Introduction

The boarding house trend began out of a need for student accommodations that the University refused to provide. The Board of Visitors set the precedent for University housing policies in 1857 when they decided that it is inexpedient for the University to undertake the building of additional dormitories, or boarding houses for the accommodation of students, unless and until it shall appear that suitable & sufficient accommodations will be afforded by private enterprise on reasonable terms. So that it is the true policy of the University to confine its operations in building to such edifices as shall be required for the accommodation of its Professors, or for public purposes." The Board's decision spurred students to look elsewhere for housing. In the first decade of the twentieth century, five boarding houses on Chancellor Street were run by single women wishing to provide students with "suitable and sufficient accommodations."

The boarding house culture was facilitated by a select group of interesting women. Most of the boarding house proprietresses were born in the few years after the Civil War from very prominent families that had been ruined financially by the fall of the South. The loss of financial support left these women at a loss. Running a boarding house was one of the few ways in which socially prominent women could make a respectable living. They provided a link between the students and the larger Charlottesville community as well as echoed the roles held by students' mothers back home - doing their best to raise good Virginia gentlemen. The passing of the boarding house proprietors - the "first generation" of women on Chancellor Street - led to the abandonment of structures once central to the University community. In the late 1970s however, the newly established University sororities bought several of the houses once owned by these prominent women, transforming them from places of feminine-generated economy to residences for organized sisterhood. Chancellor Street is once again a living feminine landscape. The houses were built and continue to exist on a domestic scale, different from the fraternity houses built on Madison Lane with large porches and proliferation of architectural pomp and circumstance. The architecture of the structures along Chancellor Street, therefore reflects the women who built and operated them as boarding houses. They were similar to the houses that these women built or would have built had they created their own families. The proximity of the houses to one another along the narrow street and the density within them would have insured that this was a thriving residential community. Now that the houses have been taken over by sororities, Chancellor Street is once again a living student community.

6. Delta Zeta Sorority (DZ)
   150 Chancellor Street, 1912

Mrs. Sallie Hamilton built this house in 1912. Judging by the massiveness of the structure and the fact that the house included so much square footage (6,839 square feet), it seems that this house was most certainly built to be a boarding house. She had come to Charlottesville to educate her sons and would care for her boarders as she would her two children. Although Mrs. Hamilton was divorced at a time when this was not necessarily common or socially acceptable, her role as a boarding house proprietor on Chancellor Street would most certainly have positively aided her reputation. Much like the Misses Dowsells or Miss Cocke, Miss Hamilton was also a good southern lady and was active in the community. She was a member of the Albemarle County Historical Society, the chairwoman of the Blue Ridge Committee of the National Society of the Colonial Dames of America, and in 1941 would publish a handbook guide to Albemarle County called "Our Country Origins." Mrs. Hamilton owned the house until 1966, when it was purchased by a private developer and rented to the Delta Tau Delta fraternity, now located further down Chancellor Street. Mrs. Hamilton's would be the last of the Chancellor Street boarding houses to close.

9. Delta Gamma Sorority (DG)
   138 Madison Lane, built between 1902 & 1907

10. Zeta Tau Alpha Sorority (Zeta)
   136 Madison Lane, built between 1907 & 1913

In the 1920's these two houses were owned by Miss Mary Minor Lewis. She purchased 136 in 1923 and later bought 138 in 1925, operating both as boarding houses. She added the present oversimplified incompatibility dormers. After her death, according to the deeds for the houses, her daughter, Elizabeth Lewis Evans, sold them to Mr. Harris. He converted the residential dwellings into apartments. Mr. Harris hired Stanislaw Makielinski, a graduate of U Va's architecture school, to do the renovations for the apartment houses in 1944. According to Sanborn maps, there used to be simple one story porches that adorned the front facade of each building, but they were removed prior to 1950, most likely to set them apart from other houses on the street. The architecture of both houses, and especially that of DG, provides a stark contrast to the architecture of the surrounding fraternity houses along Madison with their classical temple-fronted facades and abundant white trim. Chancellor Street's conversions of boarding houses to sorority houses can now be expanded to include these two sorority chapter houses on Madison Lane.
2. Betty Cocke House
125 University Avenue. Demolished

This house originally belonged to local pharmacist and doctor S.C. Chancellor. After Dr. Chancellor’s wife died in 1906, he began looking for someone to make use of his large, centrally located home, but also to take care of him. Upon meeting Betty Page Cocke, he and she immediately created an arrangement in which Cocke would care for the house and maintain it as a boarding house for her own profit while Chancellor would live there under her care as well. Due much to the fact that the house was a converted structure, it retained a distinctly domestic feel. Much of the furniture belonged to Chancellor and his wife, and other pieces were bequeathed to Cocke by the death of student, Robert D. Bollentine. Cocke continued renting the house from Chancellor until his death, upon which she bought the house in 1922.

Families applied years in advance for their sons to live at “Miss Betty’s,” and her selection process was stringent - she wanted only the best boys from the best Southern families: most had attended preparatory schools and would go on to join the “best” fraternities. Betty Cocke’s boarding house became one of the most elite in Charlottesville. Not only did she advise them in fraternity rush, but on lady-friends, too. Cocke’s students were so enthralled with her charm, that they purchased a car for her, deemed the “Struggle Buggy.” Betty Cocke remained close to her students, often called “Miss Betty’s boys,” from the early days of her boarding house up until her death.

3. St. Paul’s Memorial Church
1700 University Avenue, 1910 with renovations by Eugene Bradbury in 1926

St. Paul’s Memorial Church was established to be a mission to the University of Virginia; in 1897 Right Reverend Robert Gibson became the Bishop of Virginia and insisted that in seeking work with “neglected persons… the condition of the boys at the University of Virginia caught my attention.” In order to reach out to U.Va. Bishop Gibson envisioned a small permanent congregation that would provide a spiritual home for Episcopal students during their years at the University. On January 1, 1908, Reverend Hugh H. McLilany, the secretary of the Y.M.C.A. at the University, agreed to become the priest in charge of the proposed church. Mr. McLilany began devoting his energies toward raising the $100,000 needed to build and partially endow St. Paul’s Church. His idea was to make the church a memorial to many of the distinguished alumni, faculty and friends of the University. It would take several years to raise enough money to build a permanent church, so the trustees began considering a temporary wooden structure to serve in the interim. In August of 1910, plans were drawn up, carpenters were hired, and in two weeks the church was built, with the roof and floor being completed on Saturday evening, September 17th. The next day, Sunday, September 18, 1910, the first services of St. Paul’s Memorial Church were held. By 1922, the trustees asked Eugene Bradbury, a local architect, to design the new church. The cornerstone was laid for Bradbury’s design on April 13, 1926.

4. Chi Omega Sorority (Chi-O)
123 Chancellor Street, circa 1906

This house was built by the widowed Elizabeth Hartman and her unmarried sister Annie P. Jordan. It must have been one of the busiest boarding houses on Chancellor as it had 26 students in 1934 in addition to its owners. The two women would own the house jointly until 1951. It later was converted into apartments. In 1977, Chi Omega purchased the house and remodeled it as a sorority chapter house. The building’s lack of a classical portico signals its origin as a boarding house as opposed to a fraternity house.

5. Alpha Tau Omega Fraternity (ATO)
125 Chancellor Street, 1897 – 1900

This house was built as a boarding house by the unmarried sisters Sally and Norma Doswell. The two women descended from a prominent Southern family, their having served on General Robert E. Lee’s staff. Sally Doswell was active in the local history community as she often hosted meetings of the Daughters of the Confederacy and she wrote several books on local history topics. The women were very tolerant of their students, though Miss Sally was once heard saying, “Oh Lord, I’m ready, but please let there be no students in heaven!” ATO fraternity purchased the house in 1996.

6. Kappa Alpha Theta Sorority (Theta)
127 Chancellor Street, circa 1909

This house was built by Adelaide Saunders and her then unmarried daughter, Mary Lucille. The two operated it together as a boarding house until 1939, when Mary Lucille Palmer (now married and living in the house with her husband and daughter) took over the business with her unmarried sister Florence Saunders. The house had a proper boarding house as it had both rooms to let and served three meals a day to the larger University community. Supposedly, Mrs. Saunders’ cooking was so good that it made other boarding house proprietresses on Chancellor Street jealous! In 1909 report on the boarding houses by the University, Mrs. Saunders is asked to keep her cow in the stable and to keep her backyard cleaner. Things had certainly changed by 1978, when the Theta sorority bought and renovated the house.

7. Kappa Delta Sorority (KD)
136 Chancellor Street, built between 1896 and 1905

The widowed Isabell H. Perkins began operating a boarding house out of this home in 1903. Active in the larger University community, she catered for University events. A series of letters from University First-year, Leigh Newell, written to her mother in 1910, are quite revealing of Mrs. Perkins and her boarding house. The letter reads, “This place is all I had hoped for. The room is all that was said of it. It is completely furnished. Washstand, chiffonier, wardrobe, bed, table, and my two trunks still leave me lots of room. The room itself is on the ground floor, the windows are heavily screened with steel screen. Room about the size of the parlor. I have unpacked but have not decorated. Mrs. P gave full permission to put away things as I wanted. She is immensely fat but I like her very much.” After Mrs. Perkins’ death in 1924, the house was purchased by the widow of an Episcopal minister, Elizabeth H. Micou, who had previously run a boarding house on Elliewood Avenue. Chancellor Street was, therefore, as much a desirable place to live for students as it was a desirable and profitable place for women to conduct business.