

NEW CAGES FOR THE ZOO

By Frank A. Parsons

Fortnightly Club, February 7, 1992

THE SIGNS OF ACADEMIC RETRENCHMENT are all around us. Public institutions, their state revenues declining, are raising tuition even as they look for additional ways to cut costs. Private colleges and universities, many with tuition levels already in the stratosphere, are seeking new ways to ride out the recession. Many public institutions are trying to control costs by capping enrollment; in the private sector, some colleges try to cope with recession economics by even more vigorous recruitment.

The *Roanoke Times* two weeks ago reported at substantial length on these matters under the headline “Higher Price for Higher Ed.” This past Sunday, there was an account of the problems faced by that master fundraiser, the Reverend Jerry Falwell, whose Liberty University is burdened by some \$80 million of debt.

It’s hard times for colleges and universities, not just in Virginia, but everywhere. Last week’s *Time* magazine carried a piece on the “Big Chill on Campus.”

Frank Parsons, a 1954 Phi Beta Kappa graduate of Washington and Lee, worked at the university as chief of staff to four presidents, with responsibilities ranging over the years from publications to campus construction. In the late 1980s, he was in charge of the fraternity renaissance he describes in this article. While a student, he was a member of Phi Kappa Psi.

One may have expected to read about massive cutbacks at the University of Bridgeport, where one-third of its degree programs are gone, or at California’s Long Beach State, where varsity football — of all things — is one of many victims of the budget ax. But few were prepared to learn of an \$8.8 million operating deficit at Yale that may grow to \$50 million in just a few years. Columbia’s annual budget is already \$50 million in the red, and Stanford says it must trim \$43 million from its operations. The article described hefty tuition increases, as well as programmatic reductions, at state universities in Maine, Mississippi, California, and Oregon. And in Virginia, as elsewhere in the United States, students are angry about having to pay more and more for less and less. We read this week of the plaintive sign on the Virginia Tech campus: “We want to lern!” — yes, spelled l-e-r-n.

But, there is other news of higher education. On Sunday, January 19, Robert E. Lee’s birthday, the *New York Times* reported that a college down in Virginia was in the middle of spending \$13 million on a major new project. At a time when other colleges are trying to make ends meet by firing professors, reducing library acquisitions, eliminating degree programs, and turning down the thermostat, Washington and Lee University is investing a sizable fortune in rehabilitating sixteen fraternity houses.

If “man bites dog” is news, this thing called Fraternity Renaissance has got to be big news. Which, as a matter of fact, it is.

Not only does it run counter to current trends of fiscal retrenchment; this fraternity rescue effort at W&L appears to contradict the prevailing common wisdom on how colleges should deal with these hedonistic, often dangerously sadistic organizations whose members appear to worship a Hollywood film called *Animal House* as their organization role model. Didn’t Williams College abolish fraternities in the ’60s? Didn’t Amherst and Bowdoin follow suit more recently, along with change at Gettysburg and Franklin and Marshall? And aren’t most other colleges trying to create even more distance from the Greeks than the arm’s length that characterizes most relationships? It does appear that Washington and Lee is trying to swim up the waterfall on this one.

As most of you know, Washington and Lee enjoys a reputation currently as one of the nation’s “top 25” national liberal arts colleges. In at least one evaluation, it is the best bargain among these prestigious institutions. What compels such a college to make such a heroic effort to save a fraternity system that most Lexingtonians, many faculty and administrators, and even some students would just as soon see perish?

Some think that President John Wilson and his fellow trustees have made a bad decision, a bad investment with funds that could do so much more for Washington

and Lee if spent differently. For some, “Fraternity Renaissance” is a \$13-million oxymoron. From the viewpoint of others, the course Washington and Lee is pursuing is the only practical alternative it had.

Back in 1984, when President Wilson was suffering the slings and arrows of an outraged alumni constituency over the issue of coeducation, I had occasion to comfort him with assurances that this was nothing compared with the vitriol that had been heaped on President Gaines in 1954 when W&L gave up big-time football.* And if President Wilson really wanted trouble, I suggested he try to abolish W&L’s fraternities, a notion whose appeal I believe he considered at least once or twice. To understand why I might say such a thing, let’s take a quick look at the history of fraternities, nationally and locally.

Fraternities as we know them today trace their origin to the Raleigh Tavern in Williamsburg, Virginia, where, on December 5, 1776, five students at the College of William and Mary founded Phi Beta Kappa. Since Phi Beta Kappa evolved over its first fifty years into the now-celebrated scholarship honor society, today’s national social fraternities acknowledge a secondary genesis at Union College in Schenectady, New York. There, in 1825, the Kappa Alpha Society began, followed shortly by Sigma Phi and Delta Phi, thus bestowing upon Union the sobriquet “Mother of Fraternities.” Today, there are fifty-six national social fraternities, most of them members of the National Interfraternity Conference, headquartered in New York City. Current membership nationally is around 450,000. College sororities, almost always officially known as “women’s fraternities,” began in 1851 at Wesleyan Female College in Macon, Georgia, and there are thirty-four of these on the national scene today. Most of these, too, are organized nationally under a Panhellenic banner that flies in Indianapolis, Indiana.

If Lexington can’t be the “Mother of Fraternities,” our fair city certainly can stake out some sort of claim as a progenitor of such things. Three national fraternities were founded here, two of which — Sigma Nu and the Kappa Alpha Order (as distinguished from the northern society) — have established their national headquarters in Lexington. The national honorary leadership fraternity, Omicron Delta Kappa, also was founded in Lexington and today enjoys prestige similar to Phi Beta Kappa on 220 campuses.

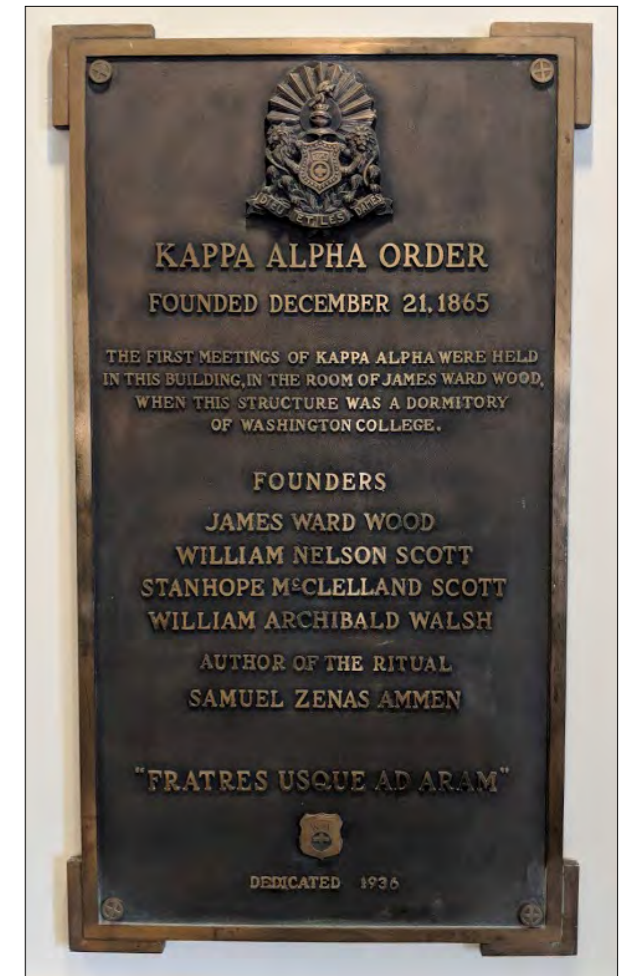
Washington and Lee’s fraternities had begun in 1855 with the establishment of Phi Kappa Psi, followed shortly by Beta Theta Pi. From the beginning, it would seem, their potential for trouble-making was well recognized. In 1857, President

* The first crisis Mr. Parsons faced as a W&L administrator. He was hired as crisis public-relations manager during the debate over football desubsidization, as it was called.

George Junkin’s annual report noted that these two fraternities had concluded the academic year with “a drinking festival” that was similar to behavior at other colleges where fraternities “had produced most disastrous consequences.” Following the Civil War, Phi Psi and Beta reappeared at Washington College, along with the aforementioned Kappa Alpha Order, which even today looks to Robert E. Lee as the spiritual father of its founding in 1865. All through the Victorian years, with enrollment in decline, fraternities came and disappeared, with W&L’s university Historian Ollinger Crenshaw

Kappa Alpha Order first met in Robinson Hall on the Front Campus of Washington and Lee, as a marker commemorates, right.

Sigma Nu was established at Virginia Military Institute; a marker, below, is at the corner of the Parade Ground.



noting wryly that three chapters in 1879 achieved the ultimate in exclusivity: only one member each.

Throughout this period there was frequent talk of special lodgings for fraternities, but most could muster only the rental of rooms for their meetings. An important trend in General Lee's era, though, was to have profound effect on the development of chapter houses several decades later. When Lee's presidency brought a surge in enrollment in the immediate postwar years, the college looked to the town of Lexington for the room and board of many of its students. For Lexingtonians, the income was most welcome during the difficult years of Reconstruction, and for the students, there might be the calming influence of the Lexington gentry upon the rambunctious nature of youth, often expressed in noisy orgies then called "calathumps." As Professor Crenshaw notes in *General Lee's College*, "The day of impressive fraternity houses did not dawn until after 1920, but the fraternity system became firmly entrenched at Washington and Lee between 1865 and 1900." A well-chosen word, that "entrenched."

In the early 1920s, there occurred a marriage between the university and its fraternity system. The union begun then has been subjected to frequent strain and estrangement, but for the sometimes adversarial partners, divorce has never seemed much of a solution.

It seemed like such a good idea at the time. The fraternities wanted chapter houses; the university owned land upon which they could be built. The university was willing to lend money and the fraternities were willing to borrow for the construction of houses on that land. Some chose to build elsewhere, but virtually all needed financial support from the university, whose loan policy was more generous than that of local banks. Rather grandiose architectural schemes were drawn up for the area now known as Red Square and the five houses that were eventually built there [North Jefferson Street, across from Lee Chapel]. Not too far away, in an area coming to be known as Davidson Park, also owned by Washington and Lee,

other fraternities put down deep roots, some with new houses, others in fine old mansions of another era.



A drawing, circa 1924, of plans for Red Square. Beta Theta Pi is at the front left. P.D.T. is Phi Delta Theta; S.N. is Sigma Nu; and P.K.S. is Phi Kappa Sigma. All still occupy the brick houses built for them then. This photo of a chalkboard sketch was taken by Henry Boley and today is held in Washington and Lee Library's Special Collections.

From the 1920s to the late 1960s, it was a symbiotic relationship that worked amazingly well. Washington and Lee maintained dormitories only for its freshmen. Fraternities, from sixteen to eighteen in number over this period, housed no fewer than 400 upperclassmen and law students, while 300 others found lodging in nearby private homes. Members and pledges made up from 95 percent to 98 percent of total enrollment. At 1:15 p.m. and again at 6 p.m., virtually the entire student body at Washington and Lee sat down at the same time in fraternity dining rooms at tables with linen tablecloths, to be served meals from well-stocked kitchens and pantries by a small army of maids and butlers, all under the management of gentle, patient, and charming housemothers. No one ever left the dining room without first being excused by the housemother, or until she herself had left. There were well-appointed parlors, libraries and lounges in every house, and upstairs — where no young women were ever supposed to tread (or bed) — there were comfortable bedrooms, mostly doubles, sometimes triples, and an occasional single. Bathrooms were kept spotless by butlers who also made up the members' beds and vacuumed the floor.

Substantially removed from responsibility for dormitories and dining halls, Washington and Lee found itself also absolved of any major obligation for the social life of its students. The Co-Op was busy as a campus snack bar and bookstore, but the so-called Student Union was a place for organization meetings, not socializing. Almost all student activities revolved around fraternity life. Over much of this era, campus politics were contested between the Big Clique and the Little Clique, with clearly defined fraternal alliances. Intramural sports pitted fraternity against fraternity. There were four big dance weekends that took on a university-wide character, but at intermission, everybody returned to fraternity houses. Some houses partied with other houses, and many maintained an amazing continuity of character. There were southern houses, northern houses, rich houses, jock houses, Jewish houses, and a couple that seemed to attract what today we would call nerds.

Let's be honest. There *was* drinking and misbehavior. But if you drank too much, or if you offended your fraternity brother's date with a careless remark, well, you were ashamed of yourself the next day. If such behavior became a pattern, fraternity brothers would draw you aside for counseling, usually a pretty effective technique. Looking back, one can see a lot more genuine brotherhood, a lot more allegiance to the lofty language of the secret initiation rituals than we were willing to admit at the time. I can remember only one such admonition from my fraternity initiation, but its relevance to the Fraternity Renaissance is undeniable: "Abhor the profligate!"

All in all, it was a very civilized way to go to college.



Two early fraternity houses: Beta Theta Pi, in Red Square on North Jefferson Street, and Phi Kappa Psi, on East Washington Street. Both photos are from the 1929 W&L student yearbook, the *Calyx*.

So, what went wrong? Vietnam, Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon, to name a few things. All of a sudden, fraternities declined in popularity among college students nationwide, and the impact of this was felt quickly at Washington and Lee. Fraternities, rightly or wrongly, were perceived by many to be a link to an industrial-military establishment that seemed bent on sending lots of young men to Southeast Asia. W&L fraternity membership dropped from 98 percent to 80 percent and then to 60 percent of the undergraduate enrollment. Law students, once an important factor in fraternity stability and responsibility, no longer found time for such commitments.

The signs of fraternities in trouble became highly visible in the mid-'60s. At that time Washington and Lee offered little in the way of upperclass housing, and with fewer and fewer students in the fraternities, private accommodations in town were often less than comfortable, safe, or even healthy. A committee studying the future of student housing recommended that W&L begin a gradual transition to a fully residential college, with fraternities the only off-campus alternative permitted. That plan was seen as a way to strengthen the weakening fraternity system, as well as move the university away from its growing dependence on the community for housing.

Virtually every W&L fraternity chapter felt the financial pinch and looked for ways to reduce expenses. Even in their diminished strength, though, fraternities still provided a vital housing and dining resource for the university, which, be reminded, had not just tolerated the Greeks for decades but had become truly dependent upon them. It was in the best interest of the university to help preserve as many of its chapters as possible.

This was the environment, then, in the late '60s, when first one, then another chapter delegation appeared in President Bob Huntley's office, asking, "Please, please, won't you let us try to get by without a housemother? Old Mrs. Goody is retiring, and if we didn't have to pay a salary and benefits for her replacement, well, we just might be able to make it." If President Huntley had a failing as college president, it was that he was always willing to place more confidence in student leadership and student organizational ability than they probably deserved. In one of the few instances of questionable judgment ever associated with his presidency, he gave in to such pleading. And once the concession was granted to one, it had to go to another, and another. Within a few years, the few houses remaining with housemothers were being "dirty rushed" by those without: "Hey, if you pledge Phi Psi, you won't have any fun and you'll have to have manners — they have a *housemother!*"

It should be noted here that Bob Huntley's decisions regarding fraternity life were always motivated by the same concerns that nearly two decades later found expression in John Wilson's decision to rescue the fraternity system. The university is dependent upon the system, and among a great majority of W&L alumni, nostalgic memories of fraternity life provide one of the strongest threads that bind them to their university. Moreover, this will be true for still a long time to come.

The way fraternity alumni remember this experience is very much like the fable of the blind men feeling the elephant and then each, having felt a different part of the beast, arguing over what the animal was like. Many remember some version of the genteel life I described earlier, others recall the difficult transition years, while most of those who graduated in the past twenty years treasure *their* great memories: parties uncluttered by unnecessary things like furniture; the smell of stale beer everywhere all the time; old food on dining room ceilings and walls.

For that is what quickly happened once the stabilizing influence of housemothers vanished, as they soon did from all houses. Letters of complaint began to pour in from alumni from these earlier eras, men who came back for homecoming and reunions, finding little of anything that resembled a home, certainly little to embrace in the spirit of a reunion weekend. Some sent money to fix this or that, but only rarely was this stopgap assistance of any lasting value.

The decade of the 1970s will probably be remembered as the Dark Ages of fraternity life at W&L. The Alumni Board of Directors began to chronicle the decline with formal resolutions and calls for revitalization of one kind or another. The Board of Trustees, now reorganized on a substantially more sentient basis — almost none fell asleep during meetings any longer — these trustees began to take note of the negative nature of fraternity life. There was that great temptation to stand aside and let the fraternities wallow and drown in their own excesses. It was

so easy to shrug institutional shoulders and say, listen, there's only so much we can do, they're not *our* houses, go talk to the alumni who own them. But as flip and easy as this response might be, there was also always the sober awareness that this was no real answer. What would Washington and Lee do with all those big houses if there weren't fraternities in them, and most of them sit on our land. And those places down in Red Square, why, they're practically on the front campus!

Having worked under four fine college presidents, I have a theory that every such president has a limit on the wars he can fight, the fund-raising campaigns he can wage, the ducks that can nibble at his ankles. Bob Huntley looked for ways to help the fraternities, but I suspect that even he couldn't muster the energy or find the resources to do what had to be done to pull the fraternities back from the edge of the precipice on which most were poised. He arranged for regular university maintenance inspection and repair of electrical, plumbing and heating systems, but if the leaking showers had rotted out the beams and framing, that wasn't covered. He also was instrumental with setting up a better check on how chapters managed their financial affairs, a first step toward assisting house treasurers in really collecting their accounts receivable. The dean of students' office was enlarged to include an assistant dean whose principal task was dealing with fraternities. When Bob Huntley stepped down as president in early 1983, fraternities were beginning to recover some of their lost vigor. They were coming back, although in order to measure this improvement, one had to know a lot more about the way they had been than you'd really want to know.

Over the past twenty years or so, fraternities have come and gone, and two or three that were gone have come back, each with its own distinctive profile of alumni interest and involvement, its own level of encouragement from its national organization, its own special "deal" with the university. I won't try to chronicle these, but I can't get to my concluding words on Fraternity Renaissance without special reference to what can surely be thought of as the phoenix of W&L's fraternity system.

IN THE EARLY MORNING HOURS of April 11, 1984, there occurred a tragic fire in the Phi Gamma Delta house at the corner of Preston Street and Jackson Avenue, deeply embedded in one of the loveliest of Lexington's old neighborhoods of stately homes. A young man lost his life in that fire, and the house was destroyed, only its thick limestone walls remaining partially in place. The Phi Gams had had their problems, as deserving as any chapter for an animal house reputation. The death of the student who died, junior Tom Fellin, from Weston, Pennsylvania, seemed destined to provide much-needed impetus to reverse this situation.

In those sad days of an otherwise lovely spring, good things began to rise up from the Phi Gam ashes.

Ed Bishop is a Phi Gam, an alumnus of 1968, one of those with a first-hand memory of a better time, one with a good notion of what might be achieved now with the opportunity to write upon a clean slate. A former Navy flier, experienced in corporate finance, Bishop assumed the leadership of a group of dedicated Phi Gam alumni who agreed to supplement the fire insurance settlement with their own major commitment of funds necessary to rebuild the chapter house. And as the new house began to take shape, so did Bishop's plan for rebuilding an organization within the chapter that would assure the integrity of his and his associates' investment. Blessed with a keen mind, Bishop is never reluctant to speak it — forcefully, very forcefully. There *would* be a housemother, employed by the Phi Gam partnership. She would help influence a new lifestyle within the chapter, one that took advantage of the new physical structure, but one that also promised proper care and respect for that very environment. If you abused the property, you paid for it through the nose, and if you did it one time too often — that was the third time by Ed's reckoning — you were out. He probably didn't invent the phrase, but he might as well have, for it echoes through the spacious basement party space, up the elegant spiral staircase in the front hall, and down the corridors of comfortable bedrooms: "It's my way, or the highway."

With this high profile resurrection of Phi Gam in progress, other alumni house corporations began to take new interest in the roles they might play to revitalize their own chapters. Other alumni leaders stepped forward to join Ed Bishop in the front rank of something that was beginning to be called, officially, Fraternity Renaissance. The next Ollie Crenshaw will surely identify two other extraordinary men among the heroes of this effort.

Paul J. B. Murphy of McLean, Virginia, a Sigma Nu 1949 graduate and a retired combat infantry colonel, became the first president of a new organization known as the Alumni Fraternity Council, consisting of representatives — usually the presidents — of the seventeen alumni house corporations. Under Colonel Murphy's energetic leadership, there occurred two important conferences at Washington and Lee, one in October, 1986, the second a year later. The first symposium brought together officers of national fraternities, alumni corporation members, faculty advisers, administrators, W&L students, and a variety of specialists. They talked of growing legal liability concerns and risk management. They debated the complex, intimate ways that fraternity life at W&L intertwines with academic life, social activities, student conduct, and the Honor System. And they pondered what in the world could be done about the condition of these houses.



From left, Ed Bishop, Paul Murphy and Tom Touchton, three “heroes” of Fraternity Renaissance, at a campus conference in 1986. The photos are from the W&L alumni magazine’s coverage of the event.

Tom Touchton, from Tampa, Florida, also a Sigma Nu, was now the chairman of the Board of Trustees’ campus life committee. Participating in this first symposium, he became a frequent and articulate spokesman for Fraternity Renaissance, both within and outside the board. With President Wilson (still *another* Sigma Nu), he helped guide the board in its endorsements of the goals of the Renaissance movement, imparting much-needed heft and momentum to the task at hand.

Perhaps the most important outcome of the 1986 symposium was the creation of a fraternity housing renovation steering committee, under Paul Murphy’s chairmanship. Working closely with Lewis G. John, the dean of students, and Buddy Atkins, assistant dean for fraternities, this committee undertook two critically important initiatives.

One was the engagement of VMDO Architects of Charlottesville to make a comprehensive survey of the fraternities that were clearly in need of rehabilitation, fifteen of the seventeen. The toughest part of VMDO’s task was estimating the cost of such renovation, which it attempted by applying the general standards it had followed in its recent participation in the renovation of some half-dozen fraternities at the University of Virginia.

The second initiative, involving many others involved in the fraternity system, was the creation of Washington and Lee’s own set of Standards for Fraternities. This document has evolved as the bible of the Fraternity Renaissance. It clearly defines five major players in the system and sets forth specific responsibilities that each must fulfill: the university itself; the national fraternal organizations; the individual house corporations, run by alumni; the individual chapters; and, finally, the W&L student interfraternity council.

Standard IV of the document addressed the physical conditions that must prevail for a fraternity to remain at Washington and Lee. The standard doesn’t quite put it this way, but it essentially describes Ed Bishop’s Phi Gam model. All well and good, but hold on! Where will the money come from? It wouldn’t do for all the other fraternities to burn down. And perhaps just as unlikely, there may not be another

sixteen other Ed Bishops out there to provide funding and moral leadership. (And even if there were, the tax laws had changed and the kind of partnership Ed had put together no longer was as appealing as it had been to him and his associates.)

If one steps back to look objectively at Standard IV, the physical condition code, it might take on the appearance of a Machiavellian plot to get rid of all but the very strongest of W&L’s fraternities. There appeared to be no way for most of the chapters to meet the financial challenge. A special trustees’ subcommittee was asked to look for feasible alternatives for financing the renovations contemplated. VMDO Architects best initial estimate was just under \$10 million, and now with the greater detail of the newly adopted standards, it would be closer to \$12 million or \$13 million.

Meanwhile, the second big conference convened in October 1987, with participation of more than fifty directors of the seventeen fraternities, along with administrators, faculty advisers, and some specialists. They pondered a proposed new manual for corporation directors, a product of the Alumni Fraternity Council. And they heard from the VMDO principal in charge of the W&L fraternity study on what needed to be done to rehabilitate the houses.



New Phi Gamma Delta house.

For almost a year, W&L found itself in possession of the framework for a promising rebirth of an ailing system, but the challenge of physical renovation remained just that: a challenge that few were willing to confront.

The fight is still joined, but a major benchmark — the completion of the physical renovations — is now within sight. Success, while not assured, is likely. [Remember, this is written in 1992.]

Wait, you might ask. Where did the money come from? Did John Wilson pull a wealthy rabbit out of a hat? In a manner of speaking, yes.

In mid-summer of 1988, getting ready to travel to England for a well-deserved leave of absence, President Wilson gathered his senior administrators and laid before them the outline of a financial plan, a realistic, achievable plan. In its bare essentials the plan said this: For those fraternities willing to participate in the plan, Washington and Lee would underwrite the costs of physical renovations and furnishings to bring each chapter into compliance with the new standards. Moreover, the university would forgive any outstanding mortgage obligations these chapters might have with W&L, and it would assume responsibility for maintenance, house-keeping, utilities, insurance and taxes. Current leases would be terminated and new agreements drawn up. In exchange for these considerations, the chapters would have a few things to do themselves. First, title to all real estate would pass from the house corporation to the university. The house corporations would agree to pay room rentals to the university at rates comparable to the fees charged to students living in Gaines Hall, W&L's newest residence building. And every member of the chapter, whether residing in the chapter house or not, would be assessed a Greek fee of some \$400 a year. This fund would be used to compensate the university for abuse or damage to the chapter houses beyond normal wear and tear. And — oh, yes — every house corporation would employ an adult, non-student resident manager. This manager need not be a housemother; in fact, the ideal might be a widower, somewhat mellowed in his retirement, who was formerly a Marine drill sergeant. (John Wilson didn't say that. I made that up.)

By the time President Wilson returned from England in December, much of the detail his outline plan required was falling into place. The Board of Trustees endorsed it, as did all other constituents of Fraternity Renaissance. An important decision involved the promise of doing the construction on a first-apply, first-renovated basis. Initially, it was assumed that much of the renovation would occur during summer months, but the scope of the work involved quickly put an end to this scheme. By happy coincidence, all five of the Red Square fraternities were among the first in line, so it became practical to address this body of work as a single contract. All of 1989 was devoted to planning, working with building committees from

each participating chapter and corporation. A revised University Master Plan had to be cleared through the Lexington Planning Commission and City Council, not without difficulty.

At last, in April 1990, the first renovation began at Sigma Alpha Epsilon on Washington Street, with the work at Red Square commencing at the close of the academic year in June.

Today, eight renovations are completed, along with major site improvements at Red Square and in Davidson Park. Two brand-new houses are under construction now, with completion scheduled in time for occupancy next September. The contract for renovation of another house was signed this month [February 1992], and the university hopes to begin construction of two more new houses at Davidson Park in late March, trading a new facility for the Sigma Chi property adjacent to the campus on Lee Avenue, and providing a new home for Sigma Phi Epsilon instead of renovating the current chapter house in its sensitive neighborhood on Preston Street.

Renovation of the Delta Tau Delta house on Lee Avenue, originally scheduled to get under way this month, is on indefinite hold at the moment. The limited renovations required at Chi Psi, in the old Ann Smith School, will begin in April and should be completed by September. Assuming a resolution to the Delta Tau Delta delay, it should all be over by the summer of 1993. [The Delta Tau Delta chapter's charter was pulled by its national leadership in 1995.]

It hasn't been easy. Not everyone is completely happy. The chapter houses were not created equal back in the '20s and '30s, and it wasn't the purpose of Fraternity Renaissance to bring about equality. Nevertheless, the chapters look about and see things elsewhere that they wish they had in their own houses. Some students, usually the carryover upperclassmen who remember the good old days before renovations, bristle at the expectations now imposed upon them for behavior and respect for the property. Costs have run considerably higher than earlier expectations, especially in the initial group of six houses. More recent renovations budgets have benefited from that Phase One experience and been helped by the current hungry



Red Square renovation. Courtesy of Special Collections, Washington and Lee Library.

climate in the construction industry. It's likely, though, that the total financial impact will exceed the earlier projection of \$13 million by a modest amount.

Where *does* that money come from? Earlier in the mid-1980s, W&L received two large estates of roughly \$2 million each. It looked for a time that this unexpected windfall might be needed to construct Gaines Hall. It wasn't, and these two estates remained discretely outside the ordinary stream of university revenue. Use of this money for renovation expenses provides about half of the cost involved, and the university expects to recover this money — refill the bucket, if you will — from alumni contributions to Fraternity Renaissance, part of an overall campaign goal to be announced imminently. The university is simply borrowing the other half of the money from its own endowment, setting up an amortization schedule under which room rentals and Greek fees will assure W&L the same income it will get from its other investments.

We've plowed new ground. Other fraternity schools come to see us now. They leave a little shaken by the costs, hoping to find the courage that John Wilson was able to inspire.

We're not done, by any means, for the goals of Fraternity Renaissance reach far beyond the physical renovations.*

Perhaps when the next historian writes about this enterprise, he (or she) will look back and pronounce it good and conclude that W&L accomplished something far better than merely providing new cages for the zoo.

Coda

In 1999, Frank Parsons wrote an essay that updated the Fraternity Renaissance tale. Excerpts:

BY SEPTEMBER 1993 the physical rehabilitation of W&L's fraternities was complete. . . . Change continues for the fraternities, and all constituencies agree that the physical improvement under Fraternity Renaissance was perhaps the easy part, despite the great expense. . . .

Our Greeks have brought Washington and Lee some nice gifts over the years, but we have learned to accept them as Cracker Jack, to be wary of a likely surprise in every package. †

* The issues recur periodically. In the late 2010s, Phi Psi was said to be planning a return to active status after a three-year suspension for hazing. Meanwhile, the university is cramped for on-campus housing.

† Parsons, Frank, "Brothers, Mothers, Sisters and Others," in *Come Cheer for Washington and Lee: The University at 250 Years* (Mame Warren, ed.), Lexington, the university, 1999, pp. 221, 225.

