

**Gamma Eta-San Jose State**

**Fast Facts:**

* Installation date: February 7, 1948
* Location: San Jose, CA
* Region: 8

**History:**

What is now San José State University was originally established in 1857 as the Minns Evening Normal School in San Francisco, founded by George W. Minns. In 1862, by act of the California legislature, Minns Evening Normal School became the California State Normal School and graduated 54 women from a three-year program. The school eventually moved to San Jose in 1871, and was given Washington Square Park at Fourth and San Carlos Streets, where the campus remains to this day. southern branch campus would remain under administrative control of the San Jose campus until 1919, when by act of the California state legislature the school became the second campus of the University of California and was renamed the Southern Branch of the University of California. In 1921, the California State Normal School changed its name to the State Teachers College at San Jose. In 1935, the State Teachers Colleges became the California State Colleges, and the school's name was changed again, this time to San Jose State College. In 1972, upon meeting criteria established by the board of trustees and the Coordinating Council for Higher Education, SJSC was granted university status, and the name was changed to California State University, San Jose. Finally, in 1974, the California legislature voted to change the school's name to San José State University.

Prior to World War I, a group of young women formed a group at San Jose State University called Kappa Sigma, or the "Kappa Society." The organization was made up of 15 women, four of whom were faculty members. These outstanding women prided themselves on scholarship, volunteer and charity work, personal dignity, and their close bond of friendship. The society sponsored fundraisers for the Girl Scouts in San Jose. Kappa Society also sponsored an all campus event called Kappa Karnival to benefit the McFadden Health Cottage, an infirmary. The women were described as "attractive, scholarly, active in school affairs." A Kappa women held the position of Secretary of the Student Council for seven years. Three members had been elected Spardi Gras Queen and the group was selected as the best dressed organization at the 1947 Spardi Gras. Kappa Society had an average of 2-3 members in Black Masque, an honorary women's organization consisting of the 13 most prominent senior women. This group of exceptional women repeatedly refused several offers from other national sororities for they knew exactly where they belonged – Delta Gamma.

In November 1947, Fraternity President Florence Cornell Bingham, Chi-Cornell, and other Delta Gamma alumnae were invited to an informal tea at the home Florence Rifenbark. A friend of Mrs. Rifenbark, who was the Kappa Society sponsor, asked her to invite some of the Kappa Society members to her home so they could meet the Delta Gammas and discuss establishing a chapter at San Jose State. President Bingham was asked to say a few words, but since she did not know if Delta Gamma was interested in the San Jose field for expansion, she only spoke of Panhellenic policies and the general standing of Delta Gamma.

Kappa members liked what she said so they invited her and other San Jose alumnae to a tea to meet the rest of Kappa Society. Florence Rifenbark, Ada Hill, Mabel Crumby from the San Jose faculty, former Fraternity president Jessie McGilvray Treat, Upsilon-Stanford, Florence Bingham, and Lucille Packard, president of the Palo Alto alumnae, went to the tea as members of the committee working on the San Jose extension. Several Gamma-UC Berkeley chapter members also attended. Following this event, the alumnae were excited for the Kappa Society to become a Delta Gamma chapter.

A formal petition to Delta Gamma was signed on December 18, 1947 by President Margaret McLean and Vice-President Patricia Griffin, officers of Kappa Society. By January 3, the affirmative vote of all collegiate and alumnae chapters in Province 13 had been obtained, and after hearing an exceptional plea from Kappa Kappa Sigma, Delta Gamma extended an invitation to the Kappa Society to become the Gamma Eta Chapter.

The charter members from the Kappa Society who aided in the establishment of Gamma Eta include: Lenore C. Curtis, Nancy F. Davis, Patricia F. Griffin, Margaret McLean (the chapter's first president), Nancy F. Talbot, Margaret M. O'Shea, Katherine S. Regan, Barbara E. Sheets (the chapter's first vice-president), and Dolores L. Skocko.

Delta Gamma shared the honor with Kappa Alpha Theta of being the first Panhellenic groups to establish new chapters. Both Initiations took place the weekend of February 6-7, 1948. Friday night opened the activities with a round table discussion and informal talks by the Council to acquaint the prospective members with the Fraternity. This event was held at Trinity Episcopal Church. Initiation was held in the early afternoon for the Kappa alumnae pledged earlier in the day, and for the Kappa collegiate members pledged on January 7. The formal Installation banquet was held in the evening at O'Brien's Pompeiian Court.

A model chapter meeting was held on Sunday morning. That afternoon, from 3-5, was a formal reception in the Empire Room at the Hotel St. Claire (now known as the Hyatt St. Claire). Guests included members of the San Jose faculty and friends and relatives of the newly initiated Delta Gammas.

During the late '60s and early '70s, there were incidents of campus violence resulting in a great drop in recruitment interest due to a change in student demographics. In 1970 there were nine sororities on campus and by 1974 there were only five. In April 1973, the chapter was notified of the Council's decision to consider the suspension of the Gamma Eta charter. In June 1973, Fraternity President Kathryn Bell Gary, Mu-Missouri, called with the news that Council had voted to not close the chapter. The alumnae and members of the chapter can be proud that they persevered during this difficult time.

In 1948, a cornerstone-laying ceremony was held at 360 E. Reed Street for a new Delta Gamma house. This house was the first official residence to be built for a San Jose sorority. A $5000 gift was given to the chapter by the Upsilon House Corporation of Stanford University.