

A Brief Account of the History of Alpha Chi Sigma, Zeta Chapter at the University of Illinois, and Meaning of Fraternity Membership

An informal talk given to local pledge candidates, Fall 1970

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I have been closely connected with this Chapter for 42 years and, of course, was a member of the Fraternity before I came here, so that my membership is very long. I have found it to be extremely profitable and very interesting, and I am sure that you Pledges will find your membership valuable to you, too. It depends, of course, on how much you put into it. You get out of it just what you put in. If you keep active, you will make friends and will have all sorts of interesting experiences. If you just let it slide, why, of course, you can't expect to benefit from it.

Well, let me start at the beginning. As you realize, the Fraternity was founded in 1902 at the University of Wisconsin. Now, I think the students there who founded this Organization really did not have any intention of founding a National Fraternity. It was simply a local organization. But, a few years later, word of this Organization reached the University of Minnesota. Some of the boys there thought that it was a good idea and they wrote to Wisconsin and said, "We would like to become a Chapter of your Organization," and thus a National Fraternity was born. The people at Wisconsin, of course, accepted the Minnesota petition, if you want to put it that way. Then, they began to think, "Well, we ought to expand," so they wrote to the heads of the Chemistry Departments of a large number of schools around the country, in one place and another, and told about their Organization, asking if they would talk with students in their schools to find out whether there were some who would like to become a Chapter of Alpha Chi Sigma. Well, this was long before I had anything to do with the Fraternity; long before I went to college, as a matter of fact.

But, I was a student some years later at the University of Colorado, which has the Eta Chapter of Alpha Chi Sigma. The way the Eta Chapter got started is that the head of the department, there, got a letter from the boys at Wisconsin about the Organization. His first inclination was just to toss it in the wastebasket and forget it, but, then, he thought, "Well, some of the boys might be interested;" so he took the letter out into the quant lab, handed it to one of the lads there, and said, "Well, is there anybody interested in this?" The boys passed it around among themselves and they decided that, yes, they would like to do this. So, they formed a group called the HAC Club. After they were well organized and running, they sent a petition to Wisconsin and were accepted as a Chapter. Nobody knew what the initials HAC stood for, for some long time. Then, it turned out that those initials stood for "Half-Assed Chemists." Now, I say this not in a sense of vulgarity and all, but simply to point out to you that, in those days, it was all taken very lightly. There was nothing to it. All you had to do was form a group, write in to Wisconsin and say, "We want to be a Chapter," and, bingo, it was done.

Now, of course, the situation is quite different. An Organization has to be formed, has to run as a Chemical Fraternity for several years to show that it has stability, and it has to have the approval of the President of the University or the College where it is. It has to pay a substantial initiation fee and buy regalia, so it's now a matter of considerable concern. This doesn't mean that we are not anxious to have more Chapters. We are anxious to expand

into schools where we don't have Chapters if they are schools that can rapidly support them. There is a National Committee on Fraternal Expansion and they have a list of all of the colleges in the country.

First, of course, at those where we have Chapters, there's nothing to be done. Second is a group of schools which we feel could support Chapters, but which do not now have one--the University of Washington, for example. Then, there is a group of schools that probably never can support a Chapter--small colleges where there may be only eight or ten chemistry majors or something of this sort. You have to have a better nucleus than that if you are going to continue. We did have a Chapter, a very good one, some years ago at Rose Polytechnic Institute over in Indiana. There was one faculty man who was much interested, and he kept the thing going, but they usually had only five or six members in the Chapter. On one occasion, they got down to three members and, unfortunately, during the Summer, two of those members were killed in an automobile accident. That left only one man, so the Chapter simply died from lack of membership. We don't want to get into that sort of problem. There has been in past times a fourth group of schools, and I used to say where we would never have Chapters--Smith, Vassar, Mount Holyoke. But, in view of the action taken at the Conclave this Summer, it is quite possible that those schools someday may have Chapters, though I suspect that this probably won't happen for many years.

Well, now for our own Zeta Chapter. When I came here in 1928, the Fraternity had a house at 907 S. Sixth Street, where they'd been for at least five years; their first place to live as a group as far as we know, since the Founding in 1908--fifteen years before that. Well, a group of boys lived there and had an active Chapter, but it was purely undergraduate. Well, I shouldn't say that either; it was largely an undergraduate group and they were operating as a social fraternity. They were competing with the social fraternities in athletics, so forth and so on. They belonged to the Inter-Fraternity Council, and they had pre-medical students, "ag" students, etc.--anybody who had enough chemistry to qualify him even if he didn't expect to be a chemist. All were eligible and some of these non-chemist boys were initiated. Well, you simply can't compete with social fraternities which don't have any restriction on membership as long as your own group does have a restriction, namely, only members who are chemists and chemical engineers. That is, the social fraternities can choose chemists and chemical engineers as well as law students, liberal arts students, engineering students, architecture students, and so on, but we were limited, you see, and, obviously, this is very unfair and uneven competition--it simply didn't go.

Moreover, the graduate students who came to Illinois didn't want to join. Most, or many of them, at least, were members of social fraternities when they were undergraduates. They didn't want to come here and go through hell week, hazing, initiation, and so on. So, the membership was very small, and it kept getting smaller and smaller for several years. This always leads to trouble: if you are going to have a house, you have got to have a big membership to support that house. You can't run a dining room and hire a cook for four or five boys. You have to have a big group. Without it, things went from bad to worse. I remember one evening--I suspect it was in 1931 or thereabouts--I can't just be sure when it was, there was a meeting called at the Chapter House of the faculty members. Now, practically all of the faculty belonged to Alpha Chi Sigma at that time. There were only 28 people on the staff of the Department then, and I think that all but perhaps one belonged to the Fraternity. So, we were all called together to find out what should be done. The Chapter was literally on the rocks. They couldn't get members and they were running into debt. I might say, just in passing, that other Chapters of Alpha Chi Sigma about this time and a little later ran into the same problems. They were operating, or trying to operate, as social organizations; several of these other Chapter went under. We had a good Chapter at Ohio State, one at Pittsburgh, one at Nebraska. They all went under for this same reason. They forgot that Alpha Chi Sigma is a Professional Organization, rather than solely a social organization.

Well, anyway, to come back to the meeting Professor Roger Adams was then Head of the Chemistry Department, and I think it was he who called us together to discuss the future of Alpha Chi Sigma. It seems rather strange, perhaps, that the faculty should discuss this problem, but Professor Adams and many other members of the faculty felt, and we still feel, that this Fraternity is a quasi part of the Department and that it can render a service to the Department if it operates properly. So, Dr. Adams and some of the others were very eager to see that Alpha Chi

Sigma was straightened up and carried on. After a long and somewhat bitter discussion, it was agreed that, if the Chapter would operate as a Professional Organization, drop out of the Inter-Fraternity Council, forget its social aspirations, and become a Professional Organization--if they would do that, then the faculty would support them. If they would not do that, the faculty would not support them. Well, there wasn't much choice, really, because the membership of the Chapter was so low that they couldn't possibly continue to run the House. They finally agreed, "Yes, we will do this."

A day or two later, Professor Adams called into his office a group of graduate students, all of whom had been invited to join the Chapter, but who had refused because they didn't like the way things were run--they didn't want a social fraternity. He called them in and said, "Well, it is on a different basis now. It is going to be a Professional group and I think it would be wise if you would join." Well, they all joined. I am sorry that you don't know Professor Adams. Maybe some of you do. He is 82 years old now, or very close to it. He still has an office in East Chemistry. He comes over every morning and spends some time there. But, if you know him, you know this action was characteristic of him. When he wanted something done, he didn't beat around the bush. He just called these boys in and said, "Look, I think you should join," and they all joined. So, the Chapter took on a new lease on life.

Unfortunately, many of the undergraduates in this group--well, I shouldn't say many, there weren't many--but some of those that belonged felt very bitter about this. They said, "We joined because we want a Fraternity. We don't want a professional group; we want to belong to a Fraternity. We want to do things that the social fraternities do." They didn't forget this bitterness at all.

After short-lived moves at 1004 S. 4th in 1932 and 810 S. 3rd in 1933, we moved to 1004 W. Nevada in 1934, which is just around the corner from the drug store on Lincoln. You probably go by there very frequently as you go to school. One morning, a Sunday morning, about 7 o'clock, the president of the group called me on the telephone and said, "We have had a little trouble. You had better come over." Now, I was used to their having trouble--quarreling among themselves, and so on. But, I thought, "Well, gee whiz, 7 o'clock is a funny time to have trouble of this kind." Anyway, I got my clothes on and got in my car. I live out this way, so I came down on Lincoln and turned the corner there at the drug store and saw what he meant. They *had* had trouble. There was a fire engine sitting there. There was a big crowd of people, boys out there in their bathrobes, and smoke rising through the roof, and so on. The inside of the House was pretty well gutted. After things calmed down a little, I gathered the group around me--I was Chapter Advisor--out in the front yard and said, "Now, there are two things we can do. Each boy can go on his own and find a room where he can go through the rest of the school year, or we can all stick together." This was about the latter part of March, I judge. Now, this was in the depression. There were lots of empty houses. There was no trouble about finding a house.

Fire

"We can all stick together and keep the Fraternity going." My heart was in my mouth because I feared that, if the boys separated, the Chapter would die. Fortunately, they did not. All but one said, "We'll stick together." So, we found a house on Green Street--a great big barn of a house that has since been torn down--right over close to the Boneyard Creek. It had been empty for a year or two. There were all sorts of animals in the basement, and so on, but we cleaned it up and moved what furniture hadn't been burned over there and lived out the rest of the year. In the following Summer, the house on Nevada Street was fixed up and, in the Fall, we moved back and, from that time on, things went along pretty well.

I should go back a little way now. A couple of boys who were graduate students came to the conclusion that what this Fraternity needed was a library, a chemical library. They thought a long time about it and they came and talked to me about it. I didn't think the plan would work, but they said, "A lot of faculty people have journals that are stuck away. The owners think they are going to use them or have them bound, but the truth of the matter is that they will just sit there and eventually get thrown out, so we will go and ask these Faculty people for their old journals. We will get some duplicate, of course, but we will sell the duplicates and that will give us enough money to bind the others, and everything will be great." They *did* get a lot of journals in this way, but when they went to

sell the duplicates, in the depths of the depression in 1933, they just wouldn't sell, and there wasn't much money for binding.

Along about this time, the City Chemist of St. Louis died and left all of his belongings to his brother, who was a minister. Among these belongings was a chemical library. The minister didn't really have much use for this chemical library. But, he knew his brother who died was a member of Alpha Chi Sigma. So, he wrote to the National Office in Indianapolis and said, "I have my brother's chemical library and I will sell it for \$500." The man at Indianapolis knew that we were trying to build a library and so he wrote to me, "Well, here it is." We wanted part of the library, but not all of it, but the minister said no, he didn't want to monkey with it. We would take all or we would take none. After some negotiations back and forth, we bought it all for \$500. It was a great bargain at that price.

Also, at this time, there was an insurance man in town, who was a very aggressive fellow. He came around and said the Fraternity ought to have some insurance. I said, "We have insurance; the House is insured." He replied, "Look, the boys' personal belongings aren't insured. If you have a fire--this was before we had a fire--and the boys lose their clothes, their books, and so on, they are just out that much money." So, I talked to the boys about it, and we decided that it was a good idea. We decided to take out insurance on each boy's personal belongings to the extent of \$300 and, for some reason--I don't remember just why--we included the library and the regalia in this insurance policy. This was about two months before the fire!

These excess journals, the journals that they could not sell, had been put up in the attic. They were all neatly arranged, nicely bundled, and tied with strings. There was a complete inventory of them and, in those days, the chemical journals were marked with prices, 75 cents a copy, or something of that sort, you see. So, we were able to collect all this money on these excess journals which we couldn't sell for even 5 cents a copy! The library which was downstairs wasn't destroyed, for that part of the House didn't burn. It was a very, very fortunate circumstance that we got this library. We were able to pay for it out of the copies that were burned, and everyone was happy. Of course, the boys got insurance money on their clothes, their books, and one thing and another. But, this is another story. It was an unusual experience.

Soon after that, maybe the next year, the boys thought, "Well, this House isn't big enough. We ought to have a bigger and better House. We ought to buy a house." We were renting in those days, you see. We decided that we ought to have our own House. As Chapter Advisor, I was delegated to look around and see what we could do. We had \$4,000, which isn't very much to buy a house.

It happens that, back in the early 1920's, a man who lived in Indianapolis, whose name was Crowell, hit upon a scheme to build fraternity and sorority houses and make a profit on them. In the course of five or six years, this man built some 100 fraternity houses and sorority houses. Purdue, Indiana, Illinois, Northwestern, and Iowa were the main schools where he worked. Now, his plan was this: he would build a house for any organization, fraternity or sorority, that had a piece of ground, put the furniture in, and set up a budget for the group. In return, they would give him notes for \$10,000 more than the house cost! He took these notes out and sold them. Now, he built 100 houses and made \$10,000 on each one. If you multiply that out, it is a million bucks. So, he made a million dollars in about five or six years. Unfortunately, he lost it all during the depression.

But anyway, he built this house at 606 W. Ohio Street about 1929-30. The Theta Upsilon Sorority occupied it first in 1930 while our group was still living at 907 S. 6th. Incidentally, the girls had borrowed money on a second mortgage to buy the land. They didn't have a penny in it. That is, the land was bought on a second mortgage, the House was built on these notes that Mr. Crowell took out and sold, and the girls moved in. As I say, he made up the budget for them. You have 40 girls, each one pays so many dollars a month and that multiplies out, and you pay the cook so much, the housemother so much, groceries so much. It was all fine, perfectly open and above board. Then the depression hit. They couldn't find 40 girls who could afford to pay \$60 a month or whatever it was in those days

during the middle 30's, so, before long, the House closed. The girls moved to less expensive accommodations at 708 S. Matthews, and "our" House sat there idle for several years. The people who had bought these notes, I might say, were mighty distressed. They wanted their money and, of course, there wasn't any money coming in. They were in a depression, too. They needed this money, so some of them went to court and asked the court to appoint a receiver, that is, a man who would manage it for them and get as much money as he could out of it. This man who was appointed as receiver was Mr. Paul Busey, who was then the President of the Busey State Bank in Urbana. I went to visit him, among other people, and said, "We want to buy a house for Alpha Chi Sigma Fraternity." "Well," he asked, "who is on your board?" I replied, "Professor Roger Adams, Professor W. C. Rose, Professor C. S. Marvel." He interrupted, "That is all right; I think we can take care of it." It pays to have prominent and forthright people on your board! He had this vacant sorority house, then, at 606 W. Ohio, and he had two or three others that he was acting as receiver on. There were lots of houses in the same situation. We had a choice, but we sort of liked this one, so he said, "Well, I'll sell it to you for \$25,000." Now, just five or six years before, it had cost \$75,000, but he said, "All right, you can have it for \$25,000!" I said, "We don't have \$25,000. We only have \$4,000." He said, "I will loan you the rest out of the bank." So, we got the House. Now, there is a sad note here. In the years that this house stood idle, taxes had run up, so there was about \$15,000 in arrears in taxes. We paid him the \$21,000 which he furnished, but before anything else could happen, he had to pay the taxes. So, the poor note holders, who had invested some \$75,000, only got \$10,000 back--which was very unfortunate for them, of course, but mighty fortunate for us because we got the house for \$25,000. We set up a program of paying off our indebtedness to the Busey Bank and, in the course of time, we did pay it all off. We had to scrimp and save to do it, so, by this time, the house was a bit run down. We borrowed again from the Busey Bank and fixed things up. We still do have a loan from the bank on this, but have lived at 606 W. Ohio Street ever since 1938.

One other incident happened a few years later, which was very interesting. The Dean's Office used to publish the scholastic averages of all the fraternities and sororities every semester, professional and social and what not. One day, I was down to see Mr. Busey about some things, and he said that he had noticed in the paper that Alpha Chi Sigma had by far the highest scholastic standing of any of the fraternities, and I said, "Yes, that's right." "Well," he said, "I like to deal with people like that. I am going to lower the interest a half percent." Now, that shows something about the rewards for diligence!

Of course, when we bought the house, Mr. Busey required that we take out \$25,000 worth of insurance on it. A few years ago, before he died, Mr. Busey called me one day to say, "You know, that House is worth more than \$25,000 and we have got to have it insured for more than that to cover your present loan." So, we called in a contractor and asked him to go over the place and tell us how much it was worth. He thumped the walls, stomped on the floors, and did all the things that a builder will do. He looked at the location, of course, and so on. He said, "This House is probably worth \$135,000." So, you see, it was a very good investment.

Now, what I have been telling you, perhaps, is that we have had tremendous luck on the library, on the House, and so on. But, it isn't all luck. Part of it comes from the fact that this has been a very active group. It has sponsored worthwhile activities that have been a real help to the Chemistry and Chemical Engineering Department, now called the School of Chemical Sciences. As long as this Fraternity continues to be of help to the School of Chemical Sciences, it will have strong support, it will prosper, and it will be a valuable Organization. If it ceases to be of real value, then, of course, it might as well fold up.

Now, what do I mean by value? We have had a great variety of activities, some social, inviting faculty to come over and get acquainted with students, inviting new graduate students to come in and make their homes here until they find places to live. We have had the safety program, we have other programs as well. For a few years, the boys were interested in an essay contest among the high schools in the area, they had students writing essays on chemical subjects, and they gave prizes--small prizes--but still valued by the high school students.

It is my own feeling, or perhaps it is an ideal, that every member of the Organization should have some sort of

activity in which he is involved. Maybe he is a member of a committee here at the House, maybe he is on some project that the House is doing to help the School of Chemical Sciences. These activities come and go. For a while, one activity seems to be very much worthwhile, then it sort of outlives its usefulness and a new activity takes its place.

As I started at the beginning to say, if you put something into this Organization, you will get a great deal out of it. If you don't want to put anything into it, you won't get anything out of it. That's my story. Thank you.

Addendum 1

November 16, 1973

One might be inclined to wonder how this booklet came to be. For our successors in the Fraternity one observes that things don't just materialize--anything that exists has been worked out by some amount of time and effort. These things don't just "happen."

In this case, Mike deRuntz had the foresight to record the talk on a small, portable tape recorder--such a talk had been given in the past, but the records were lost somehow. Rich Taubold's interest resulted in re-recording the tape to a cassette cartridge and a master file reel via a more elaborate hi-fi set up. These served their purpose locally in the interim, and were useful for orientation purposes in the establishment of a Colony at SIU-Carbondale.

Frank Morris arranged in the Fall of '73 to borrow Dr. Bailar's dictaphone to bring back to the House with the idea that Dr. Bailar's secretary, Eleanor Greeson, could type it up direct from the copy of a copy. The quality loss in transferring it from the House's hi-fi to four dictaphone belts made it unintelligible for transcription. Greg Stoner loaned his portable cassette player and Dr. Gutowsky's secretary, Cynthia Hardig, took it down verbatim in shorthand from that in her office in 106 Noyes Lab and typed a rough draft. Dr. Bailar, who maintains an office in 159 Noyes Lab, edited it, and Mrs. Greeson then retyped it in its present form and provided the cover photo and resume.

It took about three years--but it was worth it!

Addendum 2

July 21, 2003

After discovering this transcript in a collection of old documents, Robin Fishbein immediately proceeded to lose it again...until a year later, when he found it in a file box he himself put together. Now it has finally been transcribed once again, this time into electronic format.

The resume referred to in the first addendum has been omitted because it is *long*. It runs several typed pages, and this includes the categories of accomplishments that have been abridged as, "Too numerous to mention." The hard copy remains in the chapter archives.