

ALPHA DELTA PHI at CORNELL UNIVERSITY

THE FIRST 100 YEARS

(This article was written circa 1969)

Cornell University opened its doors to students in the fall of 1868. Soon thereafter, several national fraternities began taking steps to organize chapters at the new institution. In January of 1869, seven Alpha Delta Phi alumni of other chapters who lived in the Ithaca area started the formation of the Cornell chapter of their fraternity. Chapter members were chosen, and the first initiation was conducted in March at the Rochester chapter with assistance by brothers from Hamilton and Hobart Colleges. The new Alpha Delta Phi chapter was the fourth fraternity at Cornell, following closely chapters of Zeta Psi, Chi Phi, and Kappa Alpha.

At first, all the new fraternities rented social rooms and lodging in the downtown business district. Alpha Delta Phi's rooms were on Tioga Street, near those of several other fraternities. In 1870 Alpha Delta Phi moved into new quarters near the intersection of State and Tioga Street. Their rooms were next door to Wilgus Hall, Ithaca's one and only opera house (on the site of the present Rothchild's Department Store).

Throughout the 1870s, Cornell grew slowly, but fraternities proliferated -- in 1878 there were ten chapters for a mere 400 students. Several fraternities began making plans for the construction of new chapter houses. The Alpha Deltas had gotten wind of the expansion plans of their rival groups, and urged their alumni to raise the funds necessary to give Alpha Delta Phi the first of these new houses. Taking advantage of the relatively low land and construction costs in the somewhat depressed economy of 1877, a group of alumni collected \$12,000 for the erection of a new house on Buffalo Street at Schuler Place. Completed for the start of the 1878 school year, it was the first chapter house at Cornell. The large brick structure lodged a mere sixteen brothers in a state of spaciousness and luxury that would be impossible today, economically and practically. The rent charge was all of \$2.50 per week! The handsome Buffalo Street house served the fraternity for 25 years. It was later purchased by Ithaca College for use as a dormitory, and is still standing firm today as an apartment house.

Cornell experienced spectacular growth during the 1880s and 1890s, and its fraternity system grew in pace with it. By 1895 there were 2,000 students at Cornell and 30 fraternities. The Cornell Alpha Deltas had begun, in the early 1890s, to feel the pressure of their own expansion and competition from new fraternities. In 1895 they wrote to their alumni and pleaded the case for a new chapter house. The Buffalo Street house, they said, was less elegant than the new lodges being created by several "minor" fraternities, and the freshmen might not be able to see the true superiority of Alpha Delta Phi through the plainness of the house. Furthermore, the active brotherhood argued, the distance of the present house from the campus was inconvenient in the new age of higher academic demands on the Hill. The university had just instituted such "hardships" as afternoon classes, Saturday classes, and compulsory gym, and many professors were given difficult class assignments that required use of the library (horrors!). All of these considerations weighed in favor of a new on-campus chapter house.

In the spring of 1900, largely through the efforts of Brother F. R. White '95 and Martin McVoy, Jr. '92, Alpha Delta Phi purchased the beautiful hill over Stewart Avenue that has been the site of our fraternity to the present day. (One of the site's major qualities, it was noted at the time of purchase, was its proximity to the street-car line along Stewart Avenue). A year later, ten different plans for the new house were submitted by architects from California to New York. The design eventually accepted was a revolutionary, modern style: a long, linear yellow-brick house in the simple, clean-lined style identified with the "Chicago School" of architecture, originated by Louis

Sullivan and Frank Lloyd Wright. The house was completed and occupied in 1903. Constructed at the same time was Alpha Delt's star-shaped chapter room, a structure unique in America. "The Goat House" was dedicated to the memory of Hiram Murray Little '00, a much-loved and respected member of the chapter who died shortly before his graduation.

On the night of February 11, 1929, the beautiful Alpha Delt lodge was destroyed in a spectacular fire. Students and residents from all over Ithaca were attracted to the scene by the bright blaze that lit the sky. The lane up to the house became jammed with cars before the fire engines could arrive. To clear the congested driveway for the fire trucks, the police authorized students to tip autos over into the ditches lining the road! The destruction was total, so the homeless Alpha Delt's accepted the kind offer of the Chi Phi chapter to take up temporary lodging at their house. The following September, the chapter found rooms in Collegetown on Summit Avenue, where they lived until completion of a new house in the fall of 1931. The new Phi lodge, our present beautiful home, was designed in the Tudor style by John Russell Pope, one of America's most renowned traditional architects. Pope's works include the classically precise National Archives building and the original National Gallery of Art, both in Washington, DC.

Several years ago, new rooms, closet space, and a bath were added to the attic where six sophomores now live comfortably. And last fall, after so many years of distinguished and memorable service, the old fire engine collapsed during a painful journey to Schoellkopf Field. Sympathy and contributions poured into a restoration fund which only revealed the sad but real truth: the fire engine was dead. This called for immediate action and search for a worthy successor. Brother Dixon Kuhn '70 located a fine prospect, which had been long-retired in Southold, Long Island. The new fire engine, of 1935 vintage, met with immediate approval and won the affection of the Brotherhood after five courageous brothers entered her in the annual "Rallye Round the Lake," and won the Concours d'Elegance in pouring rain.

Thus, the years since the completion of the present chapter house have been uneventful in terms of major setbacks or major expansions. Weathering difficult times like the Depression, World War II, and the Korean War, Alpha Delta Phi at Cornell has continued to prosper over the years. While flexibly adapting itself to changing customs and attitudes, the active chapter has nonetheless clung to the fundamental standards of high personal achievement, service to Cornell, and gentlemanly conduct -- standards that have been honored by the men of Alpha Delta Phi since its inception at Cornell one hundred years ago.