

# OLD LIBRARY SCHOOL



Fig 1. The Phi Kappa Psi house shortly after construction in 1922. [Meuer Photo, vol. 9, p. 48]

*Built in 1922 as the Phi Kappa Psi fraternity house, this building became the property of the University in 1937. It was used as the library school until 1965, when it was changed to office space for University planning and construction. It was demolished in 1971 for construction of Humanities.*

The heyday of the fraternities on the UW campus came in 1924. The goal of every fraternity was to build their own house. Each had a building fund that grew while the organization occupied (usually) rented quarters waiting for the great day when they could build. The Phi Kappa Psi house (PKP) was the third national frat on the UW campus. It was founded in 1875 went inactive in 1893, was refounded in 1897 and eventually had 600 initiates. Their first location was in a large frame structure at 28 E. Gilman. They prospered in this spot, and in 1923-24 bought the site at 811 State Street on which stood the old family home of former president John W. Sterling (see Fig. 2). This site actually faced on Sterling Court, a now vacated street that ran south from State Street to University between Park and Murray Streets. The fraternity removed the Sterling House and built a large (3 stories and basement, 40 X 80 feet) Georgian Revival house, designed by local architect Frank Riley (see Fig. 1). The plans for this building are dated 1921 but it appears that the actual construction took place in 1922.

Whether or not it was connected with the construction of the new chapter house, the fortunes of PKP began to go into decline. Throughout the middle 1920s, the correspondence between the officers of the fraternity and dean of men Scott Goodnight (who oversaw fraternity activities on campus) was filled with admonitions from the dean. The frat continued to 'rush' first semester freshmen in violation of the rule against it, they were constantly involved in disputes with neighbors about noisy and rowdy behavior, in one case being accused by local judge Ole Stolen of immoral behavior



Fig. 2. The first building at 811 State Street, the home of president John W. Sterling the building in the background is the University Club. The house was purchased as a frat house by the Phi Kappa Psi chapter, demolished in the early 1920s for a new frat house.

with a woman in a taxi. They were also placed on academic probation when the house's cumulative grade point fell below the required 1.0 on the 3-point system. As the depression of the 1930s took hold the number of pledges dropped and money began to grow tighter. At the end of the 1930s the ownership of the chapter house passed into the hands of the fraternity's creditor and was held by the Guardian Life Insurance Corp. In March of 1938 the Wisconsin University Building Corporation (WUBC) purchased the property from Guardian Life for \$53,370.<sup>1</sup> Phi Kappa Psi lasted another year in rented quarters on Langdon Street and then passed out of existence, and despite occasional attempts has never been revived.

For the entire history of the library school of the university it had been housed in the Madison Public Library building. It was founded with a 1906 grant from the Carnegie Corporation to the State Free Library Commission. By 1916 the right of the library school to occupy the space in the library was in question. Calls were made by the schools director for larger and more conveniently located quarters and ones with unambiguous legality.<sup>2</sup> Nothing was done until in the 1930s a legislative dispute arose regarding the authority of oversight of the Library School. The two sides were those who argued for control by the Free Library Commission, and the side in favor of university control. The battle seesawed several times with the legislature passing and the governor vetoing various bills. The battle finally ended with the university faction victorious, in large part because they were able to assure the availability of high quality facilities for the library school, Those facilities were in the old PKP house at 811 State Street, leased from the WUBC until 1938 when it became the property of the University. The library school prospered in its new home for almost thirty years, offering only a bachelor of science degree from 1939 to 1950 and adding master's degrees after 1950. Then in April 1965 with space running out and the construction of the humanities complex imminent the library school was moved to a new home in the Wisconsin High School Building at 425 Henry Mall. These quarters were considered temporary at the time, and so they turned out to be. The library school was moved in 1971 to the Helen C. White undergraduate library. The old building on State Street was remodelled in 1965 for office space for the department of Planning and Construction and remained as such until the summer of 1971 when the building was demolished.

1) Minutes of the Regents of the University of Wisconsin, March 8-9, 1938.

2) Report of the Regents of the University of Wisconsin, 1914-1916, p. 256.