

The History of Sigma Tau Delta, 1924-1988

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The First Forty-Five Years

The New Organization

Judson Q. Owen, the founder of Sigma Tau Delta, sponsored the English Club at Dakota Wesleyan University, Mitchell, South Dakota, in the early 1920's. He was a young man with a family, working on his doctorate in his spare time, and had a consuming interest in his profession. There he sponsored an English Club, its membership open only to outstanding English students. The success of this club attracted inquiries from departments on other campuses and this show of interest encouraged him to propose an expansion of the English club, a national English honor society. He wrote to college English professionals throughout the nation, and the enthusiasm of the response exceeded his expectations. Professor Owen himself chronicled the immediate result in the magazine *School and Society*, February 14, 1925 (203-205):

Sigma Tau Delta
Professional English Fraternity

The first national professional English fraternity has made its appearance with the nationalization (May first 1924) at the Dakota Wesleyan University as Sigma Tau Delta, an order designed to promote the mastery of written expression, encourage worthwhile reading, and foster a spirit of fellowship among those specializing in the English language and literature.

The society is open to both men and women majoring in English and in addition meeting certain scholastic and publication requirements. It seeks in general better to prepare them for their chosen work but is especially interested in stimulating creative writing. Its units read and discuss the best contemporary literature and criticize their own products. The best work of the chapters will be published from time to time in the official journal of the organization, the quarterly *Rectangle*. (The national convention will be held on April 3, 1925, in Des Moines, Iowa.)

There are ten degrees of membership in Sigma Tau Delta—three of these being attainable by undergraduates, one following graduation, and the others by additional work in a professional capacity. The unanimous vote of a chapter is required for election into the society.

Eligibility to the first degree is based upon high scholarship in English particularly, sophomore rating, and tangible evidence of the candidate's interest in creative writing. This degree carries the privilege of association but not of suffrage, and does not entitle the holder to wear the undergraduate emblem. The second degree may be conferred upon juniors ranking within the upper third of the class in scholarship, if they have completed a minor in English and have

published one thousand words of original material in student publications or elsewhere. Membership of the third degree requires senior standing, a scholastic rating within the upper fourth of the class, and the publication of three thousand words or more of original material.

Those graduating within the upper 20 per cent of the class in scholarship, with English as a major, may be elected to the fourth degree if they have published five thousand words. This is the first honor-key degree. For the second and third degrees, the emblem is a badge. The higher degrees are wholly professional and have to do with the acquiring of additional academic degrees and of positions of responsibility in the field of college teaching.

Through a provision for associate membership, giving privileges of fellowship but not of suffrage, an arrangement is made for the membership in local chapters of capable students not majoring in English but otherwise eligible and eager to master creative writing. The emblem of associates differs in its enameling from that of the actives, but is otherwise identical with it. A somewhat unique feature of key and badge is the jewelling of the torch thereon, to indicate the degree of membership and, incidentally, of the academic degree as well. For example, the diamond-flamed torch may be worn only by members attaining the doctorate.

The motto of this fraternity, for which the Greek letters of the name constitute the symbol, is "Sincerity, Truth, and Design," elements fundamental to the most effective written expression. Every member is pledged to observe these high qualities in his work and also to contribute at least one article annually for three years to the quarterly *Rectangle*, the literary magazine of the order.

Sigma Tau Delta has now entered Dakota Wesleyan University, Grand Island College, Kansas Wesleyan University, Georgetown College, Iowa Wesleyan College, Lombard College, and the College of Idaho. It has faculty representatives in thirty additional colleges, including Goucher College, Wesleyan University, Buffalo University, Gettysburg College, Washington and Jefferson College, St. Lawrence College, Centenary College, Boston University, Western Reserve University, Cincinnati University, Ohio Northern University, University of Illinois, Parsons College, Western Union College, Simpson College, Coe College, Jamestown College, Baker University, Baylor University, Austin College, DePaul University, Utah University, and the University of Southern California.

The administrative Council of Sigma Tau Delta is composed of Dr. P.C. Somerville, Kansas Wesleyan University, national president; Professor Frederick Fadner, Lombard College, first vice-president; Dr. Florence Brinkley, Goucher College, second vice-president; Professor Judson Q. Owen, Dakota Wesleyan University, executive secretary; and Professor Myron McCurry, Georgetown College (Kentucky), editor-in-chief. The Advisory Cabinet is made up of twenty-five graduate members of the fraternity under the direction of Professor B. Roland

Lewis, head of the English department, University of Utah, chairman; Dr. Walter E. Peck, Wesleyan University, vice-chairman; and Professor Leah Ruth Rudman, University of Illinois, recorder. The central office is at Mitchell, South Dakota.

Professor Owen, throughout his tenure as executive officer, kept the fraternity, as it was then called, registered with Baird's *Manual of College Fraternities*, Banta's *Greek Exchange*, and Leland's *Fraternity Life*. In his last active year, he had the following brief history printed in Baird's *Manual*, 18th edition (1968):

Sigma Tau Delta; English: Sigma Tau Delta, professional English fraternity, was founded December 12, 1922, as the English Club of the Dakota Wesleyan University, Mitchell, South Dakota. It seeks to promote the mastery of written expression, encourage worthwhile reading, and foster a spirit of fellowship among men and women professionally engaged in the study or teaching of the English Language and Literature. It endeavors to stimulate among its members a desire to express life in terms of truth and beauty and to make first-hand contacts with literary masterpieces. Active membership is limited to upperclassmen elected by the unanimous vote of the chapter on the basis of character, high scholarship, and demonstrated ability in creative writing.

Under the leadership of Professor Judson Quincy Owen of Dakota Wesleyan University, who founded the first chapter and wrote the national constitution, Professor Frederick Fadner of Lombard College, who prepared the ritual, and Professor P.C. Somerville of Kansas Wesleyan University, the fraternity became a national organization in May 1924. It held its first national convention April 3 and 4, 1925. At this meeting it formally provided for the regular publication of *The Rectangle*, a newsletter and magazine published twice a year [a change from the quarterly publication (three times during the academic year) of most of the magazine's history].

Government. National officers form an administrative council, consisting of president, two vice-presidents, executive secretary, and seven area regents.

Traditions and Insignia. The emblem is a gold badge or a key design jeweled to indicate the wearer's degree of professional attainment.

Headquarters. 698 Brookfield Drive, West Largo, Florida, 33540.

Membership. Active college chapters 142; inactive 39; total membership 18,000.

The conventions were designated as meetings of The Grand Chapter, made up only of graduates of Sigma Tau Delta chapters and other English professionals; undergraduate members did not participate in the conventions—at least, not actively.

The first convention, announced as a triennial event, headquartered at the Hotel Fort Des Moines, Des Moines, Iowa, April 4-5, 1925. Delegates representing 31 chapters adopted

a constitution and elected officers. They confirmed the pre-convention decisions: the name was to be Sigma Tau Delta, Professional English Fraternity. They recognized the fraternity as a development of the Dakota Wesleyan English club and set the national membership fee at \$5.00. Chapters were to be chartered only in colleges which offered at least the baccalaureate degree and were accredited by the appropriate regional board. The 31 chapters holding membership at this first convention and those added were all designated as charter chapters immediately afterwards.

Austin	Drake	MU Alpha
Baker	Georgetown	(Grand Chapter)
Baylor	Gettysburg	Ohio Northern
Boston	Goucher	Parsons
Buffalo	Grand Island	St. Lawrence
Cape Girardeau	Idaho	Simpson
Centenary	Illinois	Southern California
Cincinnati	Iowa	Texas Christian
Coe	Jamestown (ND)	Utah
Dakota Wesleyan	Lombard	Westmar College
DePaul	Kansas Wesleyan	(Western Union)

The convention delegates elected, as the Administrative council, Dr. P.C. Somerville of Kansas Wesleyan in Salina, president; Professor Judson Q. Owen, by this time in doctoral studies at the University of Minnesota, executive secretary; Professor Frederick Fadner of Lombard College, Galesburg, Illinois, first vice-president; Professor Leah Ruth Rudman, of University of Illinois, Urbana, second vice-president; and Dr. A. Joseph Armstrong, of Baylor University, Waco, Texas, historian. Mabel Coy Trail, a student at the University of Iowa, Iowa City, was elected editor-in-chief of the *Rectangle*, which was to be published by the university. No copy of the *Rectangle* has been located until issue dated Fall 1927. The publication of the magazine by 1928 had become one of the duties of the executive secretary.

The Advisory Cabinet officers, elected at the first convention, were Dr. Walter Edwin Peck of Hunter College, New York City, chairman; Dr. F. H. H. Adler of Cleveland Heights, Ohio, vice-chairman; and attorney C. L. Clark, of Lincoln Nebraska, counselor. It is significant that the first three presidents of the Society, were all active from the beginning. Vice president Frederic Fadner, who would become the second president, was then at Lombard. Advisory Cabinet member Dr. Herbert L. Hughes, who would become the third president, was then dean of arts and sciences and chairman of English at Texas Christian.

Only the names of the other members of the Advisory Cabinet were listed: John Owen Beck, E.C. Beck James Cloyd Bowman, Charles S. Brooks, Hugh Roland Brower, Roy B. Clark, James E. Cox, Maynard Lee Daggy, G.L. Diffenbaugh, Elmina E. Graham, James Juvenal Hates, Claud Howard, Herbert L. Huges, William B. Jones, Edwin S. Lindsey, Gerhard Lomer, Morton Earl Mix, Lawrence El. Nelson, Elisabeth Nichols., Clark S. Northrup, Raymond W. Pence, Harry W. Robbins, Luther E. Robinson, William A.

Vann, Calvin T. Ryan, Carl E. Salomon, Lewis Worthington Smith, Lillian E. Steckman, Lewis Edwin Theiss, Hanna May Thomas, H. Adelbert White, and H.W. Ward.

The second national convention, 1928, was in the Kansas City, Missouri, Athletic Club; and the third convention, December 28-30 1931, at the University of Wisconsin in Madison, the dates chosen to coincide with the conventions of the Modern Language Association and Phi Kappa Phi. The 1931 convention was the last until the reorganizing convention of 1970.

The Kansas City convention, in 1928 representing 71 chapters, elected Dr. Fadner president and re-elected Judson Q. Owen as executive secretary. Editor Coy, now graduated and living in Dubuque Iowa, was again editor-in-chief, with Professor Owen named managing editor. Delegates elected Professor Elmina Graham, Pittsburg (KS) State Teachers' College, vice-president; and Professor Calvin Ryan, Kearney (NE) State College, historian. Professor Lewis Worthington Smith of Drake University, Des Moines, was named chairman of the Advisory Cabinet; Dr. Frederick H. H. Adler, Cleveland College of Western Reserve University, vice chairman, and C. L. Clark, attorney, of Lincoln, Nebraska, counselor. For the first time, regions were set up, only three at first, and regents elected: Dr. A. Joseph Armstrong, Baylor University, southern regent; Dr. Walter Edwin Peck, Hunter College, eastern regent; and Professor Lawrence Emerson Nelson, University of Redlands, in California, western regent.

The 1931 Wisconsin convention re-elected Dr. Fadner, now at Drury, national president; Dr. Claude Howard, Southwestern University, Georgetown Texas, first vice-president; Dr. Lew Sarret (the poet), Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois, second vice-president; and Professor Helen M. Knosker, State Teachers' College, Whitewater, Wisconsin, historian. At Madison, for the first time, the convention voted that two student representatives would serve on the board, naming LaBelle Gillespie of Drury College and David J. Davis of Bucknell University. No further mention was made, either in the *Rectangle* or in letters, of the election of student representatives, until the reorganization in 1970.

Professor Smith of Drake University was again named chairman of the Advisory Cabinet; Dr. Harry W. Robbins of Bucknell University, vice chairman; Attorney C. L. Clark of Lincoln, Nebraska, counselor. The names of the other Cabinet members were not recorded in the *Rectangle*.

The 1931 convention subdivided the regions, for a total of seven: Professor L. S. Mansfield, Jamestown (ND) College, northwestern regent; Dr. L. E. Nelson, University of Redlands (CA), western regent; Professor Elmina E. Graham, Pittsburg (KS) State Teachers' College, west central regent; Dr. Morton M. Mix, Hillsdale (MI) College, east central regent, Dr. A. Joseph Armstrong, Baylor University, southwestern regent; Dr. Herbert L. Hughes, now at Louisiana Polytechnic Institute, southeastern regent; and Dr. Blanche C. Williams, Hunter College (NYC), eastern regent.

Regions, Regents, and Elections

The third convention had revised the constitution to increase the number of regents. No limitation was placed on the terms of the regents or of any other officers. These regents and their successors served until they retired, resigned, or moved outside the region. In 1963, Professor Owen wrote to Sigma Tau Delta president, Dr. Hughes, then at Athens (AL) College:

In each area the Regent holds meetings at will. Often he is sent at fraternity expense as an installing officer, though not always. Often the expense item costs more than the total fees paid by the incoming group for a whole year or nearly that. The present Regents are Dr. H. L. Hughes, Southern; Dr. Autry Nell Wiley, Texas Women's University, Denton; Dr. Claude M. Flory, Florida State University, Tallahassee; Dr. Harold N. White, New Mexico Western, Silver City, Southwestern; and Dr. H. O. Grauel, Southeastern Missouri; and two new ones: Dr. Elizabeth Taylor McLaughlin, Bucknell University, Lewisburg, Penna; and Dr. Barry Bort, Central Michigan University, Mt. Pleasant, Michigan.

Dr. Flory is the long-time Southeastern Regent; and the retiring Dr. Cecilia A. Hotchner of Hunter College, NY City (34 years the head of an especially active chapter) is the predecessor of Dr. McLaughlin. Central Michigan University has had three or more of the Regents. The long-time able sponsor at Marquette University, Dr. John Pick, has been succeeded by a younger man, Dr. Joseph Schwartz, who will be a very able leader. Among the best of the former regents: Dr. A. Joseph Armstrong at Baylor; Dr. Lewis Edwin Theiss at Bucknell; the late Dr. Harry W. Robbins at Bucknell; the late Dr. Frederick H. H. Adler at Western Reserve, Cleveland—and many others whose names do not come to mind at this time.

[Re: Using fees to maintain a strong central office rather than on conventions] At least it keeps us ahead of expenses and with money in the bank for future *Rectangles*; and we stay solvent. Apparently no one ever before heard of a “literary” organization (except the original Phi Beta Kappa) that has held together so well and so long...I have no doubt but that the future of STD is secure. After a few more years I shall hope to turn over this office to able hands and to leave it on a firm foundation.

Professor Owen had quoted, in a 1952 letter to Dr. Hughes, the 1931 convention-expressed view that regional conventions were more practical and more representative than national conventions. He explained that the leaders had favored regional conventions over national conventions, and had then tried to arrange regional conventions every four years. During World War II, however, restrictions on travel had forced the national leaders to leave the scheduling of regional conventions to the discretion of the regents, and there it remained. He said that the leadership saw the strength of the society as being in the central office, which reached all members, and not in convention, which could be attended by only a percentage of the chapters.

The names of national officers were printed in the *Rectangle* through 1936, after which the *Rectangle* carried only the name of the executive secretary and editor, Judson Q. Owen. The reorganized Board in 1970 found no record of other officers, except that Professor Owen had sent certificates and charters, for the president's signature, to Dr. Fadner after 1928, and then, beginning in 1954, to Dr. Herbert L. Hughes. Professor Owen, throughout the changes of other officers continued as executive secretary, and, after the Kansas City convention, as editor of the *Rectangle*.

In a letter to Dr. Hughes in 1963, apparently answering a question about the election of officers, he wrote: "I am certain that our original constitution mentioned that officers were to be chosen by national convention; or in any special situation by the Administrative Council. When vacancies occur, consultation with the leaders in the areas concerned follow, until the place is filled. I was not on the committee that drafted the revised constitution and had not noted the omission." In another letter, apparently accompanying a shipment of copies of the constitution, he said that every member should have a copy and that some chapters requested as many as 100.

Alumni Affiliation

An event of the 1928 Kansas City convention, that could have become significant, was Owen's announcement that he was sponsoring a Founder's Chapter (Mu Alpha) in Minneapolis, its members to be graduate students in English and English professionals. No record has been found of the continuance of this chapter or of the establishing of other such chapters. In some locations, unofficial alumni chapters have been formed, but, lacking a national tie-in, have not flourished. At present the long-range planning committee is recommending the opening of an official slot in the international Society for an alumni association.

The *Rectangle*

With the abandoning after 1931 of the national convention, each region was free to hold its own meeting when and where the regent felt a convention was needed. Cutting a national convention out of the budget freed the Society's limited income for the expenses of the central office, the largest of which was the cost of publishing and distributing the *Rectangle*. The magazine, throughout, Professor Owen's years as editor and publisher, was the same size and the same general format as it is today, and had the same primary purpose: to provide an outlet for the writing of its members. The cover, originally feature only title and crest, began in the 1930's to feature a scene in color from one of the member campuses. The back cover featured for many years a Balfour advertisement of official Sigma Tau Delta jewelry—the only advertisement ever carried. Then for several years the magazine's table of contents was printed on the back cover. The *Rectangle* was, from the beginning, professionally printed and attractively laid out. The number of pages was between 25-30, with always 30-40 writers represented—many poems, very short short stories, and occasional essays. At least once a year chapter notes were printed.

Professor Owen was in earnest in encouraging creative writing, but he never printed his own writing, and he imposed his own opinion only once. In the 1942 winter issue, an issue with 65 pages, he wrote “a suggestion:”

The *Rectangle* goes regularly to more than forty states, to Hawaii, to Alaska, to South America, and occasionally to foreign lands. Let us devote the Spring number to a dependable and fresh, firsthand representation of life as observed in many places. Look about you. Put on paper the people and the background. Catch and preserve in carefully chosen words, and with some attention to plan, a portion of the human drama near at hand...Let us make the May offering the most worthwhile *Rectangle* of our eighteen years. [signed] Yours in the bond, J. Q. Owen.

The magazine was once or twice titled *The Quarterly Rectangle*, but nearly always the *Rectangle*, and always printing a picture of the official badge and the identification: Official Publication of Sigma Tau Delta, Professional English Fraternity.

The publication of fall, winter, and spring issues was standard until the last two or three years of Owen's life, when the magazine went to a fall and spring issue. The *Rectangle* was a continuous publication through the calendar year 1968. No issues have been located for 1969, the year of his death. The next issue would have been Spring, 1969, and he died in February 1969. The *Rectangle* hardly missed a beat, however. The next year the *Rectangle* was out again, in the spring of 1970, under the editorship of the new national executive secretary, Dr. E. Nelson James, Northern Illinois University. Since the 1970 reorganization, the *Rectangle* has been published twice during every academic year, fall and spring.

Professor Owens seems to have maintained a voluminous correspondence with officers, sponsors, several members, and several graduates still interested in the same things the Society stood for. All were encouraged to contribute to the magazine. In fact, included in the formal vows taken at induction, each new member made three pledges: to help maintain a worthy chapter, to notify the central office each year of his or her new address (either the new address or a confirmation of the old one), and to send to the *Rectangle* at least one literary contribution a year for three years. Each contribution was to be typed, with triple spacing, on one side only, and was to be error free.

As executive secretary, Professor Owen took the management of the Society and its publications with him wherever he went—from Dakota Wesleyan to the University of Minnesota 1925-1928, where he completed his doctoral course work and began his dissertation; then to Nebraska State Teachers' College at Wayne, 1928-1954, where he chaired the English department; then to Drury College in Springfield, Missouri, 1954-1964; and finally into retirement in Largo, Florida.

Officers and Their Duties

Professor Owen appointed new officers, from among chapter sponsors, whenever vacancies occurred. Most of the administration of the Society, however, was with himself as executive secretary. In the final years, the executive secretary's office was in his home. The president's main obligation was installing chapters when these were conveniently located, and signing membership certificates and chartering documents. Regents checked out applications for charters in their region, installed new chapters when nearby, and many were zealous in encouraging the formation of new chapters.

Dr. Herbert L. Hughes recalled that, as president, he installed twelve new chapters of Sigma Tau Delta in Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama, and signed and returned to Professor Owen charters, certificates, and whatever other documents he had received. Dr. Frederic Fadner recalled his own presidency, in a 1972 letter published in the September 1972 national newsletter:

Here is an outline of the happenings. One day I received a letter from J. Q. Owen, professor of English in a college in Iowa, not far from Galesburg [Mitchell, SD, is across the state of Iowa from Lombard College, Galesburg, IL; they must have met in Iowa]. He wanted to meet me in order to discuss the possibility of forming an English fraternity. He wanted to meet in a town where neither of us taught and suggested a town half way between our two towns. He suggested a date and I agreed to meet him.

We had a long talk and agreed on founding Sigma Tau Delta. He was to be the executive secretary and I the president. We shook hands on parting and also agreed to meet soon again. On parting after our second meeting he said, "We will get going." I returned to Lombard and formed a chapter and he formed one in his college. I actually formed the second chapter and he the first. I do not recall whether foundation dues were paid or not, but I recall that I went to Naperville to a college, North Central College, I believe, where I installed a chapter. I do not recall that any responsibilities were delegated to me as national president, but I thoroughly enjoyed my work with our chapter in Lombard.

Professor Owen resigned as executive secretary, in a letter to all sponsors, October 1, 1965, expressing the wish that "a younger and more alert person would come forward and take over," but no one did. He asked that sponsors hold all national fees until his replacement, but said that he would nevertheless continue to publish *The Rectangle*. This he did, largely at his own expense, for several issues, and, still feeling under obligation, continued as much as he could of the clerical work for new members and new chapters. Again, in the spring 1967 *Rectangle*, he announced his resignation:

Effective April 30 next [1968] the present national secretary-editor has resigned. The successor yet to be appointed will serve until the next national convention, tentatively being planned for 1969 to allow ample time to "make ready."

It is necessary that he (or she) be experienced in writing, editing, secretarial work, and business procedures and prepared to fit easily into the daily routine of office management. Interest in the organization and a desire to remain with it for several years are desirable assets. A central location would facilitate and expedite the work required.

SUGGESTIONS: To reduce costs and enable the present membership fee to cover them (and it is our only permitted source of income) some of the services long rendered should be eliminated. 1. The preparing and mailing first class of the certificates, next to the magazine the heaviest financial burden. (Billfold individual receipt cards for many societies suffice.) 2. The supplying to chapters of printed membership and other forms is a costly service, especially since more than two-thirds of such material is lost after arrival and seldom available for new officers. 3. The limiting of emblems to not more than three would reduce correspondence and headaches...4. Secretarial expenses and services must be paid for; hence, any methods available to trim these down will help Sigma Tau Delta to live within its income. This it has so far done. 5. Only as a last resort will we increase the membership fee or very much reduce the size of *The Rectangle*.

FINALLY: To make it possible for your chapter to send one or more members to the next national convention, KEEP IN YOUR CHAPTER TREASURY all national membership fees received from October 1 to next May 1; i.e., send NO FEES or new member lists over this period to the national secretary. Your Rectangle packages will be sent to you as usual, in care of your faculty sponsor; and individual copies to members eligible who bring their addresses up to date each autumn...

APPLICATIONS for this appointive office will be sent at once to [his address]. State qualification amply, including age and experience background. These will be sent to the Board of Regents for action by year's end.

Through it all, until his death in February, 1969, he continued to encourage creative writing among the student members and to publish the best of what he received in *The Rectangle*. The final issue, under his editorship, was Vol. XLIV, number 1, fall of 1968. That issue noted a membership of 127 chapters, down from the previous listing, in 1966, of 143. The initiation fee was still, after 45 years, \$5 a year.

The Reorganization, 1970

Dr. E. Nelson James, professor of English at Northern Illinois University and chapter sponsor there, was destined to succeed Professor Owen as executive secretary and to become for thirteen years the hub of the re-born society's activities. In the fall of 1968, he had not answered Professor Owen's call; he reports that he was still expecting that Professor Owen had someone else in mind to succeed him.

After Owen's death in February 1969, however, *Fraternity Monthly* sent James its Sigma Tau Delta material for proofreading. This was copy Owen had sent them, which included

a listing of these national officers: Dr. Herbert L. Hughes, president; Regents Dr. H. O. Grauel, Dr. Autrey Nell Wiley, Dr. Edwin Stockton, Dr. Richard Cloyed, and Dr. James. James then called Dr. Hughes, in Athens, Alabama, who said he felt too old to remain active (he was then 83) and had been unable to find a successor for himself. The next indication James had of his duties came from Dr. Donald M. Murray, a sponsor, whose interest was in the continuance of Sigma Tau Delta. Murray had mailed out, to all the sponsors listed in *The Rectangle*, a reply form proposing reorganization, with James as the new executive secretary. Dr. James had the right qualifications: literary scholarship, a reputation for dependability, and above all a consuming interest in Sigma Tau Delta. Murray received 109 favorable replies from sponsors, and James accepted the responsibility.

Northern Illinois' administration agreed to house the central office, and NIU's legal advisor drew up papers of incorporation, to insure against other claims. As of September 1, 1969 Sigma Tau Delta was incorporated, and James began his duties as executive secretary. That fall the issuance of certificates to new members began again, an action that provided for the continuance without a break of Sigma Tau Delta as the national English honor society.

James asked all the named officers to act as the Board of Directors, and invited the board and other interested persons to meet with him during the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) meeting in Washington, D.C. Present at that November 1969 meeting were Dr. H. O. Grauel, Southwestern Missouri State College, Central Regent; Dr. Autrey Nell Wiley, Texas Women's University of Denton, Western Regent; Dr. E. Nelson James, Northern Illinois University, Northern Regent; Dr. Richard Cloyed, Kearney (NE) State College, northwestern Regent; and Dr. Edwin Stockton, Radford (VA) College, Southern Regent. Wiley proposed that James continue as executive secretary, that Stockton be nominated as president, and Cloyed as treasurer, and the Board concurred. She then submitted her own resignation from the Board, but the remaining member, Dr. H. O. Grauel, stayed on as Central Regent until 1978.

James promised the Board that he would perform the essential pre-reorganization tasks; formulate a working constitution, renew and continue the publication of *The Rectangle*, and arrange immediately for a national convention that coming spring at NIU. He then sent convention invitations to all chapters identified in *The Rectangle*. That first convention was as representative of the national membership as any convention has ever been, and it was at that convention that the real reorganization of the Society took place. Dr. James and Northern Illinois University will always have the gratitude of the Society, for it was that first convention upon which the future of Sigma Tau Delta depended. Thirty chapters sent sponsor and delegates, with every one of the new Regions—Northern, Southern, Eastern, Western, and Central—sending delegates from at least four chapters.

The convention delegates adopted the new constitution and voted to apply for membership in the American Association of College Honor Societies. They approved the new executive board, elected two student advisors, and each region's delegation elected a

regent. The new northern regent, Dr. Richard Cloyed, of Kearney (NE) State College, offered Kearney as the site for the 1972 convention. Nearly every national officer has since hosted a national or regional convention on his/her own campus, cooperating with other local groups in attracting famous literary figures as speakers.

Conventions, Conferences, and Board Meetings

That first convention at NIU in 1970 set the pattern for the biennial conventions which have followed it: widely dispersed pre-convention information; noted writers on the program; social events and provision for low-cost housing; workshops, particularly in creative writing; and a low registration fee to include a banquet. The host university originally picked up the entire tab, coordinating the convention with events on the campus which could be shared by the Sigma Tau Delta delegates. In most student organizations, national conventions are rare. The student delegate not only must miss some classes and but also must pay his/her own expenses. The host must keep a low cost per delegate, while bringing in high quality of program and entertainment. More and more, as convention follows convention, the national (now international) office has had to bear a part of the real costs.

Delegates remember that first convention of 1970 because they heard Saul Bellow read, to his own delight as well as theirs, from *Henderson, the Rain King*. Lucien Stryk, poet on the NIU faculty, conducted a memorable poetry workshop, and the NIU chapter hosted social get-togethers. Important to the Society's history is the fact that the reorganization stabilized the future of Sigma Tau Delta so well that its growth since has been continuous, even phenomenal. One of the major achievements of that convention was the conformance of the Society to the pattern established by the Association of College Honor Societies, which in 1972 accepted Sigma Tau Delta as a member honor society. Membership in ACHS required changing the designation from "Professional English Fraternity" to "English Honor Society." In the second half of the twentieth century, the latter term is more appropriate to an organization which primarily serves to honor undergraduate and graduate English majors and minors.

Another priority of the 1970 convention planners was the re-establishing of regularity in the publishing of a semi-annual, *The Rectangle*. Sigma Tau Delta not only published an issue that spring but encouraged each chapter to publish its own writers' magazine and to bring a copy to conventions. The literary magazine display, like the poetry workshop and the student get-togethers, has become a popular feature of every convention.

The roster of officers elected at the NIU-hosted convention, as well as at later conventions, and the winners of the growing number of special awards and incentives are listed at the close of this section.

At Kearney (NE) State in 1972 (April 21-22), John Ciardi read his own poetry, as well as that of selected students whose work had been printed in *The Rectangle*. Mildred Bennett, biographer of Willa Cather, spoke of Cather's Nebraska roots and delegates were able to visit nearby Red Cloud, the setting for much of her fiction. Most of the delegates were seeing a part of the country entirely new to them.

Richard Eberhardt, Pulitzer-winning poet, headed the program at Baylor University in 1974. Laurence Lieberman read his poetry and conducted a poetry workshop, and W.D. Valgardson conducted a fiction writing workshop. Delegates had the privilege of viewing and even meeting in the famous Robert Browning Library, established by one of Sigma Tau Delta's first officers, A. Joseph Armstrong. Vice president and Western regent Dr. Frank Leavell, with student advisor Jeffrey Collins, shared the convention hosting.

The 1976 convention at Ole Miss gave delegates a star-studded program—Writers Eudra Welty, Cleanth Brooks, Marion Montgomery, Ellen Douglas, poet William Jay Smith, and the performance of Welty's *The Ponder Heart*. Dr. Thomas Brown and his brand new chapter were the hosts. The University of Mississippi also provided a tour of Rowan Oak, the Faulkner home, with its magnificent grounds and, inside, memories of the Nobel Prize-winning author.

Jessamyn West, Mari Evans, Philip Jose Farmer, and Howard McMillan, all Indiana-born writers, spoke to and assisted young writers at Indiana State University in 1978 in Terre Haute. Special workshops were given on the writings of Theodore Dreiser, Kurt Vonnegut Jr., and Ernie Pyle, also Indiana-born. Dr. Tasker Witham, northern regent, was host chairman.

Delegates will never forget the 1980 convention at Missouri Western State College in St. Joseph, because of the ever-present and entertaining poet Robert Bly, "Dune" writer Frank Herbert, and film critic Judith Crist. Theme: "Literary Landscapes: Rivers and Roads." The convention was open to everyone in the community, and students enjoyed the social events with local persons, as well as with students from many other campuses. Professor Isabel Sparks, then Central regent and in 1987 the first international president, chaired the convention.

Gwendolyn Brooks headlined the program in 1982 at East Texas State University in Commerce, a convention that had as its theme "Multi-Ethnic Literature." Western regent Fred Tarpley used his connections to bring such speakers as Ken Harris, with a film workshop; and speakers Laurence Perrine, famed English professor and writer; Suzanne Morris, novelist; and Susan McDowell Wood, novelist. Successful events included a reading by student poets at a club in the country; an off-campus mixer where everyone really mixed; and a reception where delegates met and talked with the writers and often got their autographs.

A popular convention was that held at Athens (AL) State College in 1984. Student housing was free, in homes close to the campus, and all events were easily accessible. And what events! James Dickey read for the first time in public his then unpublished book-length poem *Brontwyn, the Draw, and the Shape-Shifter*. The theme of the convention, "Novel into Film," brought another premiere, the first published showing of University of North Alabama's award-winning film, "She had Hair Like His Sister's" from a short story by 1933 Pulitzer-prize winning novelist T. S. Stribling. William

Bradford Huie, eight of whose books have been filmed, freely discussed his Hollywood experiences. Dr. Jim Vickrey, Montevallo University president and film critic, considered novels-to-film *Deliverance* and *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Both films were shown. In addition, poet Charles (Chuck) Ghigna read to and with other poets, and award-winning short-story writer H.E. Francis read and discussed fiction.

Luxury housing at moderate prices drew members to the 1986 convention in St. Louis, hosted by the University of St. Louis. The student advisors helped plan the convention, and Albert Montesi, sponsor of the St. Louis University chapter, was chair. Father Walter S. Ong, S. J., the headliner, proved a witty and interesting speaker, entrancing his large audience with linguistics. Delegates also visited the Arch, the zoo, the Eugene Field home, and Samuel Clemens' hometown of Hannibal; some even joined with "hands across America."

Emphasis on Chapter Activities since 1970

The years since 1970 have included an almost phenomenal growth in the Society—not only in wider distribution and greater number of chapters, but even more in services to the membership—such as writing awards, scholarships and fellowships, and recognition of outstanding chapters. Especially noteworthy has been the revitalization of chapters and their regional affiliations, through local campus cultural activities and state and regional meeting and exchanges. The conscientious and hard-working Board, made up of the executive officers, regents, and student advisors, have met regularly in a constant upgrading of the constitution, the student honors and awards, the various aids for sponsors, and central services for state, regional, and national or international conferences and conventions.

Chapter activities have increasingly centered on widening the local range of literary influence by assisting other groups, on the campus and in the community, with cultural activities. Most chapters make their own programs open to other interested persons. They give receptions for new English majors, for prospective majors among graduating high school students, and to show teacher appreciation. They offer free tutoring; present the ever-popular poetry workshop; raise money for English scholarship; arrange conversational luncheons with foreign students; and publish their talented members in a literary magazine.

Other chapter activities have combined social events with cultural events. Some of these: attendance in a group at off-campus plays; meeting in faculty homes; arranging a Poe party or a "come-as-a-literary-character" part at Hallowe'en; presenting Christmas dinner or dessert featuring one of Dickens' many Christmas stories, or Capote's "Christmas Memory," or Dylan Thomas' "Christmas in Wales." One imaginative chapter has as a fall weekender a Celtic New Year.

In what Dr. Frank Leavell recommended as "the buddy system," neighboring chapters have often pooled their interests and resources for fun and profit. The semi-annual Newsletter from the central office spreads the word, regularly carrying news of

interesting and creative chapter activities. Such activities revitalize as well as build outstanding chapters.

The Society Grows since 1970

In his annual report on Sigma Tau Delta to the association of College Honor Societies, Dr. William C. Johnson, the current international executive director, presented the results of positive hard work in making the society grow, prosper, and serve its members. "Our results speak for the vitality and enthusiasm of all our chapters across the country; we anticipate an increase, again this year, having led the nations academic honor societies in growth and expansion of services. In 1985, Sigma Tau Delta had the distinction of chartering more new chapters than any other member society of the Association [ACHS]. Sigma Tau Delta has long ago ceased to be a small organization. Our membership, both in terms of member colleges and universities and overall members, now in excess of 50,000, demonstrates our major presence in the national honor society framework. The daily demands for leadership, guidance, and organizational management assistance by active, dynamic chapters throughout the country, points dramatically to the need and desire for continued recognition of academic excellence in the fields of English and creative writing. Through long, hard, and dedicated work, Sigma Tau Delta built upon the strong foundation of Judson Q. Owen, E. Nelson James, and the National Board, and has become a truly national body representing the finest in academic scholarship. The past is but an indication of the future, and the future of Sigma Tau Delta is one of continuing growth, progressive leadership, and dedication to excellence in the discipline of English."

Sigma Tau Delta's Executive Secretaries and Presidents



Judson Q. Owen

Judson Q. Owen was born October 1, 1888, at Newman, IL, graduated from the Tuscola, IL, High School, earned his B.A. degree from Illinois Wesleyan in 1913, and began teaching that fall at Michigan State University at East Lansing, as an instructor of composition. During his four years there he began graduate study and was awarded the M.A. degree in 1920. Between 1917 and 1921, he was an accountant for Nevada Consolidated Copper, taught composition and literature at Colorado State College, and taught debate and literature at Montana State College. In the fall of 1922 he went to Dakota Wesleyan College, as head of the English department and in December of that year founded the English Club to promote the study of literature and creative writing. By May 1924, almost entirely on his initiative, the English Club had turned into Sigma Tau Delta and was nationalized. He was its executive secretary—in essence, its manager—for its first forty-five years.

He published while there several articles on Sigma Tau Delta and a study manual on the novel. In 1925 at the University of Minnesota, he began study toward the P.D. degree, while teaching rhetoric and literature. Before leaving there he had completed his course work and had begun work on his dissertation: "Romantic Tendencies in Eighteenth

Century Literature.” In 1928 he went to Wayne (NE) State College as head of the English department, chartering a Sigma Tau Delta chapter there in January 1929. His chief work at Wayne, in addition to his regular duties, was the Sigma Tau Delta organization and the editing and publishing of its literary magazine, *The Rectangle*. Although he was urged by his administration to continue his studies, the State board at that time gave no sabbaticals for advanced study, and he never completed his doctorate. He retired from Wayne in 1954, moving first to Drury College in Springfield, Missouri, and finally into complete retirement, except for Sigma Tau Delta obligations, in Largo, Florida. [Biographical details courtesy of Dr. Laura Franklin, former northern regent.]

He died in Florida in February 1969. His final contribution to Sigma Tau Delta, seems to be the fall 1968 *Rectangle*. His enduring contribution, however, cannot be measured. Millions of students and their chapter sponsors have found their minds and lives enlivened and bettered by the honor society he founded and nurtured for almost half a century.



E. Nelson James

E. Nelson James, executive secretary 1969-1982, received his B.A. and M.A. from the University of Chicago, and his Ph.D. from the University of Iowa, where he studied with the late Charles B. Woods. He is presently professor emeritus of English, Northern Illinois University, where he was on the faculty from 1948 to 1984. From 1969 to 1972 he served as director of professional publications.

His book, *The Development of George Farquhar as a Comic Dramatist*, was published by Mouton in 1972 as part of the Studies in English Literature series. In 1986, his book *George Farquhar: A Reference Guide* was published by G.K. Hall & Co., and he has contributed to the *Bibliography of Restoration and Eighteenth Century Research: 1900-1968* by C.J. Stratman and to *Index to Reviews of Bibliographical Publications*, vol. 2. by L. Terry Oggel.

He is the author of several plays, including *The Twelve Dancing Princesses*, produced at the Goodman Theatre, Chicago; *The Young Couple*, produced by the Stage Coach Players, DeKalb. He is co-author with Willard Welsh and Oscar Haugland of the musical *Jane Addams*, produced at Northern Illinois University, and he wrote the musical revues; *Some Skeletons in Our Closet and Other Friendly Ghosts; or, DeKalb County at 150*, produced by the DeKalb County Sesquicentennial Committee at the Egyptian theatre, DeKalb, July 10-12, 1987.

From 1948-1984 he sponsored Xi Delta chapter of Sigma Tau Delta at NIU and was faculty advisor for the campus literary magazine, *Towers*.

He was executive secretary of Sigma Tau Delta, the national English honor society, from 1969-1982, as well as editor of its literary magazine *The Rectangle* and its *Newsletter*, from 1969 through 1984.

As a teacher, Nelson James taught dramatic literature—Shakespeare, medieval and renaissance drama, restoration and eighteenth century drama, modern drama, and introduction to the drama.

He has been a member of the Stage Coach Players since 1958 and has directed sixteen plays for them, including *Life with Father*, *Barefoot in the Park*, *Plaza Suite*, and *Crimes of the Heart*. In 1987 he was vice-president of Stage Coach and directed *Auntie Mame*.

He is also an actor, and has appeared with the Stage Coach players as Morrell in *Candida*, Elwood P. Dowd in *Harvey*, Jonathan Brewster in *Arsenic and Old Lace*, Tom in *I Never Sang for My Father*, W. O. Gant in *Look Homeward, Angel*, Actor #4 in *The Dining Room*, and Norman Thayer, Jr., in *On Golden Pond*. At NIU he appeared as Dr. Jadin in *The Madwoman of Chaillot* and Rufe Phelps in *Lu Ann Hampton Laverty Oberlander*. From 1960-1974 he was program chairman for the Children's Community Theatre and served as mascot (Mr. C. C. T.).

One of his fondest memories as an actor was with the Renaissance Repertory Company in its initial season in 1980 in Geneva, Illinois. He played both Aegeus and Peter Quince in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, while his daughter Katherine played Hermia, and his son-in-law Alan Blumenfeld played Theseus and Oberon. (Alan and Katherine are now in Hollywood, where they appear on television, in movies, and onstage.)

In his retirement, he has become a free-lance writer of plays, short stories, and poetry, as well as doing the newspaper publicity for the Stage Coach Players. Mrs. James, Marilyn, has taken an active interest in Sigma Tau Delta, both in DeKalb and at the national level—so much so that in 1982 at the national convention she was crowned “The Sweetheart of Sigma Tau.” They have three other children besides Katherine: Carrie, in Los Angeles, Mark in Duluth, Minnesota, and Jim in Dixon, Illinois. They have five grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.



William C. Johnson

Dr. William C. Johnson, who has been executive secretary of Sigma Tau Delta since 1982, earned his B. A. at the University of Chicago and his M. A. and Ph. D. at the University of Iowa, specializing in sixteenth and seventeenth century literature as well as reformation literature. He has taught at Northern Illinois University since 1969, where he has also directed the honors program. He has served as president of the regional honors council. In addition to membership in many professional organizations, he is on the executive board of the Association of College Honor Societies and of the Sixteenth Century Studies

Conference.

He has received many grants and awards, of both local and national importance, including being named a Danforth Fellow. His books include *Milton Criticism: A Subject*

Index, and the forthcoming *Spenser's Amoretti: the Analogy of Love*. In addition he has published more than forty articles in scholarly magazines, particularly in magazines devoted to renaissance and restoration literary studies. He has delivered around twenty papers at professional meetings, as well as serving such meetings as speaker, panel member, workshop conductor, and discussion leader. He has been nominated eight times at NIU for the excellence in teaching award.

As executive secretary/director to Sigma Tau Delta, he has been instrumental in encouraging its growth to its present 400+ chapters and seeing it become an International English Honor Society. The work of the executive secretary goes far beyond record-keeping and reporting to the Society. His is the working hub of the Society, the place where information comes in and goes out, in a ripple effect; where manuals and handbooks are reviewed and distributed; where sponsors and regents, convention and conference chairs, editors and planning committees center and pool their information and coordinate their activities. In addition, the executive secretary represents the Society at various functions and organizations, particularly the ACHS.

Because of the importance of this position, the Longrange Planning Committee has recommended to the 1988 convention that the title be changed to Executive Director.



P. C. Somerville

P. C. Somerville, Kansas Wesleyan, served as president from 1924 to 1928.



Frederic Fadner

President Fredric Fadner served Sigma Tau Delta as president for around thirty-five of its first forty-five years, elected at its second convention in 1928, re-elected at its third in 1931, and remained in office until 1954. Even before serving as president, he was present at the first organizational meetings of the Society and sponsored one of its charter chapters. He taught at Lombard College, Galesburg, IL, and was briefly at Drury College in Missouri and at the University of Wyoming. He and Mrs. Fadner retired in Clearwater, Florida.



Herbert L. Hughes

President Herbert L. Hughes, who served as president of Sigma Tau Delta from 1954 through 1969, had also been in the Society from its beginning in 1924 as a member of the advisory board and as Southern Regent. Sigma Tau Delta remained a lifelong interest for him, and he was corresponding with chapter sponsors almost to the day of his death at 96. From his 1954 biography in *Who's Who in America*:

Hughes, Herbert Leland, educator: b. nr. Huntsville, Ala., Sept. 24 1886; s. Robert Lee and Nancy Elizabeth (Vaughn) H.; B. A. Transylvania Coll. 1910; M. A. Columbia U., 1920; Ph. D., U. of Virginia, 1923; m. Mellie Mae Albert, July 10, 1912. Instr. Latin, Lynchburg (Va) College 1910-1912; prof. and head of dept 1912-1925; prof. English and head dept. Texas Christian U. 1925-1931; Prof. English and head dept of English and fgn. Langs., (Ruston) La. Poly. Inst. 1931-1954, dean of sch. of Arts and Sciences 1934-1954. Phi Beta Kappa. Contributor to Jour. Of Higher Edn "Sophomore English Again." Writer of mag. articles, verse, plays, book reviews, etc. Southern Regent Sigma Tau Delta since 1924.

He became president of Sigma Tau Delta in 1954, and retired that year from Louisiana, at 66. He then came to Athens (AL) College, then a Methodist institution, as chairman of the department of English, where he remained until final retirement twelve years later at 78. His wife had recently died, and he retired to Madison, near Huntsville, where he had been born on Hughes Road so many years before. He was a cheerful and inspiring figure for many years, after entering a retirement hostel, typing poetry on his battered typewriter, always formal, always the gentleman, and never without his tie and orange velvet smoking jacket. He kept up his connections with young creative writers through his Sigma Tau Delta contacts, well into his nineties. At his death in September 1982, his family asked that, in lieu of flowers, contributions be sent to Sigma Tau Delta and to Athens College.



Edwin L. Stockton, Jr.

President Edwin L. Stockton, Jr., was elected president of Sigma Tau Delta in an emergency planning meeting of the Regents following the death of the founder and executive secretary, Judson Q. Owen, in 1969. The following spring, the reorganizing convention at Northern Illinois University elected a board which confirmed his presidency, a post he was to hold for the next seventeen years.

Dr. Stockton's association with Sigma Tau Delta extends over a period of three decades. In 1958, while a graduate teaching assistant at Florida State University, he was initiated into the Rho Epsilon chapter, which was under the sponsorship of Dr. Claude M. Flory, southeastern Regent and one of the original board of advisors in 1924. As an English faculty member,

Stockton installed the Eta Kappa chapter at Radford College (later Radford University) in Virginia in 1965, a college which was then the second largest American college for women. From that beginning to the present, he has been the chapter sponsor.

By profession, Dr. Stockton has been a scholar of early American literature for 28 years. He is the author of *The Influence of the Moravians upon the Leather-Stocking Tales* and *Salem's Remembrancers*. He has also served as the president of the Wachovia Historical Society of North Carolina; and, during the 1970's, the Honorable John N. Dalton, governor of the Commonwealth of Virginia, commissioned Dr. Stockton to a four-year term on the Virginia Board of Examiners for Audiology and Speech Pathology. Dr. Stockton's latest project is focused in historic Bethabara Park, Winston-Salem NC. Which features a \$645,000 Edwin L. Stockton Visitor Center. He is furnishing its library with his collection of rare Colonial books, and the building with the Stockton antiques from the eighteenth century.



Isabel Sparks

President Isabel Sparks, elected in the spring of 1987 as the first president of the newly designated International Society, spent twenty years teaching elementary and high school students before coming to Missouri Western State College in St. Joseph as a teacher of literature, specializing in Shakespeare and film. She holds an associate degree in music from Stephens College; from the University of Kansas, Lawrence, the A. B. degree with honors in English and the Master of Philosophy degree; from the University of Kansas City, the M. A. in English education. She has been elected to Phi Beta Kappa, Delta Kappa Gamma, and Phi Delta Kappa. She has received a number of grants and honors, including a Fulbright fellowship to Greece.

Since 1974 she has sponsored the Sigma Tau Delta chapter on her campus and has served nationally, 1978-1987, as central regent. As a Board member, Sparks has served on many active committees, including chairing the two-year revision of the constitution to conform to legal requirements as well as to meet the practical needs of an evolving Society.

President Sparks has great trust in the current long-range planning committee's work in its active exploration of ways and means to adapt the international Society to current and future needs. She sees the purpose of the Society as becoming more meaningful in the lives of its members and more valuable to their campuses and communities.