

**Records of Zeta Phi Eta, 1893-1992**

**Series 31/6/70**

**Boxes 1-4 (including one half-sized and one dropfront box)**

**History**

Zeta Phi Eta was the first professional fraternity at Northwestern University for students of the School of Oratory (later the School of Communication). The organization began in 1893 when Edith DeVore ('94) conceived the idea of a club exclusively for Oratory students. DeVore was joined by Molly Connor, Laurine Wright, Maude Newell, and Leila Little, and the group called itself the F.O.E. club, vowing to be a Friend of Each, Each Our Friend. The women held secret meetings before receiving formal approval for the Zeta Phi Eta sorority in 1894 from Dr. Cumnock, Dean of the School of Oratory. Reflecting the organization's status as a professional, rather than an honorary or social, society, the charter proclaims, "This society is to promote a greater excellence in oratorical and dramatic art, and to develop a social interest and a stronger friendship toward each other." In 1908, the fraternity began to expand when a Zeta at Northwestern corresponded with a friend at Emerson College of Oratory who belonged to an organization with similar values and goals, Phi Eta Sigma. When the two chapters joined under the name of Zeta Phi Eta, Alpha chapter status was bestowed upon the Emerson organization. During the 1910s and 1920s, campus and alumnae chapters grew quickly at institutions around the country. At the 1919 convention, all life members were promised copies of *CAMEO*, the society's national publication since 1913. *CAMEO* continues to be published quarterly.

While Evanston's alumnae chapter activity declined in the 1940's, activities were on the rise again by the mid-1950's. In 1955, the Zeta Phi Eta Foundation was established to contribute to worthy speech and drama projects. One long-term project initiated by the Zeta alumnae in 1960 was a full-scale nationwide tape recording program for the blind. Another national project, Graduate Assistantship Opportunities, was designed to provide professional guidance to senior members of campus chapters upon entering graduate school. Zeta Phi Eta began including men in its membership in 1975.

Northwestern University's Zeta Phi Eta alumnae include Winifred Ward, founder of the Children's Theatre of Evanston, Marcelline Hemingway Sanford, Ernest Hemingway's sister, and also Louise Starkey, Isobel Carothers, and Helen King, who starred as a trio of gossipy housewives on the 1930's WGN radio program, "Clara, Lu and Em".

Alumna Gertrude Bader (Speech 1934), who married Speech professor Robert Breen, was actively involved in Zeta Phi Eta since the 1930's. Leaving Evanston in 1938 due to her husband's tour of service in WWII, Gertrude Breen resumed active duties in Zeta Phi Eta in 1946, serving as a member of the National Council of Zeta, as National President during the 1970's, and as Chairman of the Advisory Board during the 1980's.

SEE ALSO: The University Archives Serials Collection includes an almost complete run of the *Cameo* (1913-1999), call # 55/00/17. Gertrude Breen's papers, contained in the Robert and Gertrude Breen Papers, Series 20/42, reflect her long-time involvement in the organization.

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**Description of the Series**

This series, filling three boxes in addition to one larger box containing two scrapbooks, spans the dates 1890-1992, with the bulk of the material dating between 1965 and 1985. It consists of historical material related to the Northwestern University chapter as well as materials relating to the national leadership of Zeta Phi Eta, and includes both campus and nationwide alumnae chapters.

The series begins with a National History of Zeta Phi Eta, published in 1937, and notes written in preparation of a speech spanning the history of the organization. These handwritten notes share several of the same anecdotes, such as the teasing label of the founders by their 1893 classmates as “Freaks of Elocutionists” and distinctive references to founders Laurine Wright and Maude Newell as “a feminine Mark Twain,” and “the campus beauty”. The Bylaws, enacted at National Conventions of 1931, 1987 and 1989, contain information about mottoes, emblems, rituals, membership clauses, officer duties, dues, publications and conventions. The first and second Beta Chapter directories [Northwestern University] list members of Zeta Phi Eta from 1894-1924. Booklets on fraternity rituals, initiation, and memorial services span the years 1958-1982. One orientation manual from 1988 is also included. Zeta Phi Eta songs, undated, appear to have been published in the late 1960s or 1970s, but return to themes and lyrics from the time of Zeta Phi Eta’s founding.

Clippings span the years 1927-1981. Early clippings document dramatic and philanthropic pursuits, as well as marriages and deaths of chapter members nationwide. Those clippings from 1961 to 1981 focus on the Zeta-initiated national project to tape-record books for the blind. Minutes for Special Zeta Phi Eta National Council Meetings, interim meetings and conventions date between 1957 and 1993. These records contain debates on magazine subscriptions, chapter status and convention topics like the creation of new positions and election of new officers.

In the correspondence files, letters from Dean Robert Cumnock to the founders and early members of Zeta Phi Eta highlight his role as mentor to the School of Oratory’s first professional fraternity. General correspondence from 1979-1992 is conducted mainly between Fannie Hicklin, a national president of the period, Gertrude Breen, immediate past president and Chairman of the Advisory Board, and the leaders of other chapters, including Mary “Corky” Wheeler of the Southern California Chapter.

Chapter business is conducted in the letters of Zeta Phi Eta officers over the span of years from 1971-1987. Other correspondence between chapters involves chapter visits, regional director’s duties (especially in regard to chapter visits), leadership school workshops, votes on charters for recognition or disbanding, national conventions, and letters to National Council. In the mid-to-late 1980s, inter-chapter communication floundered, reflecting a larger trend as Greek organizations under attack struggled to retain members and remain fiscally sound. A possible merger with Women in Communications (WICI) was discussed and researched in 1984 and 1985 while letters flew between chapters in 1986 and 1987 concerning the inability of the national president to fulfill her duties.

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Financial reports on Zeta Phi Eta span the years 1970-1983. Also included are annual reports from 1972, 1985, and 1988 concerning the Not for Profit Corporation act and a 1981 donation to Northwestern's Theatre and Interpretation Center.

Among other membership records, a Beta directory lists members during the span of years from 1979-1984 and includes information on "How to Keep Members." Many files focus on Zeta Phi members' philanthropic and thespian involvement, as evidenced by a script of the 'Polly Pockets' play, *James and the Giant Peach*, performed by Beta Chapter, and plays from the Convention of 1964.

Two of the longest ongoing projects were the national project to tape-record books for the blind and a series of cookbooks sold nationally by the fraternity. Materials gathered for the tape-recording project include all publications relating to Zeta Phi Eta involvement, ratings of voice quality, taping auditions, types of machines used by Zeta volunteers, and the acceptance or rejection of tape-recorded books by the Library of Congress. The four folders on Zeta Phi Eta cookbooks relate to national publication and sales by various chapters between the years of 1974-1982.

Other publications include Southern California Chapter Mailings, 1980 to 1988, describing local professional and social activities, and Chapter Yearbook Publications from Oklahoma City and Madison, Wisconsin, 1981-1984, providing names of actives and alumnae, mention of award nominees, and positions held in the fraternity.

A scrapbook titled "Zeta Phi Eta Alumnae Chapter" documents the Chicago chapter from its beginnings in 1893 to 1936. The scrapbook, containing photographs, announcements, and clippings from newspapers and issues of the *Cameo*, features the accomplishments of alumnae, including Winifred Ward, Gertrude Breen, and Marcelline Hemingway Stanford.

**Provenance:** The Records of Zeta Phi Eta are made up of three donations to the University Archives. Accession Numbers 90-34 and 90-49 were donated on April 4 and May 22, 1990, by Robert Breen, and Accession Number 92-117 was donated by Lynn Miller on September 23, 1992.

**Restrictions:** None

**Separations:** One cubic foot of duplicate materials was discarded. One scrapbook, commemorating the addition of the Alpha Upsilon campus chapter (University of Missouri at Kansas City), was sent to the National Headquarters in Malden, MA.

**Processor:** Kate MacLean, Fall 2001

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**Container List**

<u>Box</u>	<u>Folder</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Date</u>		
1		<u>History</u>			
		1	Official National History of Zeta Phi Eta	1958	
		2	History- miscellaneous	1962-1978, n.d.	
		3	Bylaws	1939-1989	
		4	Beta Directory	1894-1924	
		5	Chapter Handbooks, Rituals, and Orientation Manual	1961-1989	
		6	Zeta Phi Eta Songs	n.d.	
		7	Clippings	1927-1981	
	8	National Council Meetings, Interim Meetings, Conventions	1957-1993		
	9	10	<u>Correspondence</u>		
			General Correspondence	1979-1992	
			Cumnock, Robert L.: First Dean of Speech	1926-1927	
			<u>Officers of Zeta Phi Eta</u>		
			11	National President	1972-1987
			12	Executive Secretary	1979-1987
			13	First Vice President	1980-1982
			14	Second Vice President	1982-1987
15			Third Vice President	1979-1986	
16			Fourth Vice President	1971-1979	
17	Secretary- Treasurer	1981-1987			
2		<u>Subject Correspondence</u>			
		1	Chapter Visits	1963-1974	
		2	Regional Directors: Handbook on Chapter Visits	1979-1982	
		3	Leadership School Workshops	1980	
		4	Charter Applications	1980-1981	
		5	National Council and Advisory Board	1978-1983	
		6	Disbanding of Psi Chapter, University of Georgia	1980	
		7	Proposed Merger	1981-1985	
		8	Removal of National President	1986-1987	
		9	'Cameo': Correspondence regarding Publication	1974-1987	
	10	Tape recording Program	1965-1985		
11	12	<u>Financial Records</u>			
		Zeta Phi Eta Financial Reports	1970-1983		
		Annual Report: Not for Profit Corporation Act	1972-1988		

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		<u>Membership Records</u>	
2	13	Beta Directory and Manual on How to Keep Members	1979-1984
	14	Professional Pan-Hellenic Career Achievement Award	1973
		<u>Programs and Public Activities</u>	
	15	Dramatic Performances-Convention	1964
	16	<i>James and the Giant Peach</i> : Beta Chapter Production	1968
		<u>Taped Books for the Blind Program</u>	
	17	Clippings: National Project for the Blind	1961-1973
	18	Taping Auditions	1972-1973
	19	Instructions for Tape-Recording Books	1965-1971
	20	Articles and Publications	1962-1974
	21	Library of Congress Taping Reports	1973-1974
	22	Zeta Volunteers	1964-1971
	23	People Involved and Books Taped	1965-1970
	24	Library of Congress National Project Directors	1966-1970
	25	Revival of Zeta Taping under Lynn Carver	1973-1974
		<u>Cookbooks</u>	
3	1	Cookbook Sales I	1974-1979
	2	Cookbooks Sales II	1975-1980
	3	Cookbooks Sales III	1975-1978
	4	Cookbooks Reprint	1981-1982
		<u>Publications</u>	
	5	Southern California Professional Chapter Mailings	1980-1988
	6	Chapter Yearbook Publications, Alumnae and Actives	1981-1984
		<u>Scrapbook</u>	
4	1	Zeta Phi Eta Alumnae Chapter (Chicago)	1893- 1936