

Greek housing at IU: A glimpse of our history

A study has been prepared for the Alumni Interfraternity Council at IU about housing of Greek organizations at IU since 1950. This period includes the development of the North Jordan project where the majority of Greek chapter houses are now located. The study documents the comings and goings of the Greek organizations and where those organizations have been located. In 1950, 41 Greek chapters were housed at IU, today, there are only 39 housed Greek chapters but there are eight additional Greek chapters with active memberships that are seeking housing. Only 11 chapters, including Delta Upsilon, remain in the same location today as in 1950. In the 57 years, only one new parcel of land has been acquired by a Greek chapter other than the lots in the North Jordan project. Many of the sites that once housed Greek chapters are now vacant land controlled by IU; one of the sites is even a boarded-up former chapter house but IU will not make any of these sites available for housing Greek chapters. The lack of space for Greek chapters is a special problem for sororities that cannot be established on a campus where housing is not available, and the remaining sororities at IU cannot affiliate nearly all the students who seek sorority membership. The full study can be sent by e-mail to anyone who requests the information from Ronald Kovener at rrkovener@aol.com.

A book, *Greek-Lettered Hoosiers: One Hundred Fifty Years of Fraternities and Sororities at Indiana University and in Bloomington*, provides a fascinating description of the development of Greek chapters at IU. Abstracts of the 1995 book by Kent Christopher Owen and Suzann Mitten Owen that touch on the history of Delta Upsilon follow (the number at the start of a paragraph designates the page on which the abstracted section begins).

25 During the mid-1920s several chapters bought land and built stately houses along the south side of East Third Street: Lambda Chi Alpha (1210), Delta Upsilon (1200), Kappa Kappa Gamma (1018), Phi Omega Pi (1012 which would later belong to Alpha Xi Delta and then to Pi Kappa Alpha), Pi Beta Phi (928), Delta Delta Delta (818), Alpha Tau Omega (720), and Acacia (702). They joined Phi Kappa Psi (1022) and Phi Gamma Delta (631), both on Third Street for many years, to form a classically collegiate "Fraternity Row."

Since 1902 Beta Theta Pi had rented a house from the Showers family across from the Phi Gams' "Beechwood," but after years of displeasure with that arrangement, the Pi chapter raised more than \$20,000 to buy a lot at 919 East Tenth Street and start construction. The project speeded up when fire destroyed the Third Street house in late November 1927. The Betas found temporary lodging on Forest Place (Sorority Alley) and moved to their limestone Gothic manse in the fall of 1928.

The Greeks' conspicuous prosperity reflected the loyalty and generosity of their alumni brothers and alumnae sisters, who by and large had done rather well for themselves. IU as well was the beneficiary of their gifts; the Memorial Fund campaign of the early 1920s raised \$1,453,000 to finance the building of the Indiana Memorial Union, the Women's Quadrangle (now Wells Quadrangle) on Third Street and the Men's Residence Center (now Collins Living-Learning Center) at Woodlawn and Tenth, and the Memorial Stadium for football and track on Tenth Street. The fundraising project came about largely through the stewardship of fraternity members, especially with the leadership of John S. Hastings of Phi Gamma Delta and Uz McMurtrie of Phi Kappa Psi.

The Third Street neighborhood was soon rivaled by another fraternity addition of extraordinary scope and scale. Ralph S. Crowl, an entrepreneur from Madison, Wisconsin, acquired a cornfield on the east edge of the campus from the Axtell family and persuaded the city council to annex the acreage and create Jordan Avenue from Third to Tenth. Although the scheme may have seemed daring to some cautious townspeople, Crowl had completed several chapter houses at the University of Wisconsin and, seeing a ready market among the thriving Greeks, planned similar projects at other midwestern universities. His proposal was beguilingly simple and straightforward: to arrange the financing, develop the land and then design, build, and furnish all the houses as a fraternity subdivision — everything to be handled entirely by the Crowl Organization. He hired Bloomingtonians George W. Henley, later IU's general counsel, and Glenn Woodward, an insurance broker, to give the venture credence and respectability. In short order ten chapters, new and old alike, signed contracts. Working with a local contractor, E.T. Wolfe, and other Bloomington firms, Crowl broke ground in February 1926 and had the ten houses

ready for their owners' occupancy by the next fall. The array of fanciful styles was the handiwork of a single architect, Myron E. Pugh. Kappa Sigma chose a Norman French granary around the corner from Jordan east on Third; from there on north forming an elongated quadrangle with a traffic circle in the center on Jordan Avenue were Zeta Tau Alpha, Theta Chi, Alpha Chi Omega, Delta Gamma, Delta Chi, Sigma Alpha Epsilon, Sigma Kappa, Chi Omega, and Phi Mu.

Thanks to Crowl, Pugh, and associates, the Greeks settled into rapidly but sturdily built houses of a cosmopolitan and historical variety: Tudor half-timbered cottage, English gabled manor house, French chateau, Mediterranean villa, Spanish rancharo, Swiss-Bavarian schloss, American southern plantation, Gothic town house, and Georgian country house — none a purebred example of its style, but all handsome, well-sited specimens of American Collegiate Greek-letter ascendancy.

By the early 1990s, only Delta Gamma still lived in its enlarged but original Jordan Quadrangle house at 105 North Jordan Avenue, while IU offices occupy the old Sigma Kappa (Admissions: 300 North Jordan), Alpha Chi Omega (Dowling International Center: 111 South Jordan), Phi Mu (Black Culture Center: 109 North Jordan), and Chi Omega (Theatre and Drama Department Annex: 209 North Jordan) houses, the latter two scheduled to be razed for the expansion of the Theatre and Drama Department, the IU Theatre, and the Neal-Marshall Black Culture Center.

The opening of the Jordan Quadrangle made available several old houses to new tenants and owners. Kappa Delta Rho was alert to the prospect of forming a chapter and moving into what had been the Delta Gamma house next door to Tri-Delta at 814 East Third Street.

35 What had become unmistakable in the evolution of fraternities and sororities at IU was the necessity of good housing. Without it even an established

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chapter that met every other standard was still at a disadvantage. That applied especially to newly organized chapters that lacked the financial resources available to longstanding chapters through their alumni. But it also applied to older chapters whose houses had become outmoded or dilapidated, or were no longer large enough to accommodate all their members. After the war IU's housing was bursting at the seams, and the Greeks, who provided for a quarter to a third of the undergraduates, already had far more than they could handle. And there were many more still to come.

In the spring of 1949 President Wells devised an initiative to help IU's fraternities and sororities buy land near campus, build houses, and finance the transactions. The twenty or so acres north of the Illinois Central railroad tracks beyond Tenth Street owned by the Fee and Rogers families were to be acquired by the university, developed and set aside for the chapters. Once the Board of Trustees agreed to the proposal, the next step was to have the university, according to historian Thomas D. Clark, "... agree to purchase funded obligations of any chapter that defaulted on its payments, and ... use non-tax funds to carry out fraternity financing." "... [IU] ... would not agree to guarantee any obligation but would purchase the balance of an unpaid loan." Herman B Wells's Indiana Plan used the good offices of the IU administration and trustees to secure the Greeks' continuity and stability in relation to the university and the community at large. Since 1952 when the plan was officially approved, thirty-one chapter houses have been constructed and several enlarged along North Jordan Avenue, reaching beyond Seventeenth Street to an extension connecting Jordan with Fee Lane.

In retrospect the Indiana Plan, more than any other action, sustained and, indeed, reaffirmed the historical relationship begun in 1845. Virtually no other public university had ever, before or since, committed its authority so directly and with such beneficial results to the development of its fraternity chapters. From the standpoint of public policy — which required cogent reasons for supporting what were, after all, private, voluntary organizations — there was the immediate consideration of making good housing available to large numbers of undergraduates. But other American institutions had worked out quite different approaches to the question of how best to

settle students within their midst.

Harvard provided dormitories and self-contained houses throughout the yard; Yale assigned undergraduates to residential colleges; Notre Dame put them in residence halls. Public universities such as Michigan, Wisconsin, Illinois, Iowa, and Ohio State relied on a mixture of dormitories, chapter houses, rooming houses, apartment houses, and, after War World II, house trailers and barracks. And while fraternities maintained houses at most of the institutions, the administrations generally considered them private accommodations but officially approved and subject to university jurisdiction, though not officially supported in any direct way. So IU had gone its own way in keeping with its own history, traditions, and best interests — true to the nature of Hoosiers in every generation.

What Herman B Wells achieved through the Indiana Plan was a strengthening of the organic connections between the university and the fraternities. The initiative formally recognized the importance of the Greeks not only as providers of housing but as established social organizations that enhanced the university experience for thousands of students. Moreover, the policy fortified the connections between IU and thousands of alumni, giving them tangible

evidence — a palpable sense of place and of personal attachment — of their continuing association, no matter how huge, complex, or strange the university might become. It is but one measure of the Greeks' loyalty that nearly 80 percent of the gifts made to the Indiana University Foundation have come from them. Whatever their motives or resources, the Greeks' gratitude for what IU has meant to them — as mediated by the fraternity experience — has been demonstrated by their abundant generosity.

It was Herman B Wells who wrote of IU as a whole: "... our central purpose was to grow in strength and depth rather than in breadth ... and to strengthen in depth and quality our traditional fields." And "Make no small plans for your institution; the small plans are very difficult to achieve ... When you build, build for a long time. Build for a thousand years — do not build structures that will be cast away by tomorrow's fashion. Tradition has a role to play in our institutions, and traditions grow in part around physical symbols." His wisdom has been borne out equally well in its application to IU's fraternity community.

The entire book is available on line at www.indiana.edu/~deltag/IU_Greek_History.rtf
— Ronald Kovener

Both items in winter 07 Wrangler



1957 Arbutus humor DU brothers Jim Platt, left, and Ron Yenerich, right, "clean up campus rubbish." The "rubbish" on the floor is Clarence Doninger who recently served as IU athletic director.