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Ripple Effects: The Transformation of SFASU Women's Social clubs to National Sororities

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Introduction

The fraternity appealed because it captured and preserved the spirit of the revolts [against university faculty]. Although rhetoric paid tribute to serious, high-minded purpose, the real concern of each fraternity was to create within the larger college a small group of compatible fellows for friendship, mutual protection, and good times. - *Campus Life: Undergraduate Cultures from the End of the Eighteenth Century to the Present*¹

Colleges across the United States began admitting larger numbers of female students by the mid-1800s than they had in the past. Schools needed the additional tuition female students provided after the Civil War and the 1862 Morrill Land Grant Act provided even more opportunities for enrollment at state schools. Nearly all Greek-letter fraternal organizations, however, maintained an exclusively male membership. Excluded from men's groups who focused on celebrating male solidarity, women found themselves limited to joining literary societies, or affiliating with auxiliary groups of the male-dominated organizations. Bettie Locke was an ardent supporter of her brother's fraternity at Indiana Asbury University, however, when the group offered her a badge to wear as a devotee, she refused on the grounds that she would only sport the pin as a fully initiated member.²

¹Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, *Campus Life: Undergraduate Cultures from the End of the Eighteenth Century to the Present* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987), 29.

² Clyde Sanford Johnson, *Fraternalities In Our Colleges* (NY: National Interfraternity Foundation, 1972), 57-58.

Disheartened at her exclusion solely on the basis of her gender, Locke's father encouraged her to organize a fraternity for women. Along with three other women, Locke established the first all-female Greek organization, Kappa Alpha Theta. While many women's groups referred to themselves as fraternities, others adopted the more well-known term *sorority* suggested by Dr. Frank Smalley, a Latin professor at Syracuse University in the 1870s. Sororities provided an insulated setting where members worked together to secure a place for themselves on male dominated campuses and provided the members opportunities to acquire leadership skills. The women considered the groups to be an essential part of their college experience.³

These protective sisterhoods fostered a sense of belonging and identity, especially crucial at coeducational schools where men were often openly hostile to women. Like men's fraternities the new groups existed in part to offer reprieve from the strict rules imposed by the schools. Girls might steal away for picnics where members would partake in drinking or smoking. Many faculty members overlooked the harmless mischief of sororities as the groups kept the women from sneaking off with men. Over time, administrators recognized that the groups also provided a feeling of comfort and security for female students, which ultimately helped college retention numbers. There was also a belief that the

³ Nicholas L. Syrett, *The Company He Keeps: A History of White College Fraternities* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 173; Johnson, *Fraternities in Our Colleges*, 59-60.

clubs helped alleviate some of the pressures of school allowing the women to disengage temporarily from the “oppressive holy atmosphere that still prevailed on the campuses.”⁴ The shared sense of purpose enabled women to build strong relationships with their new sisters, promote leadership opportunities within the groups, and help create a sense of family while away at school. In addition to the social interactions sororities offered, dormitory life was limited or non-existent on most campuses for women. Ladies who opted to attend college away from home often found themselves living in boarding houses near the campus. Sorority housing offered a brick and mortar home for collegiate women as well as a familial feeling, while alleviating the need for schools to provide space for female students.⁵

Many new state colleges opened across the country as a result of the Morrill Land Grants of 1862 and 1890 that provided federal funding. The new schools aspired to fill their classrooms and accepting women offered another means of income. State universities accepted larger numbers of women and as a result, Greek-letter sororities expanded across the country. When Stephen F. Austin State Teachers College (SFA) opened in 1923, national sororities were well-established throughout the country including campuses in Texas, such as

⁴ Elaine Kendall, *Peculiar Institutions: An Informal History of the Seven Sister Colleges*, (NY: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1975), 148.

⁵ Amy Thompson McCandless, *The Past in the Present: Women’s Higher Education in the Twentieth-Century American South*, 142-143; Ida Shaw Martin, *Sorority Handbook*, 11th ed. (Boston, MA: Ida Shaw Martin, 1931), 15-16; Kendall, *Peculiar Institutions*, 148.

The University of Texas and Southwestern University. National organizations showed little interest in expanding to SFA because of the school's limited size and the remote location of Nacogdoches.⁶

Without national organizations, students at SFA created local social clubs that mirrored the ideals as sororities: friendship, scholarship, leadership, and school spirit. The groups provided more than an after-school activity for women attending SFA. The clubs formed the core of their friend groups, developed a sense of belonging, and created a surrogate family unit for women who moved to Nacogdoches during the school year. The bonds of sisterhood brought members closer to each other, while providing a deeper connection with the college.

The Amities and the Pine Burrs were established as two of the first female social groups shortly after the school opened. The clubs existed for the purpose of fraternizing with other women and, on occasion, with male social groups. The organizations attracted women who were outgoing and involved in school activities, which by their nature provided publicity for the groups. Members vied for top honors on campus, from editor of the yearbook to homecoming queen. Young women entering SFA sought out membership in the elite groups. After World War II, growth of the student population instigated a need to establish two additional groups, the Fideles and Sigma Gammas. Each of the groups continued to thrive despite increased competition.

⁶ McCandless, *The Past in the Present*, 1.

Dr. Ralph W. Steen became the president of SFA in 1958. He began transitioning the college toward converting to a four-year university. He brought in new faculty members who held higher degrees, received government funding for the expansion of classrooms and dormitories, and sought out new recreational activities to aid in the recruitment of students from more distant regions. Change swept across the campus like a tidal wave, however, Steen's vision of growth inadvertently effected the social groups on campus in his quest for a broader student body. His efforts to transform the college created ripples of change, which ultimately led to the nationalization of the local social groups for sororities that were recognized nation-wide, leaving behind years of tradition. Steen used the new sororities to help recruit more female students from the Houston and Dallas metropolitan areas.

Although Steen had little to do with the social groups directly, he acted as the catalyst for the changes that were implemented. He hired Ernestine Henry as the dean of women and her position included managing all aspects of women's life at SFA. As the new dean, Henry became responsible for supporting and encouraging the members of the local social clubs to move toward nationalization. The growth of the college captured the attention of the National Panhellenic Conference, which oversaw women's Greek fraternities. The groups found Panhellenic organizations matching their club's philosophies with her help. Each of the four organizations transformed into national sororities over the course of the 1960s.

The decade proved to be a time of growth and development for both the university and women's social groups. The new sororities helped bring new interest to the school. Women who joined the organizations worked hard to maintain their grades in order to return each semester. The desire to maintain the bonds of sisterhood reinforced retention rates at the school. Upon returning home for weekend visits and summer vacations, the women promoted their sororities to friends and unwittingly became recruitment agents for the school. The connection to a larger group beyond Nacogdoches allowed female students to network with women at other schools across the nation and further spread the name of SFA.

Although the groups did not bring large numbers of additional students to the school, the members continued to promote school spirit through the activities in which they participated while bringing new traditions to the campus. Membership in national sororities allowed women to remain connected to the school and old friends many years after they had graduated. Alumnae groups and conventions provided former members opportunities to gather and reminisce about their years at SFA while continuing to strengthen the feelings of sisterhood created while in college.

The transformation of the social groups came about as a byproduct of Steen's vision for change and growth for the overall university. He did not set out to eliminate the established women's clubs, nor did he pointedly seek to bring national sororities to the school. Steen's desire to impart extensive alterations to

SFA did not originally include transforming the local groups. However, Steen acted as the facilitator who provided an environment that would support national groups. Their transformation proved to be subtler, a result of ripples moving across the campus rather than a tidal wave. Steen's expansion of the campus, the need for a broader student body, and wider recognition of the school beyond the Nacogdoches region all played a part in creating the move away from more provincial social clubs toward modern and nationally recognized sororities.

Women's Social Clubs at Stephen F. Austin

Social clubs are an excellent medium through which to have fun, but it doesn't end there... Social clubs give the student an outlet for his energies. There are projects to work on... money-raising projects, homecoming floats, toys to be rehabilitated at Christmas, etc. Social clubs give their members a chance to serve their school and community, as well as their club and themselves. Social clubs open the door to so many opportunities... for meeting people and making friends... of becoming a part of... an organization. "Why Join a Club?" *Pine Log*¹

As continuing education welcomed more females in the early 1900s, women enrolled in Texas normal schools, or teaching schools, as education was one of the few professional options available to women. Southwest Texas State Normal School's student body in 1904 was 64% female, and by 1919 women's enrollment had grown to 73%. Women made up over two-thirds of the enrollment numbers at North Texas State Teachers College in 1923. In 1917, Texas legislators authorized the establishment of four new normal schools, including SFA, to promote teacher education. Although initially slated as a normal school, World War I delayed the opening of SFA. When the college finally opened in 1923, SFA offered four-year degrees as well as teacher certifications. NPC sororities expanded across Texas in the early 1900s to schools such as The University of Texas and Southwestern University but a fledgling college located in a remote area did not attract national attention.²

¹Tommy Reck, "Why Join a Club?," *Pine Log*, September 29, 1960: 2.

²Chara Haeussler Bohan, and J. Wesley Noll, "Gender and the Evolution of Normal School Education: A Historical Analysis of Teacher Education Institutions," *Educational Foundations* 21 (Summer-Fall 2007): 16; Peggy Wright, "Vista View," *Sawdust* (Fall 2013): 11.

Within the first year, SFA enrolled 245 students. Female students quickly established music and literary organizations. The Treble Clef Club accepted only female choral students, while men joined the Glee Club. Women formed two literary societies to encourage the study of classic literature and promote camaraderie. The Anne Birdwell Club named themselves in honor of one of their members, the daughter of the school's president, Dr. Alton Birdwell. The group claimed approximately twenty-five members. Considering nearly fifty members comprised the Blue Bonnet Literary Society, most females on campus belonged to one group or the other. Women on campus developed another short-lived club whose name has been lost, but students affectionately referred to them as "The Laffalots" because their members "laughed a heap."³ Although they set out to do their part helping promote spirit at the school, they were known primarily for being a loud group of energetic young ladies. The women entered a float into the circus parade and presented a "Dance of the Seven Veils" tent at the circus that evening.⁴ Students also founded a Young Women's Christian Association (Y.W.C.A.) for service opportunities, as well as a Girl Scout troop. These groups offered young women opportunities for socializing and event planning, while building leadership skills among the women who served as officers and

³*Stone Fort 1924*, 90-92, "Do You Know the Laffalots?" *Pine Log*, May 31, 1924: 1.

⁴"Do You Know the Laffalots?" *Pine Log*, May 31, 1924: 1.

conducted meetings. As the school grew, students introduced more organizations.⁵

SFA's student body grew to over six hundred by the fall of 1924 and the female students continued to develop social outlets. During the spring semester of 1925, for instance, women established a Women's Athletic Association (W.A.A.). The group encouraged participation in organized sporting events including ping pong and intramural basketball. Members also promoted hiking, gymnastics, and "asthetic [*sic*] dancing."⁶ The W.A.A. also provided another social outlet for women on campus through less formal competitions and the enjoyment of sharing refreshments after the games.⁷

During the first few years, members graduated, interests changed, and groups evolved. The Anne Birdwell Club transitioned for example, into a co-ed scholarship society and ultimately into the Anne Birdwell chapter of the Alpha Chi honor society in the mid-1930s. The Bluebonnet Society lasted only a couple of years. Although women attempted to revive the group in 1927, they failed to garner enough attention to sustain the organization. The Lumberjackettes formed on campus in 1927. They served as the school's pep squad and maintained some of the highest membership numbers of all the women's clubs. However,

⁵Bettye Herrington Craddock, *The Golden Years*, 13, 15-16; Rachel Cockrell Stallard, *Logging a Legacy: A Look at Student Activities from 1924 to 1998 as Reflected in The Pine Log*, 9; *Stone Fort 1924*, 90-93.

⁶*Stone Fort 1924*, 140.

⁷Craddock, *The Golden Years*, 25; Stallard, *Logging a Legacy*, 10.

they focused on supporting athletic teams and not creating additional social events in which women could engage.⁸

Despite the number of women's groups that emerged on campus in the first decade, the school's newspaper, *The Pine Log*, claimed no fraternities, sororities, or social clubs existed at SFA. "Not, however, that we object, but simply because we cannot afford them."⁹ The article contradicts the *Stone Fort* yearbook that shows the school had developed two women's social groups by 1929. The first organization, known as the Sweetheart Club, changed their name to Amities, which is French for friendship. Members established the group in the fall of 1928 with fifteen members. They quickly organized social events on campus including two costume dances. Thirty-one women chartered the second club organized the following year and adopted the name Pine Burrs. The Amities disbanded sometime after 1929, but reorganized in 1932 giving the Pine Burrs the distinction of being the oldest continuous social group at SFA. Both clubs encouraged service, promoted college spirit, and sponsored social activities on campus including dances for the entire school. The planned events allowed the women to practice acting as hostesses and show off their dancing skills.¹⁰

⁸*Stone Fort 1924-1935*.

⁹Craddock, *The Golden Years*, 32; Stallard, *Logging a Legacy*, 11-12.

¹⁰Craddock, *The Golden Years*, 32; Stallard, *Logging a Legacy*, 11-12; *Stone Fort 1929*, 15; *Stone Fort 1930*, 158; *Stone Fort 1935*, 77; "Install Oldest Women's Group at Austin College: 4th in Texas," *Sigma Kappa Triangle*, Spring 1961. Accessed November 30, 2018, <http://www.sigmakappaarchives.org/1961>.

By the late 1930s, the groups developed more distinctive identities that could be seen in the club specific clothing they proudly wore around campus. Each group issued a special colored ribbon to pledges upon entry into the group. A week later, the women pledged their loyalty to the club and exchanged ribbons for a club pin designating their acceptance and giving pledges a sense of belonging. Women wore their pledge pins until the last day of the term when they would receive their regular club pin, a diamond-shaped pin or a golden Pine Burr. Amities members wore white pull-over sweaters featuring a large diamond-shaped patch on the front with the name of their organization in the center. Pine Burrs opted for a bright yellow sweater. Both groups updated their wardrobes in the spring of 1942. The Amities received their new jackets after the Easter holidays. Following spring initiation, members led the newly inducted Pine Burrs into a darkened room and when the women turned on the lights, members saw their upgraded jackets for the first time. The ladies now sported dark green, elongated cardigans featuring a large yellow PB on the left side. Members of both groups wore their jackets once a week, usually corresponding with the day of club meetings.¹¹

¹¹*Stone Fort 1935*, 77; "Social Set-Up: Amities," *Pine Log*, February 28, 1942: 4; "Pine Burrs Jump Gun on Spring with New Jackets," *Pine Log*, February 14, 1942: 1; "Social Set-Up: Amities," *Pine Log*, March 28, 1942: 4; "Social Set-Up: Amities," *Pine Log*, November 1, 1941: 4; *Stone Fort 1929*, 115.

Women who joined the groups were involved in many activities on campus. The Choral Club and the Dramatic Club consisted of members from both organizations. A number of ladies worked on the school newspaper and helped put together the yearbook. They served on the Women's Council and participated in the Y.W.C.A. and the W.A.A. Several ladies shared membership in both the Amities and the Pine Burrs during the early 1930s. Yet, as the groups eventually grew in size and popularity, conditions of membership became more stringent and women were required to make a choice between the two organizations.¹²

Local clubs offered their members social involvement on campus. Dormitories and campus organizations nominated women to take part in Homecoming festivities as duchesses of the court each year. Nevertheless, because of the number of students involved in the social clubs, their nominees vied for the sought-after title of Queen and Ladies-in-Waiting without much competition from non-members. The women often won other titles on campus such as Miss SFA, Most Beautiful, and Senior Favorite.¹³

Women who joined the social groups on campus were involved in multiple facets of school life and were often the most well-known students because they

¹²*Stone Fort 1930*, 128-29, 144-165.

¹³"Queen Rogers to Reign at Homecoming" *Pine Log*, October 28, 1959: 1; "SFA Social Organization Plan Campus Activities", *Pine Log*, November 13, 1959: 10; "Club Events" *Pine Log*, December 4, 1959: 5; *Stone Fort*, 1961: 73; "Social Clubs Plan Homecoming Events", *Pine Log*, October 23, 1959: 5.

remained active in so many groups. Deana Bolton Covin serves as an example of the level of involvement that members had on campus. Covin joined the Pine Burrs her freshman year in 1939. She served as a Gibbs Hall dormitory council member and a Woman's Council member. Covin was elected class secretary and treasurer, became a member of the Alpha Chi national honor society, and served as SFA's first female drum major. In addition to being named freshman class favorite, the student body chose Covin to be the first Miss SFA, an honor she held for three consecutive years. Afterward, the school decided to award the title to graduating seniors in the future. Joyce Bright Swearingen, a fellow Pine Burr, replaced Covin as Miss SFA in 1943.¹⁴

The popularity of the women's groups came from their members' outgoing personalities and the ability to laugh at themselves. Women who swore their loyalty to the groups proudly participated in informal initiation antics before completing their pledging period. The student body began to anticipate the indignities pledges would be subjected to perform. Pine Burr recruits wore tow sack dresses with a sneaker or flat shoe on one foot and a high-heeled shoe on the other on the day of their initiation. Braids and colorful ribbons in their hair, the women appeared without make-up. Pledges carried bags of candy throughout the day and were expected to kneel before any older members declaring, "I love

¹⁴Kasi Dickerson, "Major Triumphs: Alumna Recalls Lifetime of Cherished Memories" *Sawdust* (Winter 2015): 21-22.

you, Pine Burr.”¹⁵ The silly antics culminated with the initiates rolling a mothball up Vista View, which drew large crowds of spectators. The women substituted peanuts for the mothballs in later years and students began to refer to the event as the “Goober pushing jamboree.”¹⁶ While pushing the peanuts up the main pathway, the pledges would yell out “I wanta [*sic*] be a cute Pine Burr,” while initiated members stood guard and replied, “Pine Burrs forever!”¹⁷ According to one of the members, Mary Wilson Ingram, older women often took pity upon the younger girls and tossed the peanuts a few feet further up the path.¹⁸

In addition to the fun they had on campus, the social clubs promoted school spirit at the football games. A lively social occasion, the women attended the competitions and added their own festivities to the outing. The first home game of each season found the Pine Burr pledges taking center stage during half-time. They tossed their shoes onto the football field and then scrambled to find them as quickly as possible. One pledge, Mrs. J. Fuller, had grown up in Nacogdoches and watched the women who came before her struggle to match their shoes. To eliminate the possibility of embarrassment, “I dug through our closet and found these big, bright maroon ski boots.” Fuller said. “Everyone

¹⁵*Stone Fort 1941*, 159.

¹⁶*Stone Fort 1950*, 163.

¹⁷Stallard, *Logging a Legacy*, 28.

¹⁸Stallard, *Logging a Legacy*, 28, 57; Joyce Swearingen, interviewed by the author, Nacogdoches, TX, April 26, 2017; *Stone Fort 1950*, 163; Mary Ingram, interviewed by the author via telephone, November 12, 2018.

probably thought I was crazy, but I knew that when we had to throw our shoes out on the field, I would be able to go right to mine and pick them up.”¹⁹

Although life on campus appeared carefree in 1940, World War II loomed over the country and was present in the minds of students in all activities. Dances hosted by the social groups provided evidence of how significant the fighting in Europe had become. The Pine Burrs hosted a naval-themed dance on the Steam Ship Pine Burr in March 1941. To make the venue feel more like a boat, guests entered the room by walking up the gangplank. Life preservers hung on the walls and some of the participants came dressed in nautical outfits. The ship theme reflected the desire of the women to acknowledge the war while making an effort to ignore the seemingly inevitable United States entry into the fight.²⁰

On December 7, 1941, the conflict finally came to SFA. Joyce Swearingen remembers the student body being called to the Austin Building by Birdwell. “We went to the auditorium, and Bobby Murphy (senior class president) and Birdwell put a big old stand-up radio on the stage and we listened to Roosevelt declare war on Japan.” According to Swearingen, “You could hear a pin drop. It was full, everybody was all around and a lot of boys left right then.” Birdwell pleaded with the male students to finish out the semester. Although many of the young men

¹⁹Stallard, *Logging a Legacy*, 28.

²⁰Stallard, *Logging a Legacy*, 29.

left school the following spring and enlisted in the military services, male enrollment dropped from 317 during the fall semester to 228 in the spring of 1942.²¹

After the United States entered the war, there were few men on campus and dates to the popular dances grew challenging to find. Groups became resourceful and chose to institute a vice-versa dance whereby the women invited men to the dances. The social clubs did their best to provide a festive atmosphere with reduced funding and resources. The Pine Burrs held a Christmas dance in December 1942. The members “worked on those decorations. We had used newspaper and painted them white and put glitter on them,” recalls Swearingen. “Hung it all over the WRC building (Women’s Recreation Center), of course, it’s not there now but the ceiling of the WRC was all these icicles and that was Christmas, was our Christmas dance and dinner in December of ’42.”²²

The following year proved just as difficult to find dates to the traditional Christmas dinner-dances. Pine Burr women wrote letters to Santa Claus asking for a successful event. They hosted an old-fashioned Christmas with holly decorating the tables in Gibbs Hall’s dining room. Their most ardent plea came at

²¹Swearingen, interview; “Enrollments,” box 2, folder 1, University Archives 69, East Texas Research Center, Stephen F. Austin State University.

²²Swearingen, interview; “Pine Burrs Sponsor Last Dance of This Term: Vice-Versa Dance to Be Held in WRC,” *Pine Log*, July 11, 1942: 2.

the end of their correspondence with Santa where they begged for men to be delivered among the gifts, "Please Santa, send us some stags!"²³ Although Saint Nicholas delivered a fun evening, the women did not find any men under their trees that year.

The clubs worked on service projects in the past, such as donating presents to the poor at Christmas time. During the war years, however, they turned their focus on the men fighting overseas. Family members and friends of the women enlisted in the armed forces and the clubs sought ways to show their appreciation for the sacrifice the men made. The Pine Burrs chose a different soldier each week and wrote them letters. They discussed ways of engaging the reader "and NOT [B]ore Him."²⁴ The group also gathered to knit squares that they packaged and sent to Great Britain. Once in Europe, the pieces were stitched together creating blankets that the military distributed to the soldiers. Some club members traveled to Longview to offer help in the hospital, but they did so on their own and not as representatives of the groups.²⁵

The women worked tirelessly through the war-time years and rejoiced when the men returned home and began attending SFA once again. The student population grew to one thousand students in 1946 and the male to female ratio

²³"Pine Burrs Letter to Santa," *Pine Log*, December 11, 1943: 4.

²⁴"Social Set-Up: Pine Burrs," *Pine Log*, March 28, 1942: 4.

²⁵Stallard, *Logging a Legacy*, 41; Swearingen, interview.

reversed. From an almost non-existent male population, there were now three boys to every girl. the ladies considered the school to be a “veritable paradise” according to the school paper.²⁶ The change in student population eliminated the need for a wartime social group, the Mournful Old Maids Club.²⁷

After 1946, SFA started to return to business as usual, as was the national trend, and administrators encouraged students to join campus groups and become involved in school activities. The increase in enrollment meant that more women attempted to pledge the two social clubs. The Amities and Pine Burrs were forced to deny membership to women going through recruitment due to the limited numbers accepted into each group. Often times, the women chose only to attend the parties of one club. Women could try to join a group the following year if they did not receive an invitation the first time. Yet, according to Hazel Shelton Abernathy, occasionally the clubs “would blackball you if they didn’t like you. You had to be accepted to be voted in.”²⁸

Eventually, the number of social clubs expanded to meet the needs of the increasing number of female students. Women created two additional groups in the late 1940s. The Fideles, a name meaning faithful, were established in 1946. The Sigma Gammas established themselves on campus in the spring of 1948.

²⁶Stallard, *Logging a Legacy*, 56.

²⁷Stallard, *Logging a Legacy*, 56; “Enrollments,” box 2, folder 1, University Archives 69, East Texas Research Center, Stephen F. Austin State University.

²⁸Stallard, *Logging a Legacy*, 57; Swearingen, interview.

Each club established their own traditions quickly and could be recognized around campus by their distinctive outfits. Members coordinated and wore their group's colors on meeting days. The Fideles appeared on campus in their green sweaters, while Pine Burr women wore blouses and skirts in their signature colors.²⁹

Pledges worked hard to earn their right to become members of the groups. According to Mary Ingram, club officers required pledges to obtain the signatures of every initiated member. The younger women washed and ironed member's clothes, cleaned dorm rooms, and swept steps to receive the signature of some members. Judy Samford Hilton remembers being forced to carry an egg with her for two to three weeks. Each member signed the egg. Hilton toted her precious cargo with her wherever she went to show any member who might ask. Should a pledge be unfortunate enough to break her egg, the entire process started over. The eggs were rotten and reeked horribly by the time Pine Burr members released the pledges from their babysitting duties. One of the pledges came up with the idea to sneak over to the Units, a male dorm on campus, and throw the offensive eggs at the building. Despite the mess and the putrid aroma, Hilton remembers Mrs. Ernestine Henry, Dean of Women, being more upset that some of the women wore shorts that evening. When doling out consequences for

²⁹Stallard, *Logging a Legacy*, 72-73; Ruby Shannon, "Fidele Club Founded in 1946," *Pine Log*, December 8, 1961: 5; *Stone Fort 1950*, 159; "Club and Society: Pine Burrs," *Pine Log*, January 18, 1963.

the evening's antics, Henry informed the Pine Burrs they would not be allowed to hold any pledge activities for the remainder of the semester. Hilton and her pledge sisters were delighted. Although the women valued mild hazing as a way of earning their place in the clubs, none of the pledges particularly enjoyed being the target of the tomfooleries.³⁰

Each group dressed their pledges in humiliating outfits as a part of informal initiation. Pine Burrs continued to wear burlap sack dresses with one high-heel and one flat shoe. The women wore their hair in multiple pony-tails with yellow and green ribbons. Judy Hilton recalls the ridiculous outfit drew the ire of her physical education professor who upbraided Hilton for the uneven footwear asserting that the shoes were detrimental to her posture and balance. Fidele pledges dressed as young school girls. Dr. Janelle Coleman Ashley remembers attending class while wearing "little bitty, short, green skirts and knee-socks." Along with their school books, the women carried dolls or teddy bears and candy to pass out to other students. The women cleaned the steps of the college grill with their toothbrushes and complied with the requests of the older members. Sigma Gamma pledges wore striped overalls with straw hats and sweatshirts with colorful patches on the sleeves throughout the day leading up to initiation. The members required the pledges to carry fishing poles and a can of live worms

³⁰Ingram, interview; Judy Samford Hilton, interviewed by the author via telephone, November 6, 2018.

with them as they went about campus barefoot. To assure maximum exposure, members required the pledges to dine together in the cafeteria.³¹

The women's social clubs at SFA each had a corresponding male group. Although women established the Amities and Pine Burrs on campus in the late 1920s, only a few male social groups existed for similar purposes. Four men's clubs organized between 1927 and 1948 to build fraternal brotherhood. Eventually each club partnered with a female group: Sawyers with Pine Burrs, Austinites with Amities, Foresters with Fideles, and Lambda Gammas with Sigma Gamma. Groups held joint dances, festivals, and other social activities. The Fideles and Foresters held an annual Spring Festival and the Amities and Austinites gathered for their Diamond Horseshoe Dance. The groups maintained a loyalty to their partners and did not socialize with other clubs. Generally, the men chose their 'sweethearts' and homecoming duchesses from their sister organizations.³²

By the 1950s, the social clubs participated in more contemporary sorority-style recruitments including rounds of parties where the groups gave women an opportunity to get to know each organization. Interested young ladies gathered on campus for a formal convocation in their Sunday best minus hats and gloves.,

³¹"Fidele Pledges Dress Up," *Pine Log*, January 19, 1957: 1; Hilton, interview; Stallard, *Logging a Legacy*, 57, 73; Photograph "Gone Fishin'," *Pine Log*, May 16, 1958: 2; Shannon, "Fidele Club Founded in 1946," *Pine Log*, Dec. 8, 1961: 5; *Stone Fort 1950*, 159; "Sigma Gammas Elect Kelly and Barrett," *Pine Log*, May 9, 1958: 1.

³²*Stone Fort 1950*, 152-158; *Stone Fort 1960*, 85-87.

They learned the rules of recruitment at the meeting, such as the requirement to attend all parties for which they received invitations and not being allowed to speak with members outside of events. Women attended club parties held off campus in the homes of local alumnae where members served punch and cake while getting to know the potential pledges. Each organization had time-honored activities, such as a ranch party held at Fern Lake for women interested in joining the Fideles, an annual fashion show presented by the Pine Burrs, or the Sigma Gamma carnival-themed party. Each round of parties became increasingly more selective because club size was limited to approximately twenty-five women per chapter. Groups only offered invitations to the women who had the most potential for membership selection.³³

The groups gradually began to put more emphasis on grades as the years passed. In 1942, the Women's Council required members whose grades fell below a "C" average to be placed on an inactive list, or probation, for six weeks. During their probation period women continued to pay dues and attended weekly meetings, but were not allowed to participate in any social activities. Women who wanted to join an organization were also required to have a minimum of a "C" average in order to rush or participate in recruitment. The university set out to

³³Annette Faries, "Women's Club Goes National," *Pine Log*, June 10, 1960: 1 and 4; "Convocation to Open Rush Season: Social Clubs Will Finish With Dances," *Pine Log*, October 2, 1959: 1; Jerry Reck, "All Those Wishing to Pledge Must Be At SFA Convocation," *Pine Log*, February 16, 1957: 1; "Social Organizations Plan Fall Rush Parties At SFA," *Pine Log*, October 2, 1959: 4; "Social Clubs Plan Homecoming Events," *Pine Log*, October 23, 1959: 5; Swearingen, interview; *Stone Fort 1950*, 159 and 161.

encourage social groups to stress academic achievement in 1958 by offering an award of \$50.00 to the club with the highest overall grade-point average, but the school paper never announced the winner.³⁴

The women's organizations offered more opportunities for socializing as their groups continued to grow and took on a feeling of fraternity. Holidays provided ready-made themes for the dances such as the Fidele's Halloween Ball or the Pine Burr's Valentine Ball. Each group continued to round out the fall semester with a Christmas dinner-dance. The women hosted annual "Grid Iron Shuffles" and "Sweater Dances" in the student union, which were open to the student body to attend. Members enjoyed picnics in the spring and bonded with each other at group slumber parties. Older members paired up with pledges and referred to each other as big and little sisters, which they celebrated at big-little banquets. The local social clubs began to duplicate many of the characteristics found in national sororities.³⁵

Service continued to play an important role in the social groups. Each year, Sigma Gammas sponsored the mailing of Easter Seals to benefit disabled children in the community. The Pine Burrs distributed flowers to the local

³⁴"Rush Week for Girls Will Be Held October 6-12," *Pine Log*, September 26, 1942: 4; Sally M. Gearhart, "Social Clubs to Be Awarded for Academic Achievements," *Pine Log*, October 10, 1958: 6.

³⁵*Stone Fort 1949*, 140-144; *Stone Fort 1950*, 159-165; "SFA Social Organization Plan Campus Activities," *Pine Log*, November 13, 1959: 10; "Club Events" *Pine Log*, December 4, 1959: 5; *Stone Fort*, 1961: 73; "Social Clubs Plan Homecoming Events," *Pine Log*, October 23, 1959: 5.

hospital. Christmas parties often involved some philanthropic element such as donating toys and presents to underprivileged children, providing food and clothing contributions to needy families, or collecting monetary donations. Nevertheless, philanthropy was not a primary focus for the clubs. "I guess we were a little selfish then," recalled Judy Hilton.³⁶

By the 1950s, social groups had become an essential part of the campus environment at SFA with nearly a hundred young ladies belonging to one of four organizations: Amities, Pine Burrs, Fideles, and Sigma Gamma. Their presence on campus did not go unnoticed. In 1954, the majority of homecoming court representatives came from these social groups. Of the three female cheerleaders, two belonged to the Fideles and one to the Pine Burrs; additionally, the Fideles boasted of four members leading the band as majorettes. The groups collectively boasted of sixteen homecoming duchesses, two ladies-in-waiting, and the homecoming queen in 1956. That year, two cheerleaders belonged to the Pine Burrs, while the head cheerleader and two majorettes came from the Fideles. In 1959, of the eleven females listed among the *Who's Who in American Colleges and Universities* for SFA, six winners belonged to social clubs. Members of social clubs also held leadership positions

³⁶"Sigma Gammas Assist With Easter Seal Distribution," *Pine Log*, April 3, 1954: 1; "SFA Social Organization Plan Campus Activities," *Pine Log*, November 13, 1959: 10; "Pine Burrs Plan Party," *Pine Log*, December 13, 1954; "Club Events" *Pine Log* December 4, 1959: 5; "Pine Burrs," *Pine Log*, February 22, 1963, 5; "Clubs Busy with Activities," *Pine Log*, March 20, 1959: 2; Hilton, interview.

in the National Education Association, served as editors for the *Stone Fort*, sang in the school choir, and participated in spirit groups. These women were involved in a myriad of activities and leadership positions across campus.³⁷

Although held in high regard at SFA, members had limited opportunities beyond the campus. The club names, such as the Amities and Fideles, meant little to friends and family outside of Nacogdoches. Should a woman transfer to another school, in the absence of a national affiliation, she would be required to start the process of rush anew because the social groups were specific to SFA. Upon graduation women found interaction with the groups who helped define their identity while enrolled at SFA drastically reduced once they moved away.³⁸

Graduates found few opportunities to remain involved in the social groups after they left school. A few former members who remained in Nacogdoches after graduation helped as advisors to their clubs or assisted younger women hosting rush parties, the gatherings where potential pledges met current members. Women regularly returned for homecoming festivities but this proved one of the only official ways of maintaining a connection with the organizations they had devoted so much time to while in school. The college women hosted tea parties or dinners for their former members. Alumnae designated spots along the parade

³⁷*Stone Fort 1954; Stone Fort 1956; Stone Fort 1959.*

³⁸“Social Organizations Hold Fall Rush Parties At SFA,” *Pine Log*, October 16, 1959; Office of Student Development, Rush Handbook – ’61, “Rules for All Rushees To Follow,” box 1 folder 32, University Archives 82, East Texas Research Center, Stephen F. Austin State University.

route for their groups, which they would return to each year. The women sat with old friends and cheered as their club's floats rolled past.³⁹

In 1956, the groups felt a need to form an Inter-Social Club Council (ISCC) at SFA as a means of overseeing the daily operations of the clubs, as well as the recruitment of new members. The ISCC replaced the Woman's Council, incorporating the men's groups as well. Although the organization served the needs of both male and female social organizations, each had separate councils. Delegates from each group met to create standardized rules among the individual groups. The women's groups charged the council with determining rules for rush, sponsoring convocation each semester, and hosting several of the dances held throughout the year. In the spring of 1958, after a decade of steady increases, school enrollment reached just over 2,000 students for the first time. The ISCC oversaw the largest rush the school had seen with ten parties planned for men and women's groups over a two-week period.⁴⁰

The social groups continued to grow in size. ISCC held rush in the fall and again in the spring. The council set a quota and expected the groups to accept approximately twenty new members each semester. The clubs maintained their popularity, but not everyone chose to join. Many women still commuted to school

³⁹Swearingen, interview; *Stone Fort 1950*, 165; *Stone Fort 1956*, 49.

⁴⁰*Stone Fort 1957*, 65; *Stone Fort 1958*, 153; Nona Glass, "ISCC Schedules Ten Rush Parties," *Pine Log* Feb 21, 1958; "SFA Enrollment Swells to 2,014," *Pine Log*, October 10, 1958: 1.

and found evening activities difficult to attend, while others could not afford the required dues, organization sweaters, and party dresses for the dinner-dances. According to Ernestine Henry, a former student and Dean of Women from 1959 until 1970, "If you weren't in a social group, you were either commuting or belonged to a service group. We had some nice service groups here."⁴¹

Whether purposeful or not, the organizations continued to adopt the structure and traditions of sororities. Forming a governing body to oversee rush and encourage cooperation among the groups, the distribution of badges to pledges and members, and the focus on social events, charity, and academics all reflected the attributes of national sororities. Unwittingly, the groups positioned themselves for a transition that coincided with the arrival of a new school president. The social groups showed an interest in expanding. The president, eager to bring growth to SFA, helped to pave the way for change to take place. With the help of the administration, the women would bring national sororities to the school.

⁴¹Ernestine Hankla Henry, interviewed by the author, Nacogdoches, TX, October 18, 2018.

Steen Brings Growth to Stephen F. Austin

“We will have more than an ivory tower at SFA. Providing second rate education is no way to become a first-class state,” stated Dr. Ralph W. Steen in his inaugural address as the president of Stephen F. Austin State College who was deeply concerned about the future of higher education in Texas. -*Herschel Stephens, Pine Log*¹

Despite a global economic depression and World War II, college enrollment across the country continued to rise in the 1930s and 1940s. The federal government assisted in the growth of colleges during the Great Depression by developing the National Youth Administration in 1935, which enabled hundreds of thousands of financially needy students to receive postsecondary educations that otherwise would not have been available to them. Subsequently, Congress passed the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act in 1944, commonly known as the GI Bill, to delay returning veterans from entering the job market while providing them with job skills or higher education. The bill provided funding for both male and female veterans to attend college.²

¹Herschel Stephens, “Dr. Steen Will Have No ‘Ivory Tower’ At SFA: College President Tells Houston Post Reporter,” *Pine Log*, July 17, 1958: 1.

²Alan Seidman, ed., *College Student Retention: Formula for Student Success* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2012), 19; Garland G. Parker, *The Enrollment Explosion: A Half-Century of Attendance in U.S. Colleges and Universities* (New York: School and Society Books, 1971), 90-91; Garland G. Walker, *The Enrollment Explosion; A Half-Century of Attendance in U.S. Colleges and Universities* (New York: School & Society Books, 1971) 31; John R. Thelin, *A History of American Higher Education*, (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004) 73, 84, 262-264.

Much to their surprise, supporters of the bill underestimated the number of veterans who would take advantage of the federal program. Initial estimates predicted that ten percent of beneficiaries would take advantage of the opportunity. Veteran college enrollments surpassed one million by 1946, which was closer to sixteen percent of eligible participants. By 1950, more than two million had registered for a total of sixteen percent of all students nationally. colleges and universities doubled their enrollments between 1943 and 1946, primarily due to the GI Bill. After the passage of the successful launching of the Soviet satellite Sputnik, the government encouraged students to apply themselves in mathematics, the sciences, and nursing. As a result, enrollment numbers increased across the nation even further. The government promoted college attendance as the Cold War intensified, seeking to maintain superiority as a world power.³

SFA's student population mirrored the growth taking place across the country during this time, which created the need for the campus to expand. From 1945 to 1946, enrollment numbers at SFA skyrocketed from 340 students to 993, nearly a two-hundred percent increase.⁴ The school was still a "quiet little campus dotted with frame buildings" nestled in the piney woods of East Texas

³Theilin, *A History of American Higher Education*, 262-264; Seidman, ed., *College Student Retention*, 19; Parker, *The Enrollment Explosion*, 38-39,54.

⁴"Head-Count Enrollment: Eighteen Fully State-Supported Academic Institutions in Texas," box 2, folder 3, University Archives 69, East Texas Research Center, Stephen F. Austin State University.

and required more facilities for the growing number of students.⁵ Dr. Paul L. Boynton, the second president of SFA, planned for and began the expansion of the school after World War II ended. The president sought to make SFA the “leading agricultural training center of East Texas, as well as the best balanced and most progressive educational institution of its size in the state.”⁶

SFA needed more facilities in order to meet Boynton’s aspirations. Between 1948 and 1958, the school added a new Student Union Building, three new classroom buildings, two new dormitories, and apartments for married students. The Board of Regents also approved a new football stadium and basketball gymnasium to provide seating for the growing fan base. Shelton Gymnasium replaced the old wooden Aikman Gym in 1951. The new facility afforded seating for some 3000 spectators, more than twice the number of students enrolled at SFA, which allowed the college to reach out to off-campus communities.⁷

The buildings constructed were often made of lower quality materials that appeared cheap, unattractive, and failed to reflect the original architectural design of the campus. In 1946, the administration took advantage of a post-war economy and purchased three unneeded army barracks from Camp Claiborne,

⁵Craddock, *The Golden Years*, 65.

⁶Craddock, *The Golden Years*, 58.

⁷Craddock, *The Golden Years*, 60-62.

Louisiana. Renovations began on the former military buildings that would be used by the forestry, music, and commerce departments, respectively. As was the case on many college campuses, SFA provided living quarters for veterans and their families from repurposed barracks as well. The school's population quickly outgrew the campus and the result left the school struggling to keep up with growing demands.⁸

SFA had been forced to overcome difficulties because of fluctuating enrollment numbers in the past. Boynton saved the school from certain closure during World War II by petitioning the federal government to install a Women's Army Air Corps training facility on the campus in 1943. Thousands of women lived in the dormitories while training in management and clerical courses. During his tenure, the school grew from five hundred students per year to over two thousand. Boynton watched the college enrollment fluctuate over the years and responded in a proactive manner. The burgeoning campus compelled him to prepare for construction of a new auditorium and fine arts facility. Plans were already being drawn up to increase the number of classrooms and offices, establish a health clinic, and add more dormitories for men and women.⁹

⁸Stallard, *Logging a Legacy*, 15; Craddock, *The Golden Years*, 60-61; Harlow, *Ralph W. Steen*, 100; Parker, *The Enrollment Explosion*, 39; Registrar's Office, "Head Count Enrollment," box 2, folder 20, University Archives 69, East Texas Research Center, Stephen F. Austin State University.

⁹"SFA Mourns President: Funeral for Dr. Boynton Held on Campus, Thursday," *Pine Log*, Aug 8, 1958: 1; Craddock, *The Golden Years*, 53; "Dr. Paul L. Boynton Dies; Final Tribute Today At 5," *Daily Sentinel*, August 7, 1958: 1,6.

Completion of the construction projects begun under Boynton would not take place during his lifetime. On August 6, 1958, Boynton passed away at the age of 60. That night, while working in his office on campus, he suffered a coronary occlusion. Boynton, a renowned psychologist, had served as the school's second president since 1942 after taking over for Birdwell. Boynton dedicated sixteen years to the college. Administrators dismissed classes early on the morning of his funeral to allow faculty, staff, and students to attend the service held at his home that afternoon. A number of faculty members served as honorary pallbearers. Many former colleagues and associates attended also attended the services including members of the Board of Regents and presidents from Sam Houston State Teachers College and East Texas State College.¹⁰

Following Boynton's passing, the Board of Regents began searching for a new president to lead SFA into the next decade. Dr. Ralph W. Steen, a native Texan, applied for the position. He attended McMurray College in Abilene from 1924 until he graduated in 1926. The school opened in 1923, and Steen impacted the growth of student activities participating in many clubs and organizations, including a local fraternity. As a campus leader, he understood the administration's need to expand the college and enlisted his classmates to aid in that effort. His profile in the school yearbook of his senior year described him as

¹⁰"SFA Mourns President: Funeral for Dr. Boynton Held on Campus, Thursday," *Pine Log*, August 8, 1958: 1; "Dr. Paul L. Boynton Dies; Final Tribute Today At 5," *Daily Sentinel*, August 7, 1958: 1,6; "State Educators at Dr. Boynton's Rites," *Daily Sentinel*, August 8, 1958:1.

“a hard worker, and a man who does his own thinking. When he says he will do a thing it is as good as done.”¹¹

Steen proved himself to be as hardworking as his classmates believed him to be. He went on to receive his Master of Arts and Doctor of Philosophy from The University of Texas. In 1935, Texas A&M College hired him as a professor and he remained for the next twenty-three years, where he taught history classes, published articles and books, and served as head of the history department beginning in 1954. Steen supervised the growth of the enrollment in the department and attempted to establish a master’s program, but he realized he had advanced as far as he ever would at A&M. Steen taught summer classes at SFA in 1947, 1948, and 1952. Already familiar with the school and the people of Nacogdoches, he felt he understood the problems facing the school. The Board announced on October 24, 1958, that Steen would become the third president of SFA, just one week before he was expected to step into his position. Steen arrived at SFA on November 1, which happened to coincide with homecoming that year. Former students welcomed the new president and anticipated the continuation of tradition. Yet, while alumni of the school looked

¹¹Harlow, *Ralph W. Steen*, 8-9, 23; quote from *The Totem 1927*: 31; Accessed December 2, 2018, <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph41517/m1/43/?q=ralph%20steen>.

back with nostalgia, the new president prepared bring major changes to SFA over the next decade.¹²

SFA lagged behind its contemporaries such as Sam Houston State Teachers College and North Texas State College during the 1950s, offering fewer programs and enduring with less attractive facilities. But Steen decided the time had come for the school to catch up. state legislation changed the name of the school to Stephen F. Austin State College in 1949, eliminating the prominence of being a teaching school. Nevertheless, the size of the college remained relatively small compared to other colleges across the state with an enrollment of only 2,000. According to Robert S. Maxwell, a long-time faculty member, the unappealing buildings on campus and lack of diversity in academic offerings meant that the school attracted fewer students, which brought in less money, creating a “downward spiral” the school appeared incapable of escaping. Steen “wanted SFA to stop being so sleepy and to get everything moving. I wanted us to grow... [however] If we couldn’t go first class, then we weren’t going at all.”¹³ Steen anticipated overhauling the remote regional college over the next

¹²“Dr. Ralph Steen New SFA President: A&M Professor to Begin New Duties Here Tomorrow,” *Pine Log*, October 31, 1958: 5; Harlow, *Ralph W. Steen*, 71, 78, 79, 82, 100; “Dr. Ralph Steen New President of SFA College,” *Daily Sentinel*, October 24, 1958: 1; “Club to Hear SFA President,” *Daily Sentinel*, October 25, 1958:1.

¹³Craddock, *Golden Years*, 63.

decade and creating a progressive university that would rival other schools of the same size.¹⁴

Although Boynton initiated a seemingly massive expansion, the work proved to be insufficient for the growing student population. Steen criticized the former president for cutting corners by “making revamped military barracks suffice for adequate buildings.”¹⁵ The additions housed the larger student body, but the new president brought with him a vision of SFA that would elevate the school to a state accredited university. He associated growth with progress. According to Steen, “building facilities, recruiting students, advertising the school, and increasing the level of activities on campus would result in [the] betterment of the entire climate.”¹⁶

Steen maintained that East Texas had not progressed in economic growth since World War II in comparison to many other areas across the state. The region also trailed behind in transportation and education. As a result, many young people left the region seeking out employment in the larger metropolitan areas. Steen claimed in an article he wrote about the area, “Many East Texans are now important figures in state and national business and politics, but they

¹⁴Harlow, *Ralph W. Steen*, 100; General and Special Laws of Texas, 51st Legislature, Regular Session 1949: 484, accessed December 11, 2018, <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph307687/m1/522/>.

¹⁵Harlow, *Ralph W. Steen*, 16.

¹⁶Harlow, *Ralph W. Steen*, 101.

gained these places of prominence outside East Texas.”¹⁷ To convince students to come to school in Nacogdoches the school needed to offer a wide-ranging curriculum supported by highly qualified faculty members and promote regional progress. Steen told the local Rotary Club, “We are now living in a day and age when education is more important than ever. More and more we must demand the very best of our students – we must give them a challenge.”¹⁸ Steen was determined to find ways to promote the school to a broader audience.¹⁹

Over the next year, Steen brought in new people who would support his vision of growth and challenge the students to accomplish this first step in change. He brought a former colleague from College Station, Charles G. Haas, who had served as the assistant director and business manager of the Texas A&M Memorial Student Center. Ernestine Henry, an SFA alumna, was hired as the new Dean of Women. She lacked experience, but her fresh approach to the position worked in tandem with Steen’s vision for the school. The new president gave preference in hiring to applicants who held doctoral degrees and encouraged current staff members to continue their education until they had earned their doctorates. Additionally, he reorganized the various departments

¹⁷Dr. Ralph W. Steen, “Something About East Texas,” 1962, History of SFA, accessed January 29, 2019: <http://www2.sfasu.edu/story/articles/Nov8-AboutEastTexas.html>

¹⁸“Dr. Steen Given Warm Welcome by Rotarians,” *Daily Sentinel*, October 30, 1958: 1.

¹⁹Harlow, *Ralph W. Steen*, 18 and 107; Craddock, *The Golden Years*, 65.

into five major schools of learning: Education, Liberal Arts, Science and Mathematics, Forestry, and Fine Arts.²⁰

Armed with a more supportive faculty, Steen increased the number of educational and administrative accommodations as well. If real growth was to be achieved and maintained, the campus required a physical expansion beyond the four major buildings that existed. The state provided increased funding for colleges but the money would still not put SFA on an even playing field with other Texas schools. Steen utilized the additional aid to its fullest but believed that although the state legislature had “provided larger appropriations for education in recent years,...we are already behind and these funds have not enabled us to catch up.”²¹ To obtain the funding needed, the school took advantage of federal loans that offered low-interest rates. The new buildings had to be first class as Steen believed that this would attract students and that the “people in Austin would not give you any more credit if you skimped [sic] and saved money than if you spent money adequately on what you genuinely needed it for.”²² Steen knew

²⁰Harlow, *Ralph W. Steen*, 18 and 107; “Administrative Positions Are Filled: Business Mgr. and Dean of Women Named,” *Pine Log*, June 5, 1959: 1-2; “Administrative Positions Are Filled: Faculty Appointments for Summer Session,” *Pine Log*, June 5, 1959: 1; Henry, interview; Craddock, *The Golden Years*, 65.

²¹Stephens, “Dr. Steen Will Have No ‘Ivory Tower’ At SFA,” *Pine Log*, July 17, 1958: 1.

²²Harlow, *Ralph W. Steen*, 16.

the college would benefit from the expenditures if they actually helped attract more students to the school.²³

Steen applied the theory that SFA would grow if the campus could accommodate a larger population. He continued to apply for federal funds and mortgaged buildings to acquire the necessary financing. Haas recalled, "After our first federal house funding, it mushroomed into something like twenty million dollars for dormitories, a student center, cafeteria, and an apartment building."²⁴ Construction had begun on the \$1.3 million fine arts building under Boynton, but Steen prepared to transform the campus.²⁵

The inspiration for one of Steen's first projects came from his time at Texas A&M. While there, the college built a Memorial Student Center where students could congregate before and after class. The center offered dining, a post office, conference rooms, book stores, a game room, and a bowling alley. Steen anticipated that SFA could benefit from a similar facility giving collegians a place to relax, social groups to host gatherings, and room to accommodate conferences. The building would also serve as a recruitment tool for future students. Architects submitted plans to the Board of Regents for approval. The \$1 million complex proposed space for a cafeteria, book store, post office, and

²³Harlow, *Ralph W. Steen*, 102; Stephens, "Dr. Steen Will Have No 'Ivory Tower' At SFA," *Pine Log*, July 17, 1958: 1.

²⁴Craddock, *The Golden Years*, 64

²⁵Stephens, "Dr. Steen Will Have No 'Ivory Tower' At SFA," *Pine Log*, July 17, 1958: 1.

recreational facilities. Construction was expected to begin in the fall of 1959 which would include converting the old student center into extra classrooms.²⁶

Steen added more classrooms than needed, creating a new issue, of finding additional students to fill the expanded educational spaces. Lawrence Turner Franks conducted an extensive study to determine the factors that influenced a young person to enroll at SFA. His research showed that the primary reason for choosing the school was the location of the college in relation to the distance from a potential student's residence. In the 1950s, 88.7% of the student body lived within a seventy-five-mile radius of the campus. Approximately sixty percent of registered students commuted to the college. Steen needed to find a way to encourage people from outside the constraints of deep East Texas to increase the number of students attending the college.²⁷

Limited recruitment restricted the greater growth Steen desired for SFA even though enrollment numbers continued to steadily increased. The college grew in student population by nearly ten percent over the three years prior to Steen arriving in Nacogdoches, but many of those who were counted only

²⁶Memorial Student Center, Texas A&M, 1999-2010. Accessed December 6, 2018, <http://www.msc.tamu.edu/facilities/history.html>; Harlow, *Ralph W. Steen*, 102; "Million Dollar Student Center at SFA Sketched: Architects Submit Plans For Approval," *Pine Log*, July 10, 1959: 1; Stephens, "Dr. Steen Will Have No 'Ivory Tower' At SFA," *Pine Log*, July 17, 1958: 1.

²⁷Lawrence Turner Frank, *A Study to Determine the Major Factors Which Influence Students to Enroll at Stephen F. Austin State College*, (1955), 51-52; Harlow, *Ralph W. Steen*, 109; Mildred Wyatt, Registrar's Office, "Student Enrollment – Increase", May 14, 1960, box 2, folder 3, University Archives 69, East Texas Research Center, Stephen F. Austin State University.

attended school part-time. Many SFA students worked during the school year as teachers and took classes during the summer to earn their teaching certifications. Others worked and could not afford to enroll on a full-time basis. Using conservative trends, the school expected a five percent increase each year between 1960 to 1963, with an additional three percent from 1964 until 1970. The data meant SFA could anticipate an increase of students from 2,227 in the fall of 1959 to 4,417 by the beginning of the 1969 school year.²⁸

Doubling the size of the student body over the next decade produced a significant challenge, but Steen intended for SFA to grow larger than conservative expectations. He recognized that the post-war baby-boom provided more potential enrollees for higher education. Students flooded the halls of high schools by the mid-1950s and the 1960s saw a surge in college-age students who increased the available pool for all schools to recruit. Steen aspired to take full advantage of the additional prospects. The question became how to attract the potential collegiate to SFA.²⁹

In Steen's mind, the college needed to draw students from beyond the immediate region the school traditionally served previously, but there were drawbacks that had to be overcome, with the foremost being transportation. Nacogdoches found itself cut off from the metropolitan areas of Texas. Roadway

²⁸Stephens, "Dr. Steen Will Have No 'Ivory Tower' At SFA," *Pine Log*, July 17, 1958: 1; Henry, interview.

²⁹Parker, *The Enrollment Explosion*, 39; Harlow, *Ralph W. Steen*, 102.

networks developed more slowly in rural vicinities, geographically remote regions, and areas with smaller populations. Poor highways east of the Trinity River kept towns in East Texas separated with narrow two-lane roads making travel slow. the federal government promoted the construction of highways after World War II. After his arrival in Nacogdoches, Steen aided developers and businesses in pushing for widening the roadways to SFA. Their lobbying helped persuade Texas lawmakers to pass legislation for improving roadways, especially the farm-to-market roads used around the Nacogdoches area. Both East Texas and the college benefitted economically and educationally by making travel to the area more accessible and more convenient.³⁰

The school needed to provide more housing to recruit students from the metropolitan regions of Houston and Dallas. The school started the process of building two more dormitories that provided housing for 160 additional men at the cost of over \$180,000. Construction was underway to attach another wing to the senior women's residence hall for an additional \$95,000. These projects increased the number of dormitories to seven for men, but only three for women as most females still did not commute far from home or lived off-campus in boarding houses. Meanwhile Steen managed to secure government funding for a \$3.5 million development that allowed for even more student housing to be built

³⁰Bruce Jensen, "Historic Road Infrastructure of Texas, 1866-1965 MPS," *United States Department of Interior*, Austin, TX. Accessed on December 19, 2018, <ftp://ftp.dot.state.tx.us/pub/txdot-info/env/toolkit/mps-tx-hist-roads.pdf>: 29, 62; Harlow, *Ralph W. Steen*, 141.

for men and women over the next two to three years. Steen never seemed to doubt that there would be enough students to occupy the rooms. Upon completion of the dormitories, Steen found they quickly reached capacity, “and we began to sense that everything we built would be filled.”³¹ Over the next decade, the campus averaged one new dormitory per year. One administrator observed, “Steen had courage. Boynton had been conservative, but Steen gambled on building dormitories.”³² His gamble was rewarded allowing the school to recruit in more distant regions.³³

More available accommodations meant that SFA could begin to recruit from the Dallas and Houston areas. Steen enlisted students from larger cities to enroll at SFA. Undergraduates arrived in Nacogdoches in impressive numbers. Henry remembers that “we opened up some more dorms and the girls began to come and fill it more than we had spaces for. They were coming from Dallas. They were coming from Houston and Austin and all in-between.”³⁴ The college transformed from a commuter school to one that was more residential as the population changed. “He didn’t want everyone to be local, so it was an eclectic

³¹Harlow, *Ralph W. Steen*, 104.

³²Harlow, *Ralph W. Steen*, 103.

³³“SFA Secures Loan for New Dormitories” *Pine Log*, April 17, 1959: 1; Craddock, *The Golden Years*, 63-64.

³⁴Henry, interview.

group” recalls SFA alumnus Van Craddock.³⁵ The more diverse population impacted the climate of the campus.³⁶

Between 1963 and 1968, college enrollment at SFA tripled as the campus continued to change. The rapid growth allowed the school to raise the standard for admission. As a strategic win, the college was assured of more academically qualified students while improving the reputation of the school. Recruiters spoke at high schools, and Steen claimed that the students “liked what they learned about SFA.”³⁷ Steen implemented more educational opportunities by adding the school of Business Administration and offering twenty-five master’s degree programs taught by experienced faculty members, but students attending a residential college required activities outside of the classroom as well.³⁸

One factor that helped a school stand out to prospective students was a variety of social opportunities and recreational programs. SFA offered many campus activities including intramural sports, marching band, and religious organizations. But for metropolitan students, the social groups that existed at SFA would not hold the same appeal as national sororities that were available at many other colleges and universities throughout Texas including other colleges

³⁵Stallard, *Logging a Legacy*, 96;

³⁶Stallard, *Logging a Legacy*, 96; Harlow, *Ralph W. Steen*, 103

³⁷Craddock, *The Golden Years*, 64.

³⁸Franks, *Study to Determine Major Factors*, 65; Seidman, *College Student Retention*, 17-18; Craddock, *The Golden Years*, 64-65.

governed by the same Board of Regents as SFA.³⁹ The national organizations, such as Sigma Kappa, Delta Zeta, and Chi Omega, were well-known and easily identifiable anywhere in the country. Membership in national sororities gave women a sense of belonging that extended beyond their college campuses.⁴⁰

Having been a member of a local fraternity at McMurray College, Steen understood the bonds of friendship created in such groups, as well as the leadership opportunities and the academic emphasis they offered students. He also recognized the positive impact the groups could have on the campus environment. Sororities attracted female students to colleges and kept them involved. Membership in the groups enhanced the likelihood of degree completion. For these reasons Steen supported the idea of bringing national sororities and fraternities to SFA. In January 1959, he addressed the issue with one of the men's social groups, the Lambda Gammas. He stated that the college had reached out to other schools inquiring about the process but the ultimate decision lay in the hands of the Board of Regents. As three schools governed by the same Board, Sam Houston State College, West Texas State University, and East Texas State University, already demonstrated the success of bringing

³⁹The Board of Regents that governed Stephen F. Austin State College also oversaw Angelo State College, East Texas State University, Sam Houston State College, Southwest Texas State College, Sul Ross College, and West Texas State University.

⁴⁰ Seidman, *College Student Retention*, 121; Ralph W. Steen, "Personal Correspondence to Board of Regents, State Senior Colleges," May 22, 1967, box 1, folder 1, University Archives 1, East Texas Research Center, Stephen F. Austin State University; Zeta Tau Alpha Fraternity Chapter Locator, Accessed December 28, 2018. <https://zetataualpha.org/about/zta-chapters/chapter-locator>.

national fraternities and sororities to their campuses, there was good reason to believe that SFA would be allowed to do so as well.⁴¹

Although the Board of Regents granted SFA permission to bring Panhellenic sororities to Nacogdoches later that spring, the responsibility for soliciting the organizations fell upon the shoulders of the woman who filled the position of Dean of Women. Yet, when Steen arrived the assignment was in transition. Mary W. Thomson retired from the job in June of 1958, and no one had been hired to replace her permanently. June Irwin took over temporarily during the summer of 1958, but she anticipated becoming the head of the women's physical education department and did so that fall. Mary Greenwood stepped in until a long-term solution could be found while biding her time in hopes of joining the home economics department. Juanita C. Boynton, the widow of the former president, expressed an interest in the position but was hired to teach psychology and philosophy instead. No one else at SFA appeared to want the job, which left the door open for candidates outside of the college.⁴²

As a result of such instability, Henry considered applying for the position. She lived nearby in San Augustine where she taught middle school. Having earned her Bachelor of Science in Home Economics and her Masters of

⁴¹Seidman, *College Student Retention*, 121; "Dr. Steen Favors National Frats, Sororities at SFA," *Pine Log*, January 29, 1959: 1-2; Harlow, *Ralph W. Steen*, 23.

⁴²*Stone Fort 1959*, 6 and 18; "Eight Staff Appointed on SFA Staff, Faculty," *Daily Sentinel*, October 28, 1958: 1; Henry, interview; "Administrative Positions Are Filled: Business Manager and Dean of Women Named," *Pine Log*, June 5, 1959: 2.

Education degrees from SFA, Henry knew the school and faculty well. She spoke with Greenwood, who had been her counselor for undergraduate work, about the job. Henry encouraged her friend to remain in the position but Greenwood was adamant that would not happen. "It's not for me. I'm not interested at all."⁴³ When Henry expressed that she would love it, Greenwood told her, "It would be just right for you because you like working with children."⁴⁴ With encouragement from her husband, grown daughters, and friends, Henry submitted her application.⁴⁵

Just a few weeks after Steen became president in November 1958, Henry interviewed for the position of Dean of Women. Henry's connections helped her prepare for the questions that would be asked of her by the president. By the end of the appointment, Steen told her that she was precisely the type of person he had hoped to find because, "I want a woman who has children, who understands children, and one that's married."⁴⁶ Henry did not begin her new position until June 1959, so she headed to Baylor University for the spring semester to start work on a doctorate of education, although she never completed the coursework. The potential for making changes to the women's social clubs on campus never came up during the interview or in the months before Henry began her new job.

⁴³Henry, interview.

⁴⁴Henry, interview.

⁴⁵"Administrative Positions Are Filled," *Pine Log*, June 5, 1959: 1-2; "Mrs. Henry Named SFA Dean of Women: New Dean is Former SFA Student," *Pine Log*, April 10, 1959: 1.

⁴⁶Henry, interview.

Shortly after her arrival, Henry considered the idea having attended a conference for Deans of Women where she met many alumnae of national sororities. In the interim, the female students to SFA had not forgotten about the notion of bringing the groups.⁴⁷

In the spring of 1959, while Henry studied in Waco, a number of social club members took a trip to Sam Houston State Teachers College. They spoke at length with women who were responsible for recently bringing national sororities to the school. One of the SFA students, Anita Wedgeworth, reported back to the Fideles that, "They received a favorable recommendation from the majority of members."⁴⁸ Nothing immediately came of the investigation as SFA was still waiting for the new Dean of Women to start. By the time Henry arrived that summer, more pressing priorities weighed upon the groups such as fall recruitment. Nevertheless, the seed had been planted in the minds of the club members and Henry's introduction to national sororities that summer left a favorable impression upon the new dean. The combination, along with the Steen's support, led to the establishment of national organizations at SFA.⁴⁹

⁴⁷Henry, interview.; "Administrative Positions Are Filled," *Pine Log*, June 5, 1959:1-2; Wendy Dougherty, "Associate Dean to Retire in August," *Pine Log*, April 23, 1985: 5.

⁴⁸"Clubs Busy with Activities," *Pine Log*, March 20, 1959: 2.

⁴⁹"Clubs Busy with Activities," *Pine Log*, March 20, 1959: 2.

Transitioning to National Sororities

The fraternities and sororities at SFA offer a well-rounded program of involvement for the individual ranging from athletics to scholastics, from parties to projects, and from the experience of developing with a special group, hopefully the maturity needed to make a significant contribution to the world in which we will be living when we graduate. -from the "Serious Side of Greeks" pamphlet.¹

In June 1959, Ernestine Henry became the Dean of Women at SFA. Her job included overseeing the female dormitories, establishing the school calendar, counseling women, and extolling discipline when the need arose. Henry also managed the women's social clubs. She supervised all facets of the groups from membership drives to initiation, dances, and mixers. She loved each of the various aspects of her new position and enjoyed interacting with the club members. "They came to me and talked to me, and they were the sweetest girls I ever saw," recalled Henry. "They brought flowers to the office all the time. They came to see me all the time, for no reason."² Although Steen spoke with the Lambda Gammas in January 1959 about bringing national organizations to SFA, Henry did not recall ever speaking with the president about sororities coming

¹Pamphlet *Why Greek?*, The Interfraternity Council and the Panhellenic Council of Stephen F. Austin, "The Serious Side of Greeks," Spring 1970, box 1, folder 27, University Archives 82, East Texas Research Center, Stephen F. Austin State University.

²Henry, interview.

onto the campus. Once made aware of the prospect, she served an instrumental role in bringing sororities to SFA and was fully supported by Steen.³

Shortly after starting her new job, Henry attended the “12th annual work conference for student personnel workers in colleges and schools of the Texas Association for Women Deans and counselors held at Houston University that summer.”⁴ The conference provided workshops focused on providing a pleasant living environment for women in the dormitories and on campus with the hope of ultimately enhancing academics. Representatives from most national sororities also attended the meeting as members of the National Panhellenic Conference, the governing body of women’s Greek letter organizations. They held a reception one evening and invited the deans to join them. Henry went and spoke with a number of national presidents. She told them about SFA and that the school had local social groups at present, but perhaps there might be an interest in national organizations in the future. The women expressed an eagerness to speak with Henry again when she felt the timing was better for SFA, which made her first encounter with sororities a positive one.⁵

In August 1959, students returned to campus and members began preparations for recruitment of new women into the social groups. The lead

³Dougherty, “Associate Dean to Retire,” *Pine Log*, April 23, 1985:1; Henry, interview; “Dr. Steen Favors National Frats, Sororities at SFA,” *Pine Log*, January 29, 1959: 1-2; Stallard, *Logging a Legacy*, 76-77.

⁴“Mrs. Henry at Work Conference,” *Pine Log*, June 26, 1959.

⁵“Mrs. Henry at Work Conference,” *Pine Log*, June 26, 1959: 1; Henry, interview.

officers of the four clubs met with Henry to help clarify the rules and regulations of rush in the past and make adjustments. Henry found the ladies were well-organized and helpful. With the guidance of the club leaders, she quickly learned all that rush entailed including the progression of parties and how groups selected their pledges. Henry found the experience exciting and loved working with the women. When the school held a second rush in the spring, she understood the party advancement and voting process better and felt more in control of the events.⁶

Henry prepared herself for the continued influx of women pouring into Nacogdoches from the metropolitan areas of Texas. Girls filled the dormitories as quickly as space allowed. With all of the additional women arriving on campus, social groups' numbers swelled. The clubs grew to numbers of nearly thirty women per chapter on average. Twice a year, school expectations dictated that the clubs meet a minimum quota of additional women to maintain membership numbers as in years past. The cost of the social organizations continued to prohibit some women from joining, while the time commitment was a deterrent for those who commuted. Although the groups often hosted parties with the men's clubs that were open to other students and everyone enjoyed attending, many women still felt honored when chosen for membership.⁷

⁶Henry, interview.

⁷Henry, interview.

Pledges and initiated members enjoyed belonging to their groups and the friendly but competitive rivalries between the four clubs. Although proud to claim being the oldest group on campus, the Amities struggled to keep up their membership numbers in the late 1950s. Whether women graduated, transferred to other schools, or opted to no longer participate in the social group, the Amities dropped to record low membership with only six women in 1957 and 1959. During those same years, the Fideles and Pine Burrs saw their organizations swell to forty-eight members each. Membership often fluctuated over the years as one club took in a larger pledge class, while another group graduated more seniors. Although the Amities did not survive into the 1960s, dwindling membership numbers did not bring an end to their long-running tenure at SFA, but an opportunity for change instead.

Sorority alumnae had noticed the Amities and were impressed with the history of the group even if they struggled with membership. In the spring of 1960, two students from the Sigma Kappa sorority scheduled an appointment to speak with Henry. The women arrived in Nacogdoches prior to their meeting and explored the campus before speaking with the dean. They informed her their organization wanted to establish a chapter at SFA. Henry felt reluctant to move forward as she did not believe they had enough community support and told the ladies that she did not know of any alumnae in the area. Nevertheless, the sorority members surprised Henry admitting they had visited with the Amities and found a solution to the problem, explaining “We have talked to their mothers and

we have about five we can pledge as honorary members for alum to support.”⁸

Henry was slightly dismayed by how determined the women appeared to be.

They had removed Henry’s main apprehension, however, and she reached out to the Amities herself. She quickly discovered that the collegiates had a few concerns of their own.⁹

As the sorority prepared to organize, Henry spoke to the Amities to confirm their desire to join a national sorority. Although the women struggled to keep their numbers close to the other social clubs, they understood the dean’s apprehension. But they told her, “We want to go. We’re just thrilled to death because we’re going to be number one.”¹⁰ They were excited to have an advantage over the other clubs. Yet, the offer to become a national organization required acceptance into the sorority and for re-initiation. The Sigma Kappas could also decline to accept one of the former Amities, which would leave the student without membership in any organization. Henry spoke with the national officers about the situation. Sigma Kappa alumnae acknowledged the problem but assured the dean, “We are pretty sure we will take them all” assuming the young women could meet the financial obligation.¹¹ Recognizing their excitement at the prospect of becoming members of Sigma Kappa and taking comfort that

⁸Henry, interview.

⁹Henry, interview.

¹⁰Henry, interview.

¹¹Henry, interview.

the sorority would initiate as many of the Amities as possible, Henry proceeded to speak with Steen about the idea. Not one to shy away from change, the president worried about the school's ability to transition. Henry assured him that the time had come. Steen told her, "Well, any support you need coming from me, whatever you need."¹² Henry notified the sorority that the president endorsed bringing Panhellenic sororities to SFA and Sigma Kappa moved forward with their plans.¹³

Throughout the spring semester the women worked hard to bring about the change. Sigma Kappa required letters of recommendation for each student who wanted to pledge. Some of the collegiates did not know any sorority women to ask for a reference. In hopes to bring their group to SFA first, the alumnae helped by writing letters for collegiates who could not locate any other former members. The young ladies had to consider the difference in expenses as well. Monthly dues ranged from two to five dollars each month, but proved comparable to the social clubs. Yet, initiation fees mandated by the national organization meant the women had to pay an additional fifty dollars at the end of their first semester. Although the Amities wanted to become members of Sigma Kappa,

¹²Henry, interview.

¹³Henry, interview.

ultimately only eight of the seventeen members would pledge an oath of loyalty that summer.¹⁴

The women were introduced to the public in June 1960, when SFA announced that the first national sorority would come to Nacogdoches in the fall. Ten students and their faculty sponsor, Mrs. Sue English, became official pledges of the Gamma Chi chapter of Sigma Kappa sorority. National officers and alumnae from Fort Worth, Dallas, Lubbock, and Houston hosted a reception, and Henry served refreshments along with the sorority women. The official pledging ceremony took place afterward. Alumnae spoke with the new pledges about the Sigma Kappa national convention that the sorority would hold in Sun Valley, Idaho, later that month. The collegiates chose two delegates to represent their chapter at the meeting, Ida Baty and Nancy Todd. A few days later, the women gathered for their first meeting and elected Baty to serve as their president and Todd as secretary.¹⁵

The two newly elected officers attended the national convention in Idaho along with nearly four hundred delegates in late June. Sigma Kappa hosted a full week of official meetings, roundtable discussions, outdoor barbeques, and informal activities that allowed the women to spend time socializing. For most of

¹⁴Henry, interview; Pamphlet, Office of Student Development, "Spring 1964 Rush," box 1, folder 32, University Archives 82, East Texas Research Center, Stephen F. Austin State University; *Stone Fort 1960*, 87; *Stone Fort 1961*, 72.

¹⁵"Pledging of Amities Announced," *Daily Sentinel*, June 4, 1960: 6; "Amities Join Sigma Kappa," *Pine Log*, June 10, 1960: 1, 11.

the women, the opportunity to visit with old friends and receive awards would have been among the highlights of the week. However, the SFA representatives took part in a special initiation ceremony on the second night. Members arrived in white dresses for the ritual. The alumnae and collegiate members performed the service for Baty and Todd, who became the first initiated members of the Gamma Chi chapter.¹⁶

Because the two young women had already gone through the ritual, they would take part in initiating their sisters. In addition to Baty and Todd, national officers arrived in Nacogdoches to help install the fourth Sigma Kappa chapter in Texas. Polly Greene, a traveling secretary from Abilene who had helped recruit the pledges, returned on October 26 to begin preparations for initiation. National Secretary-Treasurer, Margaret Hazlett Taggart, and two Province Presidents, Mary Lou Baker Liston, and Lucile Pemberton Duncan, officiated. Alumnae from Houston, Dallas, Fort Worth, Shreveport, Tyler, and Lufkin arrived to partake of the festivities. The sorority also invited college delegates from Southern Methodist University, Northwestern Louisiana State, and Louisiana Polytechnic Institute to perform the rituals. Initiation took place on November 19 and 20. Sigma Kappa brought in a group of special initiates too. Eight women, who lived in Nacogdoches and had a connection to the college, joined the sorority and

¹⁶“Amities Join Sigma Kappa,” *Pine Log*, June 10, 1960: 1, 11; Jean Bendslev Coleman, “Sun Valley and Sigmas Sparkle During Sky-High Sessions,” *Sigma Kappa Triangle*, Autumn 1960. Accessed February 10, 2019. www.sigmakappaarchives.org/1960.

would serve as advisors. Additionally, two former Amities returned and became alumnae of Sigma Kappa.¹⁷

The sorority celebrated their newly initiated members with lavish receptions that the local social clubs could never have afforded. The festivities began with a banquet on Saturday night. The decor conveyed the sense of formality deserving of the occasion despite being held in the Student Center on campus. The sorority women spared no attention to detail in their effort to provide the feeling of solemnity and ritual. White and gold accented the tables “with a centerpiece of white Fuji mums and gold leaves arranged in a gold epergne. Gold candles in gold candelabras lighted the tables,” and a corsage of white carnations or camellias awaited each lady at their seat.¹⁸ Henry took a place of honor joining national alumnae at the speaker’s table and remembered the event as “beautifully done.” Adding, “We were pleased it was going to work out just fine.”¹⁹ The following afternoon, the elegance of the evening banquet transformed into a less formal atmosphere with subtle touches of sorority pride. The décor transformed white and gold into Sigma Kappa colors with lavender gladiolas and

¹⁷“Fourth Chapter is Installed in Texas,” *Sigma Kappa Triangle*, Autumn 1960. Accessed February 10, 2019. www.sigmakappaarchives.org/1960; “Install Oldest Women’s Group at Austin College: 4th in Texas,” *Sigma Kappa Triangle*, Spring 1961: 15-16. Accessed February 10, 2019. www.sigmakappaarchives.org/1960; “College Club Activities: Sigma Kappa,” *Pine Log*, October 28, 1960: 4; “National Sorority Pledges Eighteen,” *Pine Log*, November 18, 1960: 5.

¹⁸“Install Oldest Women’s Group at Austin College: 4th in Texas,” *Sigma Kappa Triangle*, Spring 1961: 15-16. Accessed February 10, 2019. www.sigmakappaarchives.org/1960.

¹⁹Henry, interview.

maroon baby roses adorning the tables for a less formal tea hosted by Houston alumnae. The ladies received gifts of a silver coffee server and a silver Lazy Susan, along with a money tree covered with monetary gifts from well-wishers at the parties. The new group also received letters and telegrams of congratulation from chapters across the country, as well as from the local social groups at SFA. Sorority dues funded some of the extravagant celebrations but the national organization the remainder of the expenditures.²⁰

The social groups supported the Amities' transformation to a national sorority, but everyone's attention soon turned to the next recruitment. National advisors returned to help the newly initiated Sigma Kappas. Although the rules adhered to by the social organizations reflected those of Panhellenic, the sorority needed assurance that the collegiates recruited new members according to national regulations. The province president, Lou Pemberton Duncan traveled from Fort Worth to offer advice and oversee the women's first rush. Duncan presented one portion of a Program of Standards while in town detailing the expectations of a Sigma Kappa woman. The program presented over a series of weeks by alumnae covered membership responsibilities, as well as appropriate public behavior and personal appearance, which would have included such rules

²⁰"Install Oldest Women's Group at Austin College: 4th in Texas," *Sigma Kappa Triangle*, Spring 1961: 15-16. Accessed February 10, 2019. www.sigmakappaarchives.org/1960; Connie Cruise Stampfer, "Houston Helps with Installation of New Chapter at Austin College," *Sigma Kappa Triangle*, Spring 1961: 55. Accessed February 10, 2019. www.sigmakappaarchives.org/1960; "National Sorority Pledges Eighteen," *Pine Log*, November 18, 1960: 5; "Sigma Kappas Meet After Installation," *Pine Log*, December 2, 1960: 3.

as requiring the women to be seated when smoking cigarettes and correct attire for wearing their sorority badges. As the expectations did not differ significantly from those established by the social groups, the ease of the conversion convinced the other three organizations that they could successfully switch to national sororities.²¹

The popularity of becoming a member of Sigma Kappa helped stabilize the number of members of the former Amities, but Sigma Gamma, the youngest social group at SFA, found themselves competing for pledges. Their membership numbers dropped to twenty-one in the fall of 1961 and placed them behind the other three groups on campus. The Sigma Gammas, following the example of the Sigma Kappas, began looking at Panhellenic organizations to join. The women decided that Delta Zeta offered a sisterhood which most closely aligned with their own group and petitioned to become members during the 1962 fall semester. In February 1963, Delta Zeta sent a member of the sorority from Louisiana State University, Judy Noble, to visit with the women in preparation for the pledging ceremony. The ritual took place less than two weeks later and formally begin the long process that allowed the women to become members of the organization. Carolyn Lee, a national officer from Atlanta, Georgia, conducted the pledge pinning ritual for the Zeta Psi chapter of Delta Zeta on February 18.

²¹Sandra Mauk Pair, "Fall Schedule of Fort Worth," *Sigma Kappa Triangle*, Winter 1960: 52. Accessed February 10, 2019. www.sigmakappaarchives.org/1960; "College Club Activities: Sigma Kappa," *Pine Log*, February 3, 1961: 4.

Members of the Sam Houston State College chapter joined Lee as she bestowed the sorority's pin upon twenty-seven ladies.²²

The women proudly sported their new pins on campus. As they learned more about the sorority to which they had pledged themselves, however, they needed to establish a bond with their new sisters as well. Of the thirty-one members of Sigma Gamma in 1962, only eighteen carried their membership over to Delta Zeta the following year. Because all of the women had not been members of the social club, weekly meetings and informal gatherings served as opportunities to become better acquainted with each other. The advisors hosted a coke party in March where the pledges sang songs and participated in friendly competitions. At the formal meetings, the women discussed attending the upcoming annual state convention to be held in Fort Worth on March 16 and 17. Because Zeta Psi was the newest chapter of Delta Zeta, the SFA group received special attention at the gathering. As the seventh chapter to be established in Texas, Delta Zeta introduced the SFA group as "The New Baby" of the sorority to the three-hundred women in attendance.²³

After a semester of firsts, from the state conference to an all-campus serenade, preparations finally began for the installation of the Delta Zeta chapter

²²*Stone Fort 1961*: 66; "Sigma Gammas," *Pine Log*, February 8, 1963:4; "Social Club Activities: Delta Zeta," *Pine Log*, February 22, 1963: "Social Club Activities: Delta Zeta," *Pine Log*, March 3, 1963.

²³"Social Club Activities: Delta Zeta," *Pine Log*, March 8, 1963; "Social Club Activities: Delta Zeta," *Pine Log*, March 8, 1963; *Stone Fort 1962*: 83; *Stone Fort 1963*: 103.

and initiation of forty-nine members including former Sigma Gammas who returned to become alumnae of the sorority. The Sigma Kappas celebrated their fellow Panhellenic sisters by commencing the festivities leading up to the ritual weekend with a tea for the Delta Zetas. On Saturday, May 4, 1963, the Zeta Psi chapter of Delta Zeta received their national charter. That day members from other Texas chapters helped initiate the pledges and revealed all of the secrets of their sorority to the new members. Delta Zeta hosted an elaborate celebration banquet in the ballroom of the Student Center that evening. The group invited Henry to speak and she offered congratulations on behalf of herself and the university. The women also received telegrams from chapters across the country welcoming the group into the sisterhood. Texas chapters presented gifts and a silver coffee service arrived from the National Panhellenic Council. Sorority alumnae wrapped up the week of celebrations with another lavish tea party at the Fredonia Hotel the following afternoon.²⁴

While the school focused on the transition of Sigma Gamma to Delta Zeta in the spring, attention quickly turned toward the Pine Burrs. The women began exploring national groups at the same time that Sigma Gamma searched for the ideal sorority to join. In March 1962, Jeannie Windsor, the National Field Counselor for Alpha Xi Delta, came to Nacogdoches to speak with the women

²⁴“Social Club Activities: Delta Zeta,” *Pine Log*, April 26, 1963: 3; “Social Club Activities: Sigma Kappa,” *Pine Log*, April 26, 1963: 3; “Delta Zeta,” *Pine Log* May 10, 1963:4; “Local Girl Installed as Charter Member of Delta Zeta Sorority,” *Alto Herald*, May 16, 1963: 1.

about the history, values, and purpose of her sorority. Prior to 1962, the organization had established only one chapter in the state at The University of Texas in 1929. That group became inactive in 1943 but had begun the process of reorganizing when Windsor came to SFA. Because the group did not have a presence in Texas, Alpha Xi Delta lacked familiarity to the Pine Burrs and they continued their search. That spring, local Chi Omega alumnae, Mrs. Alice Patton and Mrs. Klein, solicited the women to consider their sorority. The women recognized Chi Omega as one of the largest national sororities and had been founded in the South. The group decided to vote on whether to affiliate with either organization. Mary Ingram, the president of the Pine Burrs, recalled that the group felt the time had come to move forward as the college was experiencing a period of growth. The fifty-seven members voted to join Chi Omega, although only twenty-four Pine Burrs became active members. They presented their decision to Henry and she sought out Steen's approval. She requested once again that Steen write a letter formally inviting a national sorority to establish a chapter at SFA.²⁵

Ingram remembers the transition being a lengthy process, but the alumnae did all of the groundwork and made sure everything progressed effortlessly. According to Henry, "They found several alumnae members that had

²⁵"Pine Burrs Hear Talk on Sororities" *Pine Log*, March 23, 1962: 5; "List of Alpha Xi Delta Chapters," Accessed February 15, 2019. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Alpha_Xi_Delta_chapters; Ingram, interview; *Stone Fort 1963*: 109; *Stone Fort 1964*: 112; Henry, interview.

been to school at SMU [sic] and University of Texas where they had chapters. So, it was very smooth and easy.”²⁶ Alumnae took care of all the required paperwork, and the collegiates simply complied with any requests from the sorority or the school in order to bring about the change. The members believed they were “progressing with the times” and anxiously anticipated their initiation into Chi Omega.²⁷ Although they realized moving forward meant leaving the Pine Burrs in the past they recognized that they were “still the same girls” regardless of the group’s name.²⁸ Even many of the officers remained the same. Ingram served the Pine Burrs well as their last president, and the women elected her to be the first president of Chi Omega during her senior year.²⁹

By December 1962, Ingram and the other members earned their right to be initiated into the Chi Omega sorority. Collegiates from the University of Houston traveled to Nacogdoches on a chartered bus to perform the rituals on December 5. National officers from across the country arrived to oversee the weekend’s events. Members installed the Epsilon Zeta chapter of Chi Omega, the 135th chapter of the sorority and the second largest in Texas, at the Episcopal Church on Friday night. Formal initiation of the pledges took place the next morning at the Presbyterian Church. Fifty-two active members and twenty-five

²⁶Henry, interview.

²⁷Ingram, interview.

²⁸Hilton, interview.

²⁹Ingram, interview; Hilton, interview.

alumnae became members of Chi Omega that morning. Following tradition, the sorority held a formal dinner that evening at the Fredonia Hotel for the new initiates, members, and a select group of faculty. The women returned to the campus on Sunday for tea at the student center where the new members could celebrate with their friends and family. Henry recalls that everything went as smoothly as hoped and the celebrations held afterward were lovely.³⁰

Through Henry's efforts and with Steen's support, female students successfully established three national sororities at SFA within the first four years of Steen being appointed president. As the college adapted to a more diverse student population, the attractiveness of nationally recognized sororities appealed to women participating in recruitment. Of the original organizations, only the Fideles remained but transition appeared imminent. Although the group had been the first to inquire about sororities on a visit to Sam Houston State Teachers College in the spring of 1959, they remained steadfast and clung to their traditions for as long as they could. Membership numbers remained competitive for the group, but the women chose to petition Alpha Chi Omega to come to SFA and colonize the fourth Panhellenic sorority on campus in 1966. After meeting, both groups agreed to move forward with the transition. On the last page of the Fidele's final scrapbook, a drawing of Linus from Charles Schultz's *Peanuts* declares, "Girls, Fideles affiliate with Alpha Chi Omega!" The

³⁰Henry, interview; "Pine Burrs Initiated as Chapter of Chi Omega," *Pine Log*, December, 15, 1963: 5.

women pledged their loyalty to the sorority in the fall. Installation of Epsilon Eta, the 106th chapter of Alpha Chi Omega, took place in the spring of 1967 after the women completed the formal pledge period.³¹

The weekend began with a pledging ceremony for Fidele alumnae on May 5, 1967. eighty-eight collegiate and alumnae women gathered the following day at First Methodist Church located on Hospital Street along with sorority members who had traveled from Sam Houston State College to help. Two initiation rituals took place that day beginning at 2:00 P.M. Upon completion of the ceremonies, over two-hundred members and guests gathered for a social hour and formal banquet in the main ballroom at SFA. Steen, Henry, and national Alpha Chi Omega officers attended the evening festivities as honored dignitaries. The new chapter received gifts from other Texas schools and alumnae groups after dinner had been served: a silver coffee service, a silver punch bowl, and trays to be used during recruitment. National officers modeled for newly initiated members how to properly conduct an official chapter meeting the following day. After the meeting, the new members attended an initiation reception held in the Starlight Ballroom hosted by Houston area alumnae. Now that the last women's social

³¹"Clubs Busy with Activities," *Pine Log*, March 20, 1959: 2; Fidele Social Club Scrapbook: 1966-1967, <http://digital.sfasu.edu/cdm/ref/collection/studentlife/id/842>; Alpha Chi Omega Sorority Scrapbook: 1967, <http://digital.sfasu.edu/cdm/ref/collection/studentlife/id/904>; Pat Krohn Broughton, "Seventh Texas Chapter Born," *The Lyre of Alpha Chi Omega*, Fall 1967: 2-4.

group transformed into a national sorority, all four groups had to find a new place for themselves at the school.³²

Much of what attracted women to social groups did not change with the introduction of sororities. The type of person who traditionally chose to join either a social group or a national sorority remained outgoing and involved on campus. From intramural sports to the *Stone Fort* staff, sorority women found a variety of other groups to join. The ladies took part in clubs that focused on their majors, religious beliefs, and personal interests. Many became members of national honorary fraternities, such as Alpha Chi, and were nominated by faculty to represent SFA as members of *Who's Who in American Colleges and Universities*. Fraternities chose 'sweethearts' to represent their organization each year. Even though the groups no longer exclusively paired themselves, the men often selected sorority women to represent them. Ingram remembers 1963 as being a very successful year for the Pine Burrs as they "won almost everything on campus that year."³³ The student body awarded honor of homecoming queen to Chi Omega member Conelia Sparks. Yet, 1964 brought even more attention to the newly installed sorority. The top three Stone Fort Beauties belonged to the group, as well as the class favorite for each class. That year Miss SFA went to

³²Alpha Chi Omega Sorority Scrapbook: 1967, <http://digital.sfasu.edu/cdm/ref/collection/studentlife/id/904>; Broughton, "Seventh Texas Chapter Born," *The Lyre of Alpha Chi Omega*, Fall 1967: 2-4.

³³Ingram, interview.

another Chi Omega, Twink Sitton, who performed with the Twirl-o-Jacks, had been voted most popular girl, and served as a Student Congress representative.³⁴

Although the groups appealed to similar women, new groups meant changes and some of the adjustments caused difficulties. The more expensive initiation fees required by the sororities eliminated the ability of some women to join the groups. Nevertheless, the higher dues meant the national groups could offer scholarships. In the first year as Sigma Kappas, the sorority awarded Janice Kahaneck with a check for \$2,000. The sororities also needed advisors to oversee that the women followed national rules. Locating alumnae proved more difficult for some groups and necessitated the initiation of local women who agreed to pay the fees and promised to help establish the new sorority. The national organizations sought former members of the groups in transition, but often found they had to reach out to family members or women who had been in different social groups while at SFA. Once located and initiated, advisors continued to provide support long after the transition period.³⁵

National and local advisors, such as Sue English with Sigma Kappa and Alice Patton from Chi Omega, volunteered to help the women adjust to the new

³⁴Ingram, interview; *Stone Fort 1964*.

³⁵Henry, interview; Pamphlet, Office of Student Development, "Spring 1964 Rush," box 1, folder 32, University Archives 82, East Texas Research Center, Stephen F. Austin State University; Swearingen, interview; Ingram, interview; "Texas Topics and News," *Sigma Kappa Triangle*, Winter 1960: 39. Accessed February 10, 2019. www.sigmakappaarchives.org/1960.

rules for each chapter and recruitment. The most significant change Ingram recalled was familiarizing themselves with Robert's Rules of Orders, which members followed during meetings. SFA complied with National Panhellenic rules for rush requiring potential members to maintain a 2.0 grade point average and attend every party on the first day. Other rules required women to observe a period of strict silence in which potential members were not allowed to speak with sorority women outside of parties, and they signed agreements at the end of rush which pledged a woman's loyalty to an organization. Overall recruitment did not appear to have changed much even though members learned new songs and chants specific to the new groups. Having letters of recommendations from sorority alumnae was essential, otherwise, "incoming pledges were still evaluated on their character. Reputation was still very important," as well as grades, recalled Ingram.³⁶ Although national organizations oversaw the implementation of the rules, overall, the women felt the rush process remained relatively unaffected.³⁷

Some of the shifts to national membership impacted other groups on campus. Sorority members adjusted to the new relationships they enjoyed with men's groups. The decision to join national sororities broke the long-standing tradition at SFA of having an all-male organization as an exclusive partner. Each

³⁶Ingram, interview.

³⁷Ingram, interview; Office of Student Development, "ISCC Convocation: Women's Inter-Social Club Council Rush Handbook," Spring 1960, box 1, folder 32, University Archives 82, East Texas Research Center, Stephen F. Austin State University.

year the men's groups voted on 'sweethearts' and homecoming duchesses who the men's groups traditionally chose from their sister groups and dances were often held in conjunction with partnered groups as well. When the Amities became Sigma Kappas, the Austinites no longer had a sister social club, and when the Sawyers, the first all-male social club at SFA, affiliated with Delta Sigma Phi in November 1960, for the first time the Pine Burrs found themselves without a male social counterpart. Although the men continued to choose many 'sweethearts' from the women's groups, there was more latitude in selecting representatives from any of the sororities and unaffiliated women. Events continued to be co-sponsored by groups, but now the sororities attended social exchanges with any of the fraternities without fear of upsetting the social dynamics on campus. The ability to mingle with multiple men's groups removed the need for dances open to the general student body.³⁸

Sororities gave women more freedom to choose which male groups to associate with, however, they also refocused some of the expectations within the chapters. The social groups prided themselves on providing school spirit but now the emphasis turned inward toward the Greek system and on the individual sororities. New events garnered enthusiasm from the student body but tended to exclude non-members even as spectators. Winning awards at Greek Week that

³⁸Vincent Stewart, "At SFA... Sawyers Become First National Fraternity," *Pine Log*, December 2, 1960; Fidele Social Club Scrapbook: 1964-65. <http://digital.sfasu.edu/cdm/ref/collection/studentlife/id/676>.

included a talent show, games, and beer chugging contests, or being awarded the title of best homecoming float became badges of honor, which the women could use to promote their sorority during recruitment. Awards given at national conventions for philanthropy efforts led the women to become more involved in helping throughout the community.³⁹

Local service projects included picking up garbage, raising money to finance a rescue boat for the Nacogdoches County Sheriff's office, visiting the elderly in retirement homes, and Chi Omega pledges sold ornaments at a Christmas bazaar to help the Brooks-Quinn Jones Elementary School purchase new playground equipment. Yet, the sororities had national philanthropies as well. The women also raised money for research and education in the fight against cancer and muscular dystrophy. The efforts the women made to bring attention to their respective philanthropies overshadowed their local outreach and their presence in the community in some cases.⁴⁰

Having never been exposed to anything different, members found most changes did not affect the new pledges. But during the first couple of years after taking on the rules of the national sorority, former social groups felt the loss of

³⁹"Social Clubs Prepare for Fall Rush Program", *Pine Log*, Aug. 12, 1960: 1; Office of Student Development, "National Panhellenic Council Rush Handbook," Fall 1964, box 1, folder 32, University Archives 82, East Texas Research Center, Stephen F. Austin State University.

⁴⁰Pamphlet *Why Greek?*, The Interfraternity Council and the Panhellenic Council of Stephen F. Austin, "The Serious Side of Greeks," Spring 1970, box 1, folder 27, University Archives 82, East Texas Research Center, Stephen F. Austin State University; "Chi Omega to Have a Booth," *Pine Log*, Nov 29, 1973: 9; Pamphlet, "Greek Week 1979", box 1, folder 27, University Archives 82, East Texas Research Center, Stephen F. Austin State University.

their old traditions. The organizations forbade forcing pledges to dress up as young school girls or hillbillies as the groups deemed the activity hazing, which included anything that could harm or humiliate a member. Former Pine Burrs missed taking pledges for a sleepover at the lake that turned into Hell Night for the young women. Members subjected the pledges to “harmless shenanigans and attempt[ed] to scare or disgust” the women.⁴¹ Hilton recalled being expected to eat various gross foods, including some type of fish or eel, which left many women feeling sick to their stomachs. Members demanded that Ingram eat a date, which had a corn chip hidden inside, but referred to the morsel as a cockroach. To this day, Ingram will not eat dates but laughs fondly at the memory of the evening. The sororities ended all antics aimed at embarrassing or upsetting pledges. But many women felt disappointed as they believed the pranks were a rite of passage that allowed the pledges to earn their way into the clubs. Nevertheless, the rules did not apply to uninitiated women and pledges looked for opportunities to harass older members. One spring, Sigma Kappa pledges hid alarm clocks in the rooms of their sisters set to ring at 2:00 a.m. and continue at intervals of fifteen minutes until everyone woke up. The younger women proceeded to kidnap the members and take them out for breakfast. But as time passed, members forgot the old traditions and established their own.⁴²

⁴¹Hilton, interview.

⁴²Ingram, interview; Hilton, interview; “Club and Society: Sigma Kappa,” *Pine Log*, January 18, 1963: 5.

Creating new traditions together as sorority sisters helped the groups to establish themselves at the school. Women looked forward to participating in the annual Greek Week competitions, attending exchanges with different fraternities, and helping around the community. But just as the social groups promoted friendships in the past, sororities allowed students to make life-long friends. The type of women who joined the groups continued to do so as a means to make friends and create a school family. Although the organizations changed, the women who sought to associate with them had not. Henry wrote of the groups that they could “bring added satisfaction to your college years and create for you bonds of friendship that will continue long after graduation.”⁴³ Ingram’s fondest memories of her time as both a Pine Burr and a Chi Omega revolve around the sisterhood and experiences she shared with the women in both organizations. Recalling time spent at SFA cannot be separated from the groups as many events, such of football games or attending classes, included being with one’s sisters.⁴⁴

As the groups moved into the 1970s more adjustments awaited the organizations. Henry’s title changed to reflect the changing attitudes of the

⁴³“ISCC Convocation: Women’s Inter-Social Club Council Rush Handbook,” Spring 1960, box 1, folder 32, University Archives 82, East Texas Research Center, Stephen F. Austin State University.

⁴⁴“ISCC Convocation: Women’s Inter-Social Club Council Rush Handbook,” Spring 1960, box 1, folder 32, University Archives 82, East Texas Research Center, Stephen F. Austin State University; Ingram, interview.

feminist movement and she became the Associate Dean of Student Affairs. Despite her new title, the job description remained relatively unaffected. She continued to manage the school social calendar and to supervise campus events. She also retained oversight of the Panhellenic groups. Although membership in Greek life declined across the country during the 1970s because of the anti-establishment attitudes of many college students, women continued to join the social groups at SFA in large enough numbers that Henry embarked on a fresh search to bring additional sororities to the school. Her search would bring two new organizations to the campus.

Henry's determination to help the members of the social groups bring national sororities to SFA, partnered with Steen's support for growth, allowed for a smooth transition. Although the president did not come to Nacogdoches with aspirations of bringing Greek-letter organizations to the campus, there was a natural move toward anything that would help the school grow and increase the student population. The national attention that the groups brought and the name recognition allowed for the recruitment of those metropolitan women that Steen hoped to attract to SFA.

Continued Legacy of the Social Organizations

Remember to look at the heart of the sorority – its members. The girls you choose as sorority sisters will be your close friends for four years of college and for years afterwards. Every group is worthwhile and has much to offer you. What do you have to offer it? -The College Among the Pine: Rush Handbook¹

The changes to the women's social groups began with the arrival of Steen in 1959. He envisioned creating a larger and more competitive institution. He provided the leadership necessary to help transform the school from a small college into a growing university. Steen oversaw the building of new facilities, classrooms, and dormitories. During his tenure, the school brought in more experienced professors and added new degree opportunities. Yet, his desire to recruit students from a broader region permitted Henry to proceed with the transformation of the local social groups at the school. Steen built a campus environment that empowered Henry to bring national sororities to the school.

The eagerness to implement growth at SFA inadvertently effected the social groups. Seeking to garner as much attention as possible to the school in an effort to attract a more cosmopolitan student body, brought about the transformation of the local clubs to national sororities. Expansion at the college rippled through the groups, as each organization transitioned into a Panhellenic organization. With the new groups maintaining many of the same ideals and

¹"The College Among the Pines: Rush Handbook," 1960, box 1, folder 32, University Archives 82, East Texas Research Center, Stephen F. Austin State University.

attracting the same type of women, the shift was often difficult to detect. The focus of the sorority turned inward, and many women felt as much loyalty for their organizations as they had for the school.

The groups did not attract large numbers of women to SFA, but those that joined the sororities were more likely to remain. Women maintained their grades so they could return each year to the network of friends that acted as a surrogate family. As members returned home during summer and winter breaks, they became unsuspecting recruiters as they shared positive stories of their sororities at SFA with friends and family members. The sororities also garnered attention as the groups won awards conferred upon them by their national organizations. Recognition at conventions helped to solidify their reputations across the state. Although the women attended a smaller college, members felt connected to women across the country when reading their sorority magazines and felt pride when the national leaders recognized their chapters for service, academics, or special events.²

Each of the women's social groups had transitioned into national sororities by 1967 even as the Greek system struggled with membership across the country. Students turned away from the traditionally conservative institutions launching protests against segregation of African Americans, participation in the

²Hilton, interview; William A. Bryan, and Robert A. Schwartz, *The Eighties: Challenges for Fraternities and Sororities*, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1983), 124; Roger B. Winston, William R. Nettles, and John H. Opper, *Fraternities and Sororities on the Contemporary College Campus*, (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1987), 8.

Vietnam War, and inequality for women. A cultural change swept across college campuses and, for many students, Greek life represented the past. Fraternities and sororities dominated and controlled much of campus life at colleges across the country through the 1950s, but change loomed. In 1961, the *Pine Log* announced the election of three independents, or non-social club members, out of eleven representatives to the Student Government Association. Even the small, conservative town of Nacogdoches began to see the effect of the youth movement, civil rights, and feminism.³

Although the women's social groups successfully transitioned into national sororities during the 1960s, feelings of anti-establishment resulted in a decreased percentage of female students joining such groups. When Steen and Henry arrived at SFA in 1958 and 1959 respectively, six percent of women belonged to one of the four social clubs. In 1964, after bringing Sigma Kappa, Delta Zeta, and Chi Omega to the school, the numbers dropped to 3.7%. The addition of the final sorority failed to reinvigorate interest in the groups. By 1969, only 2.5% of women on campus belonged to a Greek organization.⁴ Costs may have prohibited some women from joining the national groups, but the rejection of institutions that appeared to yield to traditional ideals caused other students to shun the clubs. A

³Horowitz, *Campus Life*, 226; Maury Darst, "Student Congress Posts Filled: Independents Enter Scene with Clubs," *Pine Log*, September 25, 1961: 1.

⁴*Stone Fort 1959*, 65-81; *Stone Fort 1964*, 112-121; *Stone Fort 1969*, 214-221; Registrar's Office, "Enrollment Stats," box 2, folder 20, University Archives 669, East Texas Research Center, Stephen F. Austin State University.

growing number of women chose not to join sororities. Some students even avoided being affiliated with them in any capacity by 1970.

Anti-Greek sentiments continued to rise during the 1970s at SFA. Students who did not join Greek organizations often referred to themselves as GDIs, or “God Damned Independents,” proud to promote their individuality rather than appear to conform with the conservative values of a sorority. An example of a GDI, Wanda Peterson Mouton belonged to a women’s service organization established at SFA in the late 1960s. The group’s name, Gamma Sigma Sigma, led some students to believe the organization was another social club. Members stressed that despite having Greek letters for a name, they held no affiliation with the social sororities on campus. Mouton remembers, “There was a great hatred and distrust of fraternities and sororities.”⁵ According to Mouton, the campus culture caused a “dramatic decrease in membership to sororities and fraternities on campus. It was a feeling of revolt for anything elitist.”⁶ Many students felt that members of the Greek system looked down on people that chose not to join fraternal organizations. Sue West, the *Stone Fort* editor in 1973, opted not to join in part because she believed the selection process was cruel and had witnessed “several girls hurt by this procedure.”⁷ West also felt she could make friends on

⁵Stallard, *Logging a Legacy*, 81-83.

⁶Stallard, *Logging a Legacy*, 81-83.

⁷Cindy Wofford, “Different Opinions Aired on SFA’s Greek System,” *Pine Log*, November 15, 1973: 8.

her own, explaining, "I don't need the help of a sorority to do that."⁸ For West and others belonging to a sorority meant that you were paying to have friends.⁹

The Panhellenic Council took strides to promote a more positive outlook on organizations to counter the unfavorable reputation sororities experienced in the 1970s. The group co-sponsored a pamphlet with the men's fraternities to highlight the Greek system's emphasis on academic excellence, leadership opportunities, school spirit, and community service. The booklet praised the enthusiasm members brought to athletic games and pep rallies, their involvement in other school organizations such as student government, and the various service projects performed to help improve the community. Although the advertising failed to sway the opinion of many students, the groups not only maintained membership in the established sororities but brought in two more Panhellenic organizations.¹⁰

Sororities continued to initiate less than 3% of the student population by 1972. Nevertheless, the number of women who participated in rush continued to grow and the four sororities could not accommodate everyone who wanted to join, which led Henry to believe the school could support another chapter on

⁸Wofford, "Different Opinions Aired on SFA's Greek System," *Pine Log*, November 15, 1973: 8.

⁹Stallard, *Logging a Legacy*, 81-83; Wofford, "Different Opinions Aired on SFA's Greek System," *Pine Log*, November 15, 1973: 8.

¹⁰Pamphlet *Why Greek?*, The Interfraternity Council and the Panhellenic Council of Stephen F. Austin, "The Serious Side of Greeks," Spring 1970, box 1, folder 27, University Archives 82, East Texas Research Center, Stephen F. Austin State University.

campus. The groups averaged between sixty and sixty-five members per organization since 1969. Henry wrote to Delta Delta Delta, or Tri-Delta, sorority asking if they would be interested in coming to SFA, but they were reluctant to do so. They explained that they doubted the support of alumnae in Nacogdoches. The organization already had plans to open a chapter at the University of Houston as well and did not want to over-expand in Texas. Henry understood the group's hesitancy as Greek life continued to struggle at many schools, but she believed SFA could bring in another sorority. She had her heart set on Tri-Delta because both of her daughters had been initiated into the sorority, one at Texas Tech in Lubbock, Texas and the other at Southwestern University in Georgetown. As she traveled to the annual convention for Deans of Women that year being held in Minneapolis, Minnesota, she went with a mission.¹¹

Henry went through the reception line at the Panhellenic event greeting the presidents until she found herself standing in front of Tri-Delta. She told the national president, "I want to talk to you. I need a little time. Let's step out of line over here and let's talk."¹² They found a table in a quiet place where they could discuss bringing the sorority to SFA. Henry assured the president many women in Nacogdoches were Tri-Delta alumnae and would serve as advisors. Sorority leaders reiterated the organization had already scheduled to install a chapter at

¹¹Henry, interview.

¹²Henry, interview.

the University of Houston and was hesitant to establish another one in Texas so quickly. Moreover, there was not enough time to discuss the matter further as the women planned to leave early the next morning. Henry adamantly replied, “Well, you’re going to be sorry you didn’t take us, cause we’re going to (bring in another sorority),” and added, “You can’t find a finer group of girls anyplace you go.”¹³ That evening, the roads iced over and the Tri-Delta party found themselves confined to the hotel. As they could not leave, they invited Henry to come and speak with them in further detail about SFA and the women who might be candidates for their sorority. Henry made her best sales pitch and, “. . . told them everything about the school, what all the students were taking, and how we were building and how the enrollment had increased and all of this. I laid it on the best I could.”¹⁴

Henry wrote to Tri-Delta upon returning to Nacogdoches saying the school would be honored to have the sorority consider opening a chapter at SFA. She asked Steen to write a letter extending an invitation to come and visit as well. Henry received notification from the national president two weeks later that she would soon make a trip to Texas and would like to stop by to see the school. She visited with local alumnae and interested students. She agreed that Tri-Delta should reconsider by the end of her visit. That fall semester, the sorority

¹³Henry, interview.

¹⁴Henry, interview.

established the Beta Xi chapter at SFA. The members quickly found their place on campus and were competitive by the following year, only falling short on membership quota by a few women. The strong anti-Greek feelings of the early 1970s appeared to be fading.¹⁵

The largest group of women participated in sorority recruitment in the spring of 1976. Approximately 750 ladies attended parties in hopes of joining one of the five organizations and women's Greek organizations grew to 3.8% of the college population that year. Henry quickly recognized the school needed to bring another group to campus. Without a social group to begin with or an interested sorority, Henry looked for women she believed had leadership qualities who could establish a new organization. The night before women received their invitations to join a sorority, she spoke with a number of women and offered an alternative option. Henry called Ginger Arnold Benedict, a freshman from Richardson, Texas, to inform her that two sororities planned to ask her to pledge their group. Yet, Henry proposed that Benedict join neither group and instead help establish a sixth sorority on campus.¹⁶

The idea appealed to Benedict and she met with Henry and a small group of women the next day. The ladies assembled in the office were mavericks, as

¹⁵Henry, interview.

¹⁶Ginger Benedict, interviewed by author, Nacogdoches, TX, March 4, 2017; *Stone Fort 1977*; 251-263; Registrar's Office, "Enrollment Stats," box 2, folder 20, University Archives 669, East Texas Research Center, Stephen F. Austin State University.

described by Benedict, who prided themselves on being different. National sororities presented their history and purpose to the women throughout the semester. Choosing an organization proved difficult at times and arbitrary at others. Delta Gamma met with the group, but afterward, the ladies voted against the sorority as they did not care for the group's symbol, which was an anchor. Nevertheless, the women agreed they felt something different after speaking with Zeta Tau Alpha. The sorority's crown symbol apparently met the approval of the women as well. The group extended an invitation to have the sorority establish a chapter at SFA that was accepted.¹⁷

As with many of the earlier sororities, the area lacked Zeta Tau Alpha alumnae in East Texas. Jean Spencer Hunt, a former member, sought out friends whom she believed would support the new group. She visited Joyce Swearingen, a former Pine Burr, at her office and insisted that she become an alumnae member of Zeta Tau Alpha, explaining "I will not accept a no."¹⁸ Hunt asked about Swearingen's reasons for not joining Chi Omega in 1962. With young children and trying to help her husband with his business the timing had not been right. Swearingen did not recall any of her close friends joining the sorority. Now that her children were grown, she reconsidered the proposition. Her daughter, Sally Ann Swearingen, attended The University of Texas where she

¹⁷Benedict, interview.

¹⁸Swearingen, interview.

chose to join Zeta Tau Alpha. Swearingen relented and agreed to be an advisor, along with her dear friend Peggy Wedgeworth Wright, a former Amicie. In the spring of 1977, SFA gained a sixth national Panhellenic sorority with thirty-seven active members and twelve special initiates.¹⁹

The groups prospered under the guidance of their advisors and by the 1980s took on a new challenge. Each of the organizations purchased land on the north end Nacogdoches less than three miles from the SFA campus on Steen Drive where they anticipated building homes for their chapters. The creation of sorority row helped draw visibility to the groups. As each sorority completed their house, the group saw a surge in interest in their individual chapters. Sigma Kappa, the first sorority on campus, purchased a lot but never followed through on the construction of a house. Once again, the group found their numbers falling far behind the other organizations. The Sigma Kappas could not afford to build their home without enough members. Potential members tended to disregard the group when choosing a sorority to join as they eyed the large houses the other sororities offered. After many semesters of trying to help the women recruit enough pledges, nationals decided the chapter should close and revoked their charter in 1990.²⁰

¹⁹Swearingen, interview; Patsy J. Hallman, *Joyce, The Story of Joyce Bright Swearingen: A Woman Whose Life Makes a Difference for Many*, (Nacogdoches, TX: n.p., 2004), 109; "Schedule of Activities: Theta Eta Installation," March 18—20, 1977, personal papers of Chris Littman LaFaille, Tyler, TX.

²⁰*Stone Fort 1990*: 320; Henry, interview.

Three of the original groups remain and many the former members still maintain friendships they began so many years ago. Members from the Pine Burrs and Chi Omega continue to gather annually for a girl's weekend at the Fredonia Hotel. Many of the women live near one another, and while they may not have belonged to the groups at the same time, they have built strong relationships over the years. Some of Ingram's fondest memories are of the sisterhood she shared with the other members. Hilton reads the Chi Omega magazine sent to her quarterly and enjoys connecting with a broader group of women. When her eldest daughter joined the Chi Omegas at SFA, the chapter invited Hilton to take part in the initiation ritual. In recent years, she attended a tea hosted at the house and enjoyed seeing how the chapter had changed and grown.²¹

The introduction of national sororities was never a foregone conclusion. Other colleges held onto their traditions and rejected national organizations, such as Sul Ross State College which fell under the same Board of Regents as SFA in the 1960s. Without Steen's long-term goal of growth and Henry's guidance, the social clubs established in the 1920s might continue to exist at SFA. Yet, bringing Greek sororities to campus indirectly aided in the recruitment of a broader student body. The groups helped bring new attention to the college and allowed many women to remain connected to the school long after graduation. A part of

²¹Hilton, interview; Ingram, interview.

Steen's legacy continues through the former members of the social groups as they return to SFA, escorting their daughters on tours of the campus in hopes that they will follow in the footsteps of their mothers. Many women proudly escort their daughters through the houses on sorority row and share their memories of being part of the organizations. The impressive expansion that took place under Steen continues to attract future students, both from the pronounced physical development that took place on campus and from the less noticeable transformation of the local women's social groups to national sororities.²²

²²Ralph W. Steen, "Personal Correspondence to Board of Regents, State Senior Colleges," May 22, 1967, box 1, folder 1, University Archives 1, East Texas Research Center, Stephen F. Austin State University.

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