

Dalhousie fraternities: strong in tradition, weak in number



WALSH/DAL PHOTO

by Judy Pelham

The undergraduate fraternities at Dalhousie are not the prominent institutions they once were. Only two to three per cent of the student population is now a member of a Greek letter fraternity, yet at one time they were the social heart of the university. Most fraternity presidents agree the residences "fulfill the need of fellowship" that the fraternities once supplied.

Home for U.S. Intellectual Elite

The idea of a fraternity began in the United States where the founding fathers formed literary societies of the intellectual elite. They grew to Animal House fame in the forties and fifties as an association of fun-loving nuts. Dal initiations at this time range from pranks such as placing contraceptives around the exhaust pipes of cars, to throwing pledges in the Arm and instructing them not to come up for a certain length of time. The wife of a former frat member at Dal told me of one drinking binge from which some brothers recovered to find themselves stowaways on an ocean cruise-liner. My former frat rat also informed me that Toga parties are not the invention of John Belushi, and that some young students solved their tuition problem at the card table. When I told her of a presidents' comment that frats try not to be thought of as drinking

societies, she replied, "They've worked very hard to get the reputation of a drinking society." Despite all their madness she admitted, "I don't know what it was but they really did seem to care for one another."

Hazing banned — except at Phi Kap

"There was a great rivalry," she told me among the frats at that time. Nowadays any problems would be solved by the Inter Fraternity Council (IFC), however there are none in memory. The IFC at Dal coordinates the recruiting and activities of the frats and acts as a discussion point for the various presidents. Formed in the dark days of inter-fraternity wars, a U.S. based national council decides the policy of all inter-fraternity relations. They some years ago banned hazing, which they define as the mental or physical abuse of pledges. This means that for all the branches or "chapters" of a fraternity belong to the IFC, hazing is out. One frat at Dalhousie is Canadian in origin, Phi Kappa Pi, and, respecting the outlawing of hazing, one member of Phi Kap told me "we didn't go along with it." Phi Kap has had the same initiation since 1923 and holds the distinction of being the first frat at Dalhousie.

Non-profit organizations

Fraternities are non-profit organizations,

responsible to their larger bodies for their bookkeeping and management. Any excess revenue goes toward improving the facilities of the fraternity or to the charitable institutions they sponsor. Even if they do not turn a profit they do fund raising for charities such as the recent Tramp-a-thon for MS by Sigma Chi. The frats provide a place for the members to study, to party, and to relax, and they try to promote a spirit of participation in sports, scholastics and the community. (Members must maintain a certain grade average before being ad-

mitted to the fraternity.)

The male fraternities at Dalhousie are open to all male undergraduates and the female fraternity to all female undergraduates, and any discrimination on anything besides sex would be taken up with the IFC.

Fraternities are not recognized societies at Dalhousie, which means they are not entitled to the privileges of free meeting rooms, cheaper Dal bar prices (for functions) and eligibility for grants from the student council. They could be registered as a B society, that is, a free association of students on campus if they were to submit a list of officers and a constitution to the student council. The problem has been that the fraternity's constituions are not considered open for inspection because they contain information on the initiations and other secret rites of the organization. In other universities, according to Student Council President Gord Owen, this has been overcome by the submitting of a rewritten constitution which contains the operating procedure of the organization without revealing its inner secrets.

Also, Dalhousie cannot admit any society which is sexist. If indeed fraternities are deemed sexist by the student council, there are ways around this problem as well. The formation of a "little sisters" group or "lit-

tle brothers" into a frat body, or a liason with an already formed female fraternity would make the whole organization non-sexist. The affiliate group would have its own initiation and procedure, but share functions, facilities and financing with its parent group. This type of policy in the U.S. has resulted in fraternity rows where the university supplies housing or indeed parts of the residences to the frats. Owen said however that we "expect them to take the initiative."

But when it comes to admitting female members to male frats or vice versa, opinion is unanimous that it is unlikely to happen. Jill Gibbons, president of the Alpha Gams said, "I can't imagine a guy wanting to be an Alpha Gam, I mean sitting drinking tea with the sisters. We chuckle about it." The past president of Phi Del, Kevin Phinedel, said he couldn't see it happening at all.

One thing is certain about fraternities, their members are serious about their involvement. All members seem to be a ready source of information as to the history and principles of their organization and they believe it promotes brotherhood and good citizenship in its members. If their study of academia is anything like their knowledge of their fraternity, they must be very good students.

