

**Beta Eta-Texas**

**Fast Facts:**

* Installation date: April 21, 1939
* Location: Austin, Texas
* Region: 6

**History:**

In 1839, the Congress of the Republic of Texas ordered that a site be set aside to meet the state’s higher education needs. After a series of delays over the next several decades, the state legislature reinvigorated the project in 1876, calling for the establishment of a “university of the first class.” Austin was selected as the site for the new university in 1881, and construction began on the original Main Building in November 1882. Less than one year later, on September 15, 1883, the University of Texas at Austin opened with one building, eight professors, one proctor and 221 students.

Fraternity and sorority life has been a part of the UT Austin experience since the university was founded. In March of 1904, a local sorority at the University of Texas petitioned Delta Gamma but were refused due to “more conservative” expansion programs and because UT Austin was “so far from any other chapter that we could not possibly keep in touch with you.” Delta Gamma’s attitude changed in subsequent years, and in the 1930s the Fraternity was eager to establish on campus. The Fraternity faced a difficult hurdle: the fraternity/sorority community at UT Austin already featured numerous very strong organizations, and it was considered unlikely that the university community would be able to support another strong chapter. These strong chapters were able to recruit as many women as they desired, leaving few women unaffiliated.

In the fall of 1937, many national sororities were, in accordance with the National Panhellenic Conference policy of voluntary limitation in the size of chapters, compelling their Texas chapters to reduce their numbers of pledges. This seemed to be the opportunity Delta Gamma was waiting for as there were many desirable girls not being pledged.

Fourteen women were offered membership to become the founding members of Beta Eta. These founding members include Joyce Payne Bowman, Mary Louise Turner Braselton, Sue Jenkins Dodson, Jane Kirksey Loomis, Mary Katherine McLean Scofield, the first chapter president, Eoline Brown, Phyllis Seals and Elizabeth Anne Patten Peterson.

On May 7, 1938, six of the original 14 pledges were given the honor of being initiated at the 1938 Convention in Colorado Springs. The rest of the colony members were initiated in the fall by members of Alpha Upsilon-Southern Methodist.

The first rush was held in September 1938 in the Texas Women's Federation Club building. The colony pledged 21 "fine, highly recommended" girls — a number comparison that stood well with the older established groups.

On April 29, 1939, Beta Eta installed at the University of Texas at Austin. In attendance was all of Council; Alta Gwinn Saunders, Iota-Illinois, *ANCHORA* editor; and Ludi Mai Sensabaugh Goode, Alpha Upsilon-Southern Methodist, Province V Secretary.

Since coming the UT Austin campus, Beta Eta has been incredibly active on campus. Members throughout the years have been active in and around campus, supporting causes like the March of Dimes, the American Cancer Society and the Longhorn football team, as well as having many University Sweetheart nominees.

On November 19, 2002, the Dorothy Garrett Martin Lectureship in Values & Ethics was endowed at UT Austin.

Beta Eta’s first chapter house was rented. In October of 1940, Beta Eta began preparations for building its own house. The Beta Eta House Corporation bought a plot of land on the corner of 25th and Rio Grande, and architect Arthur Fehr of Austin was chosen as the architect of the house. Construction began on April 1, 1941 and was completed in September of the same year. According to Architectural Record, "It is the first fraternity house to be built on an American campus using modern architecture." The completed house faced 25th street and accommodated 35 women.

By 1967, the need to expand upon the existing house was fulfilled. Additional land was purchased, and the house was expanded to accommodate 67 women and a house mother. By the completion of the renovation, the house faced Rio Grande Street and featured red brick, rather than the original beige brick native to Austin, Texas. After a very dedicated fundraising campaign, the women of Beta Eta were able to add a pool to the house, completed in 1976. Shortly thereafter, the house underwent another significant renovation. Beginning in 1988 and lasting for three years, an addition was added to expand the house.

At the time of its completion, the house was the largest and one of the most beautiful chapter houses on campus.