication with Betsy Hendrick, August 2006.

¹¹² *Sigma Sidelights*, May 1960; January 1963; October 1963, Record Series 41/72/7, Box 1, University of Illinois Archives.

who were acclimating themselves to many aspects of university life.¹¹⁵ Just as in the past, 1960s pledges had to learn to balance academic responsibilities with philanthropic and social activities. Sigma Chapter continued its work with cerebral palsy children, and in 1967 chapter members baked over 7,000 cookies and sold them to independent homes and fraternities, initiating a new fundraiser for their traditional philanthropy. The chapter also organized an annual garage sale to raise funds for Happy Day School for the Mentally Retarded, and, with the help of many alumnae, sponsored a “Guatemalan Imports Sale” to support national Easter Seals charity efforts.¹¹⁶ While social activities such as exchanges, dinners, dances, and athletic events were designed as opportunities for Greeks to relax and have fun, they could also require a significant time commitment. In the 1969 *Illio* Sigma Chapter proudly reported that its skit for the Homecoming Stunt Show had made the finals for the twelfth year in a row, a feat that certainly had not come without many hours of planning and rehearsal, and a bit of luck in their fraternity pairings.¹¹⁷ There is some evidence that “traditional” social events were changing their form as the decade progressed; for instance, the fall 1969 issue of *Sigma Sidelights* informed readers that the spring formal that year would be replaced by a swim party at the Howard Johnson’s Motor Inn, news that likely surprised many alumnae.¹¹⁸

Sigma Chapter’s individual and collective successes translated into a very healthy membership in the 1960s, with the entire group numbering between fifty-two and seventy-four

¹¹³ *Sigma Sidelights*, March 1965; October 1966; Spring 1969; October 1967, Record Series 41/72/7, Box 1, University of Illinois Archives.

¹¹⁴ *Illio* 1964, Record Series 41/8/805, University of Illinois Archives.

¹¹⁵ *Sigma Sidelights*, October 1966, Record Series 41/72/7, Box 1, University of Illinois Archives.

¹¹⁶ *Illio* 1967, Record Series 41/8/805, University of Illinois Archives; c. 1960s newspaper clippings, Record Series 41/72/7, Box 1, University of Illinois Archives. In 1974, *Sigma Sidelights* provided more information on the Guatemalan Imports sale, informing readers that it had been the “brainchild” of alumna Mary Lee Thompson Hendrick (mother of Betsy Hendrick ’61), who traveled to Guatemala every year to purchase items for the sale. According to a personal communication from Betsy Hendrick, the Hendrick family eventually purchased a house in Antigua, Guatemala and Mrs. Hendrick brought back tablecloths, stoles, jewelry, and cocktail napkins for this enormously popular sale.

¹¹⁷ *Illio*, 1969, Record Series 41/8/805, University of Illinois Archives.

members for the entire decade. In the 1963-1964 academic year Sigma Chapter was “the talk of the campus” for garnering one of the largest pledge classes in recent memory, a group of girls known as “The Fabulous 40.” This Rush success, and the positive energy that it generated for “the friendliest house on campus” (another superlative colloquially attached to Sigma Chapter at this time) were used to great advantage by members of the House Association, who launched a huge fundraising campaign at roughly the same time as the “Fabulous 40” burst on the scene.¹¹⁹ The chapter house had undergone several interior renovations and redecorations since its construction in 1928, including a major redecoration project in 1960-1961 that had added multi-colored princess telephones in every bedroom, prompting the *Illio* to ask, “Each Alpha Gam a princess?”¹²⁰ By the early 1960s, however, a consensus had been reached by active and alumnae members that the house needed a major addition so that it could continue to accommodate the growing fraternity. By 1964 the house quota was forty-five, but forty-nine girls were squeezed into the dorms and the kitchen and dining room were not adequate to meet the needs of such a large group.¹²¹ The House Association inaugurated its planning in August 1964, employing Donald Laz of the architectural firm Laz and Edwards to design a new wing for the house. The House Association passed the final construction plans “with enthusiasm” in November 1964, and a construction contract was signed in January 1965. Construction on the new addition was announced in the March 1965 issue of *Sigma Sidelights*, along with a fundraising campaign chaired by Ella Mae Dodds that eventually raised \$4,750 to defray building costs.¹²² The total cost of the addition, including construction, electrical work, roofing repair, new furniture and decorating, kitchen remodeling, and landscaping, came to almost \$150,000 – almost \$100,000

¹¹⁸ *Sigma Sidelights*, Fall 1969, Record Series 41/72/7, Box 1, University of Illinois Archives.

¹¹⁹ House Association Letter, March 25, 1965, Record Series 41/72/7, Box 1, University of Illinois Archives.

¹²⁰ *Illio*, 1961, pg. 342, Record Series 41/8/805, University of Illinois Archives.

more than the cost of the original house!¹²³ The new addition, finally completed in the late fall of 1965, increased the house capacity to sixty-five and included a new “Mediterranean” dining room with seating for one hundred, additional study rooms, a second-floor lounge, a new patio with professional landscaping, a rear parking area and improvements to the existing kitchen. Photographs of the dining room and new study rooms accompanied a September 26 article in the *News-Gazette* that highlighted several Greek house renovations that greeted students in the fall of 1965, and the description of the addition in the 1966 *Illio* highlighted “a special pantry where the girls could prepare midnight snacks.”¹²⁴ The additions and improvements to Sigma Chapter’s lovely French chateau helped to usher the nearly forty-year-old structure into a new era for the fraternity, one that would see the membership steadily rise to over one hundred by the 1980s. As House Association President Barbara Palmer wrote in her final report on the building campaign, “With the combination of the new and old facilities of their house, Sigma members felt better prepared to fulfill the rich tradition of Alpha Gamma Delta and looked forward to the coming years with more enthusiasm than ever.”¹²⁵

Sadly, two women who added much to Sigma Chapter’s “rich tradition” during the lifespan of the house did not live long enough to see it enhanced by the 1965 addition, nor to see the chapter celebrate the Golden Anniversary of its installation in 1968. The 1960s proved to be a “changing landscape” for Alpha Gamma Delta not only because of shifting social patterns but also due to the deaths of Katharine Macy Noyes on January 30, 1963 and Fran Myers on May 28, 1964. Through Noyes’ efforts toward financing and building the chapter house in the 1920s and

¹²¹ Report by House Association President Barbara Palmer, c. January 1966, Record Series 41/72/7, Box 1, University of Illinois Archives.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ *Champaign News-Gazette*, September 26, 1965, Record Series 41/72/7, Box 1; *Illio*, 1966, Record Series 41/8/805, University of Illinois Archives.

Myers' well-respected university reportage in the *News-Gazette* in the 1950s and 1960s, Sigma Chapter had been immeasurably enriched and strengthened. After Myers' death in May, a *News-Gazette* article revealed that she had been chosen to receive the Arc with Diamond of Epsilon Pi, one of Alpha Gamma Delta's highest honors.¹²⁶ Both women must have been very proud of Sigma Chapter's accomplishments in the first half-century of its existence and of their contribution to these successes. Katharine Macy Noyes and Fran Myers serve as excellent examples of the tradition of sustained alumnae service that Alpha Gamma Delta's earliest founders identified as so crucial to the health of the fraternity as a whole. In October 1964, Sigma Chapter's Alumnae Association initiated a new tradition for honoring outstanding alumnae service by donating a silver heritage punch bowl set to the chapter house. The gift was given on the occasion of Jean Muir Dorsey's retirement as Executive Council President and her name was the first engraved on the set's silver tray in recognition of her "outstanding service" to the chapter, but it is likely that the Alumnae Association members had women like Noyes and Myers in mind as well. After the initial gift, Alyene Westall Prehn announced that she was donating a silver cup in honor of her sister Cletis Westall Tallman, who served as the first president in the new house in 1928. Prehn urged others to donate cups in honor of past presidents, and over the coming months many alumnae responded with memorial and honorary requests for the cups, which cost \$8.27.¹²⁷

As for many of the previous decades, Sigma Chapter's archival records provide little evidence of the outside world intruding into everyday Greek life at the University of Illinois, despite the momentous changes brought about by the Civil Rights Movement and growing

¹²⁵ Report by House Association President Barbara Palmer, c. January 1966, Record Series 41/72/7, Box 1, University of Illinois Archives.

¹²⁶ *Champaign News-Gazette*, n.d. 1964, Record Series 41/72/7, Box 1, University of Illinois Archives.

¹²⁷ *Sigma Sidelights*, October 1964, Record Series 41/72/7, Box 1, University of Illinois Archives.

campaigns for women's rights, environmental rights, and an end to the United States' involvement in Vietnam. By the end of the decade, however, *Sigma Sidelights* contained a few mentions of alumnae spouses serving in Vietnam, although no deaths were reported. Despite the general archival silence on this issue, it is safe to say that the war in Vietnam provided a very different experience than World War II for Sigma Chapter undergraduates and alumnae alike. While there is no mention in the chapter's records of its members protesting against the war, there is also no suggestion that they wrote letters to soldiers, purchased war bonds, or invited ensigns to dinner as they had in the 1940s. A vastly different campus environment awaited new Alpha Gamma Deltas in the 1970s, and bitter contestations over the war half a world away were but one of the issues that University of Illinois students would face in the next decade. Greek organizations in particular discovered that they would again have to justify their existence in a changing world.

Despite these pressures, Sigma Chapter of Alpha Gamma Delta ended the decade on a decidedly high note, celebrating the 50th anniversary of its installation along with International Reunion Day during a luncheon at the Illini Union in 1968. The luncheon was a joint event held with Beta Iota Chapter of Eastern Illinois University, the same chapter that Sigma had helped to install in 1960. Then in 1969, the *News-Gazette* ran a special story to announce that Sigma Chapter had initiated its 1,000th member, Evelyn Jankovsky.¹²⁸ Both of these events speak to Sigma Chapter's strength, vitality, and leadership during its half-century presence on the University of Illinois campus, a tradition that was modeled by alumnae and carried on by active undergraduate members throughout the decade.

The 1970s: A Changing Landscape

The Spring 1972 issue of *Sigma Sidelights* contains an illuminating article with the title “Changing Trends,” and its contents serve as a helpful guide to University of Illinois Greek life in the 1970s. The item seems to have been written to acquaint alumnae readers with a social landscape that might have struck many of them as quite different from the one that they experienced as members of Sigma Chapter in the preceding decades. For example, the writer offers, “The Sigmas have not had a pinning serenade in the last year. Also, the Pin and Paddle Ball and most other beauty contests are no longer held, as well as Stunt Show and Greek Week.” The writer’s explanation for these changes is that “more emphasis is being placed on social values than social activities.”¹²⁹ Although the specific meaning of “social values” is not elaborated on, it is likely that the author is referring to philanthropy or service projects as well as activities on campus centered in politics, volunteerism, and women’s issues. Karen Koenig, a Sigma Chapter active from 1975-1979, fondly remembers the annual ice cream social organized to raise funds for the Juvenile Diabetes Foundation. In the Fall 1972 *Sidelights* issue another sign of the “changing times” is evident in a report from the national Alpha Gamma Delta convention, during which an old provision that demanded expulsion for undergraduate members who contracted a “secret marriage” (a marriage not approved by a parent or legal guardian) was removed from the organization’s constitution.¹³⁰

In the Spring 1973 issue of *Sigma Sidelights*, Debbie Foley ’75, who served that year as Panhellenic Rush Chairman, wrote an article that again addressed the issue of changes to the traditional Greek landscape, some of which she believed had come in response to earlier criticisms of the activities and values of the system. Foley professed her belief that these

¹²⁸ *Champaign News-Gazette*, October 5, 1969, Record Series 41/72/7, Box 1, University of Illinois Archives.

¹²⁹ *Sigma Sidelights*, Spring 1972, Record Series 41/72/7, Box 1, University of Illinois Archives.

critiques had been answered “because sorority girls themselves are changing, changing with the campus. They’re moving outside the bounds of their individual houses and taking part in all kinds of campus activities from Pom-Poms to cheerleading to all kinds of volunteer projects and campus politics.” The fact that Alpha Gamma Delta women and Greek women as a whole were involved in so many different activities demonstrated that, in Foley’s experience, the Greek system had “something to offer for everyone.”¹³¹

The 1972 “Changing Trends” article identified one area in particular that was receiving new attention from students across campus. Intra-mural athletics, the article reported, “have become very popular in the last few years,” and “the dormitories, independent houses, and the Greeks are all very involved in the IM program.” Interest in intra-murals seems to have been fueled in part by the construction of the Intramural Physical Education Building (IMPE) at the north edge of Memorial Stadium. During the 1971-1972 academic year, Sigma Chapter fielded teams in football, volleyball, basketball, and softball, and even the girls who did not participate were given high marks for their enthusiasm and support.¹³² Sigma Chapter seems to have quickly built a winning tradition, as a March 18, 1975 article in the *Illini Greek* (the successor to the earlier *Illigreek* newspaper serving the Greek community) reported that Alpha Gamma Delta’s basketball team had captured the intra-mural championship for the second year in a row, posting an undefeated record in the process. They had lost only one game the previous season, giving them an especially impressive two-year run. The article attributed the team’s success to the fact that they practiced three times a week and actively scouted their opponents in order to prepare specific strategies during the games.¹³³ In 1977, *Sigma Sidelights* carried news of

¹³⁰ *Sigma Sidelights*, Fall 1972, Record Series 41/72/7, Box 1, University of Illinois Archives.

¹³¹ *Sigma Sidelights*, Spring 1973, Record Series 41/72/7, Box 1, University of Illinois Archives.

¹³² *Sigma Sidelights*, Spring 1972, Record Series 41/72/7, Box 1, University of Illinois Archives.

¹³³ *The Illini Greek*, March 18, 1975, Record Series 41/62/807, University of Illinois Archives.

another chapter achievement that can perhaps be classified as “athletic:” a Sigma team took third place in the Phi Kappa Tau chug contest!¹³⁴ This event was likely held to raise money for a philanthropic interest (Sigma Chapter itself sponsored a “beer night” in 1981 to benefit the Juvenile Diabetes Association), but it involved rather different skills than baking 7,000 cookies. In 1976 the chapter managed to put beer to work in a different manner when they won a new stereo system for the house from Champaign Distributors, in recognition of their efforts to collect empty beer bottles and cans and return them to the Miller Brewing Company for recycling. An earlier directive from Alpha Gamma Delta’s national office to “Save Energy-Save Money” might have inspired this recycling effort in the energy crisis era, although the nice prize for collecting the most bottles and cans certainly served as a powerful incentive.¹³⁵

Sigma Chapter also maintained many of its traditions in the 1970s, although sometimes in new ways. Karen Koenig reports that Rush remained “intense and tiring,” lasting about four weekends. Even though many of the traditional beauty contests and Greek events had been discontinued earlier in the 1970s, during Koenig’s years Sigma Chapter still participated in at least three fraternity exchanges per month and also hosted dances in the spring and fall, including a formal Holiday Dance. Sigmas also teamed up with a chosen fraternity each year for a football block, an activity that Koenig remembers as one of her “favorite things” about being an Alpha Gam in the 1970s.

The chapter’s model of regional leadership, begun in the late 1950s, continued when it helped to install Beta Omicron Chapter of Alpha Gamma Delta at Illinois State University in Bloomington-Normal in March 1973. Several Sigmas made the trip to Bloomington to participate in the festivities, which included workshops for alumnae and undergraduates, an

¹³⁴ *Sigma Sidelights*, Fall 1977, Record Series 41/72/7, Box 1, University of Illinois Archives.

¹³⁵ *Sigma Sidelights*, Spring 1976; Spring 1974, Record Series 41/72/7, Box 1, University of Illinois Archives.

installation banquet, a tea, and a church service that all new chapter members and installing officers were required to attend.¹³⁶ Scholarship remained important as well, and *Sigma Sidelights* editions reported proudly on chapter members who were chosen for honor societies such as Alpha Lambda Delta (for freshmen), Phi Kappa Phi, Phi Upsilon Omicron (home economics), Kappa Delta Pi (education), and Mu Phi Epsilon (music). In the Spring of 1972, three Sigmas were studying in Europe, and alumnae were encouraged to contact them with well-wishes for their studies in Spain, France, and Switzerland.¹³⁷ Traditional events such as International Reunion Day were also celebrated in the 1970s, and Sigma Chapter often joined with other Illinois chapters of Alpha Gamma Delta to mark the anniversary. In 1972, for example, Sigma and Beta Iota at Eastern Illinois University collaborated on an International Reunion Day event that included a lecture by Marilee Clore, a history instructor at Parkland College.¹³⁸ Clore's address, "Women – Historical and Current Perspectives," serves as an excellent example of the ways in which traditional Sigma Chapter events were being subtly changed by the new landscape of the 1970s. This was an era in which some traditional structures of society, such as gender roles, were being closely analyzed and challenged. Though the text of Clore's speech does not survive, it is likely that she addressed some of these issues, and that she was asked to speak because the undergraduates were interested in what she had to say on the subject. Clore's speech likely identified some of the same trends that Sigma Chapter member Debbie Foley had pointed to in her 1973 *Sigma Sidelights* article about the changing face of the "sorority girl" – a more involved, more aware, in some ways more mature woman was emerging in a society that was allowing her more and more freedom and opportunities. While Sigma

¹³⁶ *Sigma Sidelights*, Spring 1973, Record Series 41/72/7, Box 1, University of Illinois Archives. It is interesting to note that through the 1970s, Sigma Chapter's slate of officers still included a "Chaplain," although there is no indication that the day to day life of the fraternity was particularly "religious." It is not clear when this position ceased to exist, but the 2006 "Officers" page on Sigma Chapter's web site does not include a Chaplain.

Chapter's history up to the 1970s certainly did not lack for strong, intelligent, or enterprising women, American society had not always kept pace with them. Perhaps the most important effect of the "changing landscape" of the 1970s was the fact that Alpha Gamma Delta women finally found themselves within a social environment that enabled them to more fully embody a crucial element of the fraternity's Purpose, written by founder Emily Butterfield in 1904:

"...to welcome the opportunity of contributing to the world's work in the community where I am placed because of the joy of service thereby bestowed and the talent of leadership multiplied . . . this shall be my Purpose that those who know me may esteem Alpha Gamma Delta for her attainments, revere her for her purposes, and love her for her Womanhood."¹³⁹

In the final decades of the twentieth century and the first decade of the twenty-first, Sigma Chapter members would reap the benefits of many years of subtle changes in American and university society, always nudged along by the efforts and talents of women like Katharine Noyes, Fran Myers, and even Debbie Foley. The examples set by these women empowered those who came after them with a legacy of communal purpose and women's leadership, proving that sororities could be much more concerned with "social values" than "social activities."

The 1980s to the Present: Just Rewards

Sigma Chapter's archival source base for the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s is not as rich as for the previous decades, but the material that has been preserved tells a triumphant story of personal and collective achievement. For example, the most notable records from the 1980s are reports of awards won by the chapter, and they sit like bookends at either end of the decade. In 1980, Sigma Brenda Bailey was one of the winners of the Beth Dohme Wallin Award, presented by Illinois' Panhellenic Council to the five sorority women who best demonstrated true Panhellenic

¹³⁷ *Sigma Sidelights*, Spring 1972, Record Series 41/72/7, Box 1, University of Illinois Archives.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

spirit throughout their college careers. The award was named for and presented in memory of Panhellenic Advisor Adlon Jorgenson's sister, and was a meaningful university honor.¹⁴⁰ In 1989, the chapter as a whole garnered an even more prestigious award when it won the Undergraduate Chapter Panhellenic Support Award at Alpha Gamma Delta's national convention. The convention citation praised Sigma Chapter for the seriousness with which its Panhellenic delegates performed their duties, noting their detailed and complete monthly reports, as well as the fact that one of Sigma's Panhellenic delegates had been named Outstanding Panhellenic Representative by the university's Panhellenic Council. The chapter was also commended for its efforts to address alcohol abuse and minimize drinking at Greek events, including its leadership in organizing a Panhellenic Alcohol Awareness Week along with Kappa Kappa Gamma, and its role in planning non-alcohol exchanges. Sigma Chapter also participated in a program organized by the Interfraternity Council (the male version of Panhellenic at the University of Illinois) called Ebony and Ivory, which was "designed to promote better relations between the black and white fraternities at the University of Illinois."¹⁴¹ Finally, Sigma Chapter was the 1989 host of the Borelli Slide Show, an event that preceded the annual Borelli Awards which recognized overall sorority achievement on the Illinois campus. As the national convention citation concluded, "For these activities Sigma Chapter received recognition from the Greek community for assuming a leadership role in areas of common interest and concern." A handwritten note at the bottom of the citation, presumably from an officer of the group who attended the convention, reads, "How happy I was to sit at the head table when this award was announced!"¹⁴²

¹³⁹ Dickover, pg. 8.

¹⁴⁰ *The Illini Greek*, November 24, 1980, Record Series 41/62/807, University of Illinois Archives.

¹⁴¹ Panhellenic Award Convention Citation, 1989, Record Series 41/72/7, Box 1, University of Illinois Archives.

¹⁴² Panhellenic Award Convention Citation, 1989, Record Series 41/72/7, Box 1, University of Illinois Archives.

Another notable trend of the 1980s was the rapid growth of Sigma Chapter's membership. After a bit of a dip in the 1970s, the chapter rebounded in the 1980s with all-time highs that remained, with a few exceptions, at more than one hundred members. This large membership continued into Sigma Chapter's next decade and into the twenty-first century, ensuring that the house on Lincoln Avenue would be full for many years to come. The chapter continued its "winning ways" in the 1990s as well, most prominently in the scholarship arena. In 1993, the chapter ranked third among all University of Illinois sororities in grade point average and proudly reported in the *Illio* that they had an average of nineteen members a semester who posted perfect 5.0 averages.¹⁴³ In 1994, Sigma Chapter won second prizes for overall achievement in both athletics and scholarship at the annual Borelli Awards Night, in 1995 Jennifer Anne Anderson received a national scholarship from Alpha Gamma Delta, and in 1996 it was placed on Alpha Gamma Delta's national Scholarship Honor Roll for chapters of eight-five members or more. In that year, Sigma's overall grade point average of 4.23 was the fourth-highest among sororities, and above the Greek women's average of 4.09.¹⁴⁴ In addition to the national scholarship award won by Sigma's undergraduate members, the chapter was honored with two other awards at the 1996 national convention: the Emily Butterfield Outstanding House Association Honor Roll and the Outstanding Chapter Newsletter Award.

The Emily Butterfield Award was certainly well deserved by a House Association that had guided its chapter through almost seventy years of building, renovation, and repair. In fact, in the same issue of *Sigma Sidelights* that announced these three awards, the House Association informed alumnae that a new fundraising campaign would have to be mounted to cover a complete replacement of the heating system in the sixty-eight-year-old house, to the tune of

¹⁴³ *Sigma Sidelights*, Winter 1993, Record Series 41/72/807, University of Illinois Archives; *Illio* 1993, Record Series 41/8/805, University of Illinois Archives.

\$200,000.¹⁴⁵ In 1993, an unpleasant discovery had been made in the house – termites – and the resulting damage cost \$8,000 to repair. House Association Board member Holly Nickeson Mirell '72 reported on the termite ordeal in *Sigma Sidelights* but also offered some positive construction news about the previous year's conversion of an old downstairs powder room to a handicapped-accessible restroom. In Mirell's opinion this addition was long overdue, since she, a wheelchair-bound person herself, had waited twenty years to be able to use a restroom in her own chapter house. She reported happily that the chapter had "another wheelchair-bound sister now, who really enjoys this facility."¹⁴⁶ Karen Koenig, a 1970s alumna who has remained active in the House Association, provided a voluminous list of ongoing improvements to the house that have been accomplished in the last decade, including a new roof, new kitchen appliances, new air-conditioning, landscaping, and an re-paved and improved parking lot. Inside the house, many redecoration projects have been accomplished or are underway, ensuring that the French Chateau on Lincoln Avenue will continue to be a comfortable and gracious home for Sigma Chapter for many years to come.

Athletics and philanthropy continued to play a large role in Sigma Chapter's schedule, and 1993 seems to have been an especially successful year in the athletic arena. Sigma took first place in a variety of Greek-sponsored athletic contests, including Pi Kappa Alpha's soccer tournament, Delta Chi's flag football tournament, Alpha Kappa Lambda's Sorority Tug-of-War, in addition to Greek Week and Sigma Chi's Derby Days. Sigma Chapter representatives were also members of the varsity women's soccer team, the Flag Corps, and the Illinettes, demonstrating that their physical talents were used outside the Greek community as well as

¹⁴⁴ *Sigma Sidelights*, Spring 1996, Record Series 41/72/807, University of Illinois Archives.

¹⁴⁵ *Sigma Sidelights*, Spring 1996, Record Series 41/72/807, University of Illinois Archives.

¹⁴⁶ *Sigma Sidelights*, Winter 1993, Record Series 41/72/807, University of Illinois Archives.

within it.¹⁴⁷ In 1996, two chapter members won individual campus-wide awards for their community service, and the entire chapter was involved in service projects with a local women's shelter, the Adopt-a-Family program, and trick-or-treating for underprivileged children.¹⁴⁸ At other points during the 1990s and 2000s, Sigma Chapter organized new events such as a beach volleyball tournament and "Water Wars" to benefit the Juvenile Diabetes Foundation, Alpha Gamma Delta's national philanthropy.¹⁴⁹

The twenty-first century Sigma Chapter of Alpha Gamma Delta century is perhaps best assessed through the medium of one of this century's most pervasive hallmarks: the Internet. Sigma Chapter's web home at www.agdsigma.com presents an impressive picture of the eighty-nine-year-old chapter and highlights the ways in which its members live out the "Vision" expressed on its "Quick Facts" page: "Inspire the Woman. Impact the World."¹⁵⁰ Areas in which this world-wide impact may be felt in the future are indicated by the nearly one hundred campus activities and leadership positions in which Sigma Chapter members were involved in the Spring of 2006, including the Business Council; College Democrats *and* College Republicans; Engineering Council; pre-dental, pre-law, pre-med, and pre-vet organizations; Society of Professional Journalists; Student Education Association; and a whole host of athletic, religious, service, and academic honorary organizations covering nearly every category imaginable.¹⁵¹ Some of these organizations, such as the Alpha Lambda Delta freshman honor society and Shi-Ai, have long traditions of Sigma involvement. Others, such as the Society of Women in Engineering, would have seemed rather pointless to the Delta Epsilon Phi women in 1917, as a career in engineering or other "serious" professions (law, medicine) was thought to be

¹⁴⁷ *Illio* 1994, Record Series 41/8/805, University of Illinois Archives.

¹⁴⁸ *Sigma Sidelights*, Spring 1996, Record Series 41/72/807, University of Illinois Archives.

¹⁴⁹ *Illio* 1992, 2003, Record Series 41/8/805, University of Illinois Archives.

¹⁵⁰ From www.agdsigma.com, accessed August 31, 2006.

out of the reach of even college-educated women. In 2006, Sigma Chapter members proved themselves worthy of their new opportunities by placing sixth out of twenty-three women's fraternities in overall scholarship with a 3.39 GPA, a mark that ranked higher than both the all-sorority and all-undergraduate GPAs. Their philanthropic work with the Juvenile Diabetes Foundation continues through the annual "Water Wars" competition, which is described on the web site as "a rotation of different water games," with participants contributing money in order to compete for the "coveted gold water gun."¹⁵² With sections on national and chapter history, alumnae relations, scholarship, philanthropy, and community involvement, Sigma Chapter of Alpha Gamma Delta's web site provides a fascinating snapshot of the 2006 fraternity, presenting an organization that strives to uphold - in a very different world - many of the positive values bestowed on it by its founders in 1904.

¹⁵¹ From www.agdsigma.com, accessed August 31, 2006.

¹⁵² Ibid.