

Pi Kappa Alpha's Myths and Legends:

Mysteries of the Estufa

"The Estufa" anchors the desolate plains of New Mexico in this early photo. Completed in 1908, this historic site has stood watch over the campus for nearly 100 years.



Dr. Tight's Boys

Belta Delta Chapter at the University of New Mexico has a long and storied history that predates even the State's admittance to the Union. From a ruckus social club to the first fraternity in the State of New Mexico to the most unusual meeting place in the Greek world, Beta Delta and its adobe structure celebrate 100 years of rich tradition. This is the legend of The Estufa.

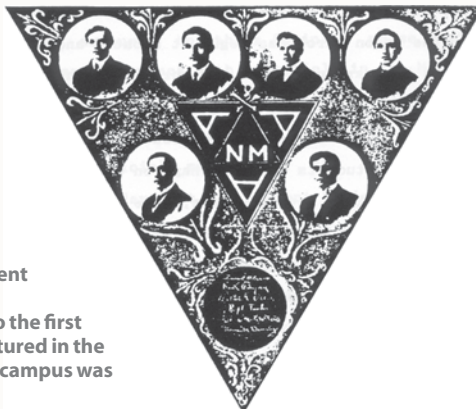
The Beginnings of The Yum Yum Society

Around 1896, a group of young men began meeting underneath a grove of trees for lunch. Known for being some of the university's rowdiest students, this group was notorious for swindling other students out of their lunches and outrageous pranks played on University faculty. The first formal public recognition of the group came in the form of an *Albuquerque Democrat* article from November 1900 which read, "Yum-Yum is the euphonious name of a recent organization among the boys. Judging from the initiation

Right: With the help of then-University President Dr. William G. Tight, UNM's boisterous group, the Yum Yum Society, reorganized in 1903 into the first fraternity in the state, Alpha Alpha Alpha. Pictured in the 1906 UNM Mirage, Tri-Alpha's introduction to campus was met with much fanfare and enthusiasm.

exercise it will require well seasoned material to ensure the ceremonial features of the new society."

By the turn of the century the Yum Yum Boys had organized into a complete club with regular meetings held in the old administration building. A female counterpart to their organization, the



Minnehahas, formed shortly thereafter. From that point forward the groups were intertwined in a tradition of both social interaction and mischievous pranks. Little did the Yum Yums realize that the university's highest ranking official, Dr. Tight, was keeping close watch on the organization for other reasons.

The Formation of Tri-Alpha

Dr. William G. Tight presided as president of New Mexico's lone institute of higher education from 1901 until 1909. At the beginning of his presidency, Albuquerque was a dusty village on the banks of the Rio Grande, and in the entire territory there was not a single high school. But Dr. Tight had a vision. Described "as a man of inexhaustible

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Right: In 1924, Roy D. Hickman (*New Mexico, Beta Delta '22*), served the chapter as president. This distinguished Pike (seated in the rock chair) went on to serve the Fraternity as district president, national alumni secretary, national president, and as an Educational Foundation trustee.



In this circa 1909 photograph, University President Dr. William Tight (front, center, looking to right) is shown with the Tri-Alpha organization during a ritual ceremony of the native Pueblo Indians.



energy and a geyser-like imagination," he made an unquestionable mark on the new institution. He saw that the formation of a Greek system would do much to increase the morale of students and help further the mission of the young school. He believed that this loose band of rough housers had the potential of laying the first brick in that foundation.

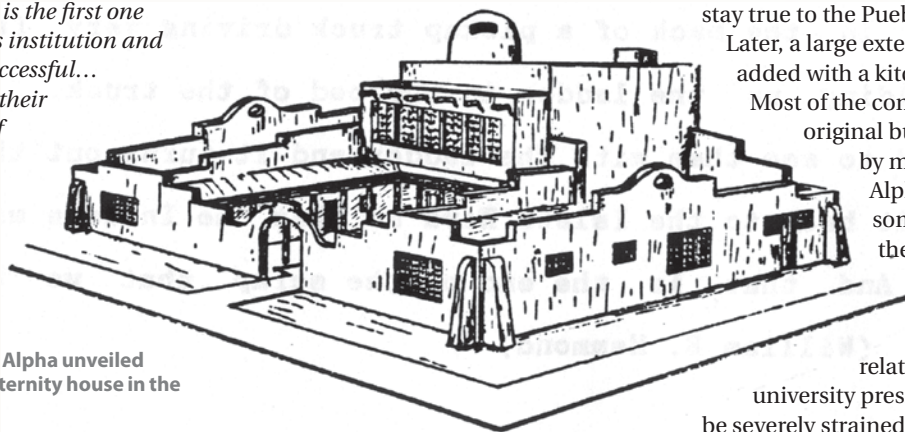
On Thursday night, September 3, 1903, under the guidance of Dr. Tight, the Yum Yum Society reorganized as Alpha Alpha Alpha. Tri-Alpha, as they were known, was introduced to the student body with much fanfare. The student newspaper, the *UNM Mirage*, wrote "This fraternity is the first one to be organized in this institution and promises to be very successful... The Tri-Alpha's begin their existence with some of the best men in the school on their rolls."

The next twelve years were filled with successes and firsts for both

the young fraternity and the university. But for a group as ambitious as Tri-Alpha, remaining a local fraternity would simply not suffice. Radical changes were on the way that would forever transform not only the organization, but the face of the university forever.

"The Estufa"

In 1906, Dr. Tight announced his plan to adopt a new style of architecture for the campus, to reflect the heritage of the southwest. One of the buildings to be erected in the pueblo style was to be a permanent meeting room for Tri-Alpha,



Right: In 1917, Pi Kappa Alpha unveiled their plans for a new fraternity house in the *UNM Mirage*.

modeled after the Santo Domingo kiva. And so, the plans for what was to become the most unique council room in the fraternity world were born.

The location for the Estufa was chosen in response to a prank. An outhouse had been laboriously brought over from Dog Town (present day Martineztown) with a sign that identified it as the Tri-Alpha house. Little did the pranksters know that the spot they had chosen to plant their hoax would eventually become listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Completed in 1908, the single, freestanding, oval room of just over 500 square feet had no windows, and entrance was gained through a trap door from the roof. Exposed rafters made of timbers and hand-cast adobes ensured the structure would stay true to the Pueblo Indian design.

Later, a large external stairway was added with a kitchen underneath.

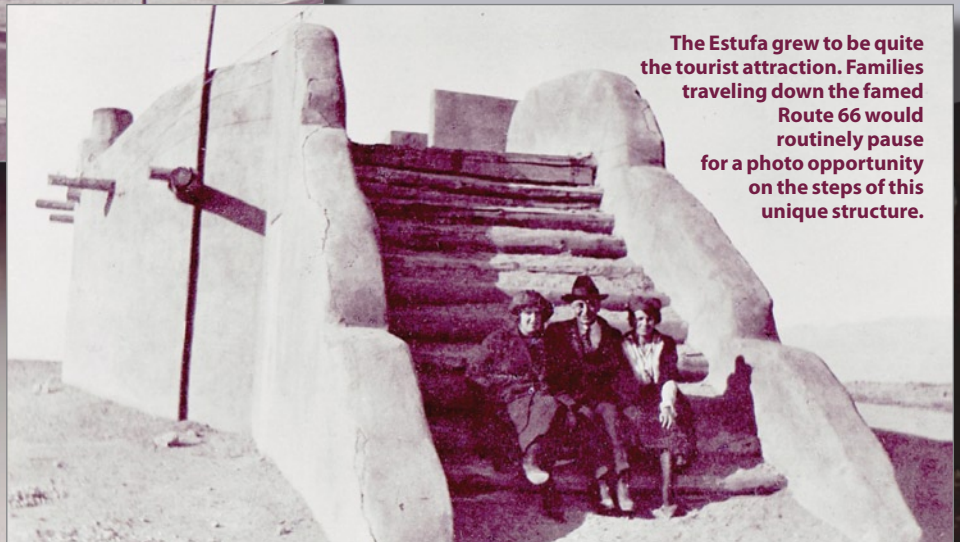
Most of the construction of the original building was done by members of Tri-Alpha themselves, sometimes even with the accompaniment of Dr. Tight.

However, Tri-Alpha's close relationship with the university president was about to be severely strained. The Estufa was



Left: The city of Albuquerque experienced exponential growth over the first half of the century as apparent in this circa 1960s photograph. Later, a decision was made to widen University Avenue, a main thoroughfare; however the road was designed to curve around the historic structure due to its cultural significance.

Photos courtesy of Albuquerque Museum Photoarchives



The Estufa grew to be quite the tourist attraction. Families traveling down the famed Route 66 would routinely pause for a photo opportunity on the steps of this unique structure.

meant to be somewhat of a bribe for Tri-Alpha. In exchange for the building, they were to affiliate with a national organization, more specifically Phi Delta Theta – of which Dr. Tight was an alumnus. However, the group was not impressed by Phi Delta and chose to remain independent for six years after the completion of their council room.

It was during the Christmas break of 1914 that Mr. John Emmons went home to Alabama and attended the Convention of Pi Kappa Alpha. He was so impressed with Pi Kappa Alpha that he immediately informed his brothers that he had found the national fraternity with which to affiliate. The oldest fraternity in New Mexico was honored on May 22, 1915 when it was chartered as Pi Kappa Alpha's Beta Delta Chapter.

The Estufa, Spanish for the word stove, has stood now for nearly 100 years on the plains of Albuquerque and is still utilized as the primary meeting place for Pi Kappa Alpha. This unique and mysterious structure gained such mass appeal that it was heralded in 1913 by the *Christian Science Monitor* and featured in a 1947 *Ripley's Believe It or Not*-style cartoon published in

Right: The Estufa gained wider fame when the building was featured by the *New Mexico Lobo-Campus Camera* in a style which imitated the famous comic feature *Ripley's Believe It Or Not*.

the *New Mexico Lobo-Campus Camera*. Recognizing this structure's historical significance, when University Avenue was widened, this main Albuquerque thoroughfare was designed to divert from its straight path to slightly curve around the Estufa, to avoid having to raze the structure or potentially damage it in an attempted move. The building's intrigue is fueled by the fact that, even to this day, only members of Tri-Alpha and now Pi Kappa Alpha are allowed inside the structure. This hasn't stopped others from trying. The adobe-brick structure has withstood the New Mexico desert's blistering summers and bitter winters, an internal gas explosion, and four direct impacts by automobiles – three of which were

intentional! The trap door has since been replaced with a side entrance that uses a salvaged bank vault door complete with a working tumbler that serves as the primary locking mechanism.

If you are cruising Route 66 (present day I-40 in Albuquerque) in search of some nostalgia, we suggest that you utilize your Pi Kappa Alpha membership and take a peek inside this building, which only a handful of people in the world have the privilege of doing. After all, membership has its benefits...

The content of this article was compiled from the University of New Mexico's archives, "The History of Beta Delta Chapter of Pi Kappa Alpha", written by Beta Delta brothers Craig Collins '86 and Jon Messier '87, and the historical archives at Pi Kappa Alpha's Memorial Headquarters.

If you know of a unique or interesting Myth and Legend you would like to see featured in the *Shield & Diamond*, please contact Michael Halbrook at mhalbrook@pikes.org.

FOR MEN ONLY!
 PI KAPPA ALPHAS AT THE UNIV. OF NEW MEXICO USE THE "ESTUFA" FOR AN INITIATION CENTER. IT IS THEIR BOAST THAT NO WOMAN HAS EVER ENTERED THE ODDLY SHAPED BUILDING!

