

ALPHA PI CHAPTER HOUSE MOVE-IN

~ 85TH ANNIVERSARY ~

FEBRUARY 5TH, 1932 – FEBRUARY 5TH, 2017



February 5th, 2017 marks the 85th Anniversary of the day that the majestic Alpha Pi Chapter House was completed and Brothers were allowed to officially move-in. This was an historic moment in our Chapter's history, perhaps the single most important signpost to the future of Delta Sigma Phi at Michigan State University, for it marked to the world that Alpha Pi was in East Lansing for the long-term, that we would have a Home where we could build our reputation as leaders and men of character for decades to come.

One of the great visionary Brothers who made the dream of an Alpha Pi Chapter House a reality was the late, great Les Belknap ('23). A wonderful sketch of Les Belknap's spectacular legacy has been provided by Delta Sigma Phi National Historian Loren Mall. Please read below and enjoy.

To celebrate this momentous occasion, Alpha Pi is launching a 30-day "LES BELKNAP MONTH-of-GIVING" campaign to raise money for Chapter House/property renovations.

Our goal for 2017 is to secure 75+ donors and \$15,000+ for needed improvements.

So please join us in helping pay the debt as proud Alumni, so that the Delt Sig Spartans of Michigan State University may reign at 1218 E. Grand River Avenue for another 85 years and more.

www.MSUDeltSigSpartanGiving.com

~ The Alpha Pi Chapter Alumni Corporation Board ~



BRIEF SKETCH OF LESLIE H. BELKNAP AND ALPHA PI

By Loren L. Mall, Alpha Upsilon
Delta Sigma Phi National Historian
January 21, 2014

When Michigan State lifted its ban on national fraternities in 1920, members of the Delta Sig chapter at the University of Michigan traveled to the campus and recruited the Aureorean Literary Society for Delta Sigma Phi. Thirty-one Aurorian students and 15 of its recent alumni men were initiated during the day on Saturday, January 12, 1923. Members from chapters at the Universities of Michigan and Chicago, and other Delta Sigs from Thiel, Hillsdale, Albion, Ohio Northern and Ohio State, arrived for the celebratory banquet that evening. They all wore tuxes to the installation dinner that evening at the Downey Hotel. During the festive celebration, the charter was delivered to the president of the student group.

The charter was dated January 13, 1923 because the national fraternity had to order the elaborate document from an engraving company well in advance of the installation weekend. Usually, Delta Sigma Phi conducted the first initiations on one day, and then held the chartering banquet on the next day. The charter was always dated according to the date scheduled for the installation banquet. In this case, the University of Michigan men apparently decided to travel home on Sunday, and they completed the initiation and delivered the charter on Saturday, January 12. Because the charter has the January 13 date, the national fraternity lists the charter date as January 13, 1923.

One of the alumni members initiated on January 12 was Leslie H. Belknap. He graduated from Michigan State in 1909 with a degree in civil engineering. A brilliant and hardworking person, he started working after graduating from the eighth grade. He skipped high school entirely and entered Michigan State in 1904 at age 18. He was short and muscular. He won both the state and national intercollegiate wrestling titles that year. He was named captain of the school's wrestling team for four years, and he was the Michigan State wrestling coach. He played varsity baseball, and during his last two years, he was manager of all interclass athletics.

A strong leader, even at a young age, Belknap organized all the independents who were not members of a local fraternity, which the school did tolerate. He led them "to such an extent," another student observed, "that the local fraternities did not have a change in (campus) politics." As a result, Les Belknap was the top choice of all the local societies. He finally chose the Aureorean Society.

After the Aureorean Society affiliated with Delta Sigma Phi, Belknap had more scope for his remarkable leadership abilities. In order, he founded and led the local alumni board in 1928, took a seat on the national board of governors in 1935, and led the national fraternity as national president from 1940 to 1947. He continued to serve on the national board for many years after that time.

When Belknap graduated from college, he worked first as a construction manager for the railroad, and then for a power company. He then worked his way up the ladder of the state highway department, becoming its chief engineer. He was soon selected as commissioner of all state highway construction in Michigan, commanding hundreds of rough workers.

After incorporating the alumni organization in 1928, Leslie Belknap led the alumni to purchase a building lot near the Red Cedar River. He made construction of a chapter house the priority of his life. He had plans drawn and personally guaranteed the construction loan. When the house was dedicated, he occupied a small room in the basement as his office for volunteer chapter work.

Belknap left the state job, started his own company and became one of the foremost road contractors in the state. He made a small fortune and retired in 1932 when he was 46.

Not one to be idle, Les Belknap devoted himself full-time to Alpha Phi as its chapter advisor. He spent every weekday in his command post in the chapter house. He counseled the student officers, kept the books, enforced collection of house bills, and made the chapter one of the most outstanding on its campus and throughout the national fraternity. He was the chapter's "father figure," highly respected by the students. Alpha Pi usually had the largest membership among the fraternity's chapters.



The Great Depression sapped the financial strength of the country and its citizens, starting in 1929 and continuing for more than a decade. Students had little money and by 1933, the Alpha Pi men were unable to pay all their bills. The bank started to foreclose on the mortgage for the house. Undaunted, Belknap undertook great personal risk and paid the mortgage. He managed to collect his loan over many years, saving the chapter home and the very existence of Alpha Pi.

In 1935, Les Belknap was elected to the board of governors of the national fraternity for the first time. In his practical and effective way, he promoted improvements in scholarship. In 1938, he returned to an active career. This time, he started an earth moving company in East Lansing.

In 1940, Belknap won election as national president of the fraternity. It was suffering mightily from the deprivations of the depression, and he knew a strong hand was necessary to return it to a stronger footing. Acting decisively, he changed its course for the better. But World War II intervened in the life of the people of the United States at the end of 1941 with the attack on the country at Pearl Harbor.

Promptly at the beginning of 1942, the federal government dragooned Belknap into managing the Nash Kelvinator automobile factory in Lansing. He managed 10,000 workers as they converted it to war production and made hundreds of airplane propellers and engines to help win the war. He was on duty at the factory seven days a week and responsible for its 24-hours a day of operations. He had to lay aside his leadership of the national fraternity, and the chapter as well. All the students of Alpha Pi went to war, fighting on the front lines or serving to support the men who fought and died there. Harold Balbach, an Alpha Pi alumnus and protégé of Belknap, did what he could to keep the chapter alive.

Alpha Pi's men knew "Hobbie" Belknap very well. Les Belknap had brought his son to the chapter house many times. But when Leslie H. Belknap, Jr. graduated from high school in the spring of 1944, he had to enlist and join the great war in Europe. Everyone in the country was doing all they could to save democracy, and much of the burden depended upon the men on the front lines. He was wounded in Germany and hospitalized in London. When he recovered, he returned to the battles in Germany as the Allies were closing in on Hitler's Nazi army and bringing the most horrific war in history to a close.

In the fall of 1946, Leslie H. Belknap, Jr. was discharged, along with several million other GIs. He enrolled at Michigan State, and Alpha Pi chapter initiated him in November of 1946.

At the end of the war, Les Belknap saw that the reliable Balbach was selected as the second executive secretary of the national fraternity. Balbach began the rebuilding process of the fraternity in 1946 and continued until the beginning of 1947.

Belknap's time as national president ended at the 1947 national convention. A stoic and taciturn man, he did not explain his absence from leadership of the fraternity during the war. He never received the appreciation he deserved. But some of the national officers supported him, and they kept him serving on the national board. He was a member of the executive committee for several years.

For two decades starting in 1947, Les Belknap undertook to add Delta Sig chapters in Michigan. He did establish most of them. To train the students, he held chapter training conclaves each year at the Alpha Pi chapter house. He considered himself the primo domo in the state, and he maintained his prerogatives as the founder of most of the Michigan chapters. Nine of them flourished under his leadership.

Leslie H. Belknap only gave up his fraternity work in the 1950s when his wife became ill and he had to care for her at home. He made Alpha Pi an outstanding chapter and a chapter with one of the proudest histories in Delta Sigma Phi. He was one of the best leaders of the national fraternity, a man who took charge and changed its course when it needed firm direction to remain viable. His most immediate legacy is Alpha Pi Chapter, which even now has initiated more members than any other Delta Sig chapter.

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