

## THE 1960s

### WHO WAS PATER KNOX?

He was "first in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his fellow Greeks!!" Samuel Taylor Marshall, of ever-honored memory, described him as "studious, notably modest, manly, and a splendid character in every way. He did not take to athletics, not being a rugged boy, and seldom played football. His college life was a dead level on a high plane and he always stood high with the faculty." In 1839, he was only 19 but already a senior set to graduate. He lived his life and practiced law in Greenville, Ohio, serving on the Miami (Ohio) University Board of Trustees until his death in 1898.

He was one of only 135 (all male) students at Miami, when he met with the other seven on August 8, 1839, at the first meeting of our grand and great fraternity. At 19, he started something that would survive hostile faculties, undisciplined chapters, and 22 years later, the Civil War. He lived to see us grow for 60 years. He founded us on the ideal that we would be "urbane in manners, mild in expressions, and steadfast in friendship." He has 165,000 brothers who have benefited from his foresight.

### THE BARN

If you are a member of Gamma Phi chapter and someone says "Beta" or "Beta Theta Pi," in all likelihood your first thought is the six stone columns and the green tile roof at 800 Chautauqua. Built in 1928, it is quite an imposing structure. The pledge class of 1962-63 was treated to an evening of history conducted by Earl Tankersly (#121), summarizing that he built a place that "you could tear up, but you can't tear down." Nicknamed The Barn or The Post Office (it is often mistaken for a government building), it has to be the best built, if not the most beautiful, fraternity or sorority house ever constructed. It holds a rightful place in the U.S. Department of Interior's register of historic buildings.

In the fall of 1962, our house was a perfect rectangle. The kitchen was small, Mom Vick's quarters were cramped, but the TV room was soon to get the latest--a color set! The north half contained the basement with makeshift furniture, a jukebox that seemed stuck on "Wonderland by Night," and several cowhide "skins" won by Gamma Phi from other Big 8 chapters foolish enough to make a football bet when we had Bud Wilkinson on our side. Down the back stairs from the kitchen and to the left was the files room, where a brother could find the answers to a test given in 1954 if he thought it might be of help.

The Chapter Room was on the third floor, front center, overlooking the portico. Chapter meetings were always on Monday nights following pledge dinner and pledge court. Woe by unto any pledge who might venture to the third floor after pledge court. Other than Monday nights, the doors to the Chapter Room were closed and locked.

The south side contained the basketball court and horseshoe pit and a direct path to the Chi Omega house. Large elms lined Chautauqua, and on sunny afternoons you could sit on the front

porch and watch the Chi O's and Thetas returning from class. Water bombs from above were always a threat.

The corner rooms were three-man, but most of the others were two-man. New room furniture (desks, chairs and bunk beds) had just arrived. But the Barn was getting cramped. In the early '60s, there were few apartments in Norman, so almost everyone (including seniors) lived in the house. Even with the normal pledge class of 30 to 40, it was tight. Then we broke all records and had a Loving Cup ceremony that took up the whole front yard with 60+ pledges for 1963-64.

Thanks to the Beta Corporation, by 1965 we expanded the kitchen and the basement below it to house the new Chapter Room, and built new rooms on the third floor. The third floor had a sign proclaiming it "Dr. George's Home for Unwed Fathers."

Today, our grand home has never been better! Thanks to Brother James Elder (#1327) and countless others, even the plumbing has improved. Admit it though -- it's a game day, you visit the second or third floor head and hear the shower -- old habit dictates that you yell "Ba-a-ck" before you flush.

## **FRIDAY AFTERNOONS**

The doors and windows were wide open and the second and third floor halls were full of competing stereo blare. If you thought "Oklahoma Hills" was the state song, "Six Pack to Go" the theme song at Louie's, and "Wild Side of Life" our real national anthem, you were a full-fledged member of the sophomore class of 1963-64. "Louie, Louie" by the Kingsmen, or that famous album by Dave Clark and the Hot Nuts could also be heard, but it was a time of pure country and western. Henry Bellmon supposedly was governor, but everyone knew it was really Hank Thompson.

When those boys from England with the funny-looking haircuts finally hit our shores, that first album swept the house. From then on it was an interesting mix up and down the halls.

Trips to Grady's on Campus Corner to buy Falstaff by the quart (or to Ole John's for something harder), a cruise through the Quads to check out any new talent, and back to the Barn to check on the latest water bomb victim.

## **THE SALT MINES**

I'll bet the first time you saw the basement bar scene in "Animal House" you just knew the director had found the Salt Mines for the film. Hand-dug by "gunny" clad pledges during "Help" Week, it might still be expanding if the Housing Corporation hadn't stopped progress due to possible foundation weakening. The 1961-62 pledge class was taken to the south wall of the laundry room and told to bust through the brick and start digging. The next few classes added expansion.

Basement parties always spilled over into the Mines. We thought it safe from the prying eyes of the IFC, or even worse, Dean Brown. Plus, it was fun to see the look on your date's face during her first trip past the washing machines and up the rickety wooden stairs.

Brothers names on the ceiling written by candle soot and no ventilation. No better place for a cold Coors or a cup of purple passion.

## **BETAVILLE AND BEAVER THETA PI**

Gamma Phi had its share of members from Oklahoma City, Tulsa and other cities, but the chapter was really medium and small-town Oklahoma. Skiatook and Shattuck or Hooker and Hennepin and scores of others were the flavor of the 1960s. Jim Odom (#1276) of Wagoner was the first to bring his pickup to OU, and now the Beta parking lot is full of them.

Lots of brothers from Enid, Altus, Ponca City and Duncan, but we had so many from Bartlesville, it was known as "Betaville." From the late 1950s through the 1960s, each pledge class had a member from Beaver. Larry Owens (#1128) called his hometown "Beaver Theta Pi."

A good number of brothers returned to their hometowns and provided quality leadership to their communities and Oklahoma.

## **SERENADES**

We didn't sing the whole Beta songbook, but all pledges spent a lot of time with the chapter song leader, as serenades were the norm for all fraternities and sororities. At times it was a planned pinning serenade at a pinmate's sorority, but often, a surprise gathering with lots of songs until the girls emerged on their front porch to respond with their songs.

The dress was always coats and ties, and rum-cured crooks were the cigars of choice. "Marching Along" and other favorites were capped off by the "Beta Mating Call," with special verses for the red-faced brother standing with his pinmate and her giggling sisters. A keg of beer in the basement was an after-serenade standard.

## **ROOM SELECTIONS AND BUMPS**

The room configuration for the house was different in the '60s than today. The only "suite" was on the second floor above the front door. It had a living area and bedroom and was shared by that semester's president and vice-president. All the others were single rooms, with room for two brothers, except the eight larger corner rooms reserved for three. All the rooms had steel bunk beds (with a trundle bed in a corner room), desks and chairs. Anything else was supplied on your own. There was some extra furniture and mattresses in the basement. Upstairs was not air-conditioned. Most kept their casement windows open in the fall and spring, and in the winter the radiators clanked.

At the beginning of each semester, the brothers would gather for room assignments. Everybody was free to pick roommates of choice, but combinations always seemed to rotate. Pledge classes tended to stick together, but all rooms were open to the brother with the lowest chapter roll number and his designated roommate(s), then on down the line until the last group was assigned. Upper class pledges ("dormies") got the leftovers.

On move-in day, if you did not like your desk or your mattress was too lumpy, you could search the other rooms and "bump" a brother with a higher roll number for one of your liking. Who says scholarship isn't important? Joe McMillin (#1173) would routinely seek me out just to say "bump," take what he wanted, then loudly "quack!"

Even though they were three-man, the corner rooms went early. They were larger, had two windows, and good views. Particularly those on Chi O corner -- the two southwest corner rooms. One enterprising Chi O wrote "No Show Tonight" on the outside of her shade.

## **BARN DANCE**

Without fear of contradiction, it can be said that the Barn Dance absolutely stands alone. Gamma Phi centers around it as it is planned, participated, and rehashed all year long -- then everything recycles. It was so much a part of our life that when anyone asked the time, the refrain was always, "IT'S BARN DANCE TIME!!" Besides, every OU coed wanted to go. She may not be very interested in you, but she didn't turn down your invitation!

It was a lot more than just the Friday night cookout and hayride in the country and Saturday night at the Barn. It was a couple of weeks of filling the front yard with farm equipment, hay bales, fencing and construction of the "Breeding Pin;" pulling furniture out of the first floor and covering the walls with cardboard and murals. And lots of "pre-game warm-ups." Lots of classes were missed and lots of trips were made to Grady's or Ole John's the week before. The old cliché about the '60s states, "If you remember it, you weren't there." Most of us remember enough to wish that we could go to at least one more.

## **THE MONT**

Officially, it's the Monterrey Restaurant on the southwest corner of Boyd and Classen (old 77 Highway). The Mexican food was very good, but most visited hundreds of times without ever glancing at a menu. Ice-cold Coors served in signature glasses for 25 cents was THE draw (no pun intended), and Thursday night was THE night! If you waited until 7:30 or 8:00, you couldn't get in with a shoehorn. Thursday night at the Mont was bigger than Sooner football, but we weren't winning many games under Gomer anyway. Pitchers were flowing and the place was full of Kappas, Chi O's, Phi Phis, etc. The Batman TV show (starring Brother Adam West) was the rage, and a couple of Sigma Nus would show up in full Batman and Robin costumes and bound through the metal crank casement windows.

The parking lot was full, the crowd was loud, your Madras shirt was wet with beer--the weekend had officially started!

## **DENCO'S**

It is 1:00 Sunday morning, you just deposited your date inside the door of her sorority house, and all roads led to Denco's. It has been a rowdy Saturday night, but it's about to get rowdier!

Denco's (or Dink's or The Denco) is on the south side of Main Street, just west of the railroad tracks. It once served as the station/café for the Denco Bus Lines and retained the name. It gives whole new definition to "greasy spoon." Open all night, it is a haven for the brothers. Had a fight with your girlfriend, or another bad blind date? Not to worry. A platter of enchiladas and eggs (two lookin' at ya), or perhaps the classic Denco Darlin', and you would soon forget about her. Now the Darlin' was special. It was basically whatever was left over from the kitchen during the past couple of days, plus noodles and a good dose of grease. One of our larger brothers, his initials are John B. Pangburn (#1112), was rumored to have a standard order of two Darlin's, extra grease and a loaf of white bread.

It was loud, raucous, and the "chef" was known to emerge from the kitchen swinging a meat cleaver and threatening to call the police, or worse. One night he said he would "clean this place out." All thought he said "clean this place up," and a big cheer occurred.

## **DRESS CODE**

The girls wore blouses and skirts to class, and the boys wore button-down shirts and slacks. Penny loafers and Madras shirts (and shorts) were the rage. Sorority members had to dress for class and fraternity men followed their lead. We all wore out Beta pins just inside the pocket on the left side of our shirts. A pledge caught on campus without his pledge pin was in big trouble. The exception, at least for Betas, was any time it rained -- or looked like rain. Then, it was always cowboy boots and jeans. Umbrellas were fine, but it was always better to find a Kappa, Theta or Chi O with one to share for the walk home. Believe it or not, even the faculty dressed up in coats and ties, or dresses for women. Sweatshirts, jeans or shorts were for intramural games, the river bottom or around the Barn.

If the weather was good, ties and slacks were always worn to football games. Maybe it was because Bud and Gomer always wore a tie, or maybe it was just because it was the '60s.

The book bag was yet to be invented, so we carried what we needed at our side. Our professors carried briefcases, and only foreign engineering students rode bicycles.

Everybody shopped at Harold's. Occasionally, you could buy any combination of three white, blue or yellow dress shirts for \$10.00. Lots of striped ties, Polo shirts and everything in Madras.

## **THE PLEDGE PROGRAM**

Now, everybody thinks their pledge program was the toughest, and it might have been. I do know that Gamma Phi's current program is a little shorter than it used to be. We had about 35 in our class, and most of us pledged in September 1962, during fall rush. We weren't initiated until April 20, 1963. The spring semester was almost over and we thought the members had forgotten about us!

### **The Line Speech**

On the first Sunday after fall classes started, we were "invited" to the house. Following a pleasant lunch we were "invited" down to the basement to allow the members to get to know us better. We were asked to stand, while the members, most with grinning faces, slumped on the chairs and couches. A few with lengthy high school resumes cheerfully recited same when asked. Then that famous line was drawn by index finger across the basement floor, extending to both polar regions, to the heavens, and the depths of the earth. Several hours of instruction ensued covering the complete definitions of Lock, Book, Rush, Pride and Determination. Multiple speakers cited unacceptable pledge conduct occurring since the Loving Cup was passed. Almost all mentioned Brother Thomas W. Metcalf (#1171) as a prime offender. Trying to hide on the back row, I remember thinking that I needed to get to know this guy better! We all got to know each other better and are still "locked up" after all these years.

### **General Rules**

Except on special occasions, pledges always used the north (side) door only. It wasn't our house yet and the front door was reserved for the owners. All pledges carried matches, fifty cents in change, and always answered the house phones.

### **Kitchen Duty**

Each pledge had assigned kitchen duty. This wasn't too bad because Lou, our cook, was a sweetheart. She had seen many pledge classes come through and was always on your side. Plus, she always had fresh cookies or brownies ready when you arrived. Whatever help she needed was your 30-minute job. The kitchen had not yet been expanded and was cramped, but was always spotless.

### **Yard Duty**

Yard manager was John Steele Berry (#1109) (or "Mr. Greenjeans" to our class). Our B-3 basketball team was his passion, and our yard assignments were performed as he practiced hook shots on the side court. Feared and respected, he used his famous sarcasm effectively. Grass was cut and hedges trimmed. The Barn had curb appeal.

### **Room Cleanup**

The theory was that each pledge could really get to know a member through room cleaning. Assignments were rotated every few weeks and, if you were lucky, you didn't draw a three-man

room or certain roommate combinations well known for less than tidy behavior. As you were required to dust, mop, scrub and generally sterilize, the wrong assignment could make for a tough day. To be avoided at all cost was the three-man room of Pete "Tracks" Adamson (#1084), Mark "Butte" Butterly (#1098), and Dave "Mule" Mueller (#1069).

### **Friday Night Cleanups**

The pledges would gather at 11:00 p.m. for an all-night, top-to-bottom house cleanup. You weren't finished "until the sun rises over the Kappa house." The kitchen was scrubbed (including the grease trap), the basement reassembled after Friday night festivities, the living and TV room straightened, and, of course, the second and third floor halls had to be double-buffed ("hummmm" and "whrrrr"). William Plowden Vick IV (#1078) was house manager. Bill was a senior from Dallas, and his grandmother was our own Mom Vick. Her presence didn't cramp his style. Legend has it that one winter night after a fight with his Chi-O girlfriend, he shut off their utilities. He performed his house manager duties with the same mechanical genius. Our large barrel-shaped vacuum cleaner (the "phantom machine") had an exhaust out the top. About 3:00 one Saturday morning, he filled it with flour, moved it into the Mole Hole (the small room at the top of the second floor side staircase), and flipped the exhaust switch. Of course, the pledges got the blame! The emergence of John Pangburn (of Denco Darlin' fame), covered with flour and screaming at the pledges, was both an unforgettable sight and living proof of Yeti.

### **Monday Nights**

Dinner was hard to digest. A nervous meal, waiting for your name to be called to answer the important questions of the day. You quickly learned that the view out the dining room windows was not the Kappa parking lot, but the three stars of Beta Theta Pi. After not much food, it was hand on your pledge brother's shoulder and, to the refrain of "Coming from the East," down the stairs for Monday night instruction from the members.

### **TAKE-OUTS, TAKE-INS, KIDNAPPINGS AND GENERAL MAYHEM**

During the Line Speech delivered at the first pledge court, the pledges were challenged to grab a member and physically take him out of the house. The distinct impression was that, if we couldn't plan and execute a "take-out," we didn't have what it takes to be a Beta. The legitimate, straight-on approach was to capture a member inside the house and whisk him away. The target was invariably a sophomore who was giving the pledge class the most problems. Charles Doyle Watson, Jr. ("#1142) fit the bill nicely for us. One cold winter night, his little brother, John Gorney, lured him out to the side yard to "see his new car." We pounced, threw him into the backseat and were off to Pete Russo's (#1175) house in Oklahoma City. It was on a lake and, when last seen, Chuck was shivering in a frost-covered, oarless rowboat several feet from shore. The members thought it was a clever ruse but didn't give us credit since we jumped him in the yard. We continued to plot, but I don't think any pledge class ever had a successful take-out. There was always somebody up and about, and the "MEMBER!!" shout would ring through the house to rally the brothers, and the pledges would scatter out into the dark. Besides, the pledges were outnumbered and the members lived in a fortress.

The "take-in" had to have been invented by Brother John Pangburn. He would stagger in the front door about 2:00 a.m. during Friday night house cleanup, plop down in the middle of the foyer and holler "TAKE-IN" until the pledges carried him up to his room.

As pledges, we were always in some kind of peril. We had a phone call system to spread the word when needed. Each class had dormies and, living in the house, were subject to the instant whims of the members. The rest of us were thankful that the university had construction bonds to pay off and required freshmen to live in the dorms. One night the phone network was used to rally us to the house parking lot. The members had kidnapped our pledge class president, Ronny Pyle (#1178), and were holding him on the third floor. Our job was to storm the house for rescue. While plotting strategy in the parking lot, headlights flashed and Jerry Richardson (#1089) pulled into a space. He had that "what's going on?" look as we grabbed him for a hostage exchange. We sent in a swap proposal and were promptly told "no deal" as Jerry didn't live in the house and, therefore, was not a real hostage. The members always set the rules and defined the terms. The house was pitch black and deafly quiet as we barged through the front doors. As we made the foyer, a wall of mattresses pressed out of the dining room and we were pile-driven into an empty living room. It was so dark you couldn't tell if you were wrestling with a member or a pledge brother. It was all capped by a get-together in the basement to remind us of our deficiencies.

Every pledge class during the 1960s had a weekend walkout to Dallas. The idea was to secretly plan and conduct it with only the help of the pledge trainer. But it was tough for word not leak. Some classes officially invited a couple of favorite members, but the special "invitee" was always some disliked sophomore who was an easy kidnap target. The unlucky victim was in for malevolence on the bus ride down, but only as far as the Red River. The 1963-64 pledge class chose Jeff Wooley (#1186). Jeff was a houseboy at the Theta house and was on the job during Friday lunch. Word of the walkout had spread that morning and a couple of us went across the street to warn likely target Jeff. The Theta housemother greeted us with the news that a gang of our "fraternity brothers" stormed the kitchen and carried Jeff out the back door. We knew the buses couldn't have left yet, so the search was on to rescue him before we had to make a late night drive to pick him up at the border. He was taken to the back yard of a Norman pledge, Steve Taylor (#1229), doused with beer and hosed down, while Steve's dad caught it all on 8mm film. Fortunately, Jeff managed an escape before the bus ride.

## **ROTC**

Army, Air Force and Navy Reserve Officer Training Corps programs were full across the country in the 1960s. Land grant universities, such as the University of Oklahoma, were required to offer ROTC and it was mandatory for freshmen and sophomores. A voluntary advanced program was offered to juniors and seniors, leading to a commission as a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant. The early '60s found our military involved in an advisory capacity to the government and military of South Vietnam. By the mid-'60s, the engagement escalated and it became more and more obvious that most of us were going to be included. Many of us chose to complete ROTC knowing a commission would probably lead to action in Vietnam. Gamma Phi provided a lot of leadership in Cadet Colonels Jack Kinnebrew (#1065), David Craig (#1170) and Dean Hart (#1228).

## **SOCIAL CLUBS**

I once overheard a brother declare, "There is only one fraternity; the rest are just social clubs." I have often used that line on friends who are members of "clubs." Gamma Phi's personality in the 1960s reflected our lofty status in academics, athletics and campus activities. Second place in any area was a failure to be quickly remedied. The Delts and Sig Alphas were our biggest rivals. Our relationship with the Delts had Sooner/Longhorn intensity, but the Sig Alphas had a personal friendship with us. We even took as many in as we could when their house burned. If it had happened to the Delts, they would have been left to fend for themselves.

There was a real division between the fraternities north and south of Lindsey Street. The newer houses were on College or Elm, south of Lindsey, and we derisively referred to the area as "Country Club Drive." Anchored by the Sigma Nus and Phi Delts, it seemed to us that the main qualification for social club membership was having blond hair and a Corvette. They gave us some competition on the intramural fields, but when house grade point averages were released, they weren't even close to us on the list.

Gamma Phi has always striven for excellence and it has separated us from the rest.

## **HAPPY BIRTHDAY**

The pledge classes of 1962-63 and 1963-64 held a reunion during the fall of 1986. Tom Drummond (#1244) toasted the brothers by saying "others say 'I was a (fill in the fraternity) at OU,' but we proudly say 'I AM a Beta!'" On occasion, over the years, I have overheard my Pi Phi wife tell someone, "Mike was a Beta at OU." I never make an issue, but always think..."wait--my shingle hangs in my study at home and I will always be #1174 on Gamma Phi's rolls."

Special thanks to Brother Steve Barghols (#1486) for asking me to write down my recollections as one great memory led to another. From the Loving Cup ceremony to the day I moved out of the Barn at graduation, I could have included a hundred great (and mostly true) stories. The Duck, Hooker, Zatty, Niz, Gurner, Fleener, Wo-o-oley and many others should be thankful that I remembered that the statute of limitations has yet to run. If I had it to do all over again, I wouldn't change a thing -- I'd just do more of it!

Happy 100<sup>th</sup> Birthday, Gamma Phi -- and many more!!

Yours in \_kai\_,

Mike Smith