Introduction

Fraternity chapter houses at the University of Virginia capture our attention through their distinct architectural style and monumentality, and through their close proximity to the University grounds. For many visitors and residents fraternity row along Madison Lane stands as a close second only to the Lawn in defining the visual character of the University. Initially fraternity brothers gathered secretly due to the fact that the University did not recognize them as formal institutions and thought of them as groups that bred only misconduct and terrible behavior. Over time, fraternity membership increased, and the University could no longer resist acknowledging them. They were not officially provided with housing, but beginning in the 1870s and the University cooperated to allow a few fraternities to dominate certain buildings of the Dawson’s Row dormitories that had been constructed in 1859 by University Architect William Pratt. It was not until twenty years later when the fraternities considered constructing chapter houses of their own. In the 1950s the University Board of Visitors announced their willingness to allow fraternities to lease University land chapter house construction, provided that the houses be built in the style and form of other University architecture. This policy significantly influenced the built form of all fraternity chapter house architecture both on and off University owned land. In 1902, when Saint Anthony Hall purchased a chapter house lot on Madison Lane, the owner stipulated that the fraternity men living in the house should conduct themselves “as if the said lot were a private residence of a gentleman and his family.” The adoption of an architecture for fraternities that was stylistically related to the University and to Virginia country homes, lived in historically by Virginia gentlemen and their families, seemed calculated to reassure potential critics of the fraternity system. By the 1930s almost every fraternity had built its own chapter house. Madison Lane and Rugby Road were the most popular locations as they were close to University grounds as well as Ferryweather Gymnasium, Madison Bowl, and Madison Hall - the athletic center of U.Va. The interiors of the chapter houses are arranged so that most social functions - chapter meetings, parties, formal dances, and dining - occur on the basement and first floors, and the more individualistic activities take place on the second and third floors. The arrangement provides for a highly insalable of communal living that promotes community both within the houses and between fraternity men and the rest of the University’s non-Greek population. In adopting domestic forms for the chapter houses, the dormers utilized in houses such as Phi Gamma Delta and Sigma Nu helped to mask the high density living that occurred under the chapter house roof.

The most important action that influenced the construction of so many fraternity houses however, was the University's refusal to provide “additional dormitories, or boarding houses for the accommodation of students, unless and until it shall appear that suitable and sufficient accommodations will not be afforded by private enterprise on reasonable terms...” The University Board of Visitors relinquished all responsibility in housing its students; therefore accommodations such as fraternity chapter houses had to be built without the help of U.Va.

University of Virginia Fraternity Houses

A Brief Sojourn Through Time and Space

8. Sigma Phi (SERP) Fraternity

163 Rugby Road, 1911

In the 1890’s the Board of Visitors, acknowledging the needs and wants of fraternity men, stipulated that certain lots of University owned land to be leased to the fraternities as long as they built in the style of University architecture, maintained the appearance of their homes and behavior. Over time, fraternity membership increased, and the University could no longer resist acknowledging them. They were not officially provided with housing, but beginning in the 1870s and the University cooperated to allow a few fraternities to dominate certain buildings of the Dawson’s Row dormitories that had been constructed in 1859 by University Architect William Pratt. It was not until twenty years later when the fraternities considered constructing chapter houses of their own. In the 1950s the University Board of Visitors announced their willingness to allow fraternities to lease University land chapter house construction, provided that the houses be built in the style and form of other University architecture. This policy significantly influenced the built form of all fraternity chapter house architecture both on and off University owned land. In 1902, when Saint Anthony Hall purchased a chapter house lot on Madison Lane, the owner stipulated that the fraternity men living in the house should conduct themselves “as if the said lot were a private residence of a gentleman and his family.” The adoption of an architecture for fraternities that was stylistically related to the University and to Virginia country homes, lived in historically by Virginia gentlemen and their families, seemed calculated to reassure potential critics of the fraternity system. By the 1930s almost every fraternity had built its own chapter house. Madison Lane and Rugby Road were the most popular locations as they were close to University grounds as well as Ferryweather Gymnasium, Madison Bowl, and Madison Hall - the athletic center of U.Va. The interiors of the chapter houses are arranged so that most social functions - chapter meetings, parties, formal dances, and dining - occur on the basement and first floors, and the more individualistic activities take place on the second and third floors. The arrangement provides for a highly insalable of communal living that promotes community both within the houses and between fraternity men and the rest of the University’s non-Greek population. In adopting domestic forms for the chapter houses, the dormers utilized in houses such as Phi Gamma Delta and Sigma Nu helped to mask the high density living that occurred under the chapter house roof.

9. Kappa Sigma Fraternity

165 Rugby Road, 1906-11 by James L. Burley

This house sits along the northern border of the Rugby Road quadrangle. Like SERP, its site was included in Manning’s fraternity plan in 1909. Constructed on University property, the house has Jeffersonian elements such as red brick, white columns and a corniced portico.

10. Zeta Psi Fraternity House

169 Rugby Road, 1924-26 by Louis Voorhees

This house is one of the most striking of the Carr’s Hill fraternity houses. Here the architect turned to Jefferson’s Monticello as a model for the design. The fraternity hoped that the Jeffersonian model would, with its central portico and octagonal bays, inducements to support the construction.

11. Ferryweather Hall

1895 by Norfolk architects Carpenter & Peabody

Ferryweather Gymnasium, now Ferryweather Hall, is the University’s oldest surviving purpose-built sports facility. Jefferson had made no provision for athletics beyond the designation of the spaces in the arcades on the south side of the Rotunda as exercise areas. Mid-nineteenth century students organized associations to fund and maintain various collections of equipment on the grounds. The gymnasium and baths by J.M. D’Afflorence and William Pratt and the renovation of Hotel B as the Squibb Gymnasium offered temporary solutions. By contrast, substantial Ferryweather Gymnasium answered the need for an appropriate sports center given the rising interest in intercollegiate athletics. The project was one of a series of gymnasiums that were funded by New York shoe manufacturer Daniel B. Ferryweather for campuses nationwide. Memorial Gymnasium replaced it in 1924 allowing Ferryweather to become home to the McIntire School of Fine Arts. Ferryweather was also home to the Architecture school from 1930 until its move to Campbell Hall in 1970. It has recently undergone a series of renovations.
1. Phi Gamma Delta Fraternity (FIJI)
128 Madison Lane, 1905 & Addition in 1928

In 1900 U.Va. Professor William E. Peters, who had retired from teaching Latin in 1902, built this chapter house for rental to fraternity students at the University of Virginia. Its design features Jeffersonian principles, and in fact was closely modeled on Pavilion X of the U.Va. Lawn. In his young life on the Lawn as a faculty member Peters and his family lived directly opposite Pavilion X in Pavilion IX. The transformation effected in the Peters chapter house project involved accommodating University students in a residential form previously reserved for members of the University faculty. The house was initially occupied by Phi Kappa Psi. In 1913 Phi Gamma Delta's Omicron Chapter House Society, chartered in 1909 to establish a reading room, study hall, and chapter house to "create and foster literary, social and fraternal intercourse" among its members, purchased the building. In 1928 Fiji commissioned architect Stanislaw Makielski to add a second wing to the house. The three-story wing provided space for a larger dining room on the first floor, four bedrooms on the second floor, and a new chapter room on the third floor. Fiji still occupies the house today.

2. Sigma Phi Epsilon Fraternity (SPE)
150 Madison Lane, 1925

Before inhabiting this chapter house, SPE fraternity members moved around frequently. In 1906 they occupied a house on Chancellor Street, but by 1921 they lived on a house on Rugby Road. They bought their present lot on Madison in 1924 from the Chi Phi fraternity, whose house had been reduced to its frame by fire. After SPE purchased the lot, the frame building of the Chi Phi House was still present and its frame was removed. In 1925 at 3600 square feet and with four floors, it is among the largest of the fraternity houses at the University of Virginia.

3. Saint Anthony Hall, Delta Psi Fraternity (The Hall)
133 Chancellor Street, 1902

Saint Anthony Hall was the first fraternity house to be built on Madison Lane, however its principal facade faced Chancellor Street. After other chapter houses were constructed along Madison Lane, Saint Anthony added a classical colossal order portico and entrance overlooking Madison Lane. Unlike many later chapter houses, Saint Anthony Hall had dormitories on the first floor as well as large public rooms. There are only eight other undergraduate Saint Anthony chapters nation-wide.

4. Madison Hall & Madison Bowl

Madison Bowl, located directly across University Avenue from the Rotunda originally housed the nation's oldest chapter of the Young Men's Christian Association. During the nineteenth century, the lengthy debate over the role of religion in the life of the University led to the 1858 founding at the University of the first American college chapter of Y.M.C.A. In 1895 Madison Hall, through the generosity of the people of Madison, was raised to the commanding position near grounds gave the organization a home. Parish and Schroeder of New York served as the architects, and Mrs. William E. Lodge of New York donated the funds for the building's construction. The building's name honored former United States President James Madison, who succeeded Jefferson as rector. A former student of the University, Woodrow Wilson, delivered the address at the dedication of Madison Hall in 1905. The building housed Y.M.C.A. activities until the 1930s. The University leased the building for the use as a student union in the 1940s before purchasing Madison Hall in 1971. Since 1984, the structure has contained the University President's and other administrative offices.

Just north of Madison Hall is Madison Bowl. A popular myth suggests the convex topography was created by slaves digging up clay for bricks and the terraces used to build the Lawn, Ranges, and the Rotunda. Over the course of the University's history Madison Bowl has served as an athletic field, as well as a track. It was first used as a field for students to gather, play a pick-up game of soccer, or listen to concerts sponsored by the University community. A prime piece of real estate located close to Grounds, it has often been considered as a site for new buildings and even an underground parking garage.

5. Phi Kappa Psi Fraternity
159 Madison Lane, 1928 by Stanislaw Makielski

In the early 1890's the Phi Kappa Psi Grand Council began pushing for all chapters to acquire chapter houses; they felt it the fraternity's first priority and announced that no new chapters would be admitted without ownership of a chapter house. Although the U.Va. Phi Kappa Psi had been occupying House E on Dawson's Row, they did not have an official chapter house at that time. From 1905 until 1913 they rented the fraternity house that Professor Peters built on Madison Lane. The chapter moved to University Place afterwards and remained there until 1926. By 1928 the Phi Psi were ready to re-establish their prominence on Madison Lane, and hired Stanislaw Makielski, architect and graduate from U.Va.'s architecture school, to design their new home. The national Phi Psi newsletter boasted of the U.Va. chapter's freshly finished house that included a dining room, dormitory, kitchen, library, guest room, chapter room, and accommodations for 21 brothers. The Phi Kappa Psi remain in this house today.

6. Student Apartments
165 Madison Lane, 1914

This house was originally built in 1914 by Eppa Rixey, Jr., an alumnus of the University and professional baseball player. Shortly after his promotion to the big leagues in Philadelphia, his earnings provided him with the means to construct this house for his mother to operate as a student boarding house. By 1919, Sigma Nu fraternity had occupied the boarding house. Even though the house lacked the colossal porticoes or the classical details of other area chapter houses, the Sigma Nu chapter occupied the house until 1928 when Louis Justement designed and built a new chapter house for the fraternity on Carr's Hill complete with classical elements such as a portico, red brick, and white trim.

7. Chi Phi Fraternity
161 Rugby Road, 1922 by Eugene Bradbury

The Chi Phi chapter house was the first fraternity house constructed after World War I, costing between $30,000 and $35,000. The house is situated on Carr's Hill quadrangle conforming to Warren Manning's master plan of 1913. The majority of the ground floor serves as public gathering space, while the upper floors provide residential rooms. Bradbury gave hierarchical importance to the public spaces by increasing both ceiling heights and room sizes. In fact, a single bedroom is one quarter of the size and about five feet lower in height compared to the chapter room. Through the use of domestic proportions, Chi Phi induces a welcoming feeling and a sense of comfort, both to pedestrians and residents alike.