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the once and future  
**KA** Kings

*The Untold Story of KA at Southern Cal*

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*The Untold Story of KA at Southern Cal*

By Scott Rowson

**It may be the** best kept secret in Kappa Alpha Order that many of our greatest chapters aren't really southern at all. KA chapters in Washington, California, Arizona, Pennsylvania and Ohio are thriving. Epsilon Lambda Chapter at Miami University in Ohio has forged an example of excellence in its first quarter-century. Closer, but still outside the strict definition of the South, Beta Alpha Chapter at the University of Missouri-Rolla has made something of an annual tradition of winning the Order's top awards. They're that good.

But the story of another, less-heralded chapter deserves to be told as well. One KA chapter on a sun-drenched campus in South Central Los Angeles churned out All-American athletes, NFL coaches, State Department officials, Olympic champions and Hollywood bigwigs for decades. It was, arguably, the brightest star in the KA sky. And then all of a sudden it was gone. This is the story of how one of Kappa Alpha Order's greatest chapters came to be, was lost and now looks for a shot at redemption. It is the story of how generations of alumni carry on a proud tradition of brotherhood with a zeal that would make just about every other chapter blush. It's the story of Beta Sigma Chapter at the University of Southern California. And it all begins with another fraternity. ▶



From 1943, Beta Sigma brothers participating in school activities: McCormick, Arendt, Schutte, Tanquary, Phelps, Milham, Kolhase and Eichenhofer.



## Auspicious Beginnings

Los Angeles was little more than a dusty frontier town when the University of Southern California first began classes in 1880. One of its founders and early professors, James Harmon Hoose, saw a need for a local men's organization dedicated to "the pursuance of truth and knowledge." Hoose pulled together some of the leading young men at the school and created Phi Alpha. The group quickly became a leading force on campus, counting student body presidents, athletes and faculty members among its ranks for nearly thirty years. Phi Alpha shared many of Kappa Alpha Order's most treasured ideals and was officially incorporated into KA on May 21, 1926. According to a chapter history which appeared in the *Kappa Alpha Journal* four years later, "the ideals of Phi Alpha fitted into those of Kappa Alpha so splendidly that the transition from a local affiliation to that of a national took place without loss of stride."



Beta Sigma House, 1943

The installation weekend itself was a harbinger of things to come. In attendance were the Province Commander as well as the President and Vice-President of USC (Harold J. Stonier, himself a charter member of Beta Sigma). Speakers included Knight Commander H.J. Mikell and Former Knight Commander Henry C. Chiles. Mikell and Chiles even assumed the roles of Numbers I and II, respectively, in the initiation of the

97 new KAs that day. It was hardly hyperbole when Fletcher Swan (Alpha Pi '11), an alumnus of Stanford University wrote the following year, "It is doubtful if any chapter of Kappa Alpha has ever been born under more auspicious circumstances than Beta Sigma." He was right. Soon Beta Sigma was not only a leading fraternity on the USC campus, but one of Kappa Alpha's best chapters.



Jares

The KAs made an immediate impact from their plot on Fraternity Row. They won the cup for best homecoming float and house decorations in the 1928 USC homecoming contest, a feat they would repeat often in the ensuing years. Al Wesson (Beta Sigma '26) wrote the school's alma mater, "All Hail." A number of school buildings, including the student union, are named after Kappa Alphas from this era. Some even say the Trojans' colors are borrowed from the Crimson and Old Gold of the Order.

Where the chapter really excelled was the athletic field. Beta Sigma athletes dominated a recent list of KA's greatest athletes compiled by fraternity sports expert Jay Langhammer (see "Sportsman of the Century," Fall 2005). Fully one quarter of the men on his Top 50 list were Beta Sigmas. Track and field star Charles Paddock ('26)

won gold three times in the 1920 Olympics and was featured in the 1981 movie "Chariots of Fire," with its depiction of the 1924 Olympic contest. Frank Wykoff ('30) won Olympic gold as part of the 400m relay in 1928, 1932 and 1936, a squad which featured Jesse Owens. Rex Cawley ('61) set a world record and won gold in the 400m hurdles at the 1964 Olympics. Jon Arnett ('54), Jim Hardy ('43), John Ferraro ('44), twins Marlin and Mike McKeever (both '59), Don McNeil ('36) and others helped establish USC's legacy of gridiron dominance that continues today.

Joe Jares (Beta Sigma '56), while Associate Editor at *Sports Illustrated*,

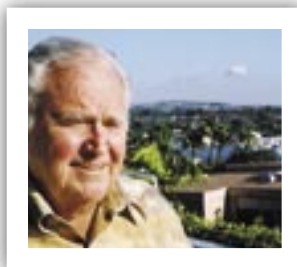




penned “Life in a Jock House” for the October 28, 1968 issue of the magazine. The subject was Beta Sigma and its disproportionate number of outstanding athletes. In a justifiably immodest statement he wrote, “There were schools that would have traded their entire athletic departments just for the jocks in our house.” But of all the jocks on campus running back Jon Arnett (Beta Sigma ‘54) – nicknamed “The Jaguar” for his combination of power and grace – got the most attention from pro teams. According to Jares,

*The bulletin board by the phone seemed to be his private message center: ‘Jaguar, call the Packers’ or ‘Jaguar, call the Eagles collect whatever time you get in – urgent!’ Eventually someone put up a sign by the phone: ‘Arnett, call everybody.’*

Beta Sigma was more than a collection of athletes, however. It was a home away from home and a source of guidance for many young men. “I was pretty lost that first year of school,” Reed Sprinkel (Beta Sigma ‘41) says, choking back emotion at the memory. “Fortunately, there had been some other actives that had gone to my high school.



Sprinkel

They kind of took me under their wing and showed me around a little bit. These are some of the things you have to do to get young men pointed in the right direction.”

Just like KA chapters all over the country, Beta Sigmas left school in droves during World War II. Down to four brothers in November of 1943 the chapter was forced to rent out rooms to coeds. Eventually, even that meager arrangement would not be enough and for a time, brothers would gather in a remade garage. The end of the war in 1945 brought an end to Beta Sigma’s lean years, however, and by November, 1946 the chapter had returned to 700 W. 28th Street and was home to 71 men. “With the house once more open and occupied by KAs instead of girls, spirits are at a new peak here at

the Beta Sigma Chapter,” Corresponding Secretary Dave Gardner wrote in the *Journal* earlier that year.

It was in this climate of a reinvigorated chapter that Otis Healy (Beta Sigma ‘44) stepped onto campus. Partially motivated by the obvious need of the com-

munities surrounding USC and partially as an answer to rival UCLA’s own community outreach philanthropy, Healy founded Troy Camp in 1948. In its first year the camp brought seventy children from one of the poorest areas of Los Angeles to USC for a week of mentoring and activities. Since then, the program has grown into a year-round operation and serves more than

200 children annually. It remains an entirely student-run operation with no paid staff. Troy Camp has been so wildly successful that the community goodwill it has generated is credited with sparing USC damage in both the 1965 Watts Riots and the rioting which followed the 1992 verdict in the Rodney King case.



Healy

## Brothers Just the Same

A new era in Beta Sigma’s history began with the January 1953 move into a new house at their same location on Fraternity Row. “Designed by KAs, built by a KA firm and paid for by KA contributions,” as a 1953 *Journal* article notes, the house featured a front-yard sand volleyball pit and



◀ Reed Sprinkel, at far left, and fellow Beta Sigmas and dates at a chapter social function in the early 1940s

would be home to USC Kappa Alphas for more than forty years. While the house at 700 W. 28th Street in Los Angeles was miles away from the magnolia-shaded porches of Kappa Alpha's traditional home base, don't think Beta Sigma was lacking in southern spirit.

KA Roses were named and Convivium held each year. An annual highlight was the Dixie Ball, akin to the Old South celebrations held by many chapters. And in a tongue-in-cheek and decidedly un-Southern California Dixie Ball tradition, the chapter for years ceremonially withdrew from Fraternity Row during the yearly festivities.

In a chapter update for the May 1929 *KA Journal*, W.C. Bradbury (Beta Sigma '26) wrote, "That slow, Southern drawl that we love to hear is becoming more and more familiar around the house and we hope to

see many new visitors from the Southern chapters at the Beta Sigma chapter, where we will attempt to extend to them some of their recognized Southern hospitality."

"The Southern heritage of Kappa Alpha was unique at USC," Bob Padgett (Beta Sigma '66)

says. "A lot of people had to be educated as to what that meant. Deference to womanhood was unique...the fact that we would stand when a woman entered the room was something that was quite unusual" on campus. While some other fraternities

were known primarily for partying, Mike McManus (Beta Sigma '89) says KA was different. "The reason people joined [Beta Sigma] is that they liked the tradition and that history and the gentleman aspect of KA."

If their connection to a historically southern fraternity set them apart at USC, the physical isolation from the rest of Kappa Alpha Order bred an independent streak within the chapter as well. Kappa Alpha Order Educational Foundation

Trustee Mike Paulin (Beta Sigma '60) says members often graduated into more "coast" professions like acting and theater and movie production. "We knew that most [California] chapters including Cal's and Stanford's were considered tops, but there was some sort of chemistry playing at Beta Sigma that said of all the chapters, ours had to be KA's finest," Paulin recently wrote in an email. The house was also home to Jewish, Latino, and later, African-American members.

Taylor Hackford (Beta Sigma '64) was one alumnus who found his way into a more "coast" profession. After graduating from USC Hackford started making documentaries for public television and eventually, the big screen. His second film,

*Teenage Father*, won the 1978 Oscar for best live action short. By the time he directed *An Officer and a Gentleman* in 1982, Taylor Hackford's star was white-hot and a string of successes followed, including 1997's *The Devil's Advocate*. But it is *Ray*, which he directed and helped write and produce, that may prove his most enduring project. The 2004 film took home two Oscars – for Best Sound and Best Actor (Jamie Foxx) – and earned the movie a Best Picture nomination and Hackford a Best Director nod along the way.

Hollywood success has not meant an end to Hackford's KA days, however. He was the keynote speaker at Beta Sigma's 2005

Convivium and remains close to the attempt to return to campus through Padgett, his good friend, who heads the Committee to Restore Beta Sigma.

### "We Just Want to Pass That On"

Fortunes back on campus had changed by the mid-1990s and Beta Sigma's prominence had slipped. McManus, who attempted to turn the chapter around as alumnus advisor during this period faults a combination of factors including membership issues, a deteriorat-

ing house, a downturn in the Greek system nationally and financial problems. "The crushing blow came when the chapter house was lost," Padgett says now. A core group of KAs attempted to keep the chapter alive in off-campus housing, but the fatal blow had been struck. The KA spot on The Row, which for seventy years had been home to Beta Sigma, was now occupied by another fraternity. In 1996, the chapter was gone.

In spite of everything, the Beta Sigma legacy of brotherhood has continued. An investment club organized by early members of the chapter has become more of a quarterly reunion. Other chapter gatherings for men initiated in the 1940s and 50s routinely draw upwards of seventy members. 300 brothers showed up for he chapter's 2005



McManus



Padgett



Convivium. Still, they yearn to reestablish something that gave them so many fond memories. “It’s part of our heritage,” Padgett says. “It’s part of USC’s legacy that Kappa Alpha was a very important part of the campus.” Wistful, he says “it would be nice to drive down The Row and see Kappa Alpha there again.”

The prospects for a Beta Sigma homecoming at USC are shrouded, but steadily improving. Two years ago The Committee to

Restore Beta Sigma was created. The group of some thirty Beta Sigma alumni have been meeting with administrative officials in hopes of securing a return for the chapter. Kappa Alpha Order’s Director of Chapter Development Jesse Lyons says serious alumni involvement over the years demonstrates the viability of a new chapter succeeding. “A new Beta Sigma Chapter would have a leg up on almost any other returning KA chapter, that’s for sure. I’m hopeful we can return and get that legacy jump-started again.”

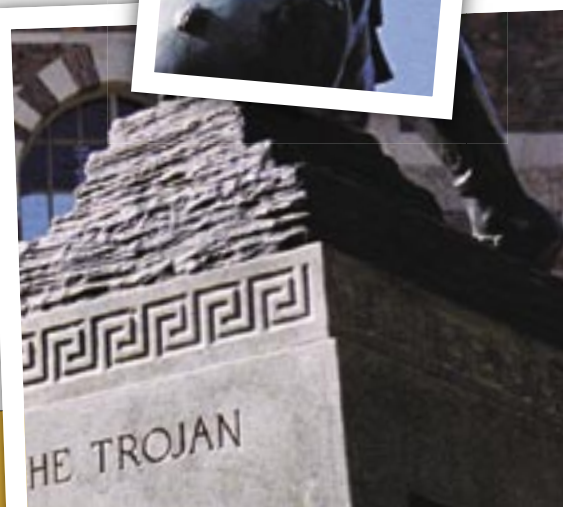
Until then the men of Beta Sigma will continue a proud tradition of brotherhood that neither time nor circumstance has diminished. Sprinkel, who shepherded the chapter through tough times during World War II, says students are missing out on a formative experience that helped shape the man he became. “We were so inspired when we were active. We just want to pass that on.” 🇺🇸

**Other Notable Alumni:**

- ▶ Dr. Michael Guhin ('59), U.S. Fissile Material Negotiator, U.S. State Department
- ▶ Ernie Zampese ('56), Offensive Coordinator who helped pioneer the West Coast Offense with the San Diego Chargers, Los Angeles Rams and other NFL teams.



Actor Jamie Foxx with Taylor Hackford





**Are you a Beta Sigma alumnus**

who would like to see the chapter return to USC? Find out how you can help by contacting Jesse Lyons at 540-463-1865 x2007 or by email at [jlyons@ka-order.org](mailto:jlyons@ka-order.org).