NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

NAME
HISTORIC

AND/OR COMMON
Delta Tau Delta Founders House

LOCATION
STREET & NUMBER
211 Main Street

CITY, TOWN
Bethany

STATE
West Virginia

CLASSIFICATION
CATEGORY
- DISTRICT
- BUILDING(S)
- STRUCTURE
- SITE
- OBJECT

OWNERSHIP
- PRIVATE
- BOTH

PUBLIC ACQUISITION
- IN PROCESS
- BEING CONSIDERED

STATUS
- OCCUPIED
- UNOCCUPIED
- WORK IN PROGRESS
- ACCESSIBLE
- YES: RESTRICTED
- YES: UNRESTRICTED
- NO

PRESENT USE
- AGRICULTURE
- COMMERCIAL
- EDUCATIONAL
- ENTERTAINMENT
- GOVERNMENT
- INDUSTRIAL
- MILITARY
- OTHER

OWNER OF PROPERTY
NAME
Trustees of Bethany College

STREET & NUMBER
c/o Dr. William Tucker, President

CITY, TOWN
Bethany

LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION
COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.
Brooke County Courthouse

CITY, TOWN
Wellsburg

REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS
TITLE

DATE

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN

STATE
Delta Tau Delta Founders House probably dates from the early 1850s; its provincial Greek Revival style is generally in keeping with the period and place, being a composition of rectangular blocks placed in an "L" shape with trabeated openings, rather smooth wall surfaces and symmetry throughout. This detached dwelling that has housed commercial businesses as well as rental rooms and apartments, fronts the town's main street, its two-story, five-bay facade hiding a basement of stout limestone walls that underlies the entire building and becomes evident as the grade slopes toward the rear. Brick walls in a common bond (7/1) top the tapering foundation, and a medium-pitch gable roof caps both main section and ell.

A general restoration has retained a complimentary double porch with stair in the interior of the ell and replaced a bulky twentieth-century (c. 1912) block porch (with enclosed room at the north corner) with a small, open, at-grade entrance porch over the central bay. Each of these has chamfered posts, and that in the rear incorporates simple horizontal board rails. Window, door and chimney placement support general symmetry, there being openings above one another on each floor (except at basement level and at the rear of the second-floor center hall). There are no doors onto the second floor of the ell porch, however, and the chimney in the ell is between rooms, unlike the inside end chimneys in windowless gable walls of the front unit.

Despite a prevailing smoothness in wall surface, the exterior has an abundance of subtle detail. Doors are of a handsome four-panel design with that on the entrance facade featuring an eleven-light transom and sidelights, windows (basement excepted) have 6/6 sash arrangements set in thin, somewhat delicate, mullions, flush wooden lintels top openings, a projecting brick cornice is at the front, and chimneys have corbeled caps. The porch in the ell is especially attractive with its approach stairs from ground level leading to another series of steps between first and second floors. In addition, structural restraining and strengthening tie rods with star-pattern facade plates take on a decorative quality. There are two each between basement and first floor and first and second floors on the north end of the main portion and four between floors in the ell.
By 1975 when the house was transferred to Bethany College (Miss Luta Gordon, former owner, retains privileges of using an upstairs apartment), it had been altered to provide for needs of succeeding owners and uses. Changes to the rear of the ell included enclosure of double porch and construction of a frame addition; the front had been transformed by a long porch with block pillars and an enclosed room. Under direction of the Charlottesville, Virginia, architectural firm of Grigg, Wood and Browne, however, an attempt has been made to return the structure to the period of building and founding of Delta Tau Delta fraternity. Upon completion of research, it was decided to replace the newer front porch with a gable-roofed, pedimented cover over the entrance bay, to remove the rear addition, and to open the double porch and restore it with retention of as much of the original fabric as possible. The structure was reroofed with wooden shingles, chimney corbeling was repaired, and exterior walls were painted. Care was taken to use existing elements and glass of the windows, some doors were refinished, fireplaces were rebricked, and walls were stripped to the bricks and replastered (a foam insulation was incorporated in this step). Only landscaping and removal of a detached cinder block garage remain before restoration is completed and the house is fully readied for furnishing and reuse as low-traffic offices and museum in memorial to Delta Tau Delta’s founding here.
SIGNIFICANCE

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW

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STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Delta Tau Delta Founders House, located at the college community of Bethany, Brooke County, West Virginia, is significant because it was in a room here that meetings were held which culminated in the organization of that Greek-letter fraternity. In a broader sense, though, the fraternity itself is significant as the product of at least two movements: the growth in importance of literary societies in this nation's higher institutions of learning prior to the Civil War and a dynamism--instilled by Alexander Campbell, founder and first president of remote Bethany College--that helped promote an atmosphere supportive of growth among students as individuals and in groups.

Greek-letter social fraternities on college campuses have been, at times, both noted and notorious, praised and tolerated. Origins of these organizations are somewhat cloudy and more complex than often realized, but it is known that the first, Phi Beta Kappa, was formed at the College of William and Mary in 1775. It was not until the mid-1820s, however, that their numbers started to increase rapidly, and when Delta Tau Delta was founded there were nearly twenty such groups, some having chapters at several schools. What is more, growth nearly stopped about the time of Reconstruction, the period of Bethany's contribution having been the high point of the movement.

Bethany College was chartered in 1840 and admitted its first students in 1841. Its location in the hills of northwestern Virginia was isolated, requiring virtually all those in attendance to seek room and board with the help of the school and among townspeople. Shortly after construction of the subject house in the early 1850s, it was apparently opened in part to students, and at this place in 1858 one Jacob S. Lowe had taken lodging. Lowe was a member of the Neotropian Literary Society, a prominent college organization through which he became associated with a faction of students seemingly dissatisfied that members of Bethany's chapter of Phi Kappa Psi were controlling society functions. And so it was on the occasion of trying to counteract the influence of one fraternity that eight students (Richard H. Alfred, Henry K. Bell, William R. Cunningham, Alexander C. Earle, John L. N. Hunt, John C. Johnson, Jacob S. Lowe and Eugene Tarr) met in the room of Jacob Lowe where they decided to draw up a constitution and bylaws for the organizing of what became, in 1859, Delta Tau Delta. From this beginning--and despite the fact that the Bethany chapter was inactive from 1895 to 1966--the fraternity has grown to more than 75,000 members comprising
in excess of 200 undergraduate and alumni chapters. As one so often calls birthplace home, Founders House has become a symbol, and more, for it is a physical memorial (as the building of actual founding) unique to Delta Tau Delta among the early Greek-letter fraternities.

Lowe, as so many others, was a short-term resident of this dwelling that has a history of its own even after those important events of 1858 and 1859 had transpired. Over the years renters of rooms have included numerous other students and travelers, the college Raccobite Club which eventually became a chapter of Phi Kappa Tau, and a woman named Kate Morris who used part of it as The Grey Bonnet Tea Room from the late 1930s until 1942. What might easily be overlooked, too, is the place of its current resident—Miss Luta Gordon, registrar of Bethany College from the mid-1950s until 1970—whose family owned the property from 1920 until 1975. She in many ways typifies a long relationship with the college shared by this building, a relationship that began when John Low purchased the lot in 1850 from Alexander Campbell, school president, town developer, and prime mover of the Disciples of Christ (Christian) Church.
MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES
Charleston, W.Va. Archives and History Division, West Virginia Department of Culture and History. Delta Tau Delta Birthplace highway marker file.

GEOGRAPHICAL DATA
ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: 1/6 acre
QUADRANGLE SCALE: 1:24000

ZONE EASTING NORTHING
A 1,7 513,7 67,0 4,4 504,2,0
C 1,7 513,7 67,0

ZONE EASTING NORTHING
B
D
E

F
H

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION
The nominated property is on a town lot, number 68, in Bethany. The lot measures 60 feet across the front and is 120 feet deep.

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES
STATE CODE COUNTY CODE
STATE
CODE COUNTY CODE

FORM PREPARED BY
NAME / TITLE
James E. Harding, Historian
ORGANIZATION
Historic Preservation Unit
Dept. of Culture and History
DATE
January 13, 1979
STREET & NUMBER
The Cultural Center
Capitol Complex
TELEPHONE
(304) 348-0244
CITY OR TOWN
Charleston
STATE
West Virginia

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION
THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:
NATIONAL ___ STATE ___ LOCAL ___

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-685), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE
DATE

FOR NPS USE ONLY
I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER
DATE

ATTEST:
DATE

CHIEF OF REGISTRATION


