ACT I  ·  The Nursery  

Brotherhood in the First House of Zeta Psi

When in their daily business, and amid the cares and trials of life, [our graduates] look back upon their college days, which are to return no more, the happy hours which they have spent in their college societies, come up before them as their happiest memories.

“Zeta psi,” University Echo, October 1871

In the city, where he sits on a stool all day, as fixed as a postage stamp, he is so like all the others on stools that you recognize him not by his face but by his stool, but at home the way to gratify him is to say that he has a distinct personality.

Mr. Darling as first described in Peter Pan

The desperate man, who has not been out in the fresh air for days, has now lost all self-control.

Mr. Darling just before he fires Nana, the Saint Bernard, in Peter Pan

On the 16th of July 1873, twelve men stood before President Daniel Coit Gilman in the still-unfinished North College (which soon became known as North Hall) to receive their degrees from the University of California. The first building of the new university stood on a cleared, gently rising slope. With its single lonely building and empty surrounds, the campus was still a place of dreams and plans more than of reality—quite fitting for the site of a Never Land. These were the early days of the Never Land that would come to be known as “Cal.” The young men of the campus had come from fine preparatory schools and, in many cases, had descended from old East Coast blood.

The dreams about the campus were not for these new graduates but for future generations of students. These twelve had completed their degree work on the campus of the former College of California in downtown Oakland, and Temescal and Oakland had been the sites of their adventures and trials. Their class had contained twenty-four people at the start, but their numbers had dwindled to half of that.
They were the first to have completed a full four years at the new University of California, and they are immortalized in university history as “the twelve apostles.” While the twelve are bonded together in history by their shared achievement, seven of these men shared another bond—brotherhood. George Ainsworth, John Bolton, James Budd, George C. Edwards, Lester Hawkins, Clarence Wetmore, and Thomas Woodward were brothers in the Iota chapter of Zeta Psi fraternity.

Perhaps it is fitting that the original graduating class of Zetes contained the same number of persons as Peter’s band of Lost Boys. These early Zetes still had the smell of the nursery on them: domesticity and civilization, not animal skins, were draped across their shoulders. There was a sense of wildness about them; they could not be part of the young state of California without it. This wild streak is part of even the civilized manhood of California, and its constant presence makes the historical transition from manliness to masculinity seem natural and inevitable. While men of the East consciously remade themselves in the masculine model, the men of the West could amplify the things they were already doing and tweak the stories they told about themselves accordingly. Masculinity was born in the West.

The Iota chapter of Zeta Psi was founded in 1870, before the new campus was completed. The October 1871 issue of the University Echo announced its founding. The anonymous newspaper article stated that the population of the University of California had grown to such an extent that it could now support the existence of a secret society like those that flourished on all the East Coast college campuses. The implication was that, to be a great university, California needed secret societies. Being the first fraternity on campus has always been a source of pride for the Zeta Psi brothers. Their status as first translated into their position in the university yearbook, The Blue and Gold, where fraternities were listed by the order of their founding—not alphabetically—until the 1920s. Pride is already evident in the wording of the announcement: “This is, we believe, the first chapter, of any such organization, that has been established on the Pacific Coast.” Over time, Zete histories expanded their colonial boundaries to declare themselves the first fraternity “West of the Rockies” or “West of the Mississippi.”

Those familiar with modern fraternities may be surprised to read how the article’s author describes secret societies: “These societies are nearly all different in their objects, but almost all of them are to some extent literary in their character, requiring their members at stated times to meet and deliver essays and orations upon various subjects of interest to the student.” This description of fraternal contributions to campus life shaped Zeta Psi’s public face during the first decades of its existence. The author then justifies the need for fraternities: “In our secret societies we
are bound together by sacred ties, as brothers. It is these societies which give tone and spirit to college life. The hour which we spend together in brotherly love is a pleasant recreation from our books and college duties.”

In an 1899 history of the chapter, William Scott Foster ('00) describes the chapter’s founding: “From the very start the qualifications for membership were of the very highest, the aim being to gather together into closer bonds of friendship a company of manly, congenial men whose union would promote zeal in study, the formation of warm and lifelong friendships, and whose combined influence in the college should ever be exerted in the direction of progress.” The reality of the founding and selection of members seems to have been less proscribed than indicated in this description. There is a strong correlation between the membership of the Durant Rhetorical Society and the original members of Zeta Psi. In April of 1871, before the fraternity was announced, the officers of the rhetorical society were published. Included were six future Zetes. Officers for the following term included six more Zetes, nearly all the officers. In later years, the fraternities would be accused of taking over student organizations like this one. However, it is clear from a chronological perspective that the Durant Rhetorical Society made Zeta Psi, not the reverse.

The 1899 self-description of the organization is worth considering further for its language. The men of Zeta Psi were to be “manly” and “congenial,” their contributions to the college should be “in the direction of progress.” These ideas are in keeping with Gail Bederman’s (and others’) characterization of Victorian manhood as focusing on civility and civilization building. The young men of Zeta Psi were living on what was still recognized as the American frontier. The massacre at Wounded Knee and Turner’s declaration that the frontier had been closed were twenty-some years in the future. As noted earlier, the University of California itself was seen as evidence of the civilizing influences of American society on the former Spanish and Mexican colony. The United States was still a growing country, at a time when expansion was seen as a natural right of civilized (white) men.

In other ways, the early members of Zeta Psi were on the forefront of the shifts in masculinity already beginning to occur. Other men at the turn of the twentieth century would come to dream about the great possibilities of the western frontier and its adventurous lifestyle while reading such authors as Zane Grey and Jack London, but the young men of Zeta Psi were already living on the frontier. Succeeding generations would idolize the wildness of the West, but these men saw its great potential for being civilized and ordered. Many of the brothers in their postgraduate lives became involved in building the railroad and steamship industries.
that connected California to the rest of the country; others were surveyors or naturalists, categorizing and charting the available resources. Still others worked in the lucrative industry of mining; and a significant number literally served as architects of the young state in a variety of elected and appointed positions in the California government. While later generations might see them as romantic frontiersmen, their activities and accomplishments mark these men as civilizers.

There was a racial dimension to this discourse as well. The Spanish, who had occupied California for nearly a hundred years before its absorption by the United States, had established a racial hierarchy that dictated social movement in the colony of Alta California. That hierarchy, however, was fluid and mobility was possible. During the American period, some of this fluidity remained, yet there were also attempts to reassert the standards of eastern society in the new state. It was common for California pioneers to brag of their East Coast origins. Kevin Starr has called this an attitude of “Anglo-Saxonism,” one advocated by such diverse men as author Jack London and David Starr Jordan, president of Stanford University. Anglo-Saxonism was a vision of whiteness that reified those whose roots were planted in England and Germany, but which also allowed for the admittance of wealthy persons of French and even Italian and Irish ancestry and, in the early twentieth century, eastern Europeans. This whiteness was somewhat more inclusive than that of the East Coast, where Catholicism, like Judaism, was seen as a clear marker of “otherness.”

The men of Zeta Psi’s Iota chapter may have been more diverse than East Coast chapters, but all considered themselves to be their century’s equivalent of “white.”

This subject position came with certain assumptions about the world and their place in it. Through their actions, we can see how these young men created a persona of civility within the campus community. We can also see how a commitment to civility shaped, in ways that are clearly evident in the materials of their everyday life, how they expressed their loyalty and fraternity to one another. And herein lies the contradiction in life at the early Zete house: even in the homosocial space of the fraternity house, they depended on the vocabularies of domesticity used by their mothers. In their outlooks, goals, and self-images, these men were fundamentally different from the later men of Zeta Psi, who came to outgrow the first fraternity house. But this is only the first act of our play, and I do not wish to give away too much of the story.

In this act we will accomplish several tasks. First I introduce you more fully to the men of Zeta Psi: their backgrounds, their accomplishments, and how they created a sense of brotherhood. This act takes place mainly in the house, the nursery to
be exact, the space where a sense of family was created and notions of gendered performances were instilled and nurtured. Together we will look more closely at the house and its materials, and at how the men became brothers. We also see in this act the seeds of discontentment and frustration with a household that drips with the rituals and practices of the female-dominated domestic sphere.

THE BROTHERS OF ZETA PSI

Who then, were, the men of Zeta Psi? They may have lived in an early Never Land, but it is important to recognize that the earliest among them were not Lost Boys. Instead, they were more like John and Michael Darling, young men ready to leave the nursery for the delights of Never Land. John and Michael are shaped by the civilizing influences of domesticity. They embrace a fierce nationalistic pride and disdain those who would question the empire as the pirates do. These boys are on their way to becoming like their father: mediocre, frustrated, and ostracized by the family. The opportunity to become Lost Boys offers them another possible future. The primary women in the Darling boys’ lives are both mother figures: Wendy, who serves as a mother in the nursery; and their biological mother, Mrs. Darling. While Mr. Darling’s work has removed him from most of their day-to-day affairs, the boys still have a clear sense of their natural superiority over women. Even as Wendy tries to make them play house, John makes the exercise into a discourse on male superiority:

JOHN (good naturedly). I am happy to inform you, Mrs. Darling, that you are now a mother. (WENDY gives way to ecstasy) You have missed the chief thing; you haven’t asked, “boy or girl?”

WENDY. I am so glad to have one at all, I don’t care which it is.

JOHN (crushingly). That is just the difference between gentlemen and ladies. Now you tell me.

WENDY. I am happy to acquaint you, Mr. Darling, you are now a father.

JOHN. Boy or girl?

WENDY (presenting herself). Girl.

JOHN. Tuts.

WENDY. You Horrid.
John then beams when Wendy tells him he has a son, provoking Wendy to call him hateful.\textsuperscript{15}

While John and Michael have a sense that a world awaits them outside the nursery, for the time being being the nursery, with its feminizing influences, is their primary world. The same was true for the first men of Zeta Psi. They entered college so they would become better equipped to conquer the public sphere they would soon enter, but were still young in the ways of the world. Most came to college directly from one of the limited number of prep schools in Oakland and San Francisco. Statistics reported in \textit{The Blue and Gold} yearbook demonstrate that most seniors left the university at twenty-one or twenty-two years of age, much as today. Yet, a surprising number entered when they were as young as sixteen. So let us now consider more closely the actual men of Zeta Psi.\textsuperscript{16}

\textbf{IDENTIFYING THE MEN OF ZETA PSI}

Providing a census of Zeta Psi brothers would seem to be a straightforward venture. After all, many available documents provide this information. The national chapter of Zeta Psi compiled comprehensive lists of its alumni that it published in 1899 and 1926. The 1899 publication is particularly interesting in that it provides brief biographies of the brothers’ accomplishments while at the university and afterward. The biographies are clearly self-reports and, as such, have differing levels of detail. Historically speaking, this is the one time when being a braggart is a desirable personality trait. The most comprehensive of the biographies include place of birth, parents’ names, high school attended, college activities, date of marriage, names of spouse and children, names of other family members who joined Zeta Psi, and significant life accomplishments.

The 1926 publication is significantly smaller and lists only the brothers’ current addresses or years of death by class year. Similar information can be found in a series of alumni registers published by the University of California’s Alumni Association. The alumni records are less useful for inventorying the population of Zeta Psi, since those registers list only persons who graduated, a feat a number of Zetes failed to achieve.\textsuperscript{17}

A complementary source of demographic information is \textit{The Blue and Gold}, which lists each fraternity’s membership. The advantage of the \textit{Blue and Gold} listings is that they allow one to determine house population on a year-by-year basis. One disadvantage, however, is that this source tends to slightly underestimate the population—pledging took place during the entire year, but submissions to \textit{The Blue and Gold} were due in February. Since, in its early days, it was not unusual for
the fraternity to admit men at any stage in their college career, seniors who rushed late in the year could conceivably never show up in any volume of the yearbook.

A final source of demographic information is Iota’s membership planks recovered from the party room. As mentioned before, we did not recover a complete set of years, but what we do have represents a significant number of years. The existence of the complementary evidence from the Zeta Psi registers and The Blue and Gold yearbooks makes it possible to fully contextualize the planks’ role in fraternity life. It is worth noting that, although I have three different sources detailing the membership of Zeta Psi, none of them completely agree with any of the others. For instance, suppose we use just the names listed on the planks for the period of 1876 through 1908: this gives us a population of 173 Zetes (see appendix 1). The 1926 register, however, lists 181 Zeta Psi members for this same period. The difference in these two populations is small; in contrast, The Blue and Gold for the same period lists only 127 seniors.

This phenomenon does not mean that one particular source of evidence is more reliable than another, just that they represent different moments of time and different kinds of measures. Some of these differences are a result of process—there was a high dropout rate among all students of the University of California. Not everyone recognized as a brother became an alumnus of the university, so counting seniors in The Blue and Gold should always result in a smaller count. Moreover, I found names on the planks that do not appear in Zeta Psi’s register—clearly, house members saw these persons as part of their brotherhood, but for whatever reason they were never recognized by the national chapter.

For our purposes, we do not need the brothers to hold still at a particular moment so we can count them. The variations remind us that brotherhood was socially constructed and fluid—perception of brotherhood in one arena did not guarantee recognition of brotherhood in another. The institution was bigger than any of its individual members. However, in all discussions of population trends, I identify which source(s) of population evidence I am using.

So, given this lengthy introduction, what can I say in general about the men of Zeta Psi during the occupation of the first chapter house? First, in the original house, no more than twenty men lived together at a time. At times, this number was much smaller. A surprising number of brothers were California natives. Given that the state had been part of the United States only since 1850, the first Zetes were among the first generation of American-born Californians (table 3). Among the brothers in the house from 1870 to 1880; 34 percent had been born in California; from 1881 to 1890, this increased to 68 percent; and from 1900 to 1910, nearly 77
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percent of the brothers had been born in California. The California-born brothers hailed from all over the state—from San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Sonoma, as well as, of course, from towns like Placer, Marysville, and Chico in the gold country of the Sierra Nevada.\(^\text{18}\) During a time when more and more outsiders came to Cal, Zeta Psi brothers were increasingly likely to have been born in the state.

Still, as has always been the case in California, many of the brothers came to the state from other places. Not surprisingly, the first decade of Zeta Psi brothers was the most geographically diverse, with brothers hailing from seventeen other states (table I-1), and with New York, Indiana, Oregon, and Missouri contributing the greatest numbers. One brother had been born abroad, in Panama. From 1881 to 1890, brothers had come from nine states other than California, with several coming from New York and Wisconsin. Two internationally born brothers were now members—one born in Chihuahua, Mexico, the other, British Columbia, Canada. From 1891 to 1900, only seven additional states contributed brothers, with Oregon, Nevada, and New York being the only states to contribute multiple members. One brother had been born in Ireland, and another, in Japan.\(^\text{19}\)

Zeta Psi suffered from accusations that it was an overly exclusive and undemocratic fraternity. The demographic shift from a relatively geographically diverse population to one more clearly biased toward native Californians may be a measure of some of the fraternity’s exclusiveness—were they selecting members primarily from established California families? A number of the Zetes came from well-known families that had deep roots in East Coast genealogies. George Edwards was said to be a descendent of New England’s fiery minister Jonathan Edwards.\(^\text{20}\) Joseph Rowell was the son of a well-known minister whose family could be traced back to Thomas Rowell, who had come to the American colonies in 1658.\(^\text{21}\) Other names from the Zeta Psi register have deep histories in California, names like LeConte, Hittell, Dwinelle, and Russell.\(^\text{22}\) Through time, Zeta Psi drew many of its new members from legacies—relatives of other Zeta Psi brothers and alumni. Since legacies would be the nephews, cousins, sons or other relatives of earlier classes of Zetes, one would expect legacies to hail almost exclusively from California.

THE DOMESTIC SPACE OF ZETA PSI

Advocates for fraternities often wrote that one of the advantages of fraternity life was that it provided a substitute home for young men living away for the first time in their lives.\(^\text{23}\) Living together was an important aspect of the fraternity’s shared experience. That the university provided no housing for its students made sharing
lodging as a group all the more desirable. After the fraternity’s founding, the num-
ber of brothers grew quickly, and as early as the fall of 1873 the group secured a
home for itself in a place called the Berkeley Farm House. The following year, they
rented Humboldt Hall, in Oakland, about two miles from the university campus.
The fraternity attempted to purchase this property, and failing to secure it, moved
again, to a house on Dwight Way. In the summer of 1876, they purchased a plot of
land on the western edge of campus, on what would become College Avenue, and
built a modest three-story house.\textsuperscript{24} According to fraternity history, the dedication
of the house was attended by elders; brothers I. T. Hinton, William Dargie, W. M.
Van Dyke, Horry Meek, and D. B. Fairbanks were cited as being “owed a heavy
debt in this matter.”\textsuperscript{25}

Early photographs of the house show that it was the first built on that portion of
what was then called Audubon Street (figure 6). The neighborhood was barely set-
tled, and the block between Audubon and Piedmont had been subdivided into eigh-
teen different plots with thirteen different owners. The Zeta Psi plot is listed under
the names of A. L. Whitney and D. B. Fairbanks, two of the founding members.\textsuperscript{26}
Eventually, a neighborhood inhabited by college professors and staff, merchants, families, vocal feminists, and additional fraternities developed in the area. An 1880 article from the newspaper the *Berkeleyan* gives a detailed description of the first house.

It is three stories in height, with a mansard roof and admirably arranged for the accommodation of the members of the society. On the first floor, there is a spacious entrance hall and on the right an elegant parlor, from which folding doors open into a spacious sitting-room; and when occasion requires the folding doors can be thrown back, and the two rooms, made one. Back on the sitting room is a small apartment, which can be used as a committee room. On the left of the entrance hall is the spacious dining room, and back of that a well-arranged kitchen with the necessary appurtenances. At the end of the hall is the linen room, and adjoining this is an elegant bath room. On the second floor are admirably arranged sleeping apartments, each provided with a grate, marble wash basin, closet for clothes, etc. The space on the third floor is devoted partly to sleeping and study rooms.17

During the 2001 archaeological excavations at the standing chapter house, we were able to locate a portion of the first house’s foundation still preserved: part of the stairs and front porch (figure 7).

**Figure 7**
Detail of the foundation of the 1876 Zeta Psi house, found in 2001.
I should perhaps pause a moment to explain—you may wonder how we found a house that had been moved somewhere else, back at its original location. James Barrie describes Wendy’s little house in Never Land as wandering about looking for anyone who needs it. Nothing so whimsical is the explanation here. Although the house structure was picked up, turned, and moved back on the lot, the brick foundation that once supported the structure was left behind. Apparently, the value of the foundation’s bricks did not justify the work it would have taken to dig them out. This is a boon for historical archaeologists—the foundation is really the only part of a structure we tend to find anyway. Foundations are places where trash tends to accumulate, and what we really hope to find is trash and some sort of feature—like remains of a building, fence post, drainage ditch, or something similar—that will help explain why the trash accumulated where it did.

Judging from photographs of other houses moved at the time, the first chapter house was probably moved using horse-powered labor, which is less detrimental to the ground surface than modern trucks and backhoes. As a result, not only do we have portions of the structure, but we also have parts of collapsed water drainage pipes and iron water pipes that ran in the front of the building, and yes, a respectable accumulation of trash.

If we were to find only a single portion of the house, this was one of the best locations to find. Corners, like the one at the intersection of the porch and stairs, are good places for trash to collect; corners also let us know exactly where on the house we are, something that would have been impossible had we uncovered only a straight length of wall.

As we worked on the dig, the shape of the foundation convinced me that we must be at the front porch, but the coup d’état came when, several meters away, students uncovered a strange iron artifact. It appeared to be some sort of rectangular object made out of woven iron wire. At first my students and I wondered if it was a strange interior of a cushion, but an Iota-scrapbook photograph taken of Zetes sitting on the porch steps solved the mystery—it was a heavy-duty welcome mat/foot scraper. Apparently it was left behind by the brothers when they abandoned the house. Other photographs from the same scrapbook show that the front steps and porch were popular social spaces for the brothers. Given its elevation and relative lack of surrounding buildings, the porch would have featured a spectacular view of the Golden Gate.

Our understanding of the social space of this house is limited to what we gleaned from a few photographs showing some interior views, and a small number of descriptions of life at the fraternity house, as in the newspaper account mentioned earlier. Our archaeological finds provide further insights into the kinds of materials used within the
house. In general, our understanding of life in this house comes from a relatively small number of sources. Still, when combined with photographic and documentary evidence, there is much we can say about life inside the first Zeta chapter house.

CREATING BONDS OF CLASS AND BROTHERHOOD

College life in the nineteenth century was extremely class oriented—in ways beyond socioeconomics. From their entry into the university until their graduation day, students were identified en masse by their class year and their class status. Freshmen, not surprisingly, occupied the lowest rung of the university social ladder. Newspaper accounts make it clear that they were targeted as the butts of jokes and hazing ranging from the informal to the formal, from gentle to brutal. A novel depicting life at Cal in the 1890s recounts how a freshman straight off the train from the south is told by two sophomores that to register he must get back on the train and go to the university headquarters in Oakland. The young man is saved when an older woman familiar with sophomores’ pranks intercedes.30

Class hazing was ritualized in annual events. The “Freshman Rush” was ultimately little more than a giant brawl between the freshman and sophomore classes. Class presidents were supposed to lead their respective classes into battle. Secret calls were devised to identify class members to one another—sophomores had the advantage of knowing their classmates, whereas freshmen did not. The two classes met in battle (women were delegated to the sidelines to cheer for their male brethren), where the objective was to wrestle a member of the opposite class to the ground and tie his hands and feet so he could not escape. The captured men were carried to the opposite side’s area and unceremoniously piled up. Some men were involved in trying to free captives while others were trying to capture opponents. The whole affair was not over until one entire class was tied up. It probably also goes without saying that these events attracted a fair number of observers from other classes and from outside the university.31 An 1881 article in the student paper, the Occident provides an insightful description of the aftermath: “Soon the campus was deserted, and there was no sign of the recent carnage there, except the rags of various hues, remains of what had probably once been clothing, but was now mutilated beyond recognition. Those who had taken part in rush now looked like members of the Mayay race. The dry grass of the campus having been burned a few days before, the ground was left covered in black ashes. This made rolling about on Mother Earth more delightful than usual.”32
In case our California students appear too barbaric, it is important to stress that hazing events were common at universities of the time. By the end of the nineteenth century, however—even at the University of California—these events were increasingly frowned on as juvenile and dangerous.33

Another festivity that marked the annual college cycle was the Bourdon Burial. This event was based on a similar ritual at Yale. Bourdon and Minto were authors of two particularly detested freshman primers. To celebrate their passage from freshmen to sophomores, the freshmen oversaw the cremation of the two primers (or stand-ins), enclosed the ashes in a small coffin, and led a funeral procession through the campus, stopping at Charter Hill to hold a mock funeral. Orators elected from the freshmen class served as memorialists for the deceased. In the early days, the procession was followed by a bust, or spree, as large parties featuring alcoholic beverages were called. Students set a subscription price that everyone was expected to pay to in order to cover the cost of the alcohol.34 In The Blue and Gold, the class of 1876 took credit for introducing this burial tradition: “’76 was the first class on this coast to introduce the time honored practice of ‘buying the Analytics.’ Few were the eyes that grew not moist as with measured tread to the sound of a hundred toot horns we bore her to her last resting place.”35

There was a competitive class element to this. Sophomores would do their best to intercept the coffin and disrupt the event. Sometimes these competitions became a little too extreme, with orators kidnapped and held hostage.36 It was also a tradition for each class to present in the annual yearbook a history of their great achievements of the year and to describe what ongoing legacy(ies) they had created. The success or failure of the Bourdon Burial was often discussed by the hosting class’s historian. The class of ’79 was particularly proud of their Bourdon: a majority vote had determined it would be a dry affair, without the customary bust following. As noted in The Blue and Gold, “This, it is conceded by all, was the grandest class affair ever known to the University. What with music, stirring oratory, grand illumination, drinking, hallooing, and solemn reverential praying attending upon the funeral obsequies, an impression was made upon those present that neither time nor distance can ever efface. And we feel proud to add that, although beer and eggnog were supplied in abundance, it is to be mentioned as a most remarkable phenomenon that not one of all of those of ’79 who were present became intoxicated.”37

While certain events, like Junior Day, an annual day when the juniors celebrated their talents and accomplishments, and the Bourdon Burial, were moments in time that galvanized classes against one another, class status shaped everyday life at the university as well. At different times, freshmen were required to wear beanies.
Sophomore hat styles changed, but bowlers were popular for a time. The wearing of gray top hats was limited to junior men, and black top hats to senior men. To lose one’s hat would be a sign of loss of status. Senior men could be seen with canes or smoking pipes, as fitting their status, but a freshman caught with such an affectation would be punished. Seniors’ hats, while typically beat up to demonstrate seniors’ lack of concern for social niceties, were not decorated. In contrast, the hats of the junior classmen might bear Greek fraternity letters or the familiar Cal cheer “Oski! Wow! Wow!” Senior men’s status was also reinforced by their special study room, reserved for them in Senior Hall.  

Moving from one class level to another was not always automatic. Freshmen had to pass a series of exams in order to graduate to the next level. In an 1879 tirade against fraternities, a writer in the antifraternity paper the *Oestrus* noted, “Look at the records of the society-men, and you will see that an immense percentage has been successively remanded to the lower classes.” There may be some merit to this criticism. As we will see, a number of Zetes magically advanced from their second freshman year to junior or even senior status, and a surprising number did not graduate.

### CLASS YEAR IN FRATERNAL LIFE

Given the class demarcations that shaped everyday life in the broader campus community, it is surprising that year rank was also a primary means of organizing life at the fraternity house. Interviews with brothers who had lived in the Iota chapter house in the 1920s and onward demonstrate this. Student class-year identities were much more important in the nineteenth-century, and this facet of fraternity life may have originated in the nineteenth century. As early as the 1920s, house life was structured by class. The seniors were the elders of the household and, as such, served as the symbolic house heads. They held the officers’ positions, represented the house in public matters, and derived all benefits that came with seniority—the largest rooms, single rooms when available, and the privileges of having first food service at dinner, directing rush and initiation ceremonies, and commanding the labor and support of brothers who were lower classmen.

*For the Blue and Gold*, a fictionalized account of life at Cal in the 1890s, describes the role of freshmen in a fraternity house.

“’Phone, ’phone, wake up, there, freshman, step lively.”

“Yes, it’s his job to answer the ’phone,” explained Boyce. “Each freshie has something special to do. I carved last year, and I tell you I was glad to graduate...
from it. Here, freshman, what sort of a slice is that to give to company? You couldn’t carve a roll of butter.”

Later, freshmen are described bringing out the keg of beer and rushing back and forth in a sweat, serving steins of beer and listening to complaints about their ability to draw a proper mug of beer.

While the relegation of chores to the underclassmen could be seen as merely part of a larger culture of class-based hazing, it has greater significance than that. For men living together in a household, it was structurally important to define roles that would facilitate household management yet not symbolically feminize younger members. Remember, household management was seen as clearly part of the realm of women’s work. Yet in a household full of men, it was work that still needed to be done. The structure of household relations within the fraternity house ensured that no brother was placed in the role of “symbolic woman.” Since freshmen represented the future leaders of the fraternity, they could not be put in a position that would permanently undermine their relationship to the other brothers.

In the early twentieth century, a range of strategies and practices would be employed in the fraternity to constantly reaffirm all brothers’ status as masculine, but during the early nineteenth century this seems to have been achieved through age-grade differentiations. Just as a freshman could look forward to burning Bourdon and Minto at the end of the year, the fraternity pledge could look forward to freedom from certain household chores.

RUSHING

The practice of rushing brought new members to the house. Few sources actually discuss what the processes of rushing and initiation entailed at this time. Ironically, an antifraternity column in the *Oestrus* provides some of the best descriptions of the rushing process in an 1879 warning to incoming freshmen. “Some of you, especially those who have considerable money to spend, will soon be approached, if you have not been approached already, by members of the upper classes. These men will be very friendly with you, they will be your constant companions; they will ask you to dine with them, they will treat you to the best things which the place affords, they will flatter and cajole you, till you will imagine to yourselves that you must be important persons.” In particular, the authors were concerned about the bad influences of Zeta Psi:
The members of Zeta Psi, in addition to practicing upon you all the arts mentioned above, will take you to their house, the advantages of which will be pointed out, they will show you a Greek Letter Pin, set with any precious stones you may desire, the cost of which would make you feel deep into your pockets; they will doubtless tell you that the fraternities are the cream of university society, and promise you the best time in the world if you but join them. If you express a desire to spend a good part of your time in study, they will tell you how high their men have stood in their classes, because they had had the advantages of association, etc.\footnote{42}

By the time the \textit{Oestrus} article was written, there was a total of four fraternities on campus: Zeta Psi (founded 1870), Chi Phi (founded 1875), Delta Kappa Epsilon (founded 1876), and Beta Theta Pi (1879). It may be that rushing was a competitive practice by that time, since more organizations were recruiting men. However, an examination of Zeta Psi’s roles suggests that recruitment was a more organic social process than the \textit{Oestrus} column might lead one to believe.

For instance, a review of the 1876 \textit{Blue and Gold} shows that J. Mailliard, F. P. McLean, W. M. Van Dyke, and W. H. Nicholson were members of the Durant Rhetorical Society in the year before they became members of Zeta Psi. Their participation in the group would have made them known to the brothers before they were recruited by the fraternity. Likewise, Mailliard would have been known to a number of brothers from his participation in the Glee Club. Joseph Hutchinson, another future Zete, would have met Frank Solinsky and Vincent Hook through the Neoelian Rhetorical Society, and any of eight other brothers through the Glee Club. In other words, there is evidence that recruitment was initially based on compatibility.\footnote{43}

Antifraternity newspapers in the late 1870s and early 1880s, suggested that the rushing process, or “roping in,” as the process of trying to quickly secure the best members of the incoming class was called, made it too difficult for fraternities to realistically select compatible freshman members. These papers argued that fraternities should not rush until the second semester. By 1928, this was actually the official practice of the Greek organizations on campus.\footnote{44} In the case of Zeta Psi, while the fraternity added a number of freshmen each year, there is ample evidence that they also recruited men throughout their college careers. In particular, the fraternity recruited senior classmen during the years when, for whatever reason, that house would have otherwise lacked members of that class. For instance, the 1892 \textit{Blue and Gold} showed that Zeta Psi had no senior members, but both Zeta Psi’s registers
and the panels show that Henry Beatty Denson and Walter Reno Hannah joined the fraternity that year as seniors.\textsuperscript{45} Because of the age-grade hierarchy, having a house without senior members would have meant having a family without a symbolic head. Adding men at such a late date in their college career ensured the health of the house. Given seniors’ high status both on campus and in the house hierarchy, these had to be men well thought of by the rest of the brotherhood.

An 1873 article about secret societies in the \textit{University Echo} (presumably written by one or more of the Zete editors) states the philosophy of fraternal selection: “Through his fraternity he comes into intimate relations with those of congenial nature to himself, for if they were not, either he would not join them, or they would refuse to admit him.”\textsuperscript{46}

The book \textit{For the Blue and Gold} describes rushing during the 1890s. After proving himself an able football player, the protagonist, James Rawson, is invited to “Gamma Delta Epsilon” on Bancroft. Though Rawson seems unaware of it, he is being rushed. He is shown the admirable house and its furnishings, and, as a guest, he is served first at the dinner table. He is shown the rooms of the house, including the bedrooms. Then the billiards table is moved out of the way and a keg of beer is rolled in. At the height of festivities, the house calls for a toast to Jim. He leaves the fraternity house with warm feelings of regard for the fraternity men. While the novel’s author, Joy Lichtenstein, gives plenty of space to the popular antifraternity arguments of the time, he also clearly is taken with the romance of what fraternities are supposed to represent—. Rawson states, “They struck me as a mighty fine lot of boys—gentlemen, all of them. It’s an ideal sort of life those fellows live there—they’re just like brothers.”\textsuperscript{47}

While fraternities were to instill a sense of fictive brotherhood in their members, consanguineal brotherhood was also an important factor in the selection of fraternity brothers. While descending kin (fathers, sons, grandsons, uncles, nephews, cousins) become a contributing source of legacy members later, in the early days of Zeta Psi the most likely kinship relationship between fraternal brothers was blood brotherhood. The Whitworths, Mailliards, Budds, Fairbankses, Meeks, Stillmans, McGillivrays, and Sherwoods were families who contributed multiple brothers to the fraternity. George Ainsworth led extended-family members to the Zetes: his brothers-in-law, John and Albert Sutton. Joseph Mailliard brought both his brother, John, and his cousin Elliot McAllister into the fraternity.

Legacies of this type, while not forming the majority of the pledges, were a significant proportion of the fraternal population through time. Between the years of 1870 and 1880, out of sixty-eight fraternity members who graduated, twelve identi-
fied as having relatives in Zeta Psi (almost 18 percent). In the period from 1881 to 1890, sixteen of sixty-eight registered entrants to the fraternity (23.5 percent) listed relatives in Zeta Psi; and finally, during the period from 1891 to 1900, a period when membership in the fraternity was dropping, fifteen of fifty-eight graduates who were members of the fraternity had family members in the fraternity (26 percent). The numbers of brothers who had other family members in the fraternity would contribute to the aura of exclusivity surrounding fraternities and would prompt the accusation that they were undemocratic institutions.48

In at least four cases, according to the 1899 register of Zeta Psi, brotherhood in Zeta Psi seems to have led to additional bonds of brotherhood. The 1894 marriage of Albert Sutton (class of 1889) and Ethel Fidelia Meek made Albert an in-law of William (class of 1888) and Horry Meek (class of 1877). In 1898, Caius Tacitus Ryland (class of 1891) married Agnes Duhring, the sister of Frederick Thomas Duhring (class of 1889). Neither of these young ladies appear in the student rolls at Cal and so must have met their future husbands through their brothers. The bride of Arthur Cross (1887), Elsie Chalip Pheby, whom he married in 1893, was sister to his fraternity brothers Frederick Pheby (1893) and I. B. Pheby (1895). Frederick Willis (1890) married Annie Mabel Rideout, who, given her distinctive last name, must have been related to his Zete brother Norman Rideout (1882). No doubt there were more intermarriages. Through time, then, the fictive family tree of fraternity genealogy came to intersect at points with biological genealogy.49

Even though the 1899 register of Zeta Psi provides only four instances of intermarriage between fraternity men’s families during the 1870–1903 period (and note that many men from the classes of the mid-1890s onward were not yet married when this register was compiled), it is still reasonable to think that one of the advantages of membership in the fraternity was the opportunity to meet appropriate marriage partners. Co-eds were not necessarily seen as appropriate matches for the fraternity men. There is little evidence of intermarriage between Zetes and university women during the occupation of the first house.

To illustrate my point, I have evidence of three fraternity brothers marrying co-eds. A comparison of wives’ names listed in the Zeta Psi register with the 1905 Alumni Association Register from the University of California identified two coed wives. J. E. Frick, who himself failed to graduate from the university, married his classmate Nannie Northrup Ridge, graduate of the class of 1883. Some Zetes may have met their brides at the university and married them before graduation. If this were the case, I’d be able to identify the couples only through other means. This is the case for John Elliot Budd (1874), who married Mary Haste (1878). The couple
wed in 1876, well before Mary would have completed her course of education. I know of this marriage only because of a cartoon in the 1882 *Blue and Gold* captioned, “The Advantages of Co-education,” which shows a bridal couple along with a list of names and class years. The final marriage I’ve identified between a Zete and a Cal alumna falls outside the expected pattern. J. N. LeConte, Zete class of 1891, who later became a professor of mechanical engineering at the university, married Helen Marion Gumpertz, class of 1884. In this case, the difference in years between their degrees suggests they did not meet as students at Cal. LeConte’s father served as president of the university, and it is tempting to wonder whether the couple met through that connection. For the most part, whatever qualities Zete men were looking for in a marriage partner, these did not include “college graduate.”

Even though the fraternity brothers’ ranks may have included kin, the object of fraternity was to create a new family that had both lateral and vertical dimensions. Items from the *University Echo* refer to Zete alumni returning to the house to visit, and to dinner parties attended by active and alumni members, which were held at various restaurants. Photographs from a Zete scrapbook from the early 1890s demonstrate that on occasion mixed-age groups of men dined and toasted together in the first fraternity house. In *The Blue and Gold* yearbooks published during the occupation of the first house, it was common for many of the fraternities to list their “Fraters in Urbanes,” which indicated those brothers who were still locally situated and involved in the fraternity house’s life.

Zete alumni were well represented in the early faculty of the university. Leander L. Hawkins (1873) was hired to teach civil engineering, and George C. Edwards was hired as an instructor in mathematics, eventually rising to the level of associate professor. The latter remained active on the campus until his death in 1930. Joseph Rowell was hired in 1875 to serve as the university librarian. These were men of high visibility who were resources for the fraternity brothers not only as alumni but also as insiders in the university hierarchy. Over time, the “Fraters in Urbanes” list also became a way of demonstrating prestige. When John Budd became governor of California, he was listed in the yearbook as “Frater in Gubernatoris.”

The presence of alumni in the house at regular intervals would have done much to create a sense of vertical, or generational, genealogies in the house. Mandatory attendance at meals, too, may have contributed a sense of continuity. Joining together over food and drink provided an opportunity for storytelling. The exploits of past brothers could be shared for the benefit of all present and would create camaraderie and a sense of shared experience. In the 1912 edition of *The Blue and Gold*, George Edwards was invited to contribute reminiscences about the early days of the university.
Notably, he included includes in his piece an extended story about L. L. Hawkins’s travels to the university—a story that involves breaking in a wild horse to arrive in time for entrance exams. He tells the story as if he had been there, and one has to wonder how many times he had heard it over a companionable stein of beer.\textsuperscript{52}

**Planks**

The brothers of Zeta Psi recorded their genealogy in a physical way, too, on the very flesh of their house: the redwood planks bearing initiates’ names. After comparing the dates on the planks with *Blue and Gold* yearbooks and the Zeta Psi registers, I concluded that the dates on the planks represent the years that the brothers were to graduate based on when they entered the university. In a number of cases, these years did not correspond to the actual year the student graduated—that is, if he did graduate. This means that, at any time, names could be added to at least four planks in any given year.

When I first identified these planks, I wondered when the brothers began posting them—was this a tradition that started in the second house, where the planks were found, or had the tradition begun earlier? Alumni from the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s remembered that the planks had been added to each year, so I knew that the tradition was in place during the life of the second house. A few of the older alumni seemed to remember hearing that these planks had been taken from the first house and moved to the second. However, it was possible that the planks had been made for the second house—that previous brothers’ names had been engraved on them by year, and that the brothers simply added names yearly after that.\textsuperscript{53} But evidence suggests that these planks predate the 1910 house. Consider the drawing of a number of the planks we found (figure 8).

The first panel we have dates to 1873, which predates the first house by three years. Each year that corresponds to the occupation of the first house is on its own plank. At some point, all the planks were apparently inscribed with a pledge year. Years corresponding to the occupation of the second house appear inscribed lower on the planks below the set of earlier dates and names. Imagine a plank-walled room, where each year a new set of names is added to a new plank—until lists of names completely circle the room—and then a new set of names is added below the earlier set. If all the planks had been made for the second house, and previous brothers’ names had been engraved on them by year, a more reasonable approach would have been to fill planks with consecutive years and then leave blank planks to be added to in the future. Further, as mentioned before, the planks do not completely correspond to official Zeta Psi national registers of members. If the planks...
were created after the move, I would expect the early years to more closely correspond to the national’s lists of members. Moreover, moving the planks from the first house to the second would have created a powerful link between the two fraternal spaces.

The planks were recovered not from the chapter room but from the party room. This location would have been used more frequently than the chapter room, and more casually. The planks would have provided a visual reinforcement of one’s place within the brotherhood of Zeta Psi. The current incarnation of the fraternity still engraves pledges’ names in wood—but no longer in house panels. Today, I am told, they use wooden paddles that hang on the walls of the chapter room. One of the mysteries that remains is why the panels were not removed from the second house when it was abandoned. Other insignia were. Several alums expressed disgust with the way the university took over 2251 College Avenue, and suggested that the fraternity did not leave the panels willingly. Others note that the panels were no longer used after 1947, so perhaps they were no longer valuable to the brothers.
RITUAL DINING

While ritual events like pledging and initiation were important parts of creating a fraternal identity, day-to-day ritualized activities were essential to creating a sense of brotherhood. As in any middle-class or elite household of the time, meals were ritualized events where social identities were performed and created. The dinner table was a place where civility was enacted through one’s behavior and compliance with etiquette.54

The importance of the dining room in fraternity life is illustrated in The Blue and Gold, where the brothers of Zeta Psi contributed selections that referred to their shared meals. The following passage from the 1886 yearbook is a particularly fine example. It helps to read it aloud to fully understand it. Its humor is accentuated when one knows that a number of Zetes through the years had trouble with their German language requirement.

“Zeta Psi Linguistische Gesellschaft.” Organized by Zetes hungering and thirsting after both victuals and de beauties of de Sherman Lideradore. Meetings held in dining room at meal times. Sample of work done.

M-K-. “Eine outside prere gefalligst.”

GENERAL CHORUS. “Outside piece gefalligst.”

K-T. “Mein lieber, monsieur Crox, reichen sie mir die, -das -le, oh hang it. Cross, hand me the spuds.”

H-D. “Iche habe Houte Fraulein Kuszmich—quick gemashed; Sie ist ein disy.”

S-T-T-N. “Oh, mon ami! Sin joken, sie hat on mich gesmiled.”

R-S-. “Oh Shutzaen sie auf, and geben sie mir die gravy.”

V-L-. “Mein lieber shanks, please passez moi le vinegre.”


M-K-. (waking up) “Who said I was a donkey?”

C-S. “Please pass the pep-”

R-S. “Sprechen sie Deutsch, or you won’t get anything.”

D-G. (to the cook, in stentorian tones) “Garcon, here. Oh, ich beg your pardon Madamoiselle! Oh shucks, she’s Mrs.—Bring sie some s-il vous plait, thé.”

COOK. (blank with astonishment) We haint got no silver plated tea, Mr. D-g.” (withdraws in disgust)55
Archaeologists have extensively studied the material culture of nineteenth-century dining—in the houses of urban and rural populations, in institutions, and in households of every socioeconomic and ethnic status. What we have learned is that certain norms shaped, to varying degrees, the kinds of tableware seen as appropriate for particular occasions. During the last third of the nineteenth century, white-bodied, minimally decorated ceramics were especially popular.

There are several reasons these wares were commonly used. That they were relatively inexpensive compared to decorated vessels certainly was a factor for some families. Some historians of diet suggest that the shift from family-style dining to service à la russe may have played a part—after all, if your food is brought to you already on the plate, there is little need for a fancy decoration covering the center of the plate. Ceramics decorated with gold bands, transfer prints, or decalcomanias (at the very end of the century) most often feature white centers and decorated rims. Still others suggest that the plain white ceramics nicely presented the values of simplicity, purity, and cleanliness, which became so important in the domestic sphere—first with the flowering of the cult of true womanhood, and then as domestic science promised to make mothers into managers. I also wonder if the simplicity of these ceramics fit into the populist movements of the late nineteenth century and the nation’s accompanying obsession with maintaining democratic values.

The properly set table also had meaning for our civilized man. It represented order, rather than chaos, and the influence of civilizing forces. Any archaeologist who has worked on British colonial sites can tell you that, even in sites in the middle of “darkest Africa” or some other location that could have threatened an Englishman’s innate character as a civilized being, you will find British ceramics. When disorder threatened, a civilized table setting could hold off barbarism. In Peter Pan’s fourth act, as the Indians stand guard above Peter’s house, Wendy and the Lost Boys are seated at the table, having dinner.

There is some evidence that the comforts of a civilized table were appreciated by our men. Zete Joseph N. LeConte (’91) kept a diary of his 1889 geological expedition with his father, Joseph LeConte, geologist and beloved Cal professor, to Yosemite. During their trip, they were invited to dine with a Judge Garber at Stoneman House, a fine hotel. This invitation pleased but also horrified them—they had no appropriate dress.

We were indeed a desperate looking set as we mounted the steps of the Stoneman House, and made our way through the staring tourists. Each was dressed in a loose flannel shirt with a handkerchief around the neck, a decayed hat and
a ferocious looking knife at the belt. We went into the parlor and cautiously sat down on some magnificent chairs and sofas. Soon Judge Garber came in and greeted us heartily and then Mrs. Garber and Miss Garber came and were introduced. . . . It was an agreeable thing to get once more amongst nice refined people after knocking about so long in the mountains.58

Keeping in mind that this civilized discourse took place at the dinner table, we can extrapolate that civilized manhood willingly cooperated with and co-opted women’s practice of organizing the table.

A woman who set her table with white ceramics was demonstrating her role as keeper of her family’s moral and physical well-being (and of course, the two were intrinsically entwined, with cleanliness brushing against Godliness). The use of matched sets demonstrated the unity of the family. Families may have differed in how or whether they chose to participate in replicating these societal values and ideals, but archaeological efforts throughout the country have demonstrated that it was a rare household that did not include these ceramics. In well-to-do households, the plain wares were often just one of several sets of ceramics used by the family. Porcelain tea sets and dining services reserved for special occasions or entertaining would be found in the china cabinet next to plain wares.

*Plain or simple* does not necessarily mean inexpensive. Fine English semivitrified wares were the choice of many middle-income families, while white German, English, or French porcelains graced the tables of wealthier families. American wares, fired at lower temperatures, and therefore more susceptible to crazing and staining, were, by economic necessity, the choice of less well-to-do families. The Sears catalogs of the late nineteenth century reified these distinctions, urging consumers to splurge on the finer imported wares.59 Perhaps the use of similar-looking ceramics across socioeconomic boundaries created a comfortable illusion of equality at a time when the disparity in wealth between the richest and the poorest was growing. Whatever the reason, any woman setting up house would be sure to have a set of plain ceramics.

The table of the first Zeta Psi house was no different than what one would expect from any other middle-class home. Only a small number of ceramics were recovered from this occupation—a measure of the small area that was preserved archaeologically. Several hundred sherds representing a minimum of twenty-nine ceramic vessels were recovered from 8 square meters of excavation. Among the excavated ceramics was a wide range of vessels, most of them tablewares (table 4). The most common tablewares were plain white semivitrified vessels. While all
were plain, at least two, possibly three, different sets were represented among the ceramics.

As I noted earlier, no more than twenty men lived in the first chapter house at a time, and during the last days of the house, the average was about ten. Since brothers dined together, we might expect that the house had, at a bare minimum, twenty
place settings, but more likely a minimum of twenty-four to thirty place settings, which would accommodate visitors. Depending on breakage rates in the house, a set of china could last for some time, with broken pieces replaced, or the set supplemented, as needed. The men were using a range of vessel forms that situated them within genteel culture. In addition to plates, bowls, teacups, saucers, and mugs, we recovered sherds from a service bowl, a platter, and a butter pat.

I would also expect that some number of ceramics would have come to the fraternity through individual brothers’ small contributions. It is easy to imagine generations of brothers abandoning odd ceramic pieces or cutlery to the household kitchen rather than taking them away after graduation.  

In another context, the miscellaneous and mismatched ceramics could be interpreted as evidence of a household that could not afford a more fashionable, matched set. Instead, I think we have a small sample of a ceramic assemblage that would be characterized by a single dining set (supplemented when necessary) and an eclectic bunch of additional vessels. As we will see from photographic evidence, the fraternity did have a matched set of plain white tableware, at least in the early 1900s.

Now, let us turn to a photograph taken in the first fraternity house. We see a number of the men surrounding a table (figure 9). By the glazed looks on a few faces, it has been either a late night or a festive one or both. The mixed ages of the diners suggest that several alumni have returned, though I cannot identify them. Note the tableware: white ceramics, underscoring the purity and sanctity of the hearth, graced the fraternal table. In addition, you can see that, despite the beautiful German tankards encircling the railing of the dining room, most of the men are drinking out of plain, matching, stoneware mugs. A few of the older men seem to have tankards in their hands. We can also see a number of saltshakers and a metal (probably silver or silver plate) covered butter dish. Stemware sits on the table, as do plates and bowls of cheese and bread. It is tempting to identify the two men at the head of the table with the pipes in their mouths as senior members of the fraternity—since pipe smoking was a privilege of senior men on campus.

A reading of the photograph, I would suggest, indicates that the men holding the plain mugs are the active members of the fraternity. Use of identical white ceramics would reinforce the bonds of brotherhood between men who occupied the house together. They may later return to the home as brothers once they are alumni, but the relationship will never be the same—it cannot be the same—between them and the actives as it was with their own family of brothers. Fraternities and other secret societies were constantly plagued with the label undemocratic. Yet using plain,
simple wares drew attention away from individualism and instead focused on values of community. (The fraternal crest of Zeta Psi apparently embodies this as well. I am told that the four parts of the crest represent one’s movement through life as a Zeta member, with one’s obligations as an alumnus being incorporated into the symbols of the crest.)

Ceramics in the fraternity were used the same way that they were in other middle-class households—to reinforce the sanctity of home and family through the symbol of purity as embodied in the white ceramics. The brothers of Zeta Psi created their sense of brotherhood at the table, the same way their mothers would have created a sense of family for them in their homes. Although a small sample, the archaeological materials recovered from the first house show there were other ceramics available. So I reiterate: it is my opinion that the ceramics were used to express a sense of family and communion at the fraternity dining table, and in doing so, they reinforced bonds of brotherhood between the men.

A final note on ceramics, for now: while the fraternity may have been using ceramics to express a sense of family, they do not seem to have been using their
ceramics to express the wealth or prestige of their fraternity. We have a range of documentary evidence to suggest that the Zetes were seen as one of the wealthier or more ostentatious fraternities on campus. If this had extended to the dinner table, I would have expected to see more evidence of this, even in our relatively small sample. While the semivitrified plain ceramics found at the site were more expensive than American or even British white earthenwares, they do not make much of a socioeconomic statement. In fact, since the semivitrified wares were fired at a higher temperature, they were stronger than comparable white earthenwares and more likely to survive the rigors of fraternity life.

**The Familial Consumption of Beer**

Fraternities may have the greatest reputation among college students for alcohol consumption, but in reality all of Cal’s first students were notorious for their drinking. An 1877 letter from Berkeley resident John Chart to the regents of the University of California complained about the use of intoxicating beverages by Cal students. He accused the students of purchasing alcoholic beverages in San Francisco, Oakland, and Temescal.

> We may safely attribute to the immoderate use of strong drink as the main cause of the numerous complaints against them. This is the fostering parent of all mischiefs and injury to private property around Berkeley. . . . They order beer by the keg and whiskey also brought here, and their greatest revelries have taken place on University grounds. Have I not seen them, with the kegs around a bon fire, in various degrees of intoxication (except dead drunk) and each trying to make more noise than the other according to the strength of his lungs. 61

Alcohol played a role in fraternity life. “Beer busts” were an integral part of the social life of the fraternity and, apparently, the rush experience. If we look again at the early-1900s table scene (figure 9), it is clear that the beverage in the brothers’ mugs was beer, probably stout or porter, based on the color. Many students today perceive beer as an appropriate route to intoxication, but for nineteenth-century European families beer was a healthful beverage, often prepared in the home, served with meals to all family members. In a world that still failed to recognize the causes of water contamination, beer was a healthful alternative to public water sources. Even the early temperance movement saw beer as an innocuous beverage. A temperance movement propaganda piece from the mid-nineteenth century illustrates a “thermometer of intemperance.” At the top of the thermometer
were healthful and temperate beverages like water, lemonade, and weak tea, while at the bottom were the worst of the intoxicating beverages, such as peppered rum. The range of beverages that fell between were appropriately ranked on the thermometer. In the illustration, both weak and strong beers are above the threat of intemperance.62

_The Blue and Gold_ often featured advertisements for saloons or restaurants, including the Pabst Café in Oakland, which described itself as a “Restaurant and Family Resort” featuring Pabst Milwaukee and imported beer on tap. The advertising section of the 1894 _Blue and Gold_ featured an ad by Schlitz Milwaukee proclaiming, “The State Analyst of New Jersey tested a score of beers and pronounced Schlitz Beer more nutritious than milk.” While not as catchy as “Drink Guinness, it’s good for you,” it does illustrate that beer’s image differed from that of other alcoholic beverages.63

Only at the close of the nineteenth century, when the consumption of beer was increasingly associated with German-run saloons, did beer drinking become associated with drunkenness and poor behavior among some of the upper-class families of the East. Therefore, the consumption of beer likely had a familial as well as social connotation for our brothers.64 Archaeological evidence from the first house included a range of artifacts related to beer consumption. Even though the assemblage was limited, it included quite a few beer-related objects. A minimum of twenty glass beer bottles and one ceramic stout or ale bottle was recovered.

The brothers apparently did not drink straight from the bottle but used steins or, as was popular with German brews, large-footed goblets. A minimum of six glass beer mugs, all variations on the German-style thumbprint mug, and a grey stoneware Stein, were recovered, as were a minimum of five goblets (figure 10). While drinking out of a mug or stein may seem genteel, in the world of unfiltered bottled beers, controlled pouring from a bottle into a drinking vessel would have saved the drinker from muddying his beer with sediment. Moreover, at that time, as now, kegs were popular containers for beer and would have necessitated drinking vessels.

It may have struck the reader as remarkable that, out of a minimum of twenty-three ceramic and glass tableware vessels for food consumption recovered, a minimum of twelve vessels related to beer consumption were found. When one considers that an additional seven tumblers were found at the house, it would seem that the brothers were drinking many of their daily calories (table 5). In instances like this, archaeologists like to talk about site formation processes—or how things get to be where they are found. Remember where these artifacts were recovered—from
the nursery.

Photographs of the 1876 house show that it had a roomy porch with a very large set of front steps—steps that are featured in many photographs with the brothers assembled on them. The front porch would have been a pleasant place to convene and share a brotherly beverage, and an unlikely place to bring one’s dinnerware. So, while the materials recovered do tell us about life in the house, they tell us even more about some of the ways the porch was used.

Beer was not the only beverage consumed by the brothers. A lone soda bottle was recovered, as were two jugs for milk. A minimum of twelve wine bottles, seven liquor bottles, four whiskey flasks, and one stoneware bottle that once contained Amsterdam gin were found. Even if we exclude the beer bottles as examples of intoxicating beverage consumption, it is clear that our brothers spent some time at the bottom of the temperance thermometer.

I should point out that nineteenth-century alcohol consumption occurred at a different scale than in the twenty-first century. Estimates for pre-Prohibition America place average consumption of hard liquor at 2.6 gallons per capita per annum in the years from 1906 to 1910, as compared with around 2.24 gallons per capita per annum today. These numbers do not include the large number of alcohol-based nostrums that were still popularly used despite increased regulation. When you

**Figure 10**
Examples of drinking vessels recovered during excavations of the first Zeta Psi house.
consider that we recovered evidence of barely enough alcohol to supply a household of twenty men of moderate consumption for a fifteen-week semester, it would be difficult to argue that the evidence demonstrates that the fraternity was a den of vice. Instead, I can assert only that they were clearly not teetotalers.65

**OTHER SIGNS OF CIVILIZATION**

Certain aspects of the fraternity’s home life were explicitly engaged in the creation of a sense of brotherhood, but other parts of daily routines and furnishings address the kind of manhood privileged in the fraternity setting. In other words, they are marks of civilization. The household assemblage contained several highly decorative lamp chimneys, at least two made of deep green glass, one rose-colored one,
and several made of milk glass. These likely sat on refined-looking oil lamps or electrical candles. Two glass vases and one ceramic pottery vase were also found. A parian, or bisque porcelain, figurine, popular in Victorian homes of the times, was among the brothers’ discarded belongings.

As was fitting of men of their time, the brothers paid attention to their appearance, as evidenced by the recovery of gold-plated brass buttons and porcelain cuff links. The Waterbury button company made one particularly ornate example found. Toiletry bottles, fragments of a bone toothbrush, and ointment jars of the type that often contained deodorant attest to a certain concern about one’s appearance.

Germ theory was the dominant medical paradigm of the time, and as a result the sanitation movement dominated discussions of public and personal health and hygiene. Differing standards of hygiene were not just a matter of personal choice but were potentially dangerous to others. A Mrs. Hickox of Berkeley attempted to divorce her husband for his lack of personal hygiene. Her husband apparently went for weeks without washing his face and for months without bathing. Her request for a divorce was denied. While her husband was a former Cal student, he was not a Zete.

Medicines believed to defeat all germs were particularly popular. While I can say little about specific products used in the first fraternity house, the artifactual remains suggest that the brothers tended their health with a range of nationally marketed drugs and pharmaceuticals from local druggists. At least one homeopathic medicine vial was recovered, demonstrating that the men were open to alternative medical ideas. Given that fraternities were accused of instilling members with the inability to think for themselves, this evidence of diverse subject positions relative to health care is refreshing. The one brand-name medicinal product identified was Bromo-Seltzer, a headache cure manufactured in Baltimore and packaged in a distinctive cobalt blue bottle. In the second Zete house, where this product was very popular, its use may have been related more to relieving hangovers than to the stresses of studying. You may have noted that I have not described the recovery of any artifacts related to studying or student life. As I explain in the next chapter, evidence suggests that classes of Zetes went for years without studying.

AS THE ACT ENDS . . .

So what can we say about the men of Zeta Psi at this point? They lived together in a house on the edge of Never Land, but the taint of civilization still marked them as
recently escaped from the nursery, rather than as true Lost Boys. They experienced their fraternal life through practices shaped by the households of their mothers: They dined together on respectable, if not expensive, tableware. They brushed their teeth, buttoned their jackets, and sat outside on the porch to drink their beer. Even as they begin to shrug off the trappings of civilization in the 1890s, the material world of their civilized forebears of the 1870s and 1880s shaped their day-to-day lives as they continued to host the older brothers in the same ways, in the same spaces, as previous generations of brothers had. Still, as we will see, outside the house, and in some cases inside it, they presented a public face to Never Land that spoke of their increasingly uncivilized ways.