

# Greeks dominated campus society and politics

By Lori McGinnis

On a Friday afternoon in the fall of 1950, UNL fraternity and sorority members could be found doing the latest steps to popular music played on record players. The dance, called an hour dance because that's how long it lasted, was a weekly event for the Greeks, and gave them a chance to get acquainted with each other.

On a Friday afternoon in 1980, there are FACs (Friday Afternoon Clubs). There is more drinking than dancing and the '50s sounds are replaced by rock 'n' roll, disco or new wave. But the basic idea is the same - for Greek students to get acquainted.

From outward appearances the Greek system has changed with the times, but a closer look shows the changes evolved in the people and the culture, not in the system itself.

1950 was a time when life was simpler and students were more apathetic about world affairs, said Gerald Hanson, 1950 president of Delta Upsilon fraternity. The main concern at the time, Hanson said, was "what you were going to do on Friday and Saturday night."

**WHAT MANY** of the students did do on Friday and Saturday nights was dance, said Jayne Anderson, current director of Greek Affairs. Anderson, who was in a sorority here at the time, recalled packing eight to 10 students into a car and heading for the Turnpike, a dance hall, or East Hills country club, the popular night spots.

"Everybody was dressed fit to kill," she said, as men wore suits and women wore cocktail dresses.

The mode of dress was more formal in the classroom also, Anderson said. Pants were unheard of for women and the sorority or fraternity pin was part of the everyday attire, she said.

Queen contests abounded in 1950 and sororities always had at least one candidate, said Betsy Palmer, 1950 Panhellenic president. Henry Fonda chose the 1950 Cornhusker Beauty Queens. They were six sorority girls described as being "outstanding in all details of appearance."

**QUEEN CONTESTS** were so numerous, in fact, that members of Delta Upsilon fraternity staged a yum yum queen contest to make fun of the idea, said Derald May, 1950 Interfraternity Council president and a member of Delta Upsilon. Each sorority sent one or two candidates to the contest, May said, and it wasn't until there were 20 to 30 contestants that it was found to be phony.

The winners of the contest were often chosen by a fraternity faction, Palmer said, which dominated campus politics. Although the faction started to break up in 1950, it gave the Greeks a powerful influence on campus.

"Nobody got elected to positions that weren't approved by the faction," she said. "Homecoming queen was selected by a group of fraternity men. It was really quite a tight political organization. The Greeks pretty much voted whatever way the faction recommended."

**PALMER SAID** part of the reason for the faction was that many of the fraternity men were veterans of World War II.

"The quality of fraternity men between '46 and '50 was an entirely different group of people than had ever been on campus, because they were all about six years older than any sorority girl. They were veterans, they had been independent and in control of their own lives for a long time. And then they came back. I think that's why the politics of that era on campus was as strong as they were. They were just a mature group of men."

Because the men were more mature, hazing was cut down, said James Troester, 1950 president of Beta Sigma Psi. Although there was no policy against hazing, rough forms that occurred before 1950, such as paddling pledges with boards, were eliminated because the veterans were thought to be too old to take part, Troester said.

**INSTEAD OF** the rough hazing, pledges were required to scrub floors, answer phones and perform other duties requested by actives.

There is now a hazing policy in the IFC bylaws, said Lee Chapin, current IFC president. The policy prohibits any hazing that may produce mental or physical discomfort, embarrassment, harassment, or ridicule. The policy states that all pledges will be treated as mature and intelligent college men.

Some active members do still occasionally request duties of pledges, however, Chapin said. But pledges duties don't take much time now and didn't in the past.

A common pastime in 1950 was breaking out a deck of cards and playing a game of bridge in the house.

**"YOU COULD** walk into almost any sorority or fraternity and find a bridge game going on," Anderson said.

And when they put down the cards, Troester said, there was a lot of socializing. Although liquor by the drink could not be bought in Lincoln, there were a few local taverns where beer could be consumed at the table, he said.

A "nightcap with a beer or two down at the Diamond Bar and Grill" was a popular way to spend an evening, he said.

But the UNL women in 1950 had to hurry their socializing because of a curfew, Anderson said. On weekdays, freshmen had to be in by 9 p.m. and upperclassmen by



10:30 p.m. On weekends, the curfew was 12:30 a.m. on Friday, 1 a.m. on Saturday, and 10:30 p.m. on Sunday, she said.

**UPON ARRIVAL** back at the house after a night out, the women had to sign on a sheet what time they came in and where they went, Anderson said. Latecomers were given demerits, which could result in various punishments such as being grounded the following weekend.

Despite the strict curfew, Anderson said, it didn't bother her.

"It was part of the expectation when you came to college," she said.

The fact that women had to be in at a certain time and men did not wasn't thought about too much, she said.

"The philosophy at that time was that if the girls were in at that time you don't have to worry about the boys," she said.

But Palmer didn't like the double standard.

"The whole concept of women being isolated and not exposed to worldly things was, as a way of life 'Victorian,'" she said.



Photo courtesy of UNL Archives

Study hours as well as strict curfews were imposed on sorority members in 1950.

## Perspectives

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Friday afternoon dances were popular pastimes for the Greeks of 1950.