



Pi Beta Phi Settlement School

In 1910, Pi Beta Phi set out to unite the Fraternity around a single philanthropic commitment—one that would bring education and opportunity to a community with limited access to both. After careful study and travel across the region, Gatlinburg, Tennessee, was selected in 1911 as the site for what became the Pi Beta Phi Settlement School. The school opened in 1912, marking the beginning of a decades-long chapter of service that expanded from classroom learning to health education and community support, and eventually helped inspire a lasting arts-and-crafts legacy in the region.

The Big Idea (1910–1911)

During the 1910 Swarthmore Convention, the Washington, D.C., Alumnae Club (represented by D.C. Alpha **EMMA HARPER TURNER**) proposed that “the alumnae of the Fraternity be given power to found and maintain a school to be dedicated on the 50th anniversary

of the founding of the Fraternity, in honor of the founders of Pi Beta Phi.”

Emma believed Pi Beta Phi’s altruistic work should be meaningful and expansive enough to unite and inspire the

entire national organization. While individual chapters had participated in philanthropic efforts before, this would be the first time all chapters would come together in support of a shared cause. Notably, this would also become the first philanthropic

project established by a National Panhellenic Conference organization.

Equally important was ensuring alumnae played an active role in the effort as well. The site chosen was the Appalachian Mountains, an area designated by the U.S. Bureau of Education at Washington as the most in need of education. Past Grand President **MAY LANSFIELD KELLER**, Maryland Alpha, visited Gatlinburg, Tennessee, and was adamant that

the Fraternity needed to place its school there.

Locating a site for the Settlement School was a daunting task because of the rural and mountainous terrain. The schools were mainly one-room wooden structures. Few of the teachers had attended high school and were teaching at the same level they had completed, often no higher than fifth grade. Abject poverty was the norm and living conditions were rugged. The cabins

were small and overcrowded; the sanitary facilities were limited. The area was deprived of the benefits of higher education, household economics, healthcare and scientific farming.

In May 1911, Gatlinburg was chosen as the school site because it was felt that Pi Phi could truly make a difference in the lives of its residents. An appropriation of \$500 from the Fraternity's Endowment Fund set the plan in motion.

The First School Term (1912)

The Pi Beta Phi Settlement School opened in March 1912 with 14 students and was held in the old school building at the junction of Baskins Creek and Little Pigeon River. Martha Hill, an experienced teacher from Nashville, was hired as the first teacher.

Many alumnae clubs were interested in the Settlement School project and by March 15, 1912, donations totaled \$2,775.63. In addition to money, some clubs sent gifts. The Washington

D.C. and Baltimore, Maryland, Alumnae Clubs sacrificed their Founders' Day banquet and instead sent an organ to be used for musical programs. The Los Angeles, California, Alumnae Club sent table silver and the Boston, Massachusetts, Alumnae Club gave linens. Other clubs sent a sewing machine, window shades, rugs, books, a cereal double-boiler, sheets, bird pictures, napkins,

dishtowels and 12 yards of blackboard cloth.

Michigan Alpha **ELIZABETH CLARKE HELMICK**, a member of the Washington, D.C., Alumnae Club, became Chairman and Treasurer of the new committee when the project was proposed. The Settlement School Committee recommended that Miss Hill be kept on and that the Chicago, Illinois, Alumnae Club assume control of the project, which Grand Council approved.

County Superintendent J.S. Keeble made the proposition that



Pi Beta Phi assume full management of the public school in the Gatlinburg district. He offered to give a clear, absolute deed to all the public school property, including a new building valued at \$1,000, which stood on a hill overlooking Gatlinburg. School authorities would also annually turn over, in cash, teachers' salaries,

as long as Pi Beta Phi maintained a public and free school in the lower grades.

December 3, 1912, marked the start of a new school term. Illinois Zeta Della "Miss Dell" **MORGAN GILLETTE**, was the first Pi Beta Phi alumna to be hired at the school. On the first day, 40 students came,

and 75 were enrolled by January. As the school year progressed, girls from the surrounding area were organized into a sewing club hosted by Miss Dell. Two boys' baseball teams were formed as well. When school ended in late March, it was the first time the children had gone to school for eight months in one year.

Finding Suitable Land (1913)

Kate Miller, a member of the Settlement School Committee, and Mrs. Helmick turned their attention to acquiring land. Although several places were considered, the only desirable tract was owned by E.E. Ogle, which they found out he would sell for \$1,800. If the Fraternity would put in \$600 and the men of the community \$1,200, they were confident the land could be obtained. Mrs. Helmick also issued an ultimatum saying that if the Ogle land was not obtained for the Fraternity by the next day at noon, Pi Beta Phi would go elsewhere and establish a school where land would be given to us.

A hack—now known as a taxi—had arrived to take Miss Miller and Mrs.



Helmick to Sevierville. Soon after its arrival, the word was spread that the two Pi Phis were wanted at the store. They found Mr. Ogle busily writing a title bond to be held by Pi Beta Phi until the deed could be

made and sworn to. Almost all the money had been subscribed, and Andy Huff and another man called Mr. Maples—both supporters in the community—agreed to make up any final deficit.

The New Pi Beta Phi School Building (1913–1914)

With the deed to the Ogle land, Pi Phi acquired 35 acres, a teacher's cottage, an old school building, a barn, a store, several storage buildings and according to Mrs. Helmick, "an immense amount of faith in the generous support and good will of Pi Phis everywhere." In return, Pi Phi

promised to maintain a school for 10 years, build a new schoolhouse and hire qualified teachers.

A new school building was designed by Mr. and Mrs. Von Holst of Chicago. **LUCY HAMMOND VON HOLST** was a Colorado Beta and a member of the Chicago,

Illinois, Alumnae Club. This new building resembled a bungalow, cost \$3,735.30 and was the second largest schoolhouse in the county.

That summer, Miss Hill resigned because of health issues. When school opened on August 4, 1913, Miss Miller assisted Minnesota

Alpha **ABBIE LANGMAID**. That was the beginning of the first year in Pi Phi's own building and with teachers who were all Pi Phis. Two months later, Miss Langmaid was succeeded by Vermont Alpha **MARY**

O. POLLARD, who was made head resident.

The new school building was dedicated on July 9, 1914. Five members of Grand Council – **MAY LANSFIELD KELLER, LIDA**

BURKHARD LARDNER, AMY BURNHAM ONKEN, ANNE STUART and **SARAH RUGG POMEROY** – attended and assisted in preparing for the guests whom they entertained at a luncheon.

A Teacher's Cottage (1916)

Conditions for the teachers were crowded, and after the 1914–1915 school year, it was recommended that a new teacher's residence be constructed. During the fall 1916, a 10-room teacher's residence was designed and planned by Iowa Gammas **ALDA** and **ALMINA WILSON** alongside architects working in New York City. It was built as a model home with furnace heat, running water and a bath, and it cost \$4,748.43. With dedicated teachers, its own schoolhouse and the new teacher's cottage, the Settlement School became a respected and integral part of the Gatlinburg community.



The Jennie Nicol Health Center (1920s–1940s)

From the start, the teachers and head residents tried to educate the students and community members about health issues. Miss Pollard spent the summer of 1914 informing the community about the danger of hookworm. Treatment could be sought at the Settlement School where the county hookworm specialist visited. In 1914, the Settlement School Committee reported that a fund had been started by three of the founders; they had contributed \$150 for the establishment of a hospital in

Gatlinburg to honor **JENNIE NICOL**.

The 1919 influenza epidemic broke down the walls of mistrust and prejudice that existed at the school's beginning. During the epidemic, the community turned to the school for help. Evelyn "Miss Evelyn" Bishop was hired as head resident in 1917, and under her direction, not one case proved fatal.

Attempts were made during the 1919–1920 school year to enlist the services of a school nurse. In



the summer of 1920, Miss Bishop attended a meeting of the New York City, New York, Alumnae Club and told them of the lack of health care in Gatlinburg. Her appeal was heard by Ontario Alpha **PHYLLIS HIGGINBOTHAM**, who volunteered her services. Nurse Phyllis, as she was known, was a graduate of the University of Toronto, Johns Hopkins University and Columbia University. She had served overseas in World War I and at the time of her hire was doing settlement work in New York City. She was the only registered nurse in the county upon arrival.

Shortly after Nurse Phyllis arrived, the Pi Phi bought the farm of Andrew Ogle. The property included a four-room home, which was turned into a health center and emergency hospital. On May 8, 1922, this hospital was dedicated as

the Jennie Nicol Memorial Health Center and Emergency Hospital. It included an office and consulting room, a work room, a bathroom and a linen closet where sterile supplies were kept. Visiting doctors could perform emergency operations in the hospital.

Nurse Phyllis' professionalism as well as her personality won the cooperation of four doctors from Sevierville, Tennessee, and Knoxville, Tennessee, and they each agreed to keep office hours once a month at the health center, as did a Knoxville dentist. Within six years, Nurse Phyllis had such a remarkable center that one of the leading doctors at the State Medical University at Memphis wrote a detailed report advising the state to use this rural health center as a model for other rural

health facilities. In 1926, Nurse Phyllis resigned to become State Supervisor of Public Health Nurses, a position she was offered because of her many accomplishments in Gatlinburg.

In 1948, a new Jennie Nicol Memorial Health Center was dedicated. Located on the Parkway near the Arrowcraft Shop, it was made possible largely through bequests and special gifts. The Andrew Ogle home, which had been the health center, became the Settlement School caretaker's residence. Though many doctors eventually moved to the town and modern school buildings were created, the building still stands, a testament to the service provided to the citizens by the Fraternity and its staff of dedicated nurses and teachers.

The Settlement School (1920s–1940s)

It was inevitable that the Settlement School would feel the impact of the rapid change when the Great Smoky Mountains became a national park. As the government acquired land for the park, people moved down to the lower elevations, many moving to Gatlinburg. The Great Smoky Mountains National Park was dedicated in 1941 by President Franklin D. Roosevelt. Motels, gift shops and restaurants opened after the park's dedication, and the town's population grew from 500 in 1928 to more than 2,000 in the mid-1960s.

Those who owned land in Gatlinburg heeded Mr. Huff's advice and held onto it. Many say the education

they received at the Pi Beta Phi Settlement School helped them cope and capitalize upon this new prosperity.

As Gatlinburg grew, the responsibilities of the Pi Beta Phi Settlement School also grew to align with the community's needs. This included emphasizing home economics and music education, teaching men in the community to make furniture, forming a Parent-Teachers' Association, establishing a class for older students and more.

The 1922 meeting of the Settlement School Committee and Grand Council empowered the Settlement School to establish a junior high school and industrial high school, to

install a moving picture machine in the auditorium of the new building, to add a course in agriculture in accordance with the Smith-Hughes Act and to establish scholarships.



They also named the original cottage the Mary Pollard Cottage in recognition of her “loyalty and worthy service to the Fraternity as the first Pi Beta Phi head resident.” Perhaps one of the greatest efforts to come out of this era was the development of the cottage craft industry, which became known as Arrowcraft. Read more about the Arrowcraft shop at Appendix 1.

In the mid-1920s, the county increased the regular free school term to eight months, and a telephone was installed at the school. In 1928, the Pi Beta Phi High

School was built. It housed the Grace Coolidge Library, which was founded in 1924. When a new junior high school and an industrial high school were built, Pi Phi maintained dormitories in which the students could be boarded and supervised.

In the 1930s, vocational agriculture continued to be strong. A Future Farmers of America chapter was established. In 1933, Miss Evelyn resigned as director of the school. During her 15 years, “new departments were created and added to the school, the standard of work in all handicrafts was

greatly raised, extension work was organized and became a wonderful success at Sugarlands and outlying districts, the mountain children were taught to play and develop as all splendid Americans should, scientific farming became established and the fine new Administration Building became a reality. The people who live up and down the creeks and hollers that lead into Gatlinburg now live happier, healthier and more prosperous lives because they were privileged to have Miss Evelyn.”

Economic Development (1910s–1930s)

Crafts had always been a part of the community members’ lives, but because there was no market for the things they made, they either used the crafts themselves or bartered them for goods. Basket making was given its first real consideration at the Settlement School when Texas Alpha **MARGARET BURROUGHS** gathered a class of girls who were interested in basket weaving in the fall of 1914.

In May of 1915, Minnesota Alpha **CAROLINE MCKNIGHT HUGHES** took charge of the business and industrial work. She installed a manual training outfit at a cost of \$179 with which she gave instruction to 52 boys.

After the Pi Phis worked diligently to secure funding, the weaving department was equipped. Spinning bees and quilting parties were held in the hope of reviving these almost lost industries. Miss Hughes taught the children

how to weave tiny rugs, mats



and hammocks. Basket making continued as a fireside industry. By the spring of 1919, baskets—ranging in price from

40 cents for a small basket to \$5 for a fireside basket—were for sale. They were made from hemlock bark, willow switches, willow bark, white oak splits and corn husks.

In 1920, the weaving department benefited when Lucy Nicholson from Berea, Kentucky, was hired to teach weaving, and interest was immediately revived. Three looms were added to the school’s equipment in 1921, and the girls and women made goods to sell to the summer tourist trade. In 1925, Winogene Reddings, a weaving teacher, was employed full-time and provided further instruction. The total of weaving orders increased from \$1,000 in 1923 to \$14,000 in 1927. By 1936, 91 looms were furnishing products for the school.

Turning over the Settlement School to Sevier County (1930s-1960s)

Two surveys of the Settlement School programs were conducted in the late 1930s and early 1940s. Both studies recommended that the cost of maintaining Settlement School be turned over to Sevier County as fast as the county could assume the burden.

By 1943, both the community and Fraternity convinced the county it should shoulder the responsibilities for basic education. Gatlinburg, they argued, should receive as much as the county gave the other schools within its boundaries. A satisfactory lease agreement was drawn up between the Fraternity and the county to cover 25 years. The Fraternity allowed the use of its high school building and playground for a rental fee of \$1 per year. In exchange, Pi Phi retained the privilege of supervising the curriculum and having equal voice with the county in selecting teachers. A secondary agreement with the Sevier County School Board gave it the use of the grade school building until conditions made it possible to build a new elementary school on land adjoining the Pi Phi property, which was to be purchased by the county.

The insurance and maintenance costs were to be met by the county, and the arrangement proved to be less than satisfactory. It was soon discovered that the basic responsibilities assumed by Sevier County were not all that was desired or needed at the school; consequently, Pi Beta Phi supplemented the program. The county supplied the faculty to teach basic subjects, but they were not able to teach all the courses which would make the school accredited. So, with the loan of the Pi Beta Phi School equipment and the addition of teachers secured and paid by the Fraternity, the school became fully accredited. Pi Phi supplied music, physical education and craft teachers as well as the necessary materials.

In 1947, the county again turned to Pi Beta Phi after two years of seeking a site for the new buildings and an athletic field. The only land was appraised at a prohibitive cost. In order for the new buildings to meet Tennessee's requirements, the Fraternity deeded 1.8 acres and leased sufficient land for playground purposes on a 50-year lease.



The first modern grade school, the Pi Beta Phi Elementary School, was built on the site by the county in 1950. A few years later, a gymnasium and a cafeteria were added, and by 1962, plans were underway for a consolidated county high school. In 1968, the Settlement School elementary and secondary educational programs were discontinued when they became part of the Sevier County school system. The high school moved to Route 321, and it consolidated with Pittman Center High School to become the Gatlinburg-Pittman High School.

After the county assumed responsibility for education, the settlement school and its summer craft workshops evolved into Arrowmont® School of Arts and Crafts.

Appendix 1 | The Arrowcraft Shop

In 1924, a trademark was sought for articles made at the school, and Grand Council suggested a contest be held. Wyoming Alpha **ALICE WALLACE WRIGHT** had the winning design. This design was used as a

basis for the trademark "Arrowcraft" when it was registered by the United States government. By 1926, the industrial work was taking up much of Miss Evelyn's and the teachers' time. In addition to their school

duties, they were buying, packing, shipping, storing and tending to the endless details of running a craft business. That spring, the Arrowcraft Gift Shop was established on an experimental basis by Texas



Alpha **HARMO TAYLOR** and North Carolina Alpha Lois. The shop first opened in the Teachers' Cottage and then moved to Stuart Cottage.

During the first month, sales totaled \$1,000. The shop was only open during the summer and between September and December. There were many orders from alumnae clubs. **LOIS ROGERS** opened the Arrowcraft Shop in April 1927 on a year-round basis. In 1929, \$22,000 was paid by the school to the makers of the craft products, and in 1931—upon the completion of the new Mountain View Hotel—a Pi Beta Phi Shop was opened in the hotel. Pi Beta Phi had been the first to provide a market for the mountain crafts, but by 1931, there were nine other shops in Gatlinburg selling weaving and other hand-crafted products. In 1940, a new Arrowcraft Shop was constructed on the Parkway.

A 1939 brochure noted, "Perhaps Pi Beta Phi's outstanding contribution to Gatlinburg has been

its part in the revival of weaving. The school furnishes not only the instruction, but also a market for high-grade weaving and basketry, wood and metal work, and its workers' products have gained nationwide reputation for artistry and craftsmanship. The woven products shown in our shops are done in the homes of the weavers on their own looms, though supervised and designed by our weaving teacher."

The Arrowcraft Shop has been featured in most of the premier art exhibitions throughout the country. In 1931, the Southern Highland Handicraft Guild—now known as the Southern Highland Craft Guild—was formed, and the Arrowcraft Shop was a charter member. The guild operated a cooperative retail shop, the Allenstand Cottage Industries, in Asheville, North Carolina. In 1935, the Arrowcraft Shop bought shares of stock of the Southern Highlanders, Inc., a craft guild that had a shop at Norris Dam,

60 miles from Gatlinburg. Through its membership in the Guild and the Southern Highlanders, Inc., Arrowcraft shared in a nationwide cooperative effort toward a renaissance of American arts and crafts.

The first Craftsman's Fair sponsored by the guild was held on the Pi Beta Phi grounds in 1948. The fair presented the opportunity for people to see demonstrations and well-planned exhibits of many diversified crafts from the area.

Arrowcraft had established one of the few examples of cottage industries in the United States. Many distinguished foreign guests who wished to promote home industries in their countries had been sent by their governments to study the project. In the early days of the weaving department, many of the weavers were mothers of young children. Weaving for the shop allowed them to stay home yet still earn money. During one five-year period, 104 babies were born to shop weavers. Pi Phi rules required pregnant weavers take two months off prior to delivery and two months off following the birth.

The years of major weaving production were from 1935 to 1945. There were never less than 90 weavers, and they each earned between \$150 and \$300 a year for part-time work. In 1940, the U.S. government required proof the shop was complying with the minimum wage, which was then 40 cents an hour. An Arrowcraft study confirmed weavers received between 45 cents and 50 cents an hour, depending on their weaving speed.

From 1969–1970, 62 weavers produced 20,000 tote bags and 15,000 daisy chain placemats, and 70 other craftsmen were kept busy.

While it had operated successfully in its early years bringing more than \$1 million to its craftsmen, in later years the Arrowcraft Shop was unable to remain a viable enterprise. In 1994, Arrowcraft, Inc. was dissolved by the Arrowcraft Shop Board of

Directors. The building was leased to the Southern Highland Craft Guild, which ran a similar store under the name of “Arrowcraft, a Shop of the Southern Highlands Craft Guild.” The shop closed in 2015.

Pi Beta Phi played a major part in the crafts revival starting from the first basket-making workshop in 1914. Arrowcraft had given the people a way to earn money using

skills many already knew. Pi Phi provided a marketplace, and handcrafted items were shipped across the country. People who had never been to Gatlinburg knew of the wonderful products made by the area’s craftsmen. Pi Phi took this long association with the crafts movement and made it the focus of its philanthropic efforts. ✨