



Holt House

In 1867, a group of young women attending Monmouth College met in a room rented from “Major” Jacob Holt. They founded I.C. Sorosis, now named Pi Beta Phi.

Where It All Began

On April 28, 1867, a group of female Monmouth College students gathered in the southwest bedroom of the house owned by “Major” Jacob Holt, in a room rented by **ADA BRUEN GRIER** and **LIBBIE BROOK GADDIS**. It was in Ada and Libbie’s second floor bedroom where the women’s fraternity movement began with the founding of a secret society named I.C. Sorosis by 12 young Monmouth students. The group’s Greek motto was “Pi Beta Phi,” which would eventually become the organization’s formal name.

After the Holt family passed on, the house was ultimately abandoned and fell into disrepair. The idea of purchasing the home was discussed at the 1938 Pi Beta Phi Convention in Asheville, North Carolina. Those who had seen it thought it was in too poor a condition to even consider renovation, and there was no real enthusiasm for the project. Most members of the Fraternity knew it was the place of the founding, but little was actually known of the part it had played as a favorite meeting place of the founders.



In 1939, during the interim of convention, a neighbor and father of a Pi Phi, Hugh Moffet, purchased the home for \$1,100 at a delinquent tax auction. Mr. Moffet turned the property over to the Fraternity. After careful inspection of the property, it was found to be fundamentally sound.

Instead of tearing it down and erecting a plaque, as some had

wanted to do, the attendees at the 1940 Convention in Pasadena, California, voted to restore the home. A committee was appointed to oversee the restoration. Mr. Harry Glen Aldrich, a Galesburg architect and Pi Phi husband, was engaged to submit plans for the restoration.

An upstairs bath and a downstairs powder room were added while

three small rooms at the rear of the first floor were combined to make one large room. Great care was taken to acquire furnishings historically accurate of the 1860s period. On April 26, 1941, a restored Holt House opened with a tea hosted by Illinois Alpha and the Monmouth, Illinois, Alumnae Club.



The First Floor

While care has been taken to make sure the window treatments and furniture are similar to what might have been there in 1867, there are two rooms on the first floor that are quite modern and yet the styling gives a nod to the home's 19th century roots. Both the kitchen and the south powder room have been recently renovated. An ADA-accessible restroom is located at the north end of the home.

Music Room —

This is the main meeting room where events are held. On the wall hang portraits of Jacob and Sarah Holt painted in 1839. The sofa and tables which flank it are original Holt family heirlooms.



Parlor —

The Founders' portraits hang above the wine, velvet-covered sofa. To the left of the portraits hangs a small photo of the Holt family members taken in this room in 1870.

Kitchen —

The kitchen was remodeled in 2009 with numerous improvements. The cupboard space was increased to house the many items used with rental events.



The Second Floor

The second floor is uniquely Pi Phi in almost every respect.

Illinois Alpha Room —

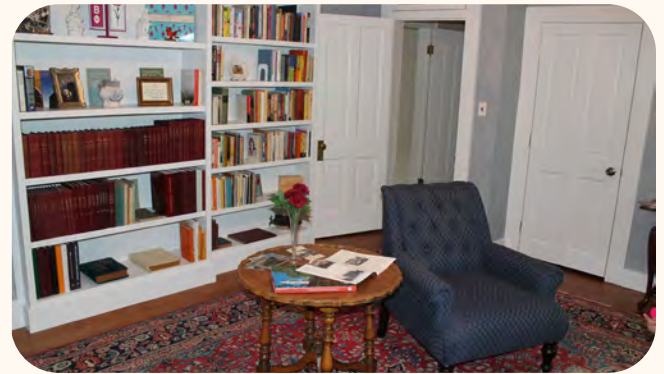
This room houses historical items pertaining to Illinois Alpha. The bed belonged to **JENNIE HORNE TURNBULL**. Above it hangs her Monmouth College diploma.



Library —

The library has a very comfortable seating area where visitors can browse the books and historical memorabilia.

The handmade bookshelves display historical items, bound copies of *The Arrow* and books written by Pi Phi authors.



Historical Room —

This room holds many historical items. This desk belonged to Illinois, Epsilon **AMY BURNHAM ONKEN**. Inside it are books and artifacts that belonged to her. Sitting on the desk is a notebook of letters written by our founders.

Above the bench in the corner, hang photos from several conventions in which living founders were present. The cabinet pictured houses 12 wax dolls of each of the Pi Phi Founders. An oval framed picture of **FANNIE WHITENACK LIBBEY**, dated 1867, hangs to the left of the cabinet.

A blue velvet settee sits between the windows. Above it hangs the Illinois Alpha Charter, given to the chapter in 1928 when it was reinstalled on the Monmouth campus.



Founders' Room —

This room is where our founding took place. The bed in the Founders' room is covered with a quilt belonging to **INEZ SMITH SOULE**.

The framed landscape on the wall was painted by **LIBBIE BROOK GADDIS** in 1868. The rocker in the corner belonged to **FANNIE THOMSON**. On the dresser is a collection of Pi Phi jewelry and hat pins.

Within those walls, they wrote a constitution and formulated objects of the society, including the mission "to cultivate sincere friendship, establish the real objects of life and to promote the happiness of humanity."



Holt House Today

Today, Holt House is a vital part of the community and Monmouth College. It is maintained by Illinois Alpha **DENISE PIERCE TURNBALL**, Holt House Curator. The house has been completely restored and is available for use by chapters, alumnae clubs and local groups for gatherings. It is an intimate setting for weddings, receptions, parties and meetings. Ample seating and the recently renovated kitchen make it perfect for private dinners or luncheons.

In early spring of 2009, the Fraternity applied to the Illinois State Historical Society for Holt House to be recognized as a historic landmark in the state of Illinois. On October 8, 2009, the Holt House Committee hosted a dedication ceremony for a historical marker, which is now permanently placed in the southeast corner of the front yard.

Holt House was intended not as a monument to the organization's achievements, but as a special place for all Pi Phis to celebrate their collective history and to mark the Fraternity's humble beginnings.

Holt House Mission Statement

The mission of Holt House, the founding home of Pi Beta Phi Fraternity, is to promote a welcoming spirit, to preserve Fraternity history and to provide an inviting setting that serves Pi Beta Phi collegiate chapters, alumnae organizations and the greater Monmouth community.

Holt House Vision Statement

Holt House, the founding home of Pi Beta Phi Fraternity, is committed to being recognized as a premier historic home. ✨

