

**Beta Phi-Pennsylvania**

**Fast Facts:**

* Installation date: April 7, 1946
* Closure date: March 1958
* Location: Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
* Region: 1

**History:**

Eager to create a college to educate future generations of Philadelphians, Benjamin Franklin presented to the men and women of Philadelphia in the fall of 1749 his vision of a school to be known as the "Publick Academy of Philadelphia.” The four colleges then in existence in the English colonies -- Harvard, William and Mary, Yale, and Princeton – were all schools for educating the clergy, rather than preparing their students for lives of business and public service. With his characteristic zeal and intent on seeing his Academy of Philadelphia become a reality, Franklin assembled a board of trustees and looked about for the least costly way to build a campus. Amidst the turmoil of the American Revolution a few years later, the state of Pennsylvania seized the College of Philadelphia in 1779 because the revolutionary Pennsylvania state government saw the College as a Tory bastion. The state transformed the College into the University of the State of Pennsylvania, thus creating both America's first state school and America's first university. This new university was born with a more egalitarian vision than ever imagined before in the colonies, with members of the Board of Trustees from every denomination and the only non-sectarian faculty in the new nation. The University of Pennsylvania earned its current name when the University was made private, once the revolutionary fervor had died down, in 1791.

Since 1945, the curriculum has steadily broadened to include virtually every significant academic discipline and UPenn has opened to tens of thousands of women, minorities, and international students through need-blind admissions and enrollment.

Members of the University of Pennsylvania administration began communicating with the Fraternity as early as 1944. During this time, several affiliates of various Delta Gamma chapters had transferred to the University of Pennsylvania, and their presence left a favorable impression on the administration. By May of 1945, the Dean of Women at UPenn requested a formal written petition for a charter, which he would present to the appropriate committees at UPenn. His request was that the chapter at UPenn be founded with at least four women previously affiliated with other chapters so that they could help get the new chapter off the ground.

Both the University and Fraternity looked favorably upon opening a chapter at UPenn, and the Beta Phi chapter was officially installed on the weekend of April 5-7, 1945. Beginning on Friday evening, the Philadelphia alumnae chapter arranged a welcome dinner at Kugler’s Restaurant to welcome the fraternity Council. Following dinner, all adjourned to a Round Table meeting at the Christian Association.

On Saturday, the Initiation ceremony was held at the Bellevue-Stratford Hotel in the afternoon. Twenty women were initiated, three of whom had been previously affiliated with other chapters. A banquet followed in the evening and was attended by over 70 guests. Fraternity President Florence Cornell Bingham, Chi-Cornell, presented newly elected chapter president Joanne Davis with the Beta Phi charter. Fraternity Secretary Dorothy Knight Wildasin, Alpha Omicron-Miami (Ohio) presented the new initiates of Beta Phi with their membership certificates. The Installation reception was held on Sunday at the Bennett Club on UPenn’s campus.

In the 1950s, the chapter faced membership and financial issues. In Beta Phi’s history, the chapter never reached total, and seldom met quota for each recruitment period. Because of the chronic membership issues, financial issues ensued. The chapter was also in debt to the Fraternity after being given an $18,000 loan for purchase of a chapter house. The chapter house only housed five women, and the financial issues burdened both the chapter and the Fraternity.

In March of 1958, Council members voted to remove the Beta Phi charter. This decision would be finalized after the 60-day period, during which collegians and alumnae could submit letters for consideration by Council.

After a visit to the chapter by Fraternity President Helen Preston, Xi-Michigan and Province Secretary Jean Chase, Lambda-Minnesota, it was deemed that the issues plaguing Beta Phi were insurmountable and that Council should proceed with their intended plan. On May 5, 1978, Council finalized the decision to revoke Beta Phi’s charter.

Plans for a Beta Phi chapter house began before the chapter was installed. They found a property on Walnut Street, and with a loan from the Fraternity, were able to purchase it. In October of 1946, the Beta Phi House Corporation asked the Fraternity to increase this loan by $3,000 in order to furnish renovations for the house. The Fraternity granted the increase in the sum of the loan, and the renovations were completed.

In September of 1955, the house was broken into and two fires were started in the basement. One fire was started in a box of stationary and burned itself out, but the other fire was started in the box containing the chapter’s ritual equipment, and that fire had to be put out by the local fire department.

In June of 1962, the house was sold after years of financial strain and the chapter’s inability to make payments on the loan.