HISTORY OF GREEK ORGANIZATIONS
AND
HONOR SOCIETIES AT SOUTHERN UNIVERSITY AND A&M COLLEGE
(Revised, January 30, 1948)

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PREFACE

This summer the class in Bibliography and Methods commenced writing the history of Southern University. This was a unique project because no group had ever attempted to put Southern University's progress on paper. Under the able guidance of Dr. S. E. Warren that class accomplished a great deal.

I am a member of the present class in Bibliography and Methods and we are attempting to complete the history. This phase that is being treated in this paper is one of utmost importance in college life. It is my sincere wish that the reader will realize the importance of such organizations in college life.

I wish to express my sincere appreciation to the secretaries of the various organizations covered in this paper. Without their records little could have been accomplished. I also wish to acknowledge the kindness extended to me by the numerous interviewees who were contacted during this study.

Although he made things appear very dark at times, without the guidance and instruction of Dr. S. E. Warren, this paper would have been impossible. I sincerely appreciate the scholarly instruction he has given me.
I. Introduction

A. Purpose of this Study

The purpose of this paper are as follows:

To describe the most influential social organizations on Southern University’s campus and what they contribute to the Campus and Dormitory life. To portray the individuals and forces that influenced the establishment and development of Greek Organizations and Honor Societies on the campus. To show how scholarship and character have been stimulated through Honor Societies and Greek Organizations.

B. Definitions Employed

Some of the terms used are defined in order to make the paper easily understood by the reader.

By Cultural Approach is meant as a scientific method used in writing history where the overall view and all underlying factors of cause and effect are considered.¹

Fraternity means a society of men especially in schools and colleges, which stresses brotherly affection.²

A Sorority refers to a woman’s club or college association which stresses sisterly love and affection.³

C. Scope of This Study

This paper covers the period from 1924 to 1947, with a background of social life before 1924. It treats the organizations at Southern University of Baton Rouge, Louisiana, especially the social fraternities and sororities and the Honor Societies. From this study are excluded the graduate chapters of the social fraternities and sororities. Likewise excluded from this study are such social organizations as the Young Men’s Christian Association, and the club’s composed of students from the various cities.

II. Background and Need for Social Organizations and Honor Societies

A. Social and Scholastic Life between 1880-1914.

This was the period when Southern University was struggling to gain a foothold among the other Negro Colleges of the South. There were no specific organizations to stimulate social life on the campus in New Orleans. The students lived in their private homes and the social life was carried on out in the city. From this fact one can readily see that organized social

¹ Ware, Carolyn F., The Cultural Approach to History
² Wilcox and Follet, The New Standard Dictionary
³ Ibid
life plays a more important role in colleges of the rural areas. The trend toward social
organizations and honor societies had not started in Negro Colleges of the south. However,
Negro students of the northern universities took the lead in organizing a fraternity at
Cornell University in 1906. This was the Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity and from this one all
of the other fraternities and sororities began to appear. It did not affect Southern
University directly during this period because of its location.

The scholastic life during this period was not stimulated by any active honor societies.

There were no societies for Negroes during this period.

B. Social and Scholastic Life between 1914-1924

This was the period immediately after Southern University was moved to its present
location. Both social organizations and honor societies sprang from the soil which
supports colleges and universities in general and institutions for Negroes in the south in
particular. During this period the social organizations and honor societies for Negroes
began to move south and others were established. In 1922, several of the young men and
women felt the need for an organization in which they could have some type of social
binding. This interest was stimulated by the spreading of various Greek organizations into
Negro College life in Southern schools.

III. Forerunner of Greek Organizations

A. The Sigma Beta Social Club

Greek letter organizations were being established in one college after another throughout
the country. Usually some kind of club preceded such organizations. With Southern
students tending to move toward Greekdom, the Sigma Beta Club was organized in
September of 1922\(^1\) with Miss Hattie B. Duval and Mr. C. N. Cornell as sponsors.

There were eight members who pledged themselves to stimulate the social activities on
the campus. They were: Horace G. White,\(^2\) President; R. S. Shade,\(^3\) Vice-President;
Charles W. Ross,\(^4\)

\(^1\) Southern University Yearbook of 1929, p.
\(^2\) Horace G. White
\(^3\) R. S. Shade, now deceased
\(^4\) Charles W. Ross
\(^5\) R. W. E. Jones, President of Grambling College
\(^6\) George Mills
\(^7\) Nicholas Harrison, presently instructor in Mechanic Arts at Southern University
\(^8\) B. V. Baranco, Jr., presently Dental Surgeon in Baton Rouge, Louisiana
\(^9\) Vera Baranco
Secretary; R. W. E. Jones, Treasurer; George Mills, Nicholas Harrison, B. V. Baranco, Jr., and Vera Baranco.

B. National Trend Followed by Southern

After the establishment of the Sigma Beta Club, Greek life was on the verge of becoming a reality at Southern University. Soon after its establishment, the first Greek organization was established in 1924. Most of its Charter Members had been members of the Sigma Beta Club. Thus Southern followed the trend of Negro colleges.

IV. Social Fraternities and Sororities

Much of the time that campus and dormitory life has had, it has been due to the zeal with which fraternities and sororities organized and competitive programs formulated.

A. Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity

In 1924, Mr. Cornelius King, Director of Agriculture, saw the interest displayed in the Sigma Beta Club. With the increasing popularity of fraternities in Negro colleges, Mr. King undertook the task of securing a Chapter of Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity at Southern University. In the latter part of 1924, he was successful.

With Mr. King as sponsor and the latter R. S. Shade as President, the Rho Chapter began its task of “Culture For Service and Service for Humanity”. The charter members were: Ralph N. Jones, N. S. Harrison, George Allen, George Mills, Harold Johnson, G. Leon Netterville, Jr., David L. May, and Charles Ross. These men inspired others to become conscious of their brotherliness and thus many others aspired and became members of the chapter.

In 1928, only four years after its founding, the fraternity became inactive. This was due to graduation of the majority of its members and withdrawal of the others. However, it was not to remain inactive very long. Mr. Lloyd Williams, who came to Southern University as a

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8 B. V. Baranco, Jr., presently Dental Surgeon in Baton Rouge, Louisiana
9 Vera Baranco
1 Interview with Raymond Scott, President of Phi Beta Sigma
2 Ibid
3 Minutes of Rho Chapter, Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity
transfer student and Sigma man from Lincoln University of Missouri, was successful in reactivating the chapter in 1929.\footnote{Interview with Raymond Scott, President, Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, October 17, 1947.} He served as the \textit{first} president of the reactivated chapter.

Other members initiated into the reactivated chapter were \textit{Joseph P. Herson, E. James Hamilton, John W. Fisher, Alvin Cook, Sherman Briscoe, and Joseph Merrick}. From these energetic young men the Rho Chapter of \textbf{Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity} has perpetuated through the years and has set the standard for younger fraternities which followed. Recently the fraternity has been setting the standards scholastically for the Greek Organizations on the campus. For the past two semesters Rho Chapter has maintained an average of 2.00,\footnote{Registrar’s Office, Southern University, October 1947.} so Rho Chapter is very successful in maintaining one of the traditions that all Greek Organizations seek to maintain, that is scholarship.

\textbf{B. Zeta Phi Beta Sorority}

With the growing consciousness of Greek life and the expansion of sororities in Negro colleges, the women of Southern University, under the guidance of \textit{Miss E. N. Mayberry} and \textit{Mrs. Octavia Clark}, established the Beta Alpha Chapter of \textbf{Zeta Phi Beta Sorority} in \textit{1932}.\footnote{Interview with Miss Lillie Ruth Smith, President, Zeta Phi Beta, October 15, 1947.} Through observation and research, the writer has noted that most of the young women in this sorority are Home Economics majors. This is due to the lasting influence of Miss Mayberry, who was Director of the Home Economics Department for an extended period.

\textit{Zeta Phi Beta Sorority} has been noted for its annual Thanksgiving program, which commenced under the guidance of Miss Mayberry in 1934. At these inspiring programs baskets of food were given to the less fortunate families of Scotlandville. During the early years of its existence, more than thirty women were initiated and the chapter proclaimed the title of “\textit{Finer Womanhood}” in 1935.

So down through the years the sorority has tried to maintain the ideas of aiding their fellow women in a Christian way and to promote scholarship in the sorority and in the individual. Under the present administration of Soror Lillie Ruth Smith, the sorority has adopted the following theme: “\textit{Service Through Finer Womanhood}.” Below is a diagram which clearly defines the above theme.
C. Delta Sigma Theta Sorority

It has been observed that faculty members have had considerable influence upon the existence of Greek Organizations on college campuses. It was through this medium that the second sorority was established on Southern's Campus. The writer has observed that unless some outside stimulus had been thrust upon the college women in 1934, there would have been no demand for another sorority. So with this faculty and outside influence Alpha Tau Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority was established.

As in the case of most new organizations, women are curious and with the growing consciousness of noble Greekism, numerous young women pledged Delta and were initiated. Under the able guidance of Soror Gwendolyn Smith, Delta gained a noticeable and successful standing among the social organizations on the campus. The charter
members were: Edith Ruth Purnell, Lucille White Johnson, Sophronia Stanley, Mattie B. Pearry, Rosalie Quinn, Ozelle B. Marbles, and Zolee M. Marbles.¹ With two sororities existing there would inevitably be competition. This early competition was of a friendly nature, but it was not to remain that way forever. The conflicting competition will be taken up later.

Twice in 1935 and in 1942 Alpha Tau Chapter was hostess to the Southern Regional Conference of the Delta Sigma Theta Sorority. These conferences brought much prestige to Southern University and to Alpha Tau for the splendid and cordial hospitality extended the visiting sorors. Delta Sigma Theta Sorority has had the largest membership of all of the sororities on the campus in recent years.² During its thirteen years of existence, Delta proudly points to the large number of her members who have won the coveted title of “Miss Southern.” Numerous others have graduated Summa Cum Laude. Recently more than thirty¹ young ladies were initiated into the Delta Pledge Club., which may become a serious threat to college life. It seems that the average college woman loses sight of the primary purpose of college when she becomes engrossed in the so-called “NOBLE GREEK LIFE.”

D. Omega Psi Phi Fraternity

In January of 1935, the second fraternity was established on the campus. It was the Beta Sigma Chapter of the Omega Psi Phi Fraternity. The charter members² were Carl Thomas, Woodrik McGuire, Adolph Slaughter, Lionel Adams, Robert Price, Robert Harris and W. H. Rucker. It was with the establishment of this chapter that competition began in the fraternities. This competition was to be quite keen and unregulated until the establishment of the intra-fraternal council.

The Omega fraternity was the first organization to present to Southern University a National Flag which was given at an impressive ceremony. Each year the fraternity sponsors programs celebrating “National Negro Achievement Week.”

¹ Minutes of Alpha Tau Chapter, Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, 1934
¹ Interview with Miss Quiret, Secretary of Alpha Tau Chapter, Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, October 23, 1947.
² Interview with John Wagner, President Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Beta Sigma Chapter, November 14, 1947.
Recently the Omegas have tended to accept large numbers of applicants. It is noticeable that the bulk of the Texas students pledge Omega. I also mention here, that with the growing spirit of Greekdom in college, men might lose sight of the primary purpose for attending college.

E. **Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity**

The Alpha Sigma Chapter of **Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity** was the *third* fraternity to be established on the campus. The movement for securing the chapter was largely sponsored by *Dr. W. W. Stewart*, who came to Southern as a Kappa man. Through his untiring efforts Alpha Sigma Chapter of **Kappa Alpha Psi** became an active organization,¹ in 1936.

Through the years Alpha Sigma has initiated many men and at present have the largest membership of any Greek Organization on the Campus.²

F. **Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity**

**Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity** was the fourth and last fraternity to be established on this campus. *Dr. William H. Gray*, then Principal of the Southern University Demonstration School, started a movement to secure an Alpha chapter on the campus. His efforts were fruitful, and on **December 11, 1936**, Beta Sigma Chapter was established on this campus.¹ The first initiation ceremony was conducted by *Joseph H. B. Evans*. The charter members were: *James P. Christy, George A. Davis, John D. Davis, Henry A. Dumoil, Charles C. Guthrie, James S. Peters, Othneil R. Thompson, Hugh J. Thornton, Edgar Thornton, and Earl L. Waters*. After these, many others have crossed the “burning sand.”

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¹ Minutes of Kappa Alpha Psi, 1936.
² Wesley, Chas H., *History of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc., 1936.*
The annual Anniversary Program and the Annual “Education for Citizenship Week” are outstanding events that the public looks forward to each year. Both of these events commenced in 1937.¹ Through the years, Beta Sigma Chapter of Alpha Phi Alpha has been noted for initiating fewer men than any of the other fraternities on the campus. This was a tradition established by the first members and has never been relinquished. The writer has observed the clannishness of this fraternity on the campus. Frequently during the noon hours one may observe them all together in a very spirited “bull session.” This was particularly noticeable during the 1946-1947 session.

During the war most of the Alpha men were in the service and during the 1944-1945 session, one brother kept the chapter active.² In the latter part of 1945, the men began to return to school and the Alpha fraternity began to grow anew.

¹ Minutes of Beta Sigma Chapter, Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc., 19336.
It reached its highest membership peak since its establishment in 1936, during the last semester of the 1946-1947 with twenty-eight members.¹

G. Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority

In the spring of 1940, Beta Psi Chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority took its place among the Greek letter organizations at Southern University.² The sponsors of the new chapter were Miss Elsie Mae Lewis, of the Social Science department and Miss Henrietta Baranco of the English department. The charter members were five young women of outstanding scholarship. They were: Lysbia Day, Girthering Evans, Garnet Conant, Willie Mae Houston, and Ethel Gowen. Under the leadership of these energetic young women, the infant chapter grew in prestige and in number.

Although the youngest chapter on the campus, in 1942, Beta Psi, not only maintained the highest scholastic average among the Greeks, but had several sorors holding T. H. Harris Scholarships, as well as five pledgees.³ One⁴ of the two charter members of the scientific honor Society, Beta Kappa Chi, was soror Pearl Reed. Beta Psi has had numerous of its sorors and pledgees initiated into Alpha Kappa Mu Honor Society. At present, a pledgee, Miss Dorothy B. Allen, is national Vice-President of Alpha Kappa Mu.⁵

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¹ Minutes of Beta Sigma Chapter, Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, 1947.
² Interview with Mrs. H. W. Little, October 10, 1947.
³ Records of Beta Psi Chapter, Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, 1942.
⁴ See page 15
⁵ See page 14
Beta Psi has been inactive since 1945. However, its record is an honorable and admirable one. The young women who comprised this group will long be remembered as the prototype of the intelligent, idealistic, socially responsible young women our universities and colleges aspire to create.

H. **Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority**

The baby of Greek Organizations on Southern’s Campus is the **Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority**. Beta Alpha Chapter was organized on **December 8, 1945**. Soror Mary S. Carter, Soror P. Ellis, Soror E. Bell and Dean of Students M. L. Harvey were instrumental in the establishment of the sorority on the campus. The charter members were Gloria Bell, Roseland Fortenberry, Julia Mae Raiey, Jessie Lee Smith and Georgia Washington. During its first year of existence on the campus, the sorority strived to gain recognition among older Greek organizations on the campus. It was through the Pan-Hellenic Council that this sorority was helped along and was treated fairly by the older and more experienced Greeks. It must be said here that the **Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority** has now become well established on the campus and has gained considerably in popularity since its very short existence on the campus.

1 Interview with Geraldine Breaux, Vice-Basileus of Beta Alpha Chapter, Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, October 17, 1947.
I. **The Pan-Hellenic Council**

In order to serve as some type of governing body, which would coordinate the activities of Greek groups on the campus, the Pan Hellenic Council was established on the campus.\(^1\) It grew out of the Intra-fraternal Council which was a very loose governing body. The general duties of the Council are: \(^2\)

1. To create harmony among the Greek organizations on the campus.
2. To coordinate the various social activities so as to have some degree of cooperation.
3. To set the dates for probations and rush parties.
4. To notify Greek organizations of their scholastic standings.

The work of this council has proven very beneficial in suppressing friction that invariably arises among Greek groups.

V. **Honor Societies**

A. **Alpha Kappa Mu Honor Society**

In order to promote and encourage sincere and zealous effort in all fields of knowledge, the administration undertook the task of establishing a chapter of Alpha Kappa Mu Honor Society and was successful in May of 1942.\(^3\) At this time in the history of Southern there were those who merited recognition for outstanding scholarship. The purposes of the organization are: \(^4\)

1. To promote high scholarship
2. To encourage sincere and zealous effort in all fields of knowledge and service.

\(^1\) Interview with Dean Harvey, November 6, 1947.
\(^2\) Constitution of Pan-Hellenic Council
\(^3\) Interview with Miss Dorothy Allen, October 15, 1947.
\(^4\) Constitution of Alpha Kappa Mu