

**Beta Psi-Alabama**

**Fast Facts:**

* Installation date: February 8, 1947
* Close date: January 1, 1979
* Re-establishment date: November 12, 2011
* Location: Tuscaloosa, AL
* Region: 3

**History:**

The University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, was founded in 1831. In 1945, when Delta Gamma first visited the campus the university consisted of 4,196 students (2,329 males, 1,867 females). It was a 4-year college offering Bachelor of Science and Bachelor of Arts degrees in five different schools (chemistry, commerce, law, home economics, and mines). There was also a graduate school program. Twenty-five fraternities and 15 sororities were installed on the campus. After careful investigation by Dorothy Wildasin, Delta Gamma Fraternity Secretary and Expansion Chairman, the University and College Panhellenic confirmed an invitation for Delta Gamma to colonize on campus.

A Delta Gamma transfer from Beta Delta-Colorado College, Clare Barton; the Dean of Women, Dr. Pauline Wilson; and her assistant, Mrs. Jennie Howard, assisted in interviews and the colonization of Beta Psi chapter. The president of Beta Tau-Miami (Florida), and another member, both having spent a semester on the Alabama campus the previous year, helped in the first pledging of nine women in 1946. Later that year the group increased to 17 members.

February 8 and 9, 1947, is when Beta Psi was formally installed at the university. Twenty-four women and two alumnae members were initiated. The ceremony was conducted by members of Delta Gamma Council; the Province Secretary, Lillian Harward; Theta-Indiana chapter member, Kathleen Coleman and five women from Alpha Psi-Mississippi. Fraternity President, Florence Bingham, presented the charter of Beta Psi to Dorothy Herrmann, president.

That afternoon, the first meeting of Beta Psi chapter was called to order. The alumnae board of advisors was announced with Mrs. Mulvahill as chairman and responsible for scholarship; Mrs. Hodnette, rush; Mrs. Warner, financial; and Mrs. Terry, social. Clare Barton was officially affiliated into Beta Psi chapter during the meeting.

From the beginning, Beta Psi participated in campus events. The first involvement in 1947 was sponsoring a speaker (along with Mortar Board and the University International Relations club) featuring Ruth Bryan Rohde-Kappa-Nebraska, the first woman elected to Congress from the South (state of Florida in 1929 and 1931) and America’s first woman diplomat (appointed by President Franklin D. Roosevelt) as minister to Denmark. This took place the following day after installation of the chapter, February 10, 1947, at Morgan Hall. Mrs. Rohde came for the installation and is said to be the first woman to map out concise plans for world peace, the topic of her speech.

Other first social events on campus were a dance, hosted on March 28 and a panel discussion on April 6. Beta Psi took the top scholastic rating for the year 1946-47. And, immediately had a member, Laura Elllis, president of Women’s Student Government Association, inducted into Capstone, the university’s outstanding student leadership honorary. Led by member, Betty Jane Holder, Beta Psi became involved in the World War II war efforts collecting and sending packages of food and clothing to the 93 families of a small town in Mouleydier, France, which was burned to the ground by the Germans in 1944.

Originally housed in a dormitory, the chapter moved into a house on Colonial Drive during the war, once owned by Phi Sigma Kappa fraternity. Plans to build a new chapter house began in 1950, and the house was completed in the summer of 1952, housing 32 women. In 1966, an addition was added increasing the capacity to 44 girls.

Over the years, membership continued to increase and traditions were established. A dance honoring pledges was the top social priority after rush. Spring formals were also held similarly, all in the chapter house. Participating in Greek Week “step-singing” was a meaningful endeavor and the first trophy for Beta Psi was won in 1949. They competed in skits as part of the annual “Jamboree” competition which raised funds for various campus projects, receiving a Certificate of Merit from the Senior Honor Society in 1952 for their contribution. In 1950, the chapter won the Homecoming display entitled “Tide Sails over State.” Cheerleaders, dance and song teams, various leadership, scholarship and honors were awarded to the chapter throughout the 1950s.

Anxious to meet the new chapter members, Beta Psi graciously hosted the 1949 biennial conference of Delta Gamma for Province IV. Again, in 1959, they hosted the conference for 200 collegiate and alumnae delegates.

Also in 1959, Beta Psi won the coveted Delta Tau Delta Fraternity Outstanding Sorority trophy and the Panhellenic Junior Scholarship Award at the annual honors convocation. Members were initiated into Phi Beta Kappa national honorary. The highlight of the year for the chapter was the installation of their newly acquired anchor just in time for rush week.

By 1962, Air Force ROTC member Charlotte Stallings welcomed Governor John Patterson to the campus. Mary Ann McDaniel was selected as a “Crimson Girl,” one of the official university hostesses. Peggy Allison, Second Vice President of Triangle; Mary Irwin, Vice President of AWS; Barbara Street, Crimson White office manager; plus two Mortar Board members, rounded out the on-campus recognition of Beta Psi chapter and its 88 members.

In 1965, the chapter house was turned into a riverboat, the Delta Gamma Queen, as rush began. At Honors Convocation in 1967, Mary Ann Blair was tapped for Alpha Lambda Delta honorary; Barbara Cusimano and Mary Beth Ware were listed in “Who’s Who in American Colleges & Universities;” 10 chapter members were tapped for Triangle honorary; two members won awards; one served as Triangle President; two were Spirit officers; and two were AWS officers.

Mrs. Walker served as Housemother from 1968-78 and helped create a wonderful home for the chapter. Beta Psi won the Homecoming display again in 1967, this time with a theme of “Bulldogs become BAMA BELIEVERS.” However, as campuses moved into the 1970s, the traditional needs of campuses changed. It became increasingly evident that college women did not simply enter school, attend classes for four years, meet requirements and graduate. Restrictions of hours were relaxed and Council started reviewing “waivers” of procedures. Rush numbers for Beta Psi saw a decline in the early 1970s. However, in 1972-73, the chapter was awarded an Improved Province Scholarship award. A Christmas party for under privileged children, fall rush, and an after-dinner party with Mrs. Waller were some of the highlights that year. Martha Chapman became a Panhellenic officer in 1973, although by the next year, Beta Psi did not meet quota during rush and with the decrease in numbers, it was becoming more difficult to sustain the chapter. Finances were tight, advisers were scarce or commuting long distances and the chapter house needed many repairs. Chapter size was 50 members in 1978, including 10 pledges. There were 3,000 Greeks at University of Alabama with 17,000 students. Panhellenic and Greek leadership on campus was not strong. Thus, after much deliberation the Council of Delta Gamma Fraternity regretfully suspended Beta Psi chapter officially on January 1, 1979.

Closing a chapter is an enormous feat. The house corporation under the leadership of Molly R. McKay made wise decisions in dispersing the assets. Because “the title of both the land and the chapter house was vested in the University of Alabama by an agreement executed on July 22, 1953, the University had the right to repossess the property upon paying the Fraternity the value of the improvements on the property. This value was to be fixed by agreement or arbitration, less indebtedness due the University.” All property was appraised–building, antiques, furnishings and equipment–the building was sold to the university. It was an honors house at one time, later Delta Sigma Theta Sorority occupied it. In 1998, several houses were torn down by the university to extend the east side of Bryant-Denney stadium. Pi Beta Phi was the only sorority still in residence at the time and they built a new house across the street on “sorority row.”

The very valuable seven feet tall Tiffany grandfather clock, with Whittingdon and Westminster chimes, phases of the moon dial, in a mahogany cabinet, also containing six chimes, three weights and a pendulum, was shipped to Delta Gamma Executive Offices, until such time as a Delta Gamma Chapter is established, re-established, colonized or reinstated on the campus of the University of Alabama, in Tuscaloosa, Alabama. Thus, it is with great joy this clock will be returned to Beta Psi chapter when its new chapter house is complete in 2012.

More than 50 years later, the reinstallation of the chapter represented a monumental effort by hundreds of DG supporters. Delta Gamma’s slogan for the expansion was “Delta Gamma says Roll Tide,” a play on words from their motto calling Alabama’s athletic teams the Crimson Tide. Ongoing support by the Tuscaloosa alumnae was very important and many took advantage of the opportunity to participate when Beta Psi recolonized on August 29, 2011, by pledging 221 women. The Alabama campus today has 30,232 undergraduate students enrolled on its campus–53% of these students are female. There are 31 fraternities with 2,000 members and 23 sororities with 3,000 members in the fall 2011. Panhellenic predicted that more than 200 women were waiting to add their place in Beta Psi history.

On November 12, 2011, the newly colonized Beta Psi chapter initiated 210 women. Fraternity President, Elizabeth Bell Searcy, Epsilon Gamma-Virginia, pinned the anchor badge on every new sister as history was made that day. This was Delta Gamma’s largest-ever colony to be installed and all celebrated the past, the present and the future of the chapter at University of Alabama.

Festivities actually began the night before, as the new members gathered with the Installation team for Inspiration and to prepare for Initiation. The young women shared their already-strong bonds of friendship through stories of their first sisterhood event at a bowling alley, late nights of Homecoming prepping and a twin reveal at a skating rink. A highlight of the evening came when Amy Ackerman performed a song she had written to recap their colony’s journey. Colony consultants Kerry Olson, Phi-Colorado, and Erica Kyle, Delta Lambda, Mississippi State, were given special recognition.

Saturday morning’s sun streamed through the stained-glass anchor in a window of the Tuscaloosa United Methodist Church. Council members’ VP: Membership Shaun Fisher Young, VP Collegians Debbie Byrd Etheridge and VP: Mary Anne Ruman Lachenmaier, joined President Searcy in conducting the ceremony, along with Director: Expansion Cheri Lall Wechsler and Interim Executive Director Tracey Doebling Williams, CAC Jane Williams Simmons, CRC Sherri Hayes Arias, Regional Director Alison Chastain Brackins and Regional Alumnae Specialist Jan Pasek.

Because of overwhelming interest, two receptions were held that afternoon and evening at The Zone at Bryant-Denny Stadium. Hundreds of friends and family of the new initiates, DG alumnae and university guests attended. Kayla Fields accepted the president’s badge, the new charter and chapter gavel. Share in the Future funds from collegiate chapters and alumnae groups were presented and Susan Eddy Kinney, Beta Psi House Corporation President, discussed the progress of the chapter house, set to be completed by the following fall.

The events were the result of years of Fraternity planning and investment, along with the hard work of countless Delta Gamma volunteers and staff members. Their determination and energy brought the Fraternity a great achievement: a new era for Beta Psi chapter at ‘Bama.

As planned, the new chapter house opened in the fall of 2012 and was dedicated in October. The house is built on leased university land and was paid for by funds raised from 191 alumnae, collegians, parents and friends who pledged to help defray the cost of the project, and an unprecedented bond agreement by the University of Alabama. A reception and open house was held for contributors and donors, as well as a dedication ceremony. Among the attendees was Mary Comfort Leonard’s granddaughter, Rose Leonard Paris, Alpha Psi-Mississippi, who presented the chapter with a china plate that Mary Comfort Leonard had hand-painted.