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A HISTORY OF PHI PHI ALPHA FRATERNITY AT ALMA COLLEGE AND OF ZETA DELTA (PHI PHI ALPHA) CHAPTER OF TAU KAPPA EPSILON
(1896 TO 2007)

College men of the 19th century were interested in helping each other in life and practicing to gain skills that would carry them with integrity into the world of work and public life. What the college curriculum may not have supplied, they often supplemented through "friendly societies," dating back to colonial Americans like Cotton Mather and Benjamin Franklin.

The college curriculum was often "classical," with large doses of Greek and Latin (sometimes even Hebrew) but not much in oratory, speech, physical exercise courses, politics, and public affairs. Practical young men "filled the gap" with "literary societies" that debated current topics.

Alma College's first literary society took as its motto "seekers of wisdom" and translated it into Greek with the initials Zeta Sigma. They did work which was much praised by faculty. Alma also had a Preparatory Department, the Academy, where students who came from districts that did not have a high school could get high school courses and qualify themselves for college. The boys in the Alma Academy wanted their own literary society, which they called the Adelpian, or "ones who support brotherhood." That would be in about 1893. By 1906 enough of the Adelpians were in college at Alma, and wanted to continue their activities as collegians, so they formed a second Alma College literary society. At about the same era when William Wilson was composing the TKE Declaration of Principles, the Alma Adelpians chose a name for their fraternity, which means "friendly-minded brothers of the love of wisdom" ("affectionate brothers of learning" was the shorter phrasing). In the Greek it was "philophrones philosophias adelphoi," which gave their group the initials Phi Phi Alpha.

If you collected some of the literary society debate topics from the years from 1906 to 1926, you would find them debating whether the US should remain neutral in the great European war, or, whether Alma College should have fraternities. Those topics were often reported in the Almanian, which started as a general interest literary magazine before it became a newspaper. One editorial on the fraternity question stated principles much like those stated by Tau Kappa Epsilon in its Declaration of Principles, or in one of its slogans, "Not for wealth, rank, or honor, but for personal worth and character." Phi and Teke would seem to have been made for each other!

Alma College did come to have fraternities, with men's residential houses (organizations rented them from local owners, or eventually purchased them). Tradition in Phi Phi Alpha was the society gained that status in 1926. The present TKE House is the fifth to be occupied by Phi Phi Alpha and TKE. The first three Phi Phi Alpha Houses included (1) a house across from the Post Office and the Alma Transportation Center on State Street, now remodeled and added onto for medical-dental-optometric practices, (2) a residence dating from before 1885, Schneider house on West Superior, which stood across from the present College entrance sign, until some time in the late 50s or 60s, and (3) a residence which stood on the current site of the Alma Dry Cleaners, and used at different times as a State Police Post and the Public Library.

The fourth "Phi House" was the first house to be owned by the fraternity. The fraternity was incorporated in 1936 to protect the undergraduates, but mainly to assure that the financial support of the alumni would be used wisely. Brother Adelbert H. Lindley, class of 1911, led the fund raising drive to buy the house on contract from the Fred Hooper family. Art Smith, '38 remembered a lot about the remodeling of the house for the fraternity, as did Al Fortino and Dr. Jack Sanders. With the outbreak of war in 1941, all but one of the fraternities were closed, since most of the men were in military service; Alma College took title, using the house as the residence of the Dean of Women, her husband and children, for the duration. After the war ended, the upstairs rooms were rented to the returning Phis, and when there were enough of them in school, the fraternity again began purchasing on a land contract. A feature of meetings in my student days was the passing of the hat for small change to be paid on the interest on the land contract.

Over the years there have been many memories of spring formals, usually off-campus and well-chaperoned; of Lincoln Day Dinners with special programs; of Homecoming floats and lawn decorations; and that great annual Homecoming tradition, the banquet after the Game, usually at a church or lodge hall n town, with speakers and introductions all around. One of the big ones occurred in 1966, at a hall on Michigan Avenue, when the big event was burning the mortgage on the fourth Teke House.

In my Phi Phi Alpha days, 1953-1956, there were fine Homecoming open houses for alumni, Homecoming floats (art majors and other brothers had plenty of time after classes to work on such projects), good programs at the annual "Phi On the Town" dance, Spring Formal Dinner Dances off campus. Song Fest and snow sculpture were yet to come in the 1960's.

Phi Phi Alpha prospered from 1926 to 1941 and quickly regained strength of numbers after 1945. Art Smith and others will remember a great many Alma College athletes, and Jeff Leestma's dad, himself a Delta Gamma Tau, remembers Phi Phi Alphas as athletes. The great athletes of my years, Denny Stolz and others among them, were men of talent and integrity, all in close association with college musicians in band and choir, English majors and French majors, champion debaters like Gene Schnelz (later a Circuit Court judge in Oakland County) and debate his partner Bill Franch, other good men like Maurice Gene "Mo" Arnold, Lynn Crawford, and Dean Remsberg, whose bearing on campus was such that just because of their friendliness you wanted to be a Phi. For a shy freshman who thought he wanted to rush another fraternity, and found yet another fraternity wanting to rush him, to get bids from the third fraternity and from the Phis, it was a thrill to be accepted by the Phis. Even a group that did not give you a bid would have a member or two wanted to be friends with you after they had turned you down, but then would turned on you when you pledged Phi. They gave you the usual taunts, and you had to be man enough to rise above the rivalries. Many of those who worked in the interfraternity council must have done so. Whatever promotes interfraternal accord is to be applaud.

In the 1950s, a rushee would remember the ceremony of bidding which took place after chapel, a quiet time to sign a bid and go to lunch to see what newly invited men were sitting together. Alma had three fraternities, and the ceremony evolved into one where the successful rushees would go out the door of the Chapel Rotunda marked with the name of the fraternity each man had accepted to be greeted outside. In later years this was moved to the lawn west of the Chapel, and then to the field house. A ceremony that led to a quiet and friendly greeting by actives eventually turned into a social and somewhat "tribal" ritual, which the whole campus attended. Some of that quieter and closer welcome now has come back.

Archivists of the chapter have listed a great many highly accomplished Phi Phi Alpha alumni. Many of them became Presbyterian ministers and served churches all over Michigan, where Alma students would know them before they came to college. One of them was a Ludington man named Hermann N. Morse, who headed the Board of National Missions and was Moderator of the General Assembly of the church. An early behaviorist psychologist, Clark Hull, was a Phi Phi Alpha {he left Alma without taking a degree}. One of them was a Minneapolis architect Ralph Rapson, who has designed several famous buildings including the Tyrone Guthrie Theater in Minneapolis.

In November 1957, the Almanian carried a story headlined "Phi Phi Alpha Petitions National Fraternity." There was a delay for about a year, self-imposed, I understand, as part of a penalty for an exuberant smoker film. Alma College Archival records show that careful questions were asked by the College before Tau Kappa Epsilon was allowed to grant the charter, including questions about the property on Philadelphia Avenue. President Swanson checked out a book on Michigan corporations during that time; the fraternity took title to the property, with two bank mortgages, one to pay off the land contract with the College, and the other to finance an addition to the building, which provided an apartment for the house mother now required by the college, and providing residence space for four to six more men. The chartering took place over a two-day period, October 12-13, 1957, with brothers attending a church service, a chartering banquet with guests and speakers. Sixteen of us, scroll numbers 44 to 59, were allowed to have our names on the original charter by extension; we were initiated during the later months of 1957. The new chapter changed its corporation name from "Phi Phi Alpha Fraternity" to "Tau Kappa Epsilon, Zeta Delta Chapter," and later the words "Phi Phi Alpha" were inserted after "Zeta Delta" to recognize the 51 years with that name.

All initiates of Phi Phi Alpha are eligible for initiation into Tau Kappa Epsilon; the latest to take advantage of this is Frater John Hurst '57.

From 1958 to 1972, the fraternity was well served by three house mothers, first Mom Zane, then Constance Creech, and finally Eleanor Milham, whose son Bob had belonged to Phi Phi Alpha. In signage it was informally designated as the Lindley Residence Wing.

During those same years, and since, Zeta Delta (Phi Phi Alpha) Chapter of Tau Kappa Epsilon has often won the All-Sports Trophy. It has had a number of winners of the College's Barlow Trophy for an outstanding senior. And, clearly those years (1964-1968) were years of campus leadership. Tekes took part in band and choir, held important posts in Student Council (later called Student Congress), and many of them were resident assistants in the residence halls when that post was formally instituted. When college men did not have many places to live on campus, fraternities often helped fill that need, and when Alma College began to build men's residence halls, they looked to fraternities for leadership. And that paid off in recruitment. One frater remembers that when the chapter took 23 men in the 1977 fall pledge class after a year of suspension and re-colonizing, the size and diversity of the new class reminded him of those days a decade earlier, when, as he said, "We had everything."

The years have not been without recognition from the International Fraternity. In 1966 a proud frater named Jim Butterick accepted an award for the Top Teke Chapter on small campuses. The chapter can be proud of two Top Tekes, Greg Hatcher in 1983 and Jason Watkins in 1988. In academic achievement, it was notable that in 1985, after an unfortunate and accidental fire destroyed the chapter house at 313 Philadelphia Avenue, two undergraduate fraters were inducted into Phi Beta Kappa. They are fraters Brian de Beaubien MD, a prominent orthopedic surgeon in Saginaw, and Philip Alan Robinson MD, a generalist who practices in California. Alumni of TKE were accorded the same honor in 1986 when Professors Arlan Edgar and Eugene Pattison were inducted into Phi Beta Kappa and likewise awarded that cherished key. In that same era, as actives coped with living on a floor of Bruske Residence Hall, they decided one term to make a strong academic effort, which brought them the top average among fraternities for a term.

Throughout those same years, new member education constantly underwent sanctions and evaluation. Shortly after World War II ended, Phi Phi Alpha members voted not to abolish hazing, feeling that veterans expected it. A new member program developed by the colony was a condition of their reinstatement as a chapter in 1977. Many fraters will remember the (in)famous "Prytanis Quiz" with its "closely guarded secret," in 1985 replaced by a program sponsored by the International Fraternity called "TKExperience." In that event, trained alumni joined an undergraduate team to teach the candidates for initiation in a weekend of talk, play, and getting better acquainted, culminating in the formal initiation. Its secrets were "closely guarded," too, but it was to protect the privacy of each individual frater and not to damage the emotional intensity of the last ceremonies of the weekend.

At the 1975 Conclave, Zeta Delta was recognized as a Most Improved Chapter, having overcome some difficulties in recruitment. That year, too, Chapter Advisor Dr. Eugene Pattison was named one of several Key Leaders by the Grand Prytanis of the Fraternity. He would go on to be one of the first class of fraters to be named to the Chapter Advisor Hall of Fame at the Fraternity's Centennial Celebration held in Bloomington, Illinois on January 9 and 10, 1999. There, in the Fraternity, as the slogan put it, was "Where the Past Meets the Future." That is a slogan that could well mark our Golden Anniversary as Zeta Delta works with creative new solutions to the challenges of tomorrow.