

NEBRASKA STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY COLLECTION RECORD

RG5666.AM: Pi Tau Delta Fraternity (Lincoln, Neb.), 1938-1958

Papers: 1938-1948

Lincoln, Lancaster County, Neb.: Young Men's Fraternity

Size: .7 cu. ft.; 10 photographs

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

The Pi Tau Delta Fraternity of Lincoln, Nebraska, manuscript collection consists of the organization's records dating from 1938-1948. Records include the articles of incorporation and by-laws; meeting minutes, financial records, membership accounts, a book of rituals, and a scrapbook.

The mission of this all boys club was to "teach patriotism and fraternalism, and uphold the highest social standards of American Manhood," (Bylaws, 165-171). The Fraternity was open to any young man over the age of 17 regardless of race, religion, or party affiliation. The Constitution and Bylaws included the penalties for non-payment of dues and for failure to attend meetings regularly. Dues were established at .25 cents per month and members in good standing could vote on all questions coming before body. The fraternity practiced only one secret ritual; the "white and black ball method" for voting in new members (Bylaws, 165-171). The organization received its first charter in August of 1939, with Ivan L. Armstrong as the sponsor and advisor. The Lincoln Branch, also known as the Alpha Branch, was the site of most of the organization's activities.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

This collection is arranged in two series: 1) Fraternity Business; and 2) Scrapbook

Series 1 contains bylaws, meeting minutes, membership records, and financial ledgers. Series 2 includes Pi Tau Delta correspondence, membership lists, resolutions, semi-annual reports, World War II oil ration coupons, and receipts. One of the most unique items in the collection is a book of rituals, formerly titled "Ritual of the Order of the Sons of Demosthenes."

The Sons of Demosthenes, the alternate name for the Pi Tau Delta's, invokes the ancient Greek orator who championed civic duty. Ivan L. Armstrong, the club's founder, hoped that his organization would create a "bridge" for young men between high school and adult life (Preface to Bylaws). Armstrong, a postman who resided in the Havelock area of Lincoln, was the father of three daughters and newspaper editors sometimes speculated that Armstrong created the independent young men's association for want of a son. Armstrong, however, said that he had designed the fraternity for those youth who were not "blessed" to be able to attend the university. He organized the club as a beneficent society as well as a social club with similarities to the masons and to Greek fraternity's; but without hazing or secrecy.

Armstrong had a long record of service to community youth before receiving the organization's charter in August of 1939, from the Secretary of State. He first conceived of the idea for a boy's fraternity in 1934 and initiated the club, informally, with eight members. He completed the fraternity's conceptual design by 1936, and piloted activities for youths that would eventually become mainstays of the association. A decade later the group had 55 members. Membership was open to all males between the ages of 17 and 24, but was especially geared toward men not attending college or business school. Financed by membership fees, the group was independent of other organizations as well as commercial endorsements. However, the "Sons" did collaborate with YMCA, Kiwanis, Rotary, and Lions, on some programming. By 1946, Armstrong had become the organization's national representative and considered his organization the first independent boy's fraternity in the United States. Additional branches were permitted to form with the consent of the Alpha branch, and Armstrong's goal was to establish branches across Nebraska and eventually across the nation.

Series One contains the names of the organization's charter members. Ivan L. Armstrong (sponsor), Robert L. Weckman (president), J. Robert Malone (vice-president), and Kenneth Burham (secretary) were among the fraternity's founding members. The full slate of officers included a sponsor, president, vice-president, secretary, treasurer, chaplain, and sergeant-at-arms. All of the officers were also the organization's trustees. Financial responsibility for the club increased with status. Gamma Degree members bore additional initiation fees (\$2.00) and membership dues that were double those (\$.50) of the Beta Degree members. Financial Ledgers recorded the fraternity's monthly bills, late payments of members' dues, and new member initiation fees. The club's rules included provisions for punishment of members who violated the fraternity's constitution. For example, more than three infractions could result in banishment for life. The usual consequences for rule infractions were verbal reprimands, but mild corporal punishment was sometimes resorted to. (For example, one prankster endured two slaps on the wrist for putting a tack on the chair of another young man). On the whole, most dues paying members remained in good standing and enjoyed an atmosphere that was non-sectarian, and open to all religions and races. The Pi Tau Delta's official purpose was to help every young man feel his place in society. However, recreational activities were the constant fare: visits to Municipal Swimming Pool, picnics, coffee and donut breakfasts, skating, and dances were frequent events. The organization also sponsored two basketball teams, took trips to Camp Strater, had cookouts, and participated in an annual Christmas parade.

Series 2 holds additional information about the lives of club members. Kenneth Burham, who served as the fraternity's president in 1938 was killed during a tour of duty in the U.S. Army in 1944. Another fraternity brother, Jack Ranz, was killed in action the same year, and the Pi Tau Delta held a joint memorial service for their fallen brothers. Names of well known Lincolniters who were affiliated with the club are Robert Malone, Arnot[t] Folsom, and J.M. Reinhardt. (Note: The collection includes **photographs**, including photographs from a reunion of the club, taken at Havelock Park in 1958.

DESCRIPTION

Series 1) Fraternity Business

Box 1

Folder

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| 1. Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws | 1939, Aug. 24-1948, Jan. 27 |
| 2. "Ritual of the Order," Book; By Laws | 1939, Aug. 24 |
| 3. Meeting Minutes | 1938 |
| 4. Meeting Minutes | 1939 |
| 5. Meeting Minutes | 1940 |
| 6. Meeting Minutes | 1941 |
| 7. Meeting Minutes & Attendance Register | 1943, Jan. 4-1944, June 5 |
| 8. Meeting Minutes | 1946-1948 |
| 9. Membership: Accounts Receivable | 1940 |
| 10. Membership: Special Assessments | 1939, Aug. 7-1941, Dec. 30 |
| 11. Attendance Rosters | 1938, Jan. 12-1941 June 30 |
| 12. Financial Journal | 1939, Apr. 1-1941, June 30 |
| 13. Financial Journal | 1941 July 1-1943, Jan. 1 |
| 14. Financial Journal | 1945, Jan. 8-1948, Feb. 17 |
| 15. Cards: Calling & Membership | [n.d.] |
| 16. Newspaper Clippings | 1944 |

Series 2) Scrapbook

Box 2 Scrapbook

1. "Sons of Demosthenes" Flyer; and explanation of the meaning of the name Demosthenes.
2. "Ritual of the Order" Procedure of the Meetings.
3. Charge of the Beta Degree
4. Constitution and By Laws (copy) 1939, Aug. 24
5. Resolution No. VII
6. Gamma Degree requirements
7. Original Membership list
8. Correspondence

Correspondents whose letters appear in Series 2 include:

- a). Secretary of State Harry R. Swanson to Hon. James A. Farley, Postmaster General, Lincoln to Washington, D.C. 1939 Nov. 1.
- b. Harry R. Swanson, to Ivan L. Armstrong, Lincoln, NE 1939, Nov. 21.
- c. James A. Farley to Harry R. Swanson, Washington, D.C. to Lincoln, NE 15, Nov. 1939.
- d. Magnus Kristoffersen, to Ivan Armstrong, Lincoln, NE 1940 Mar. 30.
- e. John C. Pryor to Ivan Armstrong [n.d.]
- f. John P. Robertson, Secretary for Senator Norris, United States Senate Committee on Judiciary to Clarence P. Johnson, Washington D.C. to Lincoln 1942 Jan. 29.
- g. Clarence P. Johnson to Senator, George W. Norris, Lincoln, NE to Washington

D.C. 1942, Jan., 27.

h. Ivan Armstrong, Open Letter to establish additional branches of Pi Tau Delta [n.d.]

i) Rich Reid to Pi Tau Delta Fraternity, Great Lakes, Illinois 1945, Sept. 4

j) Kenneth W. Burham, to Pi Tau Delta Fraternity, Shreveport, Louisiana, 1943, Feb. 28.

9. Minutes Y.M.C. A. Neighborhood Club, 1936, Feb. 10.

11. Key resolutions of the organization (Resolutions 1-11).

12. Semi-Annual Reports: 1940, Dec. 31; 1941, Dec., June;

13. Meeting minutes: 1947, Aug. 18.

14. Memo, "Installation of Officer," 1947, July 14.

15. Membership Application.

Source: "Unique Boys Club in Twelfth year," 1946, Aug. 24 (7th Anniversary of Charter).

"Pi Tau's Hold Memorial Service," for Jack Ranz and Kenneth Burham killed in action in Army, [*Lincoln Journal* ?]Sept. 21 1944.