

**Report of the Historian (#22)**  
**to the One Hundred Sixty-Seventh Annual Convention**  
**of the Chi Psi Fraternity**



*The Seventy-Seventh Annual Convention of Chi Psi Fraternity at the Lodge of Alpha Psi, Ithaca, New York, 21-23 February 1918.*

1. **This Convention** is just the third to be held in Ithaca (with convenient transportation to Ithaca usually a major issue), although the 41st to be held in New York State (24 in New York City, 5 in Troy, 5 in Schenectady, 3 in Clinton, 2 in Albany, and 2 in Albany). The two prior Conventions in Ithaca were held on 21-23 February 1818 (in the midst of the Great World War) and 5 on September 1953 (early in the relatively tranquil Eisenhower years).

2. **Alpha Psi was founded at Cornell twice**, in 1869 and in 1885. It is impossible to reconstruct an accurate record of Chi Psi at Cornell in the period from early April 1869 until autumn 1870. During the year and a half immediately following the university's opening in October 1868, seven national fraternities appeared at Cornell. Andrew White, co-founder and president of the University at the time, had been a Sigma Phi at Hobart and welcomed fraternities and the advantages they offered his undergraduates. Several of the larger fraternities, including Chi Psi, soon became dissatisfied, however, with the disorderly conditions of fraternity life at the newly founded institution and requested that their charters be suspended. After fifteen years of lying dormant, Alpha Psi refounded in 1885, due to the unceasing efforts of George B. Turner,  $\Psi$ '73, who was initiated during the initial brief period of existence. Brother Turner was able to revive the Alpha by recruiting eleven young men to form the base group for the re-founding. They were initiated on 24 April 1885.

Beginning in 1886, Alpha Psi occupied two floors of the Sage block in downtown Ithaca, before moving to a commodious house on Buffalo Street where they remained until 1896, when they acquired the most beautiful and costly fraternity home in America – the Fiske-McGraw mansion – through the efforts of Clarence F. Wyckoff, Y'98, and his brother, Edward G. Wyckoff, Y'98 (later an Alpha Visitor).

3. **Ninety years ago**, in 1918 the first Ithaca Convention was held early in the year – on the 21st through the 23rd of February – so weather was a bit of

an issue for some delegates traveling to New York State. (One can see light snow on the ground of the Official Photograph above.) Editor and future #23 Slip Slifer, A'11, E'12, wrote at the time that all the Alphas were canvassed “for the purpose of compiling plans to protect ourselves from too wide a breach in our fraternal fabric, and for the purpose of knitting the ties of brotherhood more closely together, because we certainly are confronted with most unusual conditions [The Great World War], for the world is assuredly cleaning house, and we must learn the fine art of adaptation.”

Brother Slifer, noting that a Convention “usually spells big hotels, lavish entertainment, and so on. Not so with this one.” In keeping with the spirit of the times, “this Convention was held in the Lodge of Alpha Psi; all the delegates were housed there, no elaborate entertainments were provided, and the result was that a crowd of men, both young and old, were brought closely together in enjoyable companionship, and there was nothing to distract from work, the main idea of the Convention. Every man had an excellent time and went home feeling grateful for the hospitality of Alpha Psi and feeling that a milestone of progress for the Fraternity had been passed.”

The Convention was called to order on Thursday by Ernest F. Clymer,  $\Psi$ '00, presiding #6, and Walter K. Belknap, X'19, served as secretary. Delegates took up the absorbing question of the conditions at the various Alphas (numbers were generally slightly down with men off to fight in the war). The numbers seemed symptoms of the general world conditions to which humankind was conforming. In summary, Slifer suggested that we had “no other course to pursue than to weigh our strength in the balance, stand up and face the music, and see our problems through to the end properly finished.”

In those days, the granting of an Alpha charter was done anytime during the year by mailing a ballot to each Alpha. But the rechartering of Alpha Eta at Bowdoin was discussed at great length and an approval endorsement by the Convention passed on a vote of 15–3. (The sub-

sequent vote by mail was approved by the required four-fifths majority, and our "honored sister Alpha of earlier days which became dormant is now to be revived." The local Phi Theta Upsilon Fraternity was the petitioning body, and they have given a good account of themselves. "Today Chi Psi needs, and in fact can always use the right material, and this new crowd has certainly furnished unmistakable evidence of their fitness to become Brothers."

**4. A Reunion at Psi:** In June of 1918, also ninety years ago, one of the most interesting reunion gatherings of "old grads" in some years in Ithaca was held when three members of the Cornell Class of 1871, all charter members of Alpha Psi and a member of the class of 1873, also a member of Psi, met there. The quartet included Brothers S.H. Aby, of Crystal Springs, Miss., who claimed the distinction of being the only Confederate veteran who attended Cornell University, John E. Moore, of Grand Rapids, E. Parker, of Buffalo, and former judge George B. Turner, of Auburn, who figured so prominently in the rebuilding of the Alpha Psi Lodge.

Brother Parker was initiated into Chi Psi at Amherst College. He entered Cornell with Brothers Aby and Moore when it opened in 1869. These three men were all given a year's credit for work done in other institutions. Brother Parker was considered the primary founder of Alpha Psi of Chi Psi.

The meeting was the culmination of more than six months of correspondence going back and forth between members of the quartet.

It was Brother Aby's first visit to his alma mater since he left Ithaca in 1870. He came to Cornell after service under the Stars and Bars in the "Recent Unpleasantness" (the War Between the States). He said that as far as he was able to ascertain, he was the only Confederate veteran who ever attended the University. At the time of the reunion, Aby was editor of *The Meteor* at Crystal Springs, Miss. The other three alumni were all lawyers.

Aby had just been to Washington, D.C. where he had attended a Confederate reunion. "War\* is welcomed by me," said Brother Aby, "for I see in it the complete elimination of all sectionalism and the cementing of all sections of the country into a mighty and unconquering whole. Our people are responding with alacrity to the call to arms. The South will do her part nobly although at one time she strove with might and main to dishonor the flag which so proudly floats over all of us as an emblem of a united and patriotic country."

**5. Fifty-five years ago,** the other Ithaca Convention was held on 5 September 1953 at Willard Straight Hall. When Willard Straight Hall opened, it was one of the few student unions in the country. Dorothy Straight built it in 1925 as a memorial to her husband, Willard Dickerman Straight. The student union would be a place that would lead to "the enrichment of human contacts of student life." The Convention Chair (#6) that year was long-time *P&G* editor Hiram L. Kennicott, EA'13; Wallace Goodwin, O'51, the Central Office Visitor, was the Convention Secretary.

**5. One hundred years ago,** *The Purple and Gold* published a page that was along the lines of today's

\* *The Great World War (WWI)*

Harper's Index. A few of the items in that fall's issue included:

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- Hazing was officially abolished at Amherst.
  - Sigma Phi has entered Wisconsin.
  - They have fire slides on the new Psi Lodge.
  - Underclass rush has been abolished at Cornell.
  - The New England Alumni Association Committee ought to wake up. Cannot some sturdy Downeaster prod them into activity?
  - Alpha Delta Phi has left Harvard.
  - Zeta Psi is dead at Columbia.
  - Phi Kappa Pi is a new fraternity at Stevens.
  - They are talking of making Rutgers a State University.
  - California's only local has entered Alpha Delta Phi Fraternity.
  - Kappa Alpha Northern has a larger percentage of Canadian chapters than any other fraternity.
  - The average size of the Alphas this year is 19.7; last year 18.7; for the past ten years has been 16.1.
  - Twelve Alphas show an increase over last year's numbers; three a decrease; two remain the same.
  - The largest Alpha is Psi with 34 men. the smallest is Beta Delta with 10.
  - Psi has led the list for 7 successive years.
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**7. Some comparative data of 1908:**

Alpha	College	Opening Membership	Initiated	Pledged	Probable 1908-09
Pi	Union	10	7	-	16
Theta	Williams	14	11	3	25
Mu	Middlebury	11	4	0	16
Alpha	Wesleyan	13	4	4	17
Phi	Hamilton	11	7	-	18
Epsilon	Michigan	16	6	5	24
Chi	Amherst	23	-	7	30
Psi	Cornell	22	12	2	34
Nu	Minnesota	14	6	7	20
Iota	Wisconsin	18	7	6	25
Rho	Rutgers	10	6	1	16
Xi	Stevens	11	6	-	17
Alpha D	Georgia	11	4	-	15
Beta D	Lehigh	7	2	1	10
Gamma D	Stanford	9	5	4	16
Delta D	Berkeley	11	9	4	20
Epsilon D	Chicago	10	-	8	18

**8. One hundred years ago, in 1908,** Alpha Psi largely completed the construction of the new Lodge, just two years after the tragic fire of 1906. Before the fire was extinguished (it burned continuously for 24 hours), loyal alumni arrived in Ithaca to offer succor and assistance, until they numbered as many as forty. From his home in Auburn, New York, George Turner, Ψ'73, was the first to arrive. Immediately, this group, under Brother Turner's guidance, began considering ways of replacing the home and honoring those who had died.

Since the Fiske-McGraw mansion had been insured only to the extent of the remaining mortgage, \$20,000 of which remained out-standing, Alpha Psi was left bankrupt of funds, though not in loyalty and generosity. Of the alumni who returned, many gave substantial

amounts immediately to start anew. Thus, on the very day that the Lodge burned to the ground, a campaign to construct a new home was underway under the direction of George C. Miller, Ψ'87, with considerable assistance from Brother Turner.

By 1908, a new Lodge was standing on the same site as the previous Lodge, for a cost of \$75,000. Some Brothers of the Class of '08 spent at least a night in the new Lodge before graduating that Spring. The Brothers moved in fully for the 1909-10 academic year. While the new facility was not as ornate as the Fiske-McGraw mansion, it was a dignified structure that met the expectations of the Alpha, and was again the finest fraternity home at Cornell. Finely sculptured stone fragments, salvaged from the fire, were incorporated into the new building. Similar fragments were sent to other Alphas who had them built into their Lodges and were known as "Psi Stones."

Also built into the new Lodge, on the first landing of the broad oak staircase, was the stained glass window contributed by the parents of Billy Nichols in honor of their son and Oliver Schmuck, who died trying to save him. The inscription ("Greater love hath no man...") lives on today as a symbol of a night so tragic and of heroism so shining.

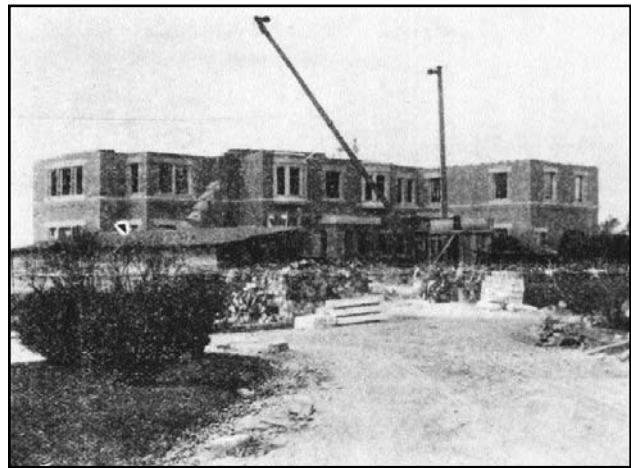
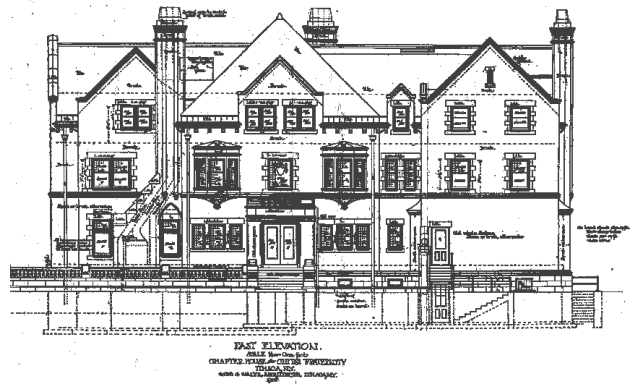
In 1908, *The Purple and Gold* offered thoughts about the new Lodge: "The architects in planning the Lodge succeeded in securing an outward appearance which enhances the effect of the spacious grounds of which it forms the center, by specifying a dark red, vitrified brick for the body of the walls and making the foundations, cornices, window settings and other decorative work of white stone, and topping the whole with a heavy red tile roof. The beauty of the general when a background of trees and shrubs and long stretches of green lawn are considered, may well be imagined.

"The general interior effect combines an impression of comfort and practicality, with elegance secured rather by the genuineness and solidity of the materials used than by their elaborate decoration."

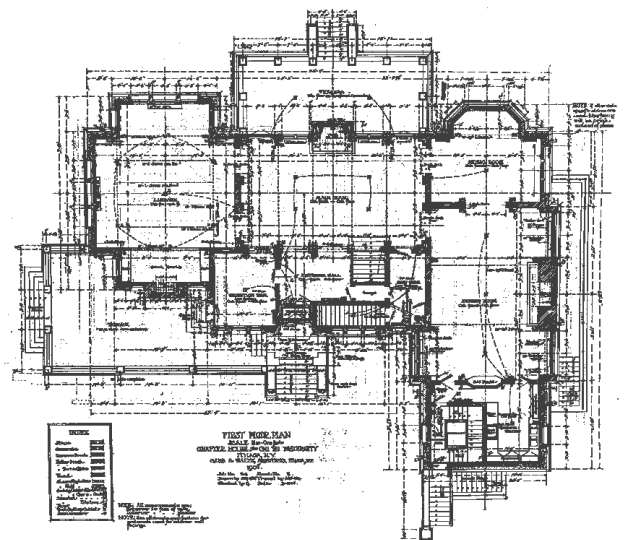
"The plans contemplated a three-story, brick and stone structure, with a ground plan in the general shape of an "L," but with the short arm pointing from right to left. The west facade overlooks the city of Ithaca and Lake Cayuga, and has a large veranda extending across the middle portion of the building. The east facade contains the main entrance, and a large terrace extends part way around to the south side. The north facade overlooks Fall Creek Gorge.

"Entering the Lodge from the main entrance, we pass through a small entrance hall into the main hall, a large room 37 by 22 feet. Opposite the main entrance is a large fireplace, ornamented with carvings and other decorative pieces saved from the old Lodge. To the left and right of the fireplace are two sets of French windows which give access to the veranda of the west facade. Oak is used throughout this story both for woodwork and flooring.

"Turning to the left, two large doors form an entrance to the library, 36 by 28 feet in dimension.



Construction photo and plans of the new Alpha Psi Lodge in early 1908



Bookcases and seats surround the walls, and the east side is given over to an angle nook with a large fireplace carrying bas-relief carvings from the old Lodge as well as ornamental woodwork. The windows from this nook overlook the terrace on the southeast corner of the building.

"On the other side of the main hall is the music room, 22 feet long by 16 feet 8 inches in width, with windows on the west and north walls. It is separated from the dining room by a sliding door entrance. The dimensions of this latter room are 35 by 22 feet. In the middle of the north wall, between two sets of three windows, is the largest fireplace in the Lodge.

“It is a heavy brick structure, ornamented principally with large carved stone heads, in imitation of gargoyles, which were originally decorated cornices on the outside of the old Lodge. The ground floor also has a small reception room to the left of the main entrance and a cloak room and the main staircase to the second floor on the right.

“The second floor contains twelve rooms and two lavatories built with the end in view that when the Alpha gave house parties, one wing of the second floor would be shut off from the other. The rooms are all fairly large and are well provided with windows, as well as having one or two wardrobes each in attachment. The floors are oak and woodwork is cypress.

“At the left and right of the main hall on the second floor, the staircases leading up to the third floor are found. This floor consists of three large studies and four large rooms to be used as dormitories, aside from the ample attic room for the storage of trunks and the like. The rooms are furnished identically to those on the second floor.

“The Lodge was planned to accommodate 28 men, but from 30 to 32 could find accommodation without the least crowding. The construction of this building marks several advances in the erection of fraternity houses, chief among which is its practically fireproof, having solid brick partition walls, reinforced concrete floorings, service stairs built of iron, and a trunk lift, built around with a fire wall and furnished with iron floors. In addition to these precautions against fire and to facilitate escape in case of fire, there are applied at three places on the outside of the structure, galvanized iron slide poles as a means of fire escape.

“Other distinctive features are the ease with which it can be adapted to the uses of a house party and its thoughtful arrangement to the needs of fraternity life. The opinion is general that this new Lodge of Alpha Psi will serve as a model of fraternity lodge construction for some time to come.”

*(Written by Werner W. Goetz, Psi '09, a name you'll recognize from the fire story as an injured survivor)*

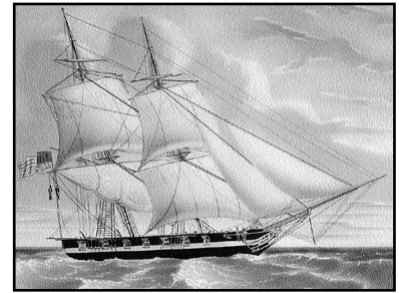
**9. One hundred sixty years ago**, in 1848, the eight Alphas then founded were able to gather for their meeting in Williamstown, Massachusetts. The original Alphas represented some of the finest schools of the day in New England and New York, and way out west at Michigan.



*From 125 and from 25 years ago, founding pictures of Alpha Xi at Stevens and Alpha Xi Delta at Texas Tech.*

Two years earlier, Chi Psi in Ann Arbor had established the country's first fraternity house. Gold was discovered in 1848 in California, although it would be nearly half a century before Chi Psi extended its circle that far west.

It might be noted that the final chapter of the “Somers Mutiny” was also written in 1848. Some two years before, the Somers had been assigned to blockade the port of Veracruz in 1846, and it capsized while chasing a Mexican ship and sank within ten minutes. Of its 76 souls, 32 drowned. After the hanging of Spencer and the others in 1842, many who served on board believed that the ship was haunted and cursed. Up until two weeks before the Somer sank, crew members reported seeing ghosts in the rigging, usually on stormy nights. In the years after the hangings, as the facts became known, the force of public opinion was generally against the Captain Alexander Slidell McKenzie. Even though McKenzie was held officially guiltless in a court martial, he was said to be a broken man in disgrace. He died on Friday the 13th of September, 1848.



**10. Eighty-five years ago**, in 1923, the Fraternity's greatest single benefactor, John Wendell Anderson, E'90, became the sixth President of Chi Psi. Brother Anderson was an early backer of Henry Ford, having served as Ford's attorney in the organization of the Ford Motor Company. In addition to gifts to the Educational Trust and the Philip Spencer Memorial Trust, he donated the Ann Arbor Central Office property and gave matching monies to all Alphas for the debt reduction drive just prior to World War II. This year also marks Alpha Iota Delta's 85th anniversary at Georgia Tech.

**11. 2008 is the 125th Anniversary** of Alpha Xi at Stevens Institute of Technology in Hoboken, NJ, and the 25th anniversary of Alpha Xi Delta at Texas Tech in Lubbock, TX.

**17.** Respectfully submitted, I am Yours in Chi Psi,

*W. S. Hattendorf Jr.*

W. S. Hattendorf Jr., AΔ'69, Σ'82, Historian

