

**Sigma- Northwestern**

**Fast Facts:**

* Installation date: March 1, 1882
* Location: Evanston, IL
* Region: 5

**History:**

The foundation of Northwestern University is traceable to a meeting on May 31, 1850 of nine prominent Chicago businessmen, Methodist leaders and attorneys who had formed the idea of establishing a university to serve what had once been known as the Northwest Territory. On January 28, 1851, the Illinois General Assembly granted a charter to the Trustees of the North-Western University, making it the first chartered university in Illinois. Although the founders affiliated the university with the Methodist Episcopal Church, they were committed to non-sectarian admissions, believing that Northwestern should serve all people in the newly developing territory.

John Evans, for whom Evanston is named, bought 379 acres of land along Lake Michigan in 1853, and Philo Judson developed plans for what would become the city of Evanston, Illinois. In 1873 the Evanston College for Ladies merged with Northwestern, and Frances Willard, who later gained fame as a suffragette and as one of the founders of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), became the school's first dean of women. Northwestern admitted its first women students in 1869.

In March of 1882, Catherine Stoneman and Leila Crandon were initiated into the chapter of Omega- Wisconsin with the expressed purpose of beginning a new Delta Gamma chapter at Northwestern. After returning to the Northwestern campus they in turn initiated five women: Sarah E. White, Alida White Sherman, Anna L. Crandon, Millicent B. Bingham, and Nellie Redfield Horswell. Delta Gamma Fraternity was the second sorority on campus, preceded by Alpha Phi in 1881. Kappa Kappa Gamma was installed the following month.

Unlike today’s formal recruitment process conducted under Panhellenic rules, girls were pledged whenever they were considered to be “good Delta Gamma material.” Strong loyalties were formed in the early years, for Antoinette Meinhardt, initiated in 1890, was credited with 33 Delta Gamma Legacies by 1950.

When the first *ANCHORA* was published in April of 1884, it records that Sigma had thirteen active members and that “they have lately refitted their fraternity rooms and are now very pleasantly situated.”

The Woman’s College at Northwestern housed all members, and in 1900 they were provided meeting rooms on the fourth floor of this building which later became Willard Hall and the Music School. This was seen as quite a step forward, since earlier chapter meetings had to be held either in members’ homrs or int eh old Sheppard, later Charles Dawes, coach house. “Cozies” were held on Friday afternoon is local members’ homes, where the latest campus news and plans for a permanent chapter house were discussed.

The earnest desire for a chapter house led the members to create an ambitious fund-raising project. They opened a tea room called “The Anchor Inn,” refinished furnishings and served as waitresses, ultimately netting $10,000.

The year 1926 was the beginning of another long-standing tradition, the Delta Gamma Night Club. This gala affair was held annually in various Chicagoland hotels until World War II. Musical extravaganzas were provided by the members, and an invitation was eagerly sought. A brief revival of the night club was attempted in the 1950’s, but the cost of duplicating such an elaborate party made it impractical.

 In 1926, they acquired the first sorority house in the quadrangle- 618 Emerson Street. The university held title to the property while Sigma received a 99-year lease. In the many moves, the original charter became lost, but when Mary McHarg Halsted, Sigma, became Fraternity President she presented the chapter with a new one in March 1931. Catherine Stoneman Long, one of the founders, was present and signed the other founders’ names to the new charter.

Sigma celebrated her Golden Anniversary with a large banquet honoring her four living founders and her members who had served as National Officers, including the president, Mrs. Halstead, Gertrude Bradley Wilbur, Caroline Hunt, Sarah Foster Briggs, Aurora Fist Zueblin, Esther Baker Andews and Nina Howard. Initiation of the newest Sigma members and numerous toasts were part of the festivities. Louise Whitehead Christopher and Inez Awty were banquet chairmen.

 In the summer of 1933, Sigma improved its financial position by opening the house to visitors attending the Century of Progress Exposition in Chicago. Visitors could stay at the chapter house for 75 cents per night.

The period of the 1920’s and 1930’s saw social activities at their peak. Many of the DG’s were crowned queen, and “Circus Sally” was frequently a Sigma. In spite of their active social lives, there must have been serious study as well, for there was frequent mention of honor society memberships in Chapter’s contemporary accounts.

In the 1940s, World War II curtailed social activities, and members knitted and rolled bandages for the servicemen at Fort Sheridan. After the war, the house was crowded with 120 members, and space in the house only went to seniors. In 1946, an annex was rented on Foster Street & Sheridan Road. Anyone living within 25 miles of campus was forced to live at home, however between classes the “town girls” were welcome at the house. The commuters had to be satisfied with a small box for their books and a coat hanger in the office closet. Lunches at the house gave them the opportunity to feel part of the chapter.

The students did their part in the Fraternity Project by reading to the blind students on campus. In 1964, the chapter received national recognition when one of these students, Bob Feinberg, was presented a $500 award for scholastic achievement by President Johnson- a proud moment for the chapter.

In 1961, the chapter house saw a remodel, it which the house was enlarged and the fourth-floor chapter room was replaced with 5 new bedrooms, housing 13 additional girls. The dining room was also enlarged and the kitchen remodeled. Now the housing capacity totaled 47, a comfortable number to maintain. This conservative decision proved to be a wise one, for many of the house which had undertaken more ambitious expansions found difficulty in keeping their houses full a few years later. Unfortunately, in losing the chapter room, many of the records and keepsakes of the past were lost as well.

In the 1960s, Sigma suffered the same identity crises as the student body in general. It was a time of questioning old customs and rituals. It was also a time of becoming politically active, of intense interest in sociological issues and student rights. As never before, the Greek of the 60’s felt pressure to change rush procedures to make them more acceptable. Fewer students expressed interest in joining fraternities and sororities, but Delta Gamma remained one of the strongest women’s fraternities on campus.

The 1970s saw Delta Gamma expressing more community awareness. Funds were collected for the needy and the United Charities of Chicago. Also, Delta Gamma was number one in the scholastic standing among all the sororities on campus.

Today, the lovely first house at 618 Emerson Street on the quadrangle houses over 100 members.