

Is it true that Fraternity Headquarters had a fire? Yes, in the early morning hours of February 11, 1965, the Fraternity Headquarters at 530 East Town Street in Columbus was severely damaged by fire of an undetermined origin. The fire was discovered by Elizabeth Brown Gallen, *Ohio State*, who rented an apartment in the building, but the fire had already gotten out of hand in the business portion of the building before detection. The catalog and office machine rooms were destroyed completely, as well as parts of the second floor in the back of the building. The remainder of the building was badly damaged by smoke and water, but fortunately there were no injuries.

The previous 13 years in this building had shown how efficient and economic the office space and the ability to house Fraternity officers during meetings and conferences had been. Increases in office rental and hotel accommodations in Columbus far surpassed the cost of operating Fraternity Headquarters, so the decision was made to restore the building.

In the interim, business continued under trying and difficult conditions. An entire building across the street at 553 East Town was leased for office operations and preparations for the 1966 Convention. A large warehouse was rented where the charred and wet, but usable, supplies, books, booklets, installation and Convention items were stored. These were dried out, repackaged and sorted for moving into the restored building. Much of this work was done by loyal members of the Columbus Alumnae Association as well as members of the Headquarters staff. The valuable catalog files were not burned, but smoke had crept into the drawers. A portion of the cards were almost impossible to read. Eventually they were retyped. All mechanical office equipment was destroyed.

The stencil files for *The Key* mailing list were stored in the basement of the temporary building. Some had been damaged. (The use of mailing list stencils was discussed in the August 2007 issue of *Historically Speaking*.) The spring issue of the magazine was delayed because a new address list had to be compiled. Fortunately the original and only copies of the minutes and Grand Presidents' reports were at the bindery. Unharmed, too, was the only known set of *The Key* since 1881, complete with original covers. The four bound sets of Grand Presidents' reports, the *Constitution*, the *Bylaws* and *Standing Rules, Proceedings* and a complete file of songbooks were also rescued. The Reference Department file of articles and dates published in *The Key* since 1882 was saved with the cuts and pictures. Fortunately stencils for the reprinting of the *Ritual Book* were saved as well as Convention verbatim minutes. The famous "Delta Red Book," earliest existing chapter record, and other valuable chapter books given to the Fraternity were in a safe and survived the fire. The old badges on display in a large gold frame were also saved.

The lovely portrait of Tade Hartsuff Kuhns, *Butler*, Kappa's first Grand President, was carried from the building along with 180 pieces of the Victorian furniture. Thanks to the efficiency of the Columbus Fire Department in removing them from the building immediately, they were unharmed. They were stored in a furniture warehouse to be dried out, refinished and reupholstered. Only two pieces were lost. The saturated carpeting was taken to a carpet warehouse for drying out. The historical gowns used for Convention pageants, choir robes, officers' hoods and insignia and other regalia were sent to a dry cleaner to have the smoke odor removed. All pieces of silver, glassware, lamps, dishes and metal office desks were placed in the temporary building and restored.

The one thing of historical value lost was a display case holding, among other Fraternity memorabilia, the original pledge pins: a gold stick pin of the Sigma in Delta, blue enamel pledge stick pin and a combination of the letters KKG in silver. The article in *The Key* asked "if anyone had one of these pins, or other historical items such as early membership certificates, charter oaths, pictures, correspondence, insignia or booklets" and if so to please send them to Headquarters

The architect for the restoration was Charles Nitschke, husband of former Fraternity President Sally Moore Nitschke, *Ohio State*. Each room and the new pieces were personally approved and selected by Executive Director Clara O. Pierce, *Ohio State*, and staff member Frances Davis Evans, *Ohio State*.

(You're invited to join the Heritage Museum Guild February 9, 2008, for a program about the Headquarter's fire. For additional details see www.kappa.org/Foundation/Museums).