

*“Now on a full wartime basis,  
the chapter is playing its  
own role in the kaleidoscopic  
picture of Education for War.”*

W. Paul Zimmerman, Jr.,  
Consul, Delta Delta  
Chapter of Sigma Chi, 1942

## The Blue Room

A change in the house in 1942 was the new “Blue Room,” formerly known as the chapter room, bum room, game room, and ping pong room. Today it is the Eldridge Room. Painted a two-tone blue, the room became the library for classical music and a popular respite during sweltering summer months before the house had air conditioning. On the south wall was a map of the United States, marked with colored pins designating the location of active chapters of Sigma Chi, as well as hometowns of each of the active brothers.



## First International Balfour Award Winner

Richard A. Dibos '42 was named Sigma Chi's outstanding undergraduate as Delta Delta's first National Balfour Award winner. Dibos graduated with distinguished honors from the school of electrical engineering in June of 1942 and was commissioned a second lieutenant in the Signal Corps. In his senior year Dibos headed ROTC, was president of the student war council, and served as Delta Delta's Consul.

Four years later, Gordan A. Logan '46 finished second in the voting for the 1946 International Balfour Award.

## Off to War

A little after 1 p.m. as the Sigs began Sunday dinner on December 7, 1941, there came a loud shout by Ben McKinney '43 from the balcony, “Hey everyone, go to your radios. The Japanese have just bombed Pearl Harbor.” Stu Pritchard '43 recalled, “En masse, we left our dinners uneaten. Enlistments, then sad farewells followed, many permanent. Bob Kemper '42 and I hitchhiked to Chicago to join the Navy.”

## From the September 1942 Boilermaker Sig

“The past year has truly been a momentous one for those of us on the Purdue campus. As the nation swung into high gear for the war, so did we; Purdue being one of the first colleges in the country to go over to the three semester-a-year program. Final exams were eliminated, as were all vacations, except for one week in August and one in December. All of this is in keeping with the speed up program to turn out well trained college graduates so vital to our national war effort. . . . In a word, Purdue has donned its war paint. The day of the pupil ‘who just gets by’ is gone, and the era of the level-headed, hardworking student has taken its place.”



The Sigs outside their temporary home at 108 Waldron Street during the 1943 – 1944 school year.

### Army Moves Sigs Out

During World War II, the Army took over the Sigma Chi house to lodge men in Purdue's Army Specialized Training Program (ASTP). This program sought to turn out more than 200,000 technically trained personnel in such fields as engineering, foreign languages, and medicine to support the war effort. The Sigs living in the chapter house received official notice in the fall of 1943 and had five days to clear their belongings and move to a rental house.

The Army rented the Delta Delta chapter house for the year at four percent of its assessed value of \$50,000, a total of \$2,000 per year. Before moving in, the Army required the chapter to build a fire escape from the main dorm to the senior porch and clean up the furnace room in the basement.

While the Army men lived in the chapter house, Roy E. Slavens, the Sigma Chi caretaker, stayed in the basement to look after things.

### Sigs Move to 108 Waldron

Sigma Chi was the only fraternity on campus to leave its chapter house during the war and move into a private "house," which was found by Consul Allen Menke '44. *The Delta Delta Newsletter* from August 1943 edited by Ray Nihan '45 stated, "The word house deserves quotation marks because outside of general structure our new possession couldn't qualify for that title in any other way. . . . It is a frame building—14 rooms (two baths)—at 108 Waldron. . . . Next door is a house of girls, and at ten o'clock every night we all knock off and have 'tea-time,' window to window. The houses are only about 15 feet apart."



Jack Stuart "Stu" Pritchard '43

Stu Pritchard's stories of his days at Delta Delta in the early 1940s added humor and poignant reflections from one of the most challenging times in our chapter's history during World War II.

Pritchard's daughter wrote "Dad cherished his association with Sigma Chi and his beloved Purdue chapter. For as far back as we can remember my siblings and I heard stories of Dad's days at Purdue and 'his' fraternity. No one who heard him reminisce could miss his pride in his membership and Sigma Chi values and the importance to him of his friends and memories of the years he lived at 202 Littleton."

*“One popular event was a Saturday night ‘Melon Mess.’ We’d get a couple of watermelons, hollow them out, add some cheap gin, put in a bunch of straws lay down on the grass, and socialize. One time we did the party in poison ivy and learned to be more careful.”*

Scott Haynes ’47

As the fall 1943 semester approached and Sigs would be returning to the new, temporary location, the newsletter story ended with this promise: “It’s not anything like the Delta Delta we knew, but our old ‘shingle’ is hanging in front, and we’ll do our best to make the inside feel right for you when you come back.”

John Ade ’47, nephew of George Ade, was a Delta Delta pledge who joined the Navy but did not return to Purdue following the war. Instead, he ran a successful farm in Kentland, Indiana.

The Sigma Chi rental did not have a room to hold initiation, so a team of actives and pledges led by Ray Nihal ’45 dug a basement chapter room under the two-story clapboard house. The dirt from the excavation was moved to a nearby vacant lot.

At the Sigma Chi Greatest Generation Reunion in 2016, Menke said, “Everyone told us that the house would collapse if we did that so we made sure that the foundation was on solid earth, and then we dug a room under the house. We had no permission to do this. We took the earth out and dispersed it during the night. ...Then we held the first initiation in the house in that room.” Scott Haynes ’49 recalled, “Brother Bob Esch’s father, a contractor, saw what we were doing and told us the house would surely fall into this ‘chapter room’ if we continued our digging—so we stopped.”

### **McCutcheon Cartoon Brings \$20,800 War Bond Bid**

On September 25, 1942, the *Chicago Tribune* reported:

*“An original cartoon by John T. McCutcheon, Chicago Tribune artist, brought a high bid of \$20,800 worth of war bonds at an auction held last night at the Lafayette and Tippecanoe County war show and bond rally in Purdue University stadium.*

*The purchaser was Frank C. Hockema, acting president of the university in the absence of President Edward C. Elliott, now on a special war mission to Washington. The cartoon was purchased for the Purdue faculty and will be hung in one of the university buildings.*

*Twenty thousand persons attended the show, at which \$508,000 worth of bonds were purchased. Film Star Dorothy Lamour was a special attraction. She sold her lipstick-marked handkerchief to H.G. Jenkins, chairman of the county war bond committee, for \$8000 in bonds and promised a sarong to the Sigma Chi Fraternity for buying \$1000 in bonds.”*

### **Roy E. Slavens, the “Old Wrangler”**

Delta Delta brothers called their “houseman” Old Wrangler, although never within earshot. Roy E. Slavens ensured that the chapter house was neat and presentable from the 1930s into the 1960s. Slavens was an efficient man who made dorm beds daily, changed sheets weekly, and provided towels in rooms for each brother. He kept coal in the furnace and generally helped the house run smoothly for more than thirty years.

Bob Schneider '61 recalled, "Roy was simply an indispensable part of the Delta Delta culture. He went about his work and did not bother us unless we got in his way. He knew all the brothers, and we respected him. I never saw him come or go, but he was always there, except when he took his afternoon nap in one of the recesses behind the walls."

"Roy couldn't whistle properly," said Nick Fritsch '63. "He sounded more like air slowly leaking out of a tire. Undaunted, on his happy days, he would shuffle down the hallway dragging with a clothesline his empty box that once held fifty rolls of toilet paper. That was his trash 'cart' for emptying waste baskets and beverage containers. He was kind with an occasional display of gruffness."

"Roy retired in the early sixties," Bernie Sergesketter '58 recalled. "And I think a big mistake was made in not replacing him. One of the benefits of having Roy was that he would not tolerate destructive behavior on the part of any of us."

Born December 26, 1893, in Romney, Indiana, Slavens lived in Lafayette and once worked at Ross Gear as a timekeeper. He passed away on March 30, 1969, at age seventy-five. His obituary stated his occupation as simply "Custodian—Fraternity."

### Consul's Farewell Letter

A letter from Consul Bill Jones '46 found in the May 1945 edition of the *Delta Delta News letter* reads:

Dear Brothers,

Last November the Navy saw fit to put me on inactive duty until I report to the Academy in June. Not many days passed before I was again in the folds of Delta Delta. Strange faces were all about, but genuine Sig personalities they were: the Chapter has been kept strong through the earlier phases of the war.

As always, Bivvy and Uncle Ben are still participating actively. They haven't changed a bit. They often inquire about various ones of you, and look forward to our return to the peacetime schedule.

In two short weeks I shall relinquish the gavel and also my status as an active of Delta Delta. This is the second separation from the Chapter; her ties become stronger by the hour. The personnel has greatly changed, but when you return you'll find the same profound unity of Sig spirit. A few of our Brothers will never return in body. The Chapter Eternal has called them from our midst. But we have no alternative but to continue in their footsteps as the Best Chapter of the Best Fraternity.

Sincerely,  
Bill Jones, Consul



Roy E. Slavens (circa 1958)