



ALPHA GAMMA  
University of Michigan

## Alpha Gamma Chapter

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University of Michigan  
1351 Washtenaw Avenue  
Ann Arbor, Michigan

By George Starr Lasher, 1911

When Victor T. Conklin, Arthur E. Curtis, and George Starr Lasher, all members of the Class of 1911 at the University of Michigan, decided in the Spring of 1910 that they were tired of ordinary rooming house existence and wanted to enjoy with others a group relationship similar to that prevailing in the twenty-four Fraternities and house clubs on the campus, they thought only in terms of one year, having no idea of establishing a permanent organization.

So it was that in September, 1910, twelve men in the most informal way possible laid the foundations of an organization that in less than a decade was to win the respect of the students and faculty of the University and to secure a charter in the Theta Chi Fraternity. The house at 526 Church Street which they leased was but a commonplace frame structure, furnished with equipment typical of the ordinary rooming house, yet in those surroundings was generated a spirit of friendship that has enriched the lives of those men who faced the problems, financial and social, that are inevitable in the developing of any group.

These problems soon made evident the necessity for a business organization of some sort. Officers were selected, G. S. Lasher being made President and Victor T. Conklin, Secretary-Treasurer. Later in the year the name Eremites, discovered by A. E. Curtis, began to be adopted by the group. It did not appear in print, and was quite unknown to the campus world. Nevertheless its use was significant. It indicated to the unconscious development of a sense of unity, a desire to continue existence as a group. That desire developed into a reality, and so the men who lived that year at 526 Church Street

Became the founders of what is now Alpha Gamma Chapter of Theta Chi. They numbered thirteen, as Arthur F. Frazee has been "pledged" to fill a vacancy caused when one of the original twelve completed his college course at the end of the first semester. They were: Victor Tuttle Conklin, '11; Arthur Eugene Curtis, '11; Byron Barry Harlan, '11; George Starr Lasher, '11; Leonard Harrison Cretcher, '12; Arthur F. Frazee, '12; Arthur Lovell Loring, '12; George Lyman Curtis, '13; Howard Wilber Geiger, '13; Clay Webster Wilber, '13; Harry Reynolds Hewitt, '15; Roger S. Loring, '15; and Clarence J. Sherff, '14.

The Fall of 1912 found the Eremites established in a larger, more attractive house at 1020 South University, which was occupied for two years. It was here that a constitution was perfected and an impressive ritual adopted. A thoroughly distinctive pin to be worn by members was designed. It was a gold cowl set in relief and surrounded by crown-set pearls. On the lower part of the cowl were the Egyptian letters *ei phei lauda lauda*, which indicated the basic ideals of the brotherhood. A crest was adopted later. The Egyptian initials appeared on a band across a shield, which contained three lamps. Above the shield was a cowl; below it the name "Eremites" on a scroll band.

It was in this house on South University that plans were perfected to put the organization on a firm financial basis and to equip a house for fraternity purposes. Articles of incorporation were taken out, and the Fall of 1913 found Eremites at 1006 Cornwell Place in a house built for the use of another fraternity. After two years here, Eremites moved to 1335 South State Street, a house splendidly adapted to fraternity purposes.

Here the progress forward continued. Favorable campus recognition had been gradually won on account of the prominence of various members in activities. This was greatly strengthened by the showing made in scholarship, Eremites in 1914-1915 leading all local fraternities and all but a few national, and in 1915-1916 leading all of both by a comfortable margin.

Then followed a period of stress. A fire made the fraternity house

uninhabitable and forced the chapter to rent the only vacant house in the city into which twenty-one men were crowded in an effort to keep the organization intact. Later in the year five members who had joined the naval militia were called for active service.

Despite the unsettled conditions due to the Great War, an attractive house was leased for the next year at 821 East University Avenue. Twelve months later it became, like all other fraternity houses in Ann Arbor, an army barracks under the S. A. T. C. regime. A suite of clubrooms was rented by Eremites to provide a place in which to enjoy whatever fraternity life was possible under military conditions.

The World War service record of the Eremites is a notable one. At the time of the signing of the Armistice there were one hundred and four members on the Eremite roll, and eighty-one of them were in some form of military service. The list included sixteen commissioned officers in the Army, and five in the Navy. Of the twenty members who saw service overseas none, fortunately, were killed or injured.

The abolishment of the S. A. T. C. regime on December 15<sup>th</sup> made it possible for Eremites to secure possession of their home, at 821 East University Avenue, after the Christmas vacation. Life took on a normal aspect the second semester.

Soon after the opening of the second semester, Eremites was urged by A. C. Schrader, Lambda, a senior in the College of Dentistry, to consider petitioning his fraternity, Theta Chi. The idea of becoming a part of a national organization was not a new problem. Several times before efforts had been made to have Eremites petition for a charter in a national fraternity. At least two Grand Chapters had sent official representatives to urge such action, but each time the decision of the Eremites was adverse. This time, however, the actives were more favorable, and, after a careful investigation, the matter was taken up with the Grand Chapter of Theta Chi. A visit to Ann Arbor by Frederick W. Ladue, then National Secretary, soon followed. As a result of the information received from him, the question of petitioning Theta Chi was referred to the alumni. While opinions of the alumni as to the advisability of "going national" varied, practically all were

willing to abide by the decision of the active chapter.

With such assurance of loyalty, the actives on March 17, 1919, voted to petition the Theta Chi Fraternity for a charter. At that time there were twenty-nine actives and seventy-one alumni on the membership roll. The petition found favor with the chapters of Theta Chi, and June 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> were set as dates for the installation of Alpha Gamma Chapter.

The committee in charge of the ceremonies was composed of: National marshal J. W. MacGregor, Epsilon, '13; National Councilor N. R. Clark, Theta, '13; Ensign B. E. Dunham, Kappa, '15; Maxwell E. McDowell, Iota, '16; T. W. Edwards, Rho, '20; A. W. Schmoeller, Rho, '21; L. E. Were, Rho, '22; L. A. Jiranek, Alpha, '22; C. D. Hipp, Xi, '18; A. C. Schrader, Lambda, '14; and H. E. Steggall, Iota, '17.

The installation program opened at 2 o'clock, Friday afternoon, June 20, 1919, and just at noon Saturday Erwin E. Dreese, as president of the new chapter, received the charter which had officially been granted by the Grand Chapter on May 24, 1919.

Thirty-one actives and twenty-nine alumni had been given their obligations and two neophytes, Morgan A. Aldrich and John Esterheld, had been initiated during the ceremonies. The membership roll at the conclusion totaled sixty-two.

In the interesting account of the installation of Alpha Gamma Chapter published in the October Rattle of 1919 appeared this significant statement:

“We of the installation group were particularly impressed by the showing made by Alpha Gamma’s alumni. Twenty-three of them were back to assume the new relationship with the petitioners, and their spirit and interest can mean but one thing—continued support and stable counsel for this, our baby chapter.”

Immediately following the installation festivities, the actives scattered to their homes for the summer vacation, well knowing that in the Fall they were to face a tremendous task. Even at that time Michigan had an attendance of more than 8,500 students. In such a large institution an individual or an organization must win considerable distinction in order to become known favorably. Nine

years of steady development had made the name of Eremites known and respected, but to identify that organization with the name of Theta Chi was a problem.

Unique in Michigan's fraternity history is the fact that in one short year the name of Theta Chi became well known. This recognition was secured by thoroughly legitimate means and in a way that won the approval of the other fraternities and of students and faculty in general. Much of it was due to the fact that the Theta Chi membership roll contained names of men conspicuous in campus activities.

The President of the chapter, Erwin E. Dreese, set a fine standard. He broke all records for scholarship in the College of Engineering by securing "A" in every hour of work for four years, despite the fact that he majored in electrical engineering, said to be the most difficult branch in the College. At the end of the year, he was appointed to the faculty together with two other Theta Chi seniors, thus giving the Fraternity six representatives on Michigan's faculty.

Not only did individuals help to establish Theta Chi's name at Michigan, but the group as a whole made a decided contribution. The chapter was one of the few fraternities to enter teams in every form of intramural activity, and at the end of the year it ranked third among the forty fraternities in athletic competition.

The third thing which materially helped to secure campus recognition for Theta Chi was the purchase of the Fred Newton Scott property on the corner of Washtenaw and South University Avenues. On account of the unsurpassed location, the unusually spacious lot, and the large, attractive house, this had been considered for years one of the finest pieces of residential property in the city. Situated in the center of the most beautiful fraternity district in Ann Arbor, only three blocks from the campus, and facing on the finest residence street, this home is recognized as ideal for fraternity purposes. The purchase was made possible by the organization of the Theta Chi Building Corporation Ann Arbor, in January, 1920. The directors purchased the Scott property February 28, 1920.

Another notable event of this initial year as Theta Chi was the war service reunion held November 21-23, when thirty alumni responded

to the “get-together” class, some coming from distant points. Theta Chi obligations were given to fifteen Eremite Alumni. So successful was the affair that a homecoming reunion has become an annual event.

What has developed into another tradition was started the same year, the annual observance of Mother’s Day in May. Alpha Gamma was the first fraternity chapter at Michigan to inaugurate a custom that has now become very general, the entertainment of the mothers of members on Mother’s Day.

The chapter also proved an exception to the usual rule. According to records at the University of Michigan, when a group “goes national” or buys a new home, it slumps decidedly in scholarship. Instead, Alpha Gamma advanced in its scholarship rating, securing sixth place.

In the Fall of 1920 Alpha Gamma moved into its new house, celebrating the event with a housewarming reunion at which National Secretary Frederick W. Ladue was a guest of honor.

The year 1925-26 was a notable one in the history of Alpha Gamma, for, by virtue of ranking sixth in scholarship, third in intramural athletics, and second in activities among the fifty-eight general fraternities at Michigan, Theta Chi was accorded unquestioned campus leadership, being the only fraternity to stand sixth and above in the three divisions.

At the close of its seventh year as Alpha Gamma of Theta Chi and its sixteenth year of existence, the chapter claims 189 living members. There are still twelve Eremites who have not taken the Theta Chi obligations. Four members have been lost by death.

Such a development from a group of thirteen who tried out an experiment of living together in a fine-spirited fellowship is an inspiration.

### Statistics

Number of members initiated to September, 1927: 193.

Average size of chapter: 40.

Name and frequency of chapter publication: Gab, quarterly

Both members and pledged may room in the chapter house.  
The chapter operates a dining room.  
Alpha Gamma owns its home. Value \$60,000.

### University of Michigan

The University of Michigan, sharing with Columbia, Illinois and Pennsylvania the distinction of being one of the largest American Universities, was established in 1836 and is located at Ann Arbor. Michigan is a State supported, co-educational institution and had during the collegiate year of 1926-1927 an enrollment of approximately 10,000 students, of which number practically 7,000 were men. Fifty-two national social fraternities are represented at Michigan, of which number Theta Chi was the thirty-fourth to be established.

Ann Arbor is a city of 20,000 people, located in South-Eastern Michigan, thirty-six miles due West of Detroit. The city may be conveniently reached from either Chicago or Detroit by the Michigan Central Railroad.