

Fraternity's cook mixes up active life

By Patti Gallagher

Take a combination of feeding a house full of hungry males, leading many Lincoln civic activities and raising a growing family, and you've got three major components in the make-up of cook Lenora Letcher.

Letcher, 66, has been cook at Beta Sigma Psi fraternity for 33 years, president of the Lincoln Branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, as well as mother of three, grandmother of eight, and proxy-mother to the boys at Beta Sigma Psi, whom she calls "her kids."

Letcher, whose son, Paul, is a UNL student and football player, said that in various pursuits, her philosophy is to aid people regardless of creed or religion, and to "help upgrade mankind in any way I can."

Thirty-three years ago, Letcher came to Lincoln and to Beta Sigma Psi as a cook. Her duties include lunch and dinner preparation, and anything in between. She quit making breakfast four years ago.

Letcher attributed her longevity at the house to a genuine enjoyment of the work and the students.

"I enjoy them, and they seem to enjoy me too, I guess," Letcher said.

LETCHER ALSO SAID one plus in her extended years at Beta Sigma Psi is the return of alumni to the house. She said that when past members return "I'm the only one they remember."

Letcher said that during the years the change most apparent in college students has been their age. She said that when she began working with students in 1946, they were older and many were veterans.

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Photo by Jerry McBride

After 36 years of service to the university, James Thomas Lees requested to be buried on the university campus. Lees ashes are buried outside Architecture Hall.

Last resting place is UNL campus

By Mary Kay Wayman

Students and faculty are concerned about education at UNL these days, but how many know of a faculty member so dedicated to this university that he requested burial on campus?

James Thomas Lees was buried on campus in 1926 after 36 years of service to the university. A 580 pound granite rock outside Architecture Hall marks the resting place of Lees' ashes. That building was the former university library.

The rock's inscription reads: "Dr. James Thomas Lees: He served well; 1889-1926."

In attempting to discover the reason for this campus grave a trail of red tape was followed from nearly every possible source, the dean of the architecture college to the physical plant and business offices. Even questioning a meeting of the Emeriti Association of retired faculty was suggested.

After the stone had rested on campus for 54 years no one seemed to know the reason for it or whether it actually marked a grave.

But Lee's portrait hangs in the University Archives and it was there that his life was remembered. Files of 60-year-old photographs and dissertations on subjects in Greek maintain the memory of this man who so loved the university.

During his years at NU the British-born Lees was a Greek professor, head of the Greek department, chairman of the department of ancient languages, and the first university provost.

The regents created the undefined position of provost for Lees. He worked to simplify the university's organization, to eliminate duplicate courses and to reduce the size of the catalog. As provost Lees was a member of all faculties and all courses of study.

Lees came to the university in 1889 after receiving his masters and doctor of philosophy degrees from John Hopkins University.

J.C. Whitten said that Lees joined the university staff at a time when NU was moving into a place of recognized leadership among American universities. The university was called then by some the "Athens of the Plains," Whitten said in a 1975 letter-to-the-editor.

Lees was forced to retire in 1922 because of a "painful and mysterious disease," according to papers in the university archives. Lees retired from active work and moved to California where he died at the age of 66.

Lees was a member of Beta Theta Pi fraternity, Phi Beta Kappa and a 36 degree Mason.

It was Lees wish that he be buried on the University campus. His wife and Chancellor Samuel Avery arranged a memorial service near the university library in May of 1926.

Chancellor Avery said of Lees, "His passing leaves one less in the group of men and women who have been great University builders during the period of its greatest growth and activity. His career covers the state's period of development and its growing maturity. In his passing the University loses from its councils one of a group who might be termed 'the elder statesmen.'"

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