

**Pi-Montana**

**Fast Facts:**

* Installation date: September 7, 1911
* Location: Missoula, MT
* Region: 7

**History:**

An act of Congress of February 18, 1881 dedicated 72 sections (46,000 acres) in Montana Territory for the creation of the University. Montana was admitted to the Union on November 8, 1889, and the Montana Legislature soon began to consider where the state's permanent capital and state university would be located. To be sure that the new state university would be in Missoula, the city's leaders made an agreement with the standing capital of Helena that Missoula would stay out of the bidding for the new capital and would support Helena over its leading competitor, Anaconda.

Missoula won the legislative vote for the new university at the Third Montana Legislative Assembly in February 1893. The University was formally opened in 1895. While plans for a university campus were progressing, classes were temporarily held at nearby Willard School. The South Missoula Land Company, owned by A.B. Hammond, Richard Eddy and Marcus Daly, joined with the Higgins family in donating land for the new campus. In June 1898 the cornerstone for A.J. Gibson designed University (Main) Hall was laid and Missoula became "the University City."

In the fall of 1908, three young women, Laura Johnson McVey, Frances Foster Bonner, and Jennie Lyng Kitt had a dream to form a club that would later petition for a national charter. The University– then known as Montana State University – was only thirteen years old when the three came to school. There were 12 professors and 291 students enrolled, and room and board averaged $25 per month. The University was in its present location and had its own buildings. The first graduation class boasted two members, but as the west grew, the university grew by leaps and bounds, for twelve years later there were forty graduates.

The women knew almost from the beginning that Delta Gamma was the national organization they wished to be a part of, and hoped to build on the small sorority culture already started. Sigma Nu and Sigma Chi appeared a few years after the school was chartered, but sororities were slower, as there were none until Kappa Kappa Gamma was chartered in 1909 and Kappa Alpha Theta a year later. After drafting up rules and regulations for membership, eight other young women were invited to join the group and they began meeting secretly each Monday at Bess Bradford’s home.

These eleven women made raising money for their organization a priority by sewing felt banners for football games and selling them at YMCA events. In the fall of 1909 the group went public and was recognized by the university as Sigma Tau Gamma. Immediately thereafter the women petitioned Delta Gamma. Eight young campus leaders joined the founders and are known as the charter members of Pi chapter: Ida Cunningham Bush, Bess Bradford Poplin, Almeda Andrews Farmer, Mamie Burke, Daisy Penman Pendor, Edith Steele McGregor, Helen Weir and Roberta Satterthwaite Morgan. The group thrived on campus, both in scholarship and with notable campus leaders.

After being visited by two national officials, Agnes Burton, Xi-Michigan, Grand Treasurer, and Ethyl Tukey Korsmeyer, Kappa-Nebraska, National Editor, they were told to wait another year to petition again, as it was important to show the group’s viability as a potential chapter. The group lost six members to graduation, but bounced back with a strong recruitment bringing in all the top women from recruitment and garnering campus recognition for oratory, music, and literary work.

With their fingers crossed, the women petitioned Delta Gamma again and had an inspection in the spring of 1910. Enrollment had increased and was expected to do so dramatically each year. This time Pearl McDonald, Beta Gamma-Utah and Genevieve Thornley from Delta Gamma recommended that Sigma Tau Gamma be granted a charter, reporting, “We have an opportunity to start a chapter with an unusually fine group of girls and will be the third fraternity to enter.” At Convention in 1911 it was made official.

At the 1911 Convention, Pi was added to the roll books. Formal chapter Installation was September 7, 1911 at the home of Dr. and Mrs. W.F. Book. Mrs. Book, who had served as the group’s long-time patroness was named an honorary member. A few days later at the Palace Hotel, Pi chapter celebrated with a banquet complete with a small pie decorated with sugar in the shape of the Pi letter at each setting. We know from the installation feature in the *ANCHORA* that, “Laura Johnson presided gracefully as toastmistress. [...] The toasts were cleverly arranged, the first letters of each subject being one of the letters which spell Delta G.”

The first initiation was of February 6, 1912. The chapter moved into a house on University Avenue in 1914. Thirteen young women lived in the house, and it was “much larger than any other sorority house on the campus, having eleven rooms and two grand fireplaces.” That year the chapter blossomed socially with a regular whirl of theater parties, dinners, a steak fry, teas and a big formal ball. The first rush as Delta Gammas was “… beyond our wildest expectations; we pledged eighteen lovely girls, the cream of the crop!” The chapter met in dorm rooms and in rented rooms in town until 1925 when Delta Gamma built the Pi chapter house at 516 University.

Again, the girls had a full social calendar. The biggest affair was held at Frank Lloyd Wright’s Bitter Root Inn, with 17 carloads of members and their guests driving 30 miles from town. Soon, words of war found their way onto campus. On campus, the Red Cross was enrolling classes in first aid and in other courses that might “help back the boys at the front.” Everyone was knitting, sending boxes abroad and buying bonds. The women worked in organizations for immediate aid for the wounded soldiers in France, and joined the Red Cross society.

January, 1918 started a year of improvement for the university. Ground was broken for the building now known as Old Science and at last the Oval was being lighted with gas lamps. By this time, Pi chapter had quite a following of alumnae in Missoula so they decided to organize. They called their association Pi Kappa. That fall, influenza swept the country and the university was closed from October 15.

In 1921, Delta Gamma continued to shine, as the chapter maintained a scholarship average far above that of the entire university average.

All sights were set on working to buy a chapter home instead of renting. Both alumnae and collegiate members launched money-making campaigns: bazaars, dime dances, teas and parties, and the very first rummage sale ever held in Missoula, resulting in more money than they could have ever anticipated.

By 1923, plans for the new house were steaming ahead with a lot a block and a half from the campus, next to Phi Delta Theta. Alumnae efforts were non-stop with sales, bazaars, hope chest raffles and more parties. One memorable event was a children’s garden party that was nearly rained out, but generous hearts made it a financial success with $50 to donate to the house fund.

In 1925, the same year the university got a radio station and Delta Gammas took an active part in broadcasts, the house became a reality. By June, the building committee completed the plans as well as the fund to build. Delta Gamma was the first group on campus to build a new house. That fall Beulah Rice wrote, “We look back on our summer’s work with a great deal of pleasure, glad because we have a new and permanent home for our girls and one of which they can be justly proud.” Indeed, the new house at 516 University was the culmination of dreams and hard work. November 19, 1925 was the official house-warming reception.

The fundraising did not stop there, however. Rummage sales and bazaars were held by the Pi Kappa alumnae to pay off the mortgage loan and landscape the new house. The Fraternity had provided a loan of $3,000 that the alumnae were eager to repay.

The 25th anniversary of Pi chapter in 1936 was a highlight for chapter members and alumnae alike, including one charter member. Alumna Grace Dratz reported, “Cars from all over the state rolled up to the house … and an old-fashioned picnic was held with songs around a camp fire, after which we sauntered back to the house and sat around on the floor by a crackling fire. Letters were read from those who couldn’t be there in person but surely were there in spirit. … The climax of the celebration came that night when we gathered at the Gold Room of the new student union building for our formal banquet.”

That year was also an auspicious occasion with the return of Jessie Sloan Thompson to take over as housemother. Tommie, as she was nicknamed, was an alumna initiate and great inspiration for the original group in those early struggling days in 1910. She came to Montana in a covered wagon in 1878 and immediately began to serve as an influence in the state with women’s suffrage. Tommie was one of nine women chosen to go to Washington, DC, to lobby for the passage of the bill. During World War I, she served with 11 men on the Governor’s Council of Defense.

In May of 1937, the alumnae decided to remodel the house so it could accommodate 25 members. Tommie wanted the plans to include a study room. Thanks to creative alumnae fundraisers, the house was remodeled and ready for fall (all except the roof on the third floor). Among the renovations, the third floor was made into a dormitory with individual clothes closets large enough for formals and large dressing rooms with built-in dressing tables. The second floor had a study room and bedrooms with new studio couches for upper-class members. The bathroom was new with tubs and showers, and the kitchen was “modern,” with a butler’s pantry, a new institutional gas range and a new icebox.

In 1940, the winter brought sleeping sickness, and the DG house was quarantined for a week. It was the year the dining room was carpeted by the mothers’ club and the year there was a dog, Gammy. World War II soon arrived and struck a sadly familiar chord on campus. One thousand Army aviation cadets took over the campus, and female students outnumbered the men, 477-213. Classes under the Red Cross came back and rationing coupons appeared. For the first time a woman (a Delta Gamma) edited the school paper, the yearbook, and governed the student body. Women joined the services, married servicemen and some became the widows of servicemen.

Another Delta Gamma chapter was added in Montana in 1947: Gamma Delta chapter in Bozeman. On Memorial Day weekend of 1947, the six young women of Gamma Delta colony came to Pi to be officially pledged. Pi chapter installed Gamma Delta chapter in February, 1948.

With no house to plan and no war jobs to do, Pi chapter turned to working on the Fraternity projects, which included participating in the international education project by hosting foreign exchange students, at least two of whom were initiated into Pi chapter. Pi set a record for the most international guests in the Fraternity.

More house renovations were on the books in 1950, and the alumnae answered the call with a sizeable sum for the chapter room fireplace. Pi chapter thrived.

Pi chapter involved itself in sight conservation in local high schools and local philanthropic causes, won numerous Province and Fraternity awards, and celebrated its 75th anniversary in 1987 with alumnae from 1920 to 1978.

Scholarship has always been a pride point of the chapter; in the 1980s, Pi held a record in scholarship on campus- having held the rotating scholarship cup on campus for more than 40 consecutive terms. A Kappa Alpha Theta member was heard to say on campus, “If you’re smart at Montana, you’ll be a Delta Gamma.”

In the 1990s, retreats would find the chapter at Flathead Lake, and chapter members still excelling on campus and within Delta Gamma. In the ‘90s, a remarkable number of six Pi members served the Fraternity as Collegiate Development Consultants: Peggy Pollem Bennett; Elizabeth Miller Hayhurst, Erin Egeland Fuller, Karissa Reinke Cornell, Erika Hoff Brooke and Barbra Broudy.

The first floor of the house was recently remodeled during the summer of 2013. As of 2016, the Pi chapter of Delta Gamma has had the highest overall GPA in the Greek system for seven semesters.