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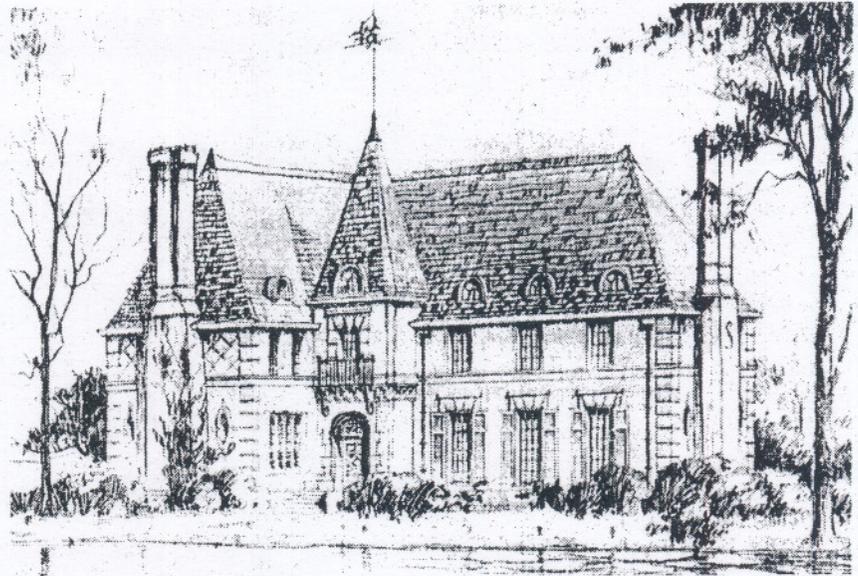
Number 6

Focus On: Alpha Rho Chi Fraternity

Alpha Rho Chi is considered a professional fraternity of architecture and allied arts students. Professional fraternities are the same as social fraternities and sororities except that they focus their membership recruitment on students studying a particular profession.

Alpha Rho Chi Fraternity was founded on April 11, 1914, with the merger of the Arcus Society of the University of Illinois and Sigma Upsilon of the University of Michigan. The union of these two architecture student organizations formed the first national architecture fraternity. The Arcus Society was formed secretly in the autumn of 1911 by a group of 15 men; formal approval for the group was given in the fall of 1912 from the Council of Administration and early in 1913 the Society was recognized by the faculty of the University of Illinois. During this time, the organization's meetings were held in the Y.M.C.A. building at the University, but a house was secured during the first semester of 1913-1914. Faculty members of the Society were Dr. Nathan C. Ricker, L.H. Provine, and A.H. Kimball.

A desire for a national organization emerged in 1913 and Arcus member W.M. Wadsworth was delegated to write to various universities throughout the country and inquire whether other architectural societies might be interested in forming a national fraternity. As a result of this correspondence, Leo M. Bauer of Arcus at Illinois and Chandler Cohagen of Sigma Upsilon at Michigan began formulating the basis of a national architecture fraternity. Two organizations at Cornell University, L'Ogive and Gargoyle, were initially interested, but the Cornell organizations quickly lost interest. Bauer and Cohagen met in April, 1914 to discuss the particulars of a national fraternity. On April 11, both delegates declared the name of the new organization to be "Alpha Rho Chi" and then went on to discuss other matters such as a constitution,



Rendering of new Alpha Rho Chi Fraternity House as drawn by the firm of Royer, Danelly & Smith in 1927. The house is located at 1108 S. First Street, Champaign.

by-laws, rituals, charter and certificate designs, emblems and articles of association. A general outline on each matter was prepared, but the individual tasks of writing or designing each section was divided between the two charter groups, Arcus and Sigma Upsilon.

The name "Alpha Rho Chi" was chosen at the suggestion of Professor Ricker, as it was taken from the first three letters of the Greek word for architecture. Also at Ricker's suggestion, chapter names were chosen from prominent architects from ancient Egypt, Greece or Rome. The Arcus Society became the Anthemios Chapter on May 22, 1914; Anthemios of Tralles was a notable Greek architect and mathematician who planned and built the famous Church of St. Sophia at Constantinople around 532 A.D.. Sigma Upsilon of Michigan became the Iktinos Chapter on June 6, 1914, named after the Athenian Iktinos who was involved in building the great public works of Athens. He was principally active about 450 to 430 B.C. and designed the Parthenon with Kallikrates.

Anthemios Chapter of Alpha Rho Chi

As one of two founding chapters, the Anthemios Chapter had a great influence on the development of the national Alpha Rho Chi fraternity. Members of Anthemios drafted the national constitution and by-laws, designed the fraternity's official badge, revised the design for the coat of arms, and drafted the charter forms. The fraternity motto, "Fidelitas, Amor et Artes," was a combination of the mottos of Arcus Society and Sigma Upsilon.

University of Illinois faculty members played a large role in the founding of Alpha Rho Chi and in its development. Dr. Ricker and Prof. Allen Kimball are singled out for recognition by the fraternity. Not only did Ricker suggest the name of the fraternity, "Alpha Rho Chi," and a system for naming chapters, but also suggested its motto, and many of its underlying principles. He first served as a faculty advisor of Arcus, and later helped Bauer and Cohagen work out the details for forming the new fraternity. His name is constantly mentioned in correspondence between the two student

founders. In recognition and honor of his pivotal role in the fraternity's founding, Nathan C. Ricker was elected the first "Master Architect"; to date, only six other architects have been so honored. For the local Anthemios Chapter, Ricker served not only as faculty advisor, but also took a personal interest in the affairs of the chapter. This interest was materially shown with his gift of a \$500 Liberty bond to the house building fund.

The chapter's esteem toward Ricker was shown in the Anthemios Chapter's presentation to the University of Illinois Department of Architecture of a bronze bust of Ricker. The presentation of the bust occurred on March 15, 1922, the fiftieth anniversary of Dr. Ricker's professional service to the university, and the bust was placed in the Ricker Library of Architecture where it remains today. At the same time that the presentation took place, the Anthemios Chapter announced the Ricker Prize in Architectural History. This prize is open to juniors in Architecture and Architectural Engineering and is awarded for the best treatment of some phase of history of architecture. Ricker taught "architectural history at Illinois for over fifty years, and the prize is essentially a memorial to him."

Architecture

The Alpha Rho Chi fraternity house is a blend of the English derived Arts and Crafts architectural style and the French Eclectic. The Arts and Crafts style was begun as a reaction to Victorian fussiness and the industrial processes that broke the connection between labor, product and consumption. The English Arts and Crafts movement spread to the United States, including Chicago, where the Chicago Arts and Crafts Society was founded in 1897. Communication between England and the American Midwest was easy with a number of English Arts and Crafts practitioners visiting Chicago and lecturing on the new movement. In addition, numerous publications carried the work of English and continental architects and American architects were exposed to the new style while traveling abroad. American adaption of the English Arts and Crafts style, however, took a number of different avenues of expression including the Prairie School, the Craftsman Bungalow, and the period revival domestic styles.

The French Eclectic originates from the informal domestic buildings in northwestern France, especially Normandy and Brittany which have a variety of different wall materials and tall steeply pitched roofs. Other characteristics of the

French style include quoins, double-hung or casement windows, full-length casement windows (French doors) with shutters, and circular roof dormers. The subgroup, Norman cottage, is based on farmhouse examples and is a romanticized informal asymmetrical style commonly identified by a prominent round tower with a tall, conical roof; the entrance is often found in the tower. Mixed wall textures are also common characteristics of this subgroup.

World War I helped familiarize Americans with this French vernacular style and architects became conversant with the style through the publication of various studies in the 1920s. From about 1915 to 1940, many Norman cottages or French Eclectic style houses were built, especially in well-to-do suburbs in the east and midwest. House plan firms and ready-cut-house distributors quickly picked up the style and small scale houses based on a free interpretation of the French style, often intermingled with medieval English characteristics, were soon to be found all across America.

Anthemios Chapter House

After first meeting at the University Y.M.C.A., the fraternity secured a house at 401 East Green Street, Champaign in 1913. After W.W.I, Alpha Rho Chi followed the lead of other Greek Letter Societies in planning for a new chapter house. The Anthemios Alumni Association was formed during the fall of 1924 in order to carry on a building program. During 1925 the Board of Trustees of the Association and the Active Chapter met individually or collectively to discuss building. The sale of debenture bonds created a sinking fund and questionnaires and circular letters were set out to gather opinions of the alumni. A lot was purchased on First Street at Gregory in February, 1927 and at the same time the firm of Royer, Danely and Smith of Urbana was chosen to prepare sketches of the new house. Working drawings and specifications were soon completed and bids were taken in August of 1927. Ground was broken in October under the supervision of alumnus T.J. Strong. By March of 1928 the house was nearing completion.

A founding member of the Alpha Rho Chi chapter, Truman Jefferson Strong, worked as the field superintendent for the local architectural firm of Royer, Danely and Smith. It was probably through this connection that the firm undertook to design the fraternity house, although a number of other Greek Letter Society houses are attributed to the firm.

T.J. Strong also graduated from the University of Illinois with a degree in architectural engineering in 1917. He was a member of Arcus, the group from which Alpha Rho Chi was formed, and he remained closely associated with the local chapter throughout his life. As Worthy Grand Estimator (treasurer) for the fraternity from 1921 to 1927, he secured the sound financial growth of the early national body. In 1929, when the fraternity house was sold at a courthouse sale, Strong initiated a drive that bought the building. In 1939 the house was again foreclosed upon and was only saved through alumni donations. From 1938 to 1955, he was Secretary-Treasurer of the Anthemios Control Corporation and in this role was landlord and friend to chapter members. In honor of all of his work and leadership, T.J. Strong was given a Special Recognition Award in 1966 by the Anthemios Alumni.

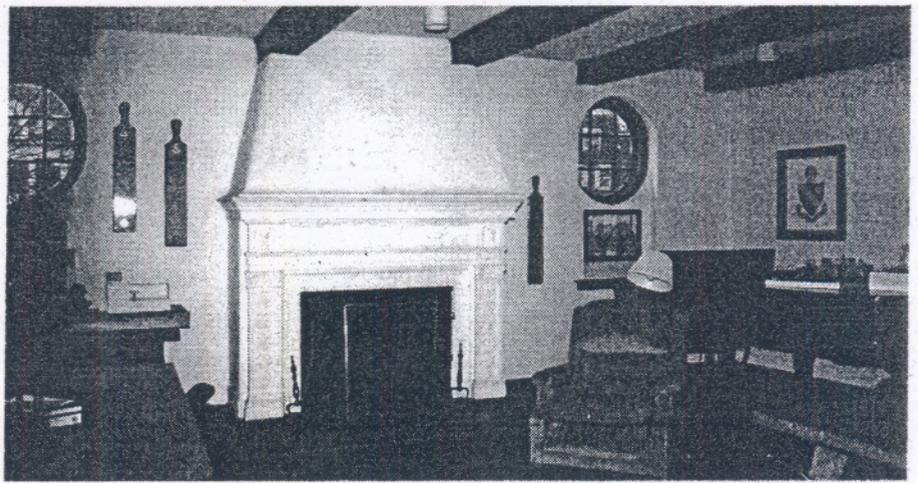
Stylistically the Anthemios Chapter house is related in form and materials to William Morris's Red House (1859), designed by Phillip Webb, in Bexleyheath, England. The Alpha Rho Chi Fraternity House shows many characteristics of the Red House, particularly its well-house elevation. Asymmetrical and L-shaped in plan, the building faces a paved courtyard/patio; a tower is located in the corner formed by the two wings and likewise is topped by a hip roof with weathervane. A large, steeply pitched tile roof shelters the building and picturesque chimneys are dominate and anchoring features as at the Red House. Similarly, the multi-light windows are set directly into the brick walls, without surrounds or other embellishments. Internally, the fraternity house is arranged around the main hall, an extension of the tower entry space; at the Red house, the staircase tower organizes the plan. While not a direct copy of Webb's design, the fraternity house clearly shows its antecedents and shares the principles of tradition and invention that mark the Red House. Most of the differences that mark the two buildings can be traced to their different uses: the Red House is a single family dwelling while Alpha Rho Chi is a multi-person fraternity house.

The Alpha Rho Chi Fraternity House evokes the feeling of the vernacular building traditions and hand craftsmanship of medieval England as interpreted in the Arts and Crafts architectural style. This is especially evident in the building's masonry walls and tile roof. For the walls, "culls or seconds" were chosen of a variegated colored face brick; over 30 different brick types can be observed in the walls varying in color and/or texture.

Building specifications detail that the bricks were to be laid for a "skintled effect" that is, laid rough so as to form an irregular face. Uncolored mortar was also specified. This construction method produced an effect "very interesting with its play of color and shade in the sunlight." This play of light and shadow is further enhanced by the use of brick quoins, projecting rowlock bricks forming a decorative diamond pattern to sections of the upper story, and by the projecting tile caps found above the brick stringcourse and flat arches over the French doors.

The irregular play of light and shadow on the building's walls is repeated in the clay tile roof. A very dominant exterior feature, the steeply pitched hip roof was purposely built with swales and the Normandy shingle tiles were stipulated to be laid "to a broken or irregular line." A full range of tile colors was specified with shades ranging through orange, red and buff. Lighter color tones were placed near the soffit with the color gradually darkening as the ridge was reached; a 1% to 10% color variation can be observed. The use of "natural" building materials such as brick and tile, with different textures and color ranges coupled with construction techniques that emphasized irregularities and the play of light and shadow produced a building that elicits the idea of a medieval vernacular building.

The steeply pitched hip roof is also a characteristic of the French Eclectic style as is the use of clay tile on the roof and the half-round dormers. Other characteristics of the French style in evidence on the fraternity house's exterior include the use of casement windows and French doors. The variety of window openings used at the chapter house draws on the medieval vernacular as interpreted by both the French Eclectic and Arts and Crafts styles. The Alpha Rho Chi Fraternity House has four different types of windows: French doors, casements (in a variety of groupings), round, and half-round windows; only some of the windows have transoms. In addition, the window openings are finished in a number of ways: the French doors have brick flat arches with tile caps, the round windows have rowlock surrounds with exaggerated tile keystones, the quadruple casement groups have stone lintels and rowlock sills, while the half-round dormers are finished simply with wood casings and the paired casements have brick cased corners with no sills or lintels. Although the casement windows are modern metal fabrications, the use of multi-light casements is a medieval feature found in the French Eclectic style.



Library in the Alpha Rho Chi chapter house reflects the French Eclectic style in its fireplace surround and beamed ceiling.

Aspects of the fraternity house that evoke the Norman cottage, are its asymmetrical massing, corner entrance tower, and mixture of wall textures. Situated at the junction of the two wings, the tower softens the rather regular L-plan of the building by providing an asymmetrical focal point for the entrance. The tower transforms the facade into a picturesque and romantic grouping that harkens back to the simple vernacular of a Norman manor house. This feeling is further enhanced by the placement of an iron balcony outside the tower's upper window. The mixture of wall textures is emphasized by the use of different brick types and their skintled arrangement, contrasting brick quoins, and the sparing use of limestone. Distinct from the brick on both color and texture, the stonework of the tower embellishes the building's entrance, a medieval inspired panel door set in an arched surround. The stone appears handcrafted with the rock-faced foundation stone contrasting with the smooth texture of the dressed-faced upper ashlar surround with chamfered edge and base stop.

One of the more striking features of the building are the two chimneys found on the west and south elevations. These imposing semi-hexagonal brick masses rise above the soffit line, slightly tapering as they ascend to a stone reducing collar; the chimneys are also laid in a skintled pattern. The west chimney, above the collar, becomes two tall stacks joined in the center; the stacks are turned on angle for a diamond appearance and each has an elaborately corbelled cap. The south chimney is similar, but has only a single hexagonal shaped stack with two flues.* Together these chimneys add to the asymmetrical and picturesque feeling of the building and its vernacular roots where often building features were similar, but not duplicated, as the work was done by

different craftsmen.

On the interior, the medieval roots of both the Arts and Crafts and French Eclectic architectural idioms can be found. The walls of the square foyer are plaster, but lightly scored as to appear as stone blocks, and there are shallow niches on the side walls, perhaps intended for display of fraternity "armaments" or heraldry. The ceiling of the foyer, as well as that of the main hall, consists of four-pointed groined vaults; four-centered arched openings, with wide chamfered corners, lead from the hall into adjoining rooms. The lounge is presented almost as a medieval "Great Hall," set three steps down from the hall, with a high simple beamed ceiling (two plaster-encased structural beams) and a large French-inspired fireplace as the room's focal point at the south end. The white plaster fireplace is adorned with fraternity symbols including the Alpha Rho Chi emblem in the center of the slanted chimney hood. Other elements appearing on the fireplace that have fraternity associations include the roses (fraternity flower), the griffins (part of the original coat-of-arms that was revised in 1930), and the acanthus leaves (part of the official fraternity badge). Coincidentally, horticultural ornament, especially the acanthus leaf, is used quite often in Arts and Crafts designs and the handcrafting of the fireplace by a member's relative is truly in the craft tradition. The library's fireplace has similar ornament and a beamed ceiling, but its lower beamed ceiling height and smaller room size coupled with the casement and round windows confers the more intimate feeling of a medieval parlor.

This article was taken from the National Register of Historic Places nomination. The house was listed in May, 1997.

Winter Prairie Meeting

Grand Prairie Friends of Illinois has scheduled their winter meeting for February 9, 2001 at the Anita Purves Nature Center, 1301 N. Broadway Ave., Urbana. A potluck dinner will start the evening at 6:30pm with the program commencing at 7:00. The topic of the meeting will be polination biology. Details on the meeting are posted on their website: www.prairienet.org/gpf.

Board of Directors Openings

Three positions on the PACA Board of Directors are open for election at the Annual Membership Meeting. Board members serve a three-year term and attend monthly Board meetings held the second Wednesday of each month. Responsibilities of the nine-member Board include overseeing PACA finances, defining Board policies, dealing with preservation issues, and establishing preservation programs. It is an active, hands-on Board, and each Director is asked to help on an activity or project within their area of expertise or interest.

To learn more about serving on the Board, please contact PACA or talk to one of the current Board members: Jeff Gordon, Tony Bamert, Dan Shapiro, Ray Lytle, Dan Leasure, Kathy Reeves, Kristin Solbert, Trevor Jones or Bruce Creamer.

Old House Journal subscriptions will be solicited by PACA in February. Details on this fundraising activity will be available at the warehouse in January.

Nominations Sought

The Heritage Award Committee is seeking nominations for the 2001 Heritage Award Program. Any building or landscape that has been appropriately renovated in the recent past or that contributes to enhancing the historic built heritage of Champaign County should be nominated. In addition, persons, groups, or special projects that contribute to historic preservation activities in Champaign County are also eligible for an award. Projects in nearby counties that do not have preservation groups will also be considered for recognition. Nominations will be judged by a committee appointed by the PACA Board of Directors. Self-nominations are encouraged and volunteers to serve on the committee are needed. The Awards will be presented at the next Annual Membership Meeting to be scheduled in early March. For further information or to volunteer to serve on the judging committee, please contact PACA at 359-7222.

The following is a list of award categories:

- Landmark Heritage Award
- Residential Heritage Award
- Commercial Heritage Award
- Institutional Heritage Award
- Landscape Heritage Award
- Special Heritage Award
- Adaptive Use Heritage Award
- Neighborhood Heritage Award



Champaign's Past & Present

A six-week course on historic architecture and preservation will be presented by PACA this winter. The course is part of Parkland College's "Live and Learn" program and is a non-credit offering. The class will be held Tuesday nights starting January 30 and run until March 6. Each class should last about two hours. The topics to be covered include:

- History of Champaign County (presented by Trevor Jones)
- Architectural Styles of Champaign County (presented by Karen Kummer)
- Vernacular Building Types Common in Champaign County (Kummer)
- How to Research the History of Your Property (Kummer)
- The National Register and Local Preservation Programs (Kummer)
- History of the Preservation Movement and PACA Programs and Activities (Kummer and Jeff Gordon).

A tour of historic sites is being considered as a course finale.

Information and further details about class registration will be available in Parkland College's "Live and Learn" catalogue that is due to be mailed shortly.

Membership Application P.A.C.A.

MEMBERSHIP CATEGORY:

- Adult\$15.00
- Student (1/2 time or more)\$10.00
- Senior Citizen\$10.00
- Family\$20.00
- Corporate\$75.00

- NEW
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Make checks payable to: PACA, Box 2575, Station A, Champaign, Illinois 61825

Contributions are tax deductible to the extent allowed by law.



Ricker House Celebration

PACA members and friends celebrated the interior completion of the historic 1892 Nathan C. Ricker House in November at a festive open house. The National Register-listed house is now being offered for sale by PACA with a tax-deductible preservation covenant on the exterior a requirement for purchase. The new owners will also be eligible for an eight-year property tax freeze, at the pre-renovation tax rate. Completion of the exterior awaits warmer weather when scraping, painting, and minor repairs will be finished by Castle Painting. An appropriate four-color paint scheme will be left to the new owners to choose.

PACA purchased the house in 1996 to save it from demolition for an apartment complex. It is the only known residential design by noted campus architect, Nathan Ricker and occupies a key position along West Green Street, the campus gateway to downtown Urbana.

Salvage Donations

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City of Champaign
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Dale Busboom
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Stanley Weaver
Champaign County Courthouse-Larry Adams
Tom Schuh

PACA Newsletter

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