

**Beta Iota-Purdue**

**Fast Facts:**

* Installation date: February 17, 1940
* Location: Lafayette, Indiana
* Region: 4

**History:**

In 1865, the Indiana General Assembly voted to take advantage of the Morrill Land-Grant Colleges Act of 1862, and began plans to establish an institution with a focus on agriculture and engineering. Communities throughout the state offered their facilities and money to bid for the location of the new college. Popular proposals included the addition of an agriculture department at Indiana State University or at what is now Butler University. By 1869, Tippecanoe County’s offer included $150,000 from Lafayette business leader and philanthropist John Purdue, $50,000 from the county, and 100 acres of land from local residents. On May 6, 1869, the General Assembly established the institution in Tippecanoe County as Purdue University, in the name of the principal benefactor. Classes began on September 16, 1874, with six instructors and 39 students. Professor John S. Hougham was Purdue’s first faculty member and served as acting president between the administrations of presidents Shortridge and White. A campus of five buildings was completed by the end of 1874. Purdue issued its first degree, a Bachelor of Science in chemistry, in 1875 and admitted its first female students that fall. In the early 1900s, the enrollment of women began increasing and women's dormitories were being built.

Miss Jean Soehner, a member of Alpha Tau chapter at Butler, transferred to Purdue in 1936. Several girls approached her about starting a Delta Gamma chapter, and a club was organized to investigate the matter. They named the club Pedalion and within two years this group was competitive with the six national sororities.

There was a good deal of prejudice in the province against Purdue as a field of expansion because of pre-conceived ideas about the type of women who attended Purdue. With the persistence of the Pedalion members, and the help of the Purdue faculty, inspections were scheduled by Delta Gamma representatives. Their impressions were very favorable. Dorothy Knight Wildasin, Alpha Omicron-Miami (Ohio), then Province Secretary and later Fraternity President, said it best, "This group has pluck, courage, and initiative which would form a fine nucleus for a chapter of Delta Gamma."

In the North Ballroom of the Purdue Memorial Union on a February morning, quite a few girls were scurrying around in their platform wedge shoes and their crepe dresses with little puffy sleeves and padded shoulders. These girls were all part of the new Delta Gamma “colony” and getting ready to receive their charter and be installed as Beta Iota chapter of Delta Gamma Fraternity at Purdue University in West Lafayette, Indiana. Dorothy Deming VanBuskirk, Zeta-Albion, was the chapter adviser and she prepared the women well for the installation. Beta Iota was the only chapter installed in 1940.

The Initiation services were held in the afternoon and Fraternity President Marguerite Winant, Omicron, Adelphi, Vice-President Roberta Abernethy, Epsilon-Ohio State, and Fraternity Treasurer Edith Taylor Smith, Alpha Beta-Swarthmore, along with assorted Province secretaries and guests from many chapters attended and participated in the initiation. Theta-Indiana and Alpha Tau-Butler performed the initiation ceremony for 54 women, 18 of whom were patronesses representing faculty and citizens of West Lafayette. Beta Iota was installed on February 17, 1940.

After installation there were a few difficulties, the first being a chapter house. Because of the advent of World War II Beta Iota rented the former Kappa Sigma house. Following the war in 1946, they relocated to the basement recreation rooms of the women’s North Residence Hall. However this didn’t last long and the chapter was forced to move to the attic of Cary East until a house at 303 Waldron was ready for occupancy. Because the chapter was “unsettled” in housing, the 1946 pledge class was initiated in the Sigma Alpha Epsilon home. The attitude toward the fraternity/sorority system was very friendly and cooperative at the time.

The chapter immediately involved itself in campus activities and in 1949, Patricia Cunningham, became the first DG Miss Indiana.

In the summer of 1957 preparations for a new house were in progress. The old house was torn down and members lived in one-floor, flat-roofed huts during the construction, according to member Nancy Purcifull Gustafson. Finally in May 1958 they broke ground for a new house, and a $300,000 Georgian “U” shaped house, complete with a courtyard effect was begun. Nine months later, in February 1959, the overanxious Beta Iotas moved into their new home.

During the 1950s, the chapter participated in campus-wide organizations and endless honoraries were bestowed on many chapter members. They realized however that they needed to put more effort into scholarship; by 1953 they were ranked third and by 1958 they were ranked the number one group on campus.

Other than scholastics and activities, the Beta Iotas put much effort into philanthropic projects. The Delta Tau Delta and Delta Gamma “Toyland” booth at the Greek Week Carnival and the annual DG Ice Cream Social, held on the island in Waldron Street, were very successful. Thanks went to the Glover’s Ice Cream truck from Frankfort, Indiana, whose products the DGs sold, receiving the profits, as Mr. Glover’s wife, Virginia Mann Glover, was a Beta Iota initiate. Another project was “Hannah’s Gift Shop” held at the University Book Store every holiday season.

The years of the 1950s and 1960s found DGs enjoining playing cards in the chapter house with Coke in hand and cigarette in mouth. A campus group named “The Salty Dog” was the popular choice for dance music and social events. Dress was mostly saddles, cords or Bermuda shorts on campus with bouffant hair styles very popular. The chapter house received a newly-designed living and dining room done in shades of peach and blue, and a 3,500 pound, seven-foot anchor was located on the front lawn next to the new red brick walkway.

The anchor, donated by the 1965 pledge class, became the object of various fraternal shenanigans. None compared to the April 1970 scheme when during a “panty raid” prank, the anchor was dropped (pulled or pushed, perhaps) in the Wabash River. According to the Lafayette Journal and Courier, the anchor was rescued when five Purdue men swam in the cold waters to find the anchor, then off-duty policeman, Art Burroughs, did some scuba diving and attached a wrecker cable to its top and pulled it up, delivering it safely back to the chapter house, where it was attached more securely to the ground.

The 1970s saw chapter members wearing minis and flared pants and transitions were everywhere. Radical proposals such as a proposal for a “coed” fraternity were heard throughout campus, but activities, honors and philanthropies were the main areas of involvement. Individual activities soared during this period with many honors bestowed on members. Delta Gamma was recognized for raising the most money of 14 sororities for philanthropy in 1974. In 1978 still another creative project was initiated by Beta Iota. The chapter sold tickets that could be turned in for food, music and a DG date, so that they could build a curb-cut which enabled handicap individuals to follow an accessible path from the sidewalk to the street. The seniors provided a new jukebox for the event.

A new chapter tradition started in 1975 when the Beta Iotas named their first Anchor Man. Gary Clayton, Phi Kappa Tau, received the title for his “Mr. Fix-it and Chauffeur” image.

Beginning in 1980 the chapter won the Gamma Phi Delta Panhellenic Spirit Award for five consecutive years, summarizing the chapter’s intense participation in various Panhellenic activities. However, the most exciting award came at the 1980 Convention in Denver when Beta Iota won the Outstanding Chapter Award. Individual members continued to be recognized and showered with awards on campus.

In 1982 the chapter held its first Anchor Splash®, raising $1,500 for the Foundation. In 1984 the Challenge 50 Bike Race was organized with proceeds going to Purdue Cancer Research. Collegiate women were still wearing minis or “pegleg” pants, colored sunglasses, argyle vests, Levis or walking shorts, while men were looking very “preppy” at the beginning of the decade, while dress turned more punk-rock with some brightly colored hair as popular music such as “Flashdance” initiated these new fads. Fitness-fanatics showed up on campus, striding across paths and walkways.

By 1984 there were 21 sorority members of the Purdue Panhellenic Association; however, the fraternity/sorority community, including the 26 men’s fraternities, was showing a decline on campus with only 16 percent of the student body being members. Many chapters worked to create a more positive image for the Greeks. Beta Iota continued to receive first and second place rankings in scholarship and they continued to receive the Gamma Phi Delta Spirit Award for 12 years. In 1986 Beta Iota-Purdue won the recently created Patricia Peterson Danielson Award, honoring chapters who met the Fraternity standards of excellence. It quickly became the chapter’s favorite award to aspire for.

The 1987 Anchor Splash exceeded all expectations when $6,100 was raised for Service for Sight & Aid to the Blind, and once again the chapter was presented with the Outstanding Chapter Award at the 1988 Convention in Philadelphia.

The last addition on the house was built in 1989.