

Theta Chi Comes to Life, Across

By Doug Allen (Delta Beta/University of Georgia '90)

A living connection to Theta Chi's history was made recently when Minnesota Court of Appeals Judge R. A. "Jim" Randall, grandson of Phil Sheridan Randall (Alpha/Norwich 1886), met with National President Paul Norstrom (Alpha Pi/Minnesota '86) and Regional Counselors Royce Keehr (Zeta Sigma/Wisconsin-River Falls '88) and Doug Allen (Delta Beta/Georgia '90). Judge Randall and National President Norstrom live very near one another and the meeting took place at a restaurant near their homes.

It was Phil Sheridan Randall who, in 1881 as an incoming freshman, convinced Theta Chi's lone undergraduate on the Norwich campus, James Michael Holland (Alpha/Norwich 1883), that he, along with his friend, Henry Hersey (Alpha/Norwich 1885), should be allowed to join the Alpha chapter. That was achieved, the chapter was saved, and so was Theta Chi Fraternity. Brother Randall was involved with Theta Chi until his death in 1960 at the age of 90; at that time he was the Fraternity's oldest living initiate.

"Theta Chi was very important to my grandfather, and my grandfather was very important to me," said Judge Randall. The judge also shared pictures and mementos of his grandfather and said that one of his prized possessions is his grandfather's college chair that he keeps in his chambers at Minnesota's second highest court. In an article he wrote for the Winter 1957 issue of *The Rattle* (see sidebar article), Brother Phil Randall describes how he got the chair from James Michael Holland as payment for helping Holland with some farm work.

R.A. "Jim" Randall follows in his grandfather's footsteps, as he was also a judge in Minnesota. Phil Sheridan Randall lived out his later years in the same home with his grandson, and his parents. Grandfather and grandson even shared a room for some time.

The Randall family also carries another connection to Norwich University. R.A. 'Jim' Randall's great-grandfather, Francis Voltaire Randall, was at one time the Vice-President of the university. Francis V. Randall was a Colonel

in the Union Army during the Civil War, and was an important figure at the battle of Gettysburg. He is also an honorary member of Theta Chi.

Doug Allen located R.A. "Jim" Randall as part of his work as co-chair for the "Archive & Historical Significance Sub-committee" for the 150th Anniversary Convention that will be held at Norwich University in 2006. "I've always thought Phil S. Randall was one of the under-appreciated giants in our Fraternity, so it was a special thrill to find and meet his grandson," said Brother Allen.

Judge R.A. "Jim" Jim Randall was appointed to the Minnesota Court of Appeals by Governor Rudy Perpich on April 2, 1984; his current term expires in January 2005. His undergraduate degree is from Gonzaga University, Spokane, Washington, where he graduated cum laude in 1962. His law Degree is from the University of Minnesota Law School. He is a member Gamma Eta Gamma legal fraternity.

Judge Randall did not have an opportunity to join a fraternity as an undergraduate. He has accepted the offer of National President Norstrom to become an initiate of our honorary chapter, the Theta Chi Chapter of Theta Chi Fraternity. Tentative plans have been made to initiate Judge Randall, and his son, Jim, at Norwich University during the 150th Anniversary Convention in June of 2006.

Saving a Fraternity, and Saving a Chair

By El Ahlwardt

(Editor's Note: The January, 1957 issue of The Rattle contains the story of Cadet Phil S. Randall's story and of how Theta Chi Fraternity was saved from extinction. It contains a tremendous amount of information, including a November 19, 1956, letter written by Brother Randall that begins with 'Greetings and kindest felicitations to my brothers in Theta Chi Fraternity.' In what is a remarkable collection of words that captures his personality and depicts the role he played in our

Fraternity's survival, his prescient letter reads as follows:

"I sit in my college chair at home along on this day which marks the 75th anniversary of my initiation into the Theta Chi Society, as it was then called, and as the flood of letters, cards, and telegrams of congratulation come pouring in, my mind naturally reverts to the early eighties when two Norwich University cadets actually rushed the solitary active of Alpha Chapter for membership into the Theta Chi Society.

It was soon thereafter that the minds of three cadets met in unison and agreed in solemn pledge, a verbal covenant, to attempt the restoration of Theta Chi Society on the college campus to its former glory of usefulness. Theta Chi had been established by its founders, Freeman and Chase, twenty-five years before. We three automatically became the last initiates of the old regime and thus set the wheels of progress in slow motion. Little did we realize the undertaking we were promoting, nor what the fruits of others to follow would be.

If it had only been possible for Holland and Hersey to have been present with me today to share the homage rendered and to review the resulting endeavors of the present personnel of our clan—we note with human pride that we are now 119 chapters strong and 42,000 members active—then I would have had a perfect anniversary.

The above is the record for the first one hundred years. No one can foretell what the harvest will be during the next century, but I will venture it would surprise us.

If I were asked this day to state what was the major asset I derived from my association with a college fraternity, I would unhesitatingly reply, "Friendship." What a great word with incalculable meaning! As I have stated long ago, I firmly believe that the college fraternity is a chief agency and laboratory for the express purpose of compounding everlasting friendship, which must be a first and lasting element in one's life. We strongly are in need of it in our

Generations



Judge R.A. "Jim" Randall with the chair of his grandfather, Phil Sheridan Randall.

everyday life, and more so now in world affairs. What the civilized nations of the earth require at present is more genuine friendship and less ammunition and heavy artillery.

In conclusion, I am obliged to request you to accept the foregoing as my 'thank you' for the many expressions of friendship and the congratulations received during this day.

Thanking you all again, I am Fraternally yours.

*Phil Sheridan Randall, Norwich, 1886
Alpha Chapter of Theta Chi as of 1881"*

The issue of *The Rattle* then presented an article called "Here Is The Story." It is described by the editor of the magazine as follows: 'This



From left to right, National President Paul Norstrem, R.A. "Jim" Randall, Royce Keehr, and Doug Allen.

Narrative was prepared by Judge Randall to be presented at the Centennial Convention banquet at Norwich University, September 8, 1956, in person, but the orders of his physician prevented the 91-year old alumnus, oldest living Theta Chi, and oldest Norwich University graduate, from being present, much to his disappointment and to that of the more than five hundred who did attend.'

What follows are two segments of that article that are very pertinent to the recent reunion of our current National President, two Regional Counselors, and Judge Randall's grandson, and their discussion of a chair and a Fraternity.)

"On June 15, 1881, the twenty-fifth anniversary year of Theta Chi, Henry Martin Jones was graduated at Norwich University. Thus, James Michael Holland, or Mike, as he was affectionately called by the cadets, automatically became the 'orphan' of the Theta Chi Society, as it was then known, fraternity being a strange word on the campus.

Mike was a good, clean cut, loyal and jovial student, a shrewd and able debater of the principals of free trade, and with an ambition to become a great lawyer.

He was one of those tall, lean, lank fellows, typical of the sidehills of Vermont, who had the native ability to 'swap jackknives without looking, or trade horses in the middle of the stream' or deal in 'Connecticut wooden nutmegs' at a profit, and was even able to argue one out of a two-gallon jug of apple juice, cork, bung-hole, and all with great nonchalance.

When young Holland suddenly discovered himself to be the only active member and sole heir to the Theta Chi Society, a unique distinction, he promptly took possession of his heritage, put his house in order, and made an inventory of his stock in trade.

That little consisted of a single pedestal, two tables, a few old chairs, some pictures on the wall, a small library, a much-used set of diner dishes, and, most valuable of all, the Ritual and Constitution of Theta Chi Society. There were no

funds in the treasury for the income collector to worry about, but, thank goodness, there were no debts.

At least, Mike was supreme in his solitude, solvent in his finance, and monarch of all he surveyed."

With this description of James Michael Holland squarely cast before his brothers as a matter of first-person historical record, Brother Randall went on to note that the Theta Chi and Alpha Sigma Pi societies were the only Greek-letter organizations authorized by Norwich University. In the Fall of 1881, Norwich University consisted of four professors and fourteen cadets. Of the fourteen cadets, Alpha Sigma Pi claimed seven as members, and Theta Chi but one, James Michael Holland. Randall then colorfully described how he came to meet Henry Blanchard Hersey on the evening of September 8, 1881 and call him a friend. Randall next described how he and Hersey assessed the situation on campus, and how the two of them bolstered each other in the face of their determination to approach Holland and seek membership in Theta Chi.

"I shall never forget the look of surprise that appeared on Holland's face when we approached him. He fully realized the weakened condition of his society and had but little to offer us. We, too, were standing in the rather unusual light of actually trying to 'rush' the Theta Chi Society, instead of receiving the accustomed invitation.

After gaining his composure, Holland said, 'That would be all right, boys, but I am here all alone. How can I initiate you?' He was told that 'where there's a will there's a way,' and we even suggested to him that he could call in Prof. Charles Dole and Prof. John B. Johnson along with other members of the alumni residing in the village, and turn the trick.

He then saw his way clearly and decided to act accordingly, instructing us not to mention the matter any one; we obeyed to the letter.

In due time Holland announced that he had perfected his arrangements as outlined, and wanted us to be ready for initiation November 19, 1881, at 8 p.m.

After the supper hour of that day, we locked ourselves up in my room. After waiting until all was quiet and the coast clear, we slipped up to the third passage of the building [*Editor's Note: third floor of Jackman Hall*] and were admitted



The third floor of Jackman Hall contained rooms associated with Theta Chi Society in 1881.



Cadet Phil Sheridan Randall, 1886.



Phil Sheridan Randall, 1932.

into the Theta Chi Society room, where we were duly and truly make members of Alpha Chapter of Theta Chi Society.

The ceremony was conducted by that much beloved man, Prof. Charles Dole, '69, who occupied the president's chair. He was ably assisted by Prof. John B. Johnson, '79, William Franklin Baker, '79, Robert Alexander Silver, '74, Charles Marsh Davis '82, and James Michael Holland, '83...

On the following day (Sunday), we paraded for church, each adorned with a large red and white rosette, which had been prepared by some of our girlfriends of the village of Northfield.

You can easily imagine the look of chagrin on the faces of some of the Alpha Sigma PIs when they discovered the red and white insignia, and realized that the Theta Chi Society was not extinct."

Randall continued by stating "it was sometimes said that real money was so scarce in those early days of Vermont that the natives had to go out into the woods and tap a couple of maple trees to get a little sap to pay the book money and complete a horse trading deal."

Randall then turned to describe how he came to own his chair mentioned by his grandson and pictured with this story.

"It is no wonder that the illustrious James Michael Holland was compelled in early life to learn the value of barter in trade. We found him in his senior year gathering up the hardwood ashes from the few cadets' stoves on a Saturday morning and carefully carrying them down to the basement of the barracks, to sell to some farmer in the spring at 25 cents a bushel; Mike sometimes had

to take his pay in hard labor.

Once I had occasion to counter to one of his bargains in the fall term. I was badly in need of a chair to complete furnishing my room. Mike had been doing a little truck farming as a side line, and on a Saturday he said to me, 'Randall, I want a man today to help pull and stack some white beans.' As I had lived on the farm and knew my beans and wanted a little money, I told him I would be glad to help him out...By supper time when all was finished I realized that I had performed a full day's work. Mike said to me, 'Randall, I am mighty sorry, but I haven't got any money and can't pay you. I'll tell you what we can do; let's go up to my store room, and if you can pick out a chair for your work, I will call it square.'

I finally selected something which looked a little like a chair, and possibly may have been a chair in some remote period of the world's history, but to me it resembled an object for the junk pile. Mike stated that he would be glad to give the object of my search for my day's labor. I said, 'All right, Mike,' and took the Chinese puzzle to my room for further identification, soon commenced to subtract coils of wire, rope, strips of iron, nails and other things too numerous to mention, and then began the process of adding another assortment of about the same things until I made that chair stand alone. I used the old chair during four of the years I was a cadet, and at the end, my only regret was that Mike had been graduated, and I couldn't sell it back to him at half price. I still have the old relic in my home, and am now using it while writing this tale.

It is one of the few things I possess today that reminds me of the years I spent with Theta Chi at Norwich University, Northfield, Vermont." ■