

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service  
National Register of Historic Places Registration Form



602

1. Name of Property

Historic Name: Kappa Kappa Gamma House  
Other name/site number:  
Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

2. Location

Street & number: 2001 University Avenue  
City or town: Austin State: Texas County: Travis  
Not for publication:  Vicinity:

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this  nomination  request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria.

I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following levels of significance:  
 national  statewide  local

Applicable National Register Criteria:  A  B  C  D

Mark Wolfe State Historic Preservation Officer Date 6/18/13  
Signature of certifying official / Title  
Texas Historical Commission  
State or Federal agency / bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of commenting or other official Date  
\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency / bureau or Tribal Government

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

- entered in the National Register
- determined eligible for the National Register
- determined not eligible for the National Register.
- removed from the National Register
- other, explain: \_\_\_\_\_

Joy Eason H. Beall Date of Action 8.13.13  
Signature of the Keeper

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**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Private
<input type="checkbox"/>	Public - Local
<input type="checkbox"/>	Public - State
<input type="checkbox"/>	Public - Federal

**Category of Property**

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	building(s)
<input type="checkbox"/>	district
<input type="checkbox"/>	site
<input type="checkbox"/>	structure
<input type="checkbox"/>	object

**Number of Resources within Property**

Contributing	Noncontributing	
2	0	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
2	0	total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: 0

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions:** EDUCATION/education-related housing

**Current Functions:** EDUCATION/education-related housing

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification:** LATE 19<sup>TH</sup> AND 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY REVIVALS: Colonial Revival and Classical Revival

**Principal Exterior Materials:** Brick

**Narrative Description** (see continuation sheets 7-6 through 7-8)

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## 8. Statement of Significance

### Applicable National Register Criteria

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<b>A</b>	Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
	<b>B</b>	Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<b>C</b>	Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
	<b>D</b>	Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

**Criteria Considerations:** N/A

**Areas of Significance:** Education, Architecture

**Period of Significance:** 1939–1963

**Significant Dates:** 1939

**Significant Person** (only if criterion b is marked):

**Cultural Affiliation** (only if criterion d is marked):

**Architect/Builder:** Briscoe, Birdsall Parmenas

**Narrative Statement of Significance** (see continuation sheets 8-9 through 8-15)

## 9. Major Bibliographic References

**Bibliography** (see continuation sheets 9-16 through 9-17)

### Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #

### Primary location of additional data:

- State historic preservation office (Texas Historical Commission, Austin)
- Other state agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other -- Specify Repository:

**Historic Resources Survey Number** (if assigned): N/A

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**10. Geographical Data**

**Acreage of Property:** less than one acre

**Coordinates**

Datum if other than WGS84: N/A

1. Latitude: 30.282733 Longitude: -97.739345

**Verbal Boundary Description:** Lot 5 and the south 60 feet of Lot 4, Outlot 18, Division D, Louis Horst's Addition, Travis County, Texas.

**Boundary Justification:** Nomination includes all property historically associated with the building.

**11. Form Prepared By** w/ assistance from Suzanne Deaderick, Beta Xi House Association and Carlyn Hammons, Historian, THC

Name/title: Serena Bolliger, student  
Organization: University of Texas at Austin  
Street & number: Sutton Hall  
City or Town: Austin State: Texas Zip Code: 78701  
Email: serena.bolliger@gmail.com  
Telephone: 201 739 7813  
Date: 11/25/12

**Additional Documentation**

**Maps** (see continuation sheet Map-18 through Map-20)

**Additional items** (see continuation sheets Figure-21 through Figure-22)

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## Photographs

Name of Property: Kappa Kappa Gamma House  
City or Vicinity: Austin  
County, State: Travis County, TX  
Photographer: Serena Bolliger  
Date Photographed: October 7, 1012  
Number of Photos: 11

TX\_Travis County\_Kappa Kappa Gamma House\_0001.tif  
Primary (west) elevation. Camera facing east.

TX\_Travis County\_Kappa Kappa Gamma House\_0002.tif  
Southwest oblique. Camera facing northeast.

TX\_Travis County\_Kappa Kappa Gamma House\_0003.tif  
1972 Garden Room addition as seen on the south elevation. Camera facing north.

TX\_Travis County\_Kappa Kappa Gamma House\_0004.tif  
Southeast oblique and courtyard wall. Camera facing northwest.

TX\_Travis County\_Kappa Kappa Gamma House\_0005.tif  
Rear elevation as seen from the service alley. Camera facing approximately southwest.

TX\_Travis County\_Kappa Kappa Gamma House\_0006.tif  
North elevation. Camera facing approximately east.

TX\_Travis County\_Kappa Kappa Gamma House\_0007.tif  
Interior spiral staircase located in the first floor reception room. Camera facing north.

TX\_Travis County\_Kappa Kappa Gamma House\_0008.tif  
Fireplace in the southwest corner room, first floor. Camera facing approximately southeast.

TX\_Travis County\_Kappa Kappa Gamma House\_0009.tif  
Oval reception room, first floor. Camera facing south.

TX\_Travis County\_Kappa Kappa Gamma House\_0010.tif  
Kappa House (left) in general setting, looking south towards the Texas State Capitol.

TX\_Travis County\_Kappa Kappa Gamma House\_0011.tif  
Kappa House (right) in general setting, looking north towards UT Main Building/Tower.

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

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## Narrative Description

The Kappa Kappa Gamma House is a three-story brick house with a double-height entry portico supported by tall Ionic columns and wrought iron detail work. On the northeast corner of 20<sup>th</sup> Street and University Avenue, it is in the line of sight of both the Texas State Capitol and The University of Texas at Austin's famed Main Building/Tower. Purpose-built as the seat for the Beta Xi chapter of Kappa Kappa Gamma, a national sorority, the house was completed in 1939. Originally consisting of 39 rooms, accommodating 38 female students, a 1972 addition to the U-shaped property enclosed the building at the rear, adding important public space. Designed by noted Houston architect Birdsall P. Briscoe, this building is a fine example of his work, and embodies the eclectic period revival style for which Briscoe is so well known. Characteristic features include the Ionic columned entry portico topped by a prominent pediment, stately brick construction, multi-paned windows, regularly spaced fenestration, a wide cornice, and elegant iron work.

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## General Setting

The Kappa Kappa Gamma House<sup>1</sup> is located on the northeast corner of 20th Street and University Avenue, just south of The University of Texas at Austin's core campus. The approximately 16,000 square foot house sits on just over one-third of an acre, nearly filling the lot. The main entrance is situated towards University Avenue, a broad, divided thoroughfare which features a landscaped median. The avenue is just two blocks long, leading north from Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard and terminating at the Littlefield Memorial Fountain near the heart of the campus's historic core. The Kappa House is within the boundary generally associated with The University of Texas at Austin academic campus, which is roughly enclosed by Guadalupe Street to the west, Interstate 35 to the east, East Dean Keeton Street to the north, and Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard to the south. However, with the exception of the AT&T Hotel and Conference Center (2008) at the northwest corner of University Avenue and MLK, the properties located along this two-block stretch of University Avenue are not technically included in the official boundaries of the campus, though they certainly possess a university affiliation. Along the east side of University Avenue, north of the Kappa House, lies University Christian Church and the Alpha Phi sorority house, while to the south lies University Avenue Church of Christ and its affiliated student center and surface parking lot. The west side of University Avenue is home to the AT&T Hotel and Conference Center (anchoring the south end) and the University Catholic Center (anchoring the north end). A surface parking lot lies between them, putting it directly across from the Kappa House. The university's expansive Perry Castaneda Library (1972) lies directly behind (east) of the Kappa House.

The Kappa House faces west onto a small landscaped yard, with concrete footpaths leading from the entrance right and left onto the sidewalks skirting the streets. Twentieth Street forms the southern boundary of the property. Immediately north of the Kappa House is the Alpha Phi sorority house, also constructed in the 1930s; an asphalt driveway separates the two properties. A service alley forms the eastern boundary of the property. A brick wall encloses a small garden patio area on the south of the building, punctuated by mature oaks, between the house and 20<sup>th</sup> Street. The patio hardscaping was added in the early 2000s.

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<sup>1</sup> For simplicity, the remainder of this nomination will refer to the property simply as the Kappa House.

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## Exterior

The Kappa house is composed of pink Monticello brick and is sheltered by a cross-hipped roof. The original design formed a formal, symmetrical, rear-facing U. In 1972, a one-story Garden Room was added on to the rear. Thus, the first floor plan now more closely resembles a rectangular block while the second and third floors retain the original U plan. The addition is not visible from the primary elevation.

The primary (west) façade features a double-height entry portico supported by four Ionic columns with a simple pediment and a plain frieze. Between the columns on the first floor is an ornate wrought iron handrail, a detail which is duplicated in the carport and on the rails on the first floor windows. There are six triple-sash windows with louvered shutters on the first floor and double hung windows on the floors above. A simple horizontal band of white plaster encircles the building just beneath the bottom sash of the third floor windows. The white front double doors have an ornate capital detail, and the Kappa Kappa Gamma Greek letter insignia is centered over the doors. The clean lines and simple design are typical of Birdsall Briscoe's interpretation of the period revival movement.

The rear (east) face of the building reveals the largest part of the 1972 addition. The former open courtyard was enclosed with the one-story Garden Room that supports an upper patio area on the roof. The back of the property, which faces a service alley, reveals its utilitarian function. The wall consists of a pink brick section and a white board-and-batten clad utility space which feeds directly into the kitchen wing on the north side of the building. This board-and-batten portion was once a free-standing service building, but the 1972 expansion incorporated it into the main volume of the house. However, because it was once free-standing, it is counted as a separate resource in the Section 5 chart on page 2 of this nomination, per guidelines in National Register Bulletin 16A.

A concrete driveway runs adjacent to the house from University Avenue to the service alley, creating the northern boundary of the property. A porch roof, held by wrought metal supports, projects over the driveway and shelters the side entrance to the building. A wrought metal gate complements the ironwork around the property. Entry is provided by a single door with a transom above. Windows which correspond to the interior stairwell are differentiated from the others by their staggered placement. All other windows follow the fenestration and style pattern as on other elevations, with the exception of those that correspond to the kitchen and pantry; those are smaller in scale.

The south face of the building expresses the double hung triple sash windows on the first floor and double hung windows on the second and third floors. The exception is towards the rear of the building, where louvered windows fill openings to the second and third floor spaces originally designated as the dormitories. The south elevation also incorporates the entrance to the 1972 Garden Room addition from the patio. Exterior access to the basement is also provided on this elevation.

## Interior

The house sits on a partially excavated basement. The basement level has always been used for official Kappa Kappa Gamma chapter business, such as chapter meetings, initiation rites, and chapter paraphernalia storage. It is closed to the public, but it has not been remodeled since it was designed, so its floor plan can be determined

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from the original blueprints of the building. The stairs from the first floor descend into the northwest corner, into a passage that opens to the chapter room in the mid-east part of the house, a game room on the south side, and mechanical spaces on the north and northeast sides of the house.

The first floor is notable for its graceful winding staircase to the left of the doorway. It has a walnut bannister and white painted spindles. The oval reception room features simple crown molding, tall base boards, and variegated wood parquet floors. Ceilings and walls are smooth painted plaster. Ornate plaster moldings surround all the light fixtures, including the wall sconces and chandelier. The windows on the first floor are triple sash, sensible for ventilation in a Texas climate building that was originally designed to have air conditioning only in the basement. The living room, to the right of the entrance, is an entertaining space which was also redecorated in 1972, and can lights were inset into the ceiling. There is crown molding throughout the room and a chair rail. Behind it is a small library, which is used both for its original purpose and as a study space. The Garden Room is the 1972 addition and is now the main entertainment space on the first floor. It is used for meals, informal meetings, recruitment events, and fundraising events. The kitchen to the left of it has been in place since 1938 but it was expanded into the original pantry with the 1972 addition.

The living room features a carved wood fireplace mantel attributed to master woodcarver Peter Mansbendel whose work is prominently on display throughout the University of Texas. This is speculation by the staff, and evidence supporting the claim has not yet been found. If it were a Mansbendel piece it would have been one of his last, as the carpenter died in 1940.<sup>2</sup> Briscoe did commission Mansbendel to work on at least four of his projects, and the artist had married an Austinite after immigrating from Switzerland, which supports the suggestion that he would have been in Austin at this time.

The central spiral staircase spans only from the first to the second floor. The floors are otherwise connected by traditional straight profile staircases. The entire second, third, and basement floors are carpeted, and all the white painted doors are original to the home. A PA system installed in 1972 runs throughout the house and is still in use today, allowing communication between the girls during house events and from the house staff to the residents for administrative purposes.

Originally the second and third floors each held two large rooms for group dormitory-style sleeping, as well as ten smaller rooms designated for studying. In recent years, the twelve rooms serve as private and semi-private bedrooms. The second floor also contains three bathrooms and a laundry room. All the rooms branch out of a central corridor. The third floor is almost identical to the second floor, the only difference being the access to the attic (used for storage). In addition, the second floor laundry room space is a bathroom space on the third floor.

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<sup>2</sup> Al Lowman, "MANSBENDEL, PETER HEINRICH," *Handbook of Texas Online* (<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fma97>), accessed November 26, 2012. Published by the Texas State Historical Association.



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## Statement of Significance

The Kappa Kappa Gamma House, designed in the eclectic period revival style popular in the interwar years, is the work of Birdsall P. Briscoe, a highly regarded Texas architect known primarily for his work in upscale residential suburbs in Houston. Completed in 1939, the Kappa House is one Briscoe's very few projects completed outside of Houston. The house embodies the distinctive characteristics of Briscoe's blending of period revival styles as he interpreted them for a fraternal organization. Not only does the design project the refined and dignified image so desired by such an organization, but the interior plan also reflects the unique needs of private sorority business, as well as the housing of a relatively large number of members. Chapter houses such as this one played an important early role in women's higher education at The University of Texas at Austin. Not only did they play an important social and cultural role in the students' character development—increasingly seen as an important and supplementary component to higher education—but they also filled a very basic housing need for women students during a time when the university could not.

The Kappa Kappa Gamma House was designated a Recorded Texas Historic Landmark in 1989 and a City of Austin Historic Landmark in 2009. It is now nominated to the National Register of Historic Places at the local level of significance under Criteria A and C in the areas of education and architecture. The period of significance extends from 1939, the original date of construction, to 1963, the fifty year threshold for eligibility.

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## Women's Housing at The University of Texas at Austin

Female students were admitted to The University of Texas from the school's beginning in 1883, and though their numbers were smaller, they took classes alongside their male counterparts. In 1886, UT enrolled 245 students, 54 of whom were female. Their numbers steadily rose, and by the turn of the century, female students represented about one-third of the student population.<sup>3</sup>

Throughout most of this time period, however, student housing was not provided by the university. In fact, the legislative act that established UT prohibited state funds from being used to build dorms. All state money was to go towards education, not housing, and school officials concerned themselves with the managerial and educational aspects of running an institution of higher education. Students were left to make their own housing arrangements, and the vast majority of them lived in boarding houses that met with faculty approval located near the university.<sup>4</sup> The lone exception to this was B Hall, a men's dormitory constructed in 1890 with funding from a private donor. The dorm could accommodate 58 male students.

Finally, in 1901, the Texas legislature—by a margin of just one vote—allowed funding for a women's dorm. The very first state-funded dorm on campus was named simply the Women's Building. It opened in 1903 and could house only 72 of the nearly 900 women enrolled. "Generously equipped and staffed with a gymnasium,

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<sup>3</sup> For a comprehensive discussion of women's housing issues, see Chloe Lee Quebedeaux, *Housing of Women Students at the University of Texas* (Thesis, University of Texas at Austin, 1938).

<sup>4</sup> National Register of Historic Places, Scottish Rite Dormitory, Travis County, Texas, National Register #427479.

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swimming tank, a diet kitchen, a large reception area, a housekeeper, a matron, and a physical directress, the Women's Building was committed to the holistic education and development of women."<sup>5</sup>

Attitudes regarding student housing slowly began to change around the turn of the century. One reason was that boarding houses were becoming so expensive that officials feared a university education would no longer be possible for anyone but the most elite. Changing educational philosophies may also have played a role in changing attitudes. Officials slowly began to see value in concerning themselves with more than just a student's studies and focused on ways in which to provide for well-rounded student life on campus. However, even as officials began to realize the importance of on-campus housing for students, the legislature's chronic underfunding of the university, combined with notorious statehouse politics and a flawed financial structure meant little progress in actually providing funds for student accommodations.<sup>6</sup> By 1915, though, the university had established a Student Life Office and even a Dean of Student Life, signaling an increased interest in and responsibility for students' overall well-being. However, the housing shortage remained an issue, and religious and fraternal organizations tried to fill the void. Already in 1897, the Episcopal Church had built Grace Hall, a women's dormitory that could hold 30 students, and sororities began operating chapter houses as early as 1902. Sorority houses, in fact, soon became one of the primary providers of housing for female students.

In 1920, the university could still house less than one-quarter of the enrolled female students in its sole women's dormitory. Privately-held Grace Hall accommodated 30 more, and 119 female students resided in one of the ten sorority chapter houses on or near campus.<sup>7</sup> This suggests that these chapter houses played a crucial role in the higher education of women at the university—at least in these early years—if for no other reason than they provided a necessary quality-of-life component that the university could not yet provide to students.

### **Sorority Formation at The University of Texas at Austin**

Sororities were founded, of course, for myriad more reasons than to simply provide housing for collegiate women. More, even, than a social organization, sororities set out to guide the character development of its members. In her dissertation, Mari Ann Callais observes that instinctual need for fraternity between men is equally reflected in the development and success of sororities.<sup>8</sup> She quotes Robson, "The fraternity fulfills the need for belonging. It fulfills a natural, almost instinctive desire of belonging to a group composed of one's peers. Failure to fulfill this need interferes with one's educational development. The satisfaction of this need is acquired through the lessons of getting along successfully with fellow members and through an internal group spirit."<sup>9</sup> Noted women's historian Barbara Miller Solomon confirms the importance of this social role: "The growth of sororities over the period illustrates well illustrates the mixed purposes and results of organized social groups. Sororities were originally founded as secret societies to affirm the ties of friendship. Gradually, however, they took over public functions, and, to varying extents, became influential forces on many

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<sup>5</sup> "An Overview of Housing at the University of Texas," University of Texas Website. Accessed February 1, 2013. <http://www.utexas.edu/student/housing/index.php?id=725&scode=0&site=0>.

<sup>6</sup> Richard Cleary and Lawrence Speck, *The University of Texas at Austin: The Campus Guide*, (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2011), 21.

<sup>7</sup> Margaret C. Berry, *Scottish Rite Dormitory at the University of Texas, A History* (Waco: Nortex Press, 2007).

<sup>8</sup> Mari Ann Callais, *Sorority Rituals: Rites of Passage and their Impact on Contemporary Sorority Women*, Dissertation, Louisiana State University, May 2002. [http://etd.lsu.edu/docs/available/etd-0418102-225829/unrestricted/Callais\\_dis.pdf](http://etd.lsu.edu/docs/available/etd-0418102-225829/unrestricted/Callais_dis.pdf).

<sup>9</sup> J. Robson, *The College Fraternity and Its Modern Role* (Menasha, WI: George Banta Company, Inc., 1966), 30.

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campuses. ...In addition, especially at coeducation schools, they provided institutional group support for young women."<sup>10</sup>

Whatever value sororities might have provided to a woman's pursuit of higher education, not everyone was supportive. University officials actually banned sororities from the campus for most of the nineteenth century, fearing that the institutions would be disruptive to students' learning and promote elitism on campus. Sororities were finally allowed to form at The University of Texas in 1902, but support was not universal. Governor Ferguson, for example, was an outspoken critic of both fraternities and sororities. As late as 1917, he publicly criticized them as undemocratic and contributing to class and social demarcation on campus.<sup>11</sup>

The university, however, eventually became supportive of these groups as officials realized the positive role they played in the character development and education of female students. An added benefit, of course, was that the presence of chapter houses somewhat relieved the university from pressures to build additional dormitories.

In 1923, when asked about the role of sororities on campus, the university's Dean of Women Lucy Newton stated,

"Oh, I heartily approve of the sororities, and I have three good reasons why I think they should be encouraged. First of all, their plan of individual chapter houses is an ideal housing arrangement, where congenial groups of girls dwell comfortably together with a chaperone of their own choosing. Second, such plan teaches the girls to be self reliant, for they are a self-governing group with the backing of their respective national orders. And these national organizations have excellent standards, each and all pledging loyalty and service to the universities. Third, I find that girls who belong to sororities develop with greater rapidity along the lines of scholarship and cultural ideals as demanded by the national societies of which they are a unit."<sup>12</sup>

By 1935, 14 sororities operated chapter houses on or near the university campus and were regarded as important complements to a student's social well-being and a supplement to higher education.

### **Kappa Kappa Gamma at the University of Texas at Austin: Beta Xi Chapter**

Kappa Kappa Gamma, a national collegiate fraternity,<sup>13</sup> was founded at Monmouth College (Monmouth, IL) in 1870, making it one of the earliest American collegiate sororities. The Beta Xi chapter of Kappa Kappa Gamma was founded at The University of Texas in 1902, making it the 39<sup>th</sup> chapter of the sorority established nationally. It shares distinction as one of the first sororities established at the university; the Texas Alpha chapter of Pi Beta Phi was established that same year.

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<sup>10</sup> Barbara M. Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 107.

<sup>11</sup> Chloe Lee Quebedeaux, *Housing of Women Students at the University of Texas* (Thesis, University of Texas at Austin, 1938), 60-64.

<sup>12</sup> *Daily Texan*, (UT-Austin Student Newspaper), September 26, 1923.

<sup>13</sup> Because it admits only women, Kappa Kappa Gamma is more commonly referred to as a sorority.

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The Beta Xi chapter first operated a chapter house located at the corner of 24<sup>th</sup> Street and Rio Grande Street, beginning in 1904. It provided residence to 10 of the chapter's members. By the mid-1930s, however, the organization outgrew its first home. Nearly 3,000 women were enrolled at the university in 1936, and while the university had added two more women's dormitories by then, additional housing was still very much a necessity, and sororities were now firmly entrenched in the university's culture. The Beta Xi House Association was formed that year with the purpose of raising funds and overseeing construction of a larger home for the chapter members.

### **The 1939 Kappa House**

The Association purchased the property at 20<sup>th</sup> Street and University Avenue from E. L. Steck for \$13,500 in 1936. Steck had only owned the property for a year, having bought it for \$10,000 from Mrs. Mary E. Brown, who ran a boarding house there. Mr. Steck's daughter, Mary Frances Steck, was a member of the sorority and became a member of the House Association's Finance Committee, a group appointed to sell the existing Kappa house located at 2400 Rio Grande, dispose of the boarding house on the newly purchased lot, and secure financing for the new chapter house.<sup>14</sup>

The choice of location may have simply been one of opportunity; the sorority needed a new house, and a sorority alum just happened to have a family connection to property located near the campus. The site along University Avenue, just three blocks south of the university's main building, certainly placed the Kappas within close proximity of the official campus (known as the Forty Acres). However, what was known as the Women's Campus—consisting of the women's gym, home economics building, and the few women's dormitories—was located north of the Forty Acres, all the way across campus from the new house location. University Avenue and the areas immediately surrounding it was lined with turn of the century residences that had long since been converted to boarding houses, a situation that persisted well into the 1960s. Nonetheless, University Avenue retained high visibility and prominence as a visual corridor between the university and the Capitol and the Kappas likely regarded their new location in the virtual "front yard" of the university as one of prestige.

Margaret W. Read, the consulting architect with the national office of Kappa Kappa Gamma, worked with the local board and submitted interior plans for the new house. Well-regarded Austin architect A. W. Harris was appointed as the local supervising architect to work with Read.<sup>15</sup> Four different plans were drawn but only three were presented to the board. They were a three-story Georgian, a Southern colonial with dormer windows and a French influence, and a recessed portico adaption of a Southern colonial. The fourth exterior was a modified French chateau, but didn't have the recommendation of the committee. The committee decided to let all Board members vote on the four styles with the top three being sent to Read for her opinion.<sup>16</sup>

Apparently a misunderstanding or difference of opinion seems to have taken place between the various parties the following year. The Board voted to "relieve him [Harris] of the impossible situation in which he is now placed." The minutes also state "that Mr. Harris has at all times been most patient and generous with an

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<sup>14</sup> Beta Xi House Association Minutes, Volume 1, Page 13, August 24, 1936.

<sup>15</sup> Beta Xi House Association Minutes, Volume 1, Page 14-15, September 19, 1936.

<sup>16</sup> Beta Xi House Association Minutes, Volume 1, Pages 21-22, January 16, 1937.

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impossible situation that has dragged itself out over four months and at present seems more puzzling than ever; we do not feel that it is fair to ask Mr. Harris to continue with such a situation.”<sup>17</sup>

The search for a new architect eventually led the committee to Houston, where they somehow became acquainted with the work of Birdsall P. Briscoe, a prolific and distinguished architect primarily known for his residential designs in upscale Houston neighborhoods such as River Oaks, Courtland Place, and Broadacres. The House Plans committee “reported that the committee had gone as a body to Houston to inspect the work of various architects there. They concluded that the work of Mr. B. P. Briscoe was outstanding and had therefore interviewed him with respect to his employment on the new Kappa house. He agreed to use as a base the interior plans drawn by Miss Read.”<sup>18</sup> Briscoe submitted interior plans and four to five exterior designs to the committee in May 1937. The board ultimately chose what was referred to then as the “Greek Revival House,” though they did request minor revisions to the rear of the house, which Briscoe incorporated.<sup>19</sup>

It must have taken the association some time to secure the necessary finances for the project because construction did not begin until the following year. On August 21, 1938, the Austin *Statesman* reported that ground had been broken for the home that week in an article titled “Kappa Home Put Underway with Largest of Permits.” The paper reported that building permits for the week totaled \$136,469. The Kappa House permit was for almost \$70,000. The paper went on to report that Moore Construction Company was named General Contractor, while the wiring contract went to Fox-Schmidt, the air conditioning contract to Young-Pratt, and the plumbing contract went to Spiller Miller. The new home, completed in 1939, could house 38 girls. A small, wood-frame, single story, service building was constructed on the rear, northeast corner of the lot at this time, as well. This building eventually became part of the main house when the 1972 Garden Room addition incorporated it into the main volume of the house.

Still used for its original purpose today, the Kappa House has housed over two thousand Kappa sorors since it was constructed. The modern mission of Kappa Kappa Gamma involves sisterhood and philanthropy. The philanthropies include fundraising for scholarships, local charity work, and annual support for Reading Is Fundamental, the official Kappa charity since 2004. Kappa activities involve social events, chapter meetings, and philanthropy work around campus and the community. Kappas have always been actively involved in philanthropic work, both locally and nationally, with a major emphasis on reading and education for children. The Beta Xi chapter has helped the Scottish Rite Children’s Hospital, the Retirement and Nursing Center of Austin, Genesis Women’s Shelter, A Million Thanks (letters to soldiers), The Davis Moon Project, Book Spring/RIF of Austin, and Breakthrough Austin. In past years they have volunteered with the Austin Children’s Shelter, the Children’s Hospital of Austin, the Lance Armstrong Foundation, and RIF. Currently, the chapter is raising funds to build a school in Africa. The house is a central hub for activity and it is the seat for the majority of the sisterhood activities. Sisters are encouraged to live in the house during their third year at the university to promote their unity as a pledge class, responsibility within the chapter, and legacy to the sorority.

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<sup>17</sup> Beta Xi House Association Minutes, Volume 1, Page 25, March 12, 1937.

<sup>18</sup> Beta Xi House Association Minutes, Volume 1, Page 29, April 17, 1937.

<sup>19</sup> Beta Xi House Association Minutes, Volume 1, Page 32, June 17, 1937.

Kappa Kappa Gamma House, Austin, Travis County, Texas

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## Architect: Birdsall P. Briscoe

Birdsall Parmenas Briscoe was born in Harrisburg, Texas, in 1876. Briscoe's great-grandfather John R. Harris arrived in Texas in 1826 from New York and founded Harrisburg. Later, Harris County (Houston) was named for him. Briscoe studied at San Antonio Academy, A&M College, and the University of Texas, completing degrees in engineering and mathematics. "Without the benefit of a professional degree in architecture, Briscoe followed a lengthy though not uncommon route into the field. He learned by observing, reading and practicing."<sup>20</sup> He was very much influenced by the popular eclectic movement in Houston, which eschewed the heavy ornamentation of the recent Victorian period for an adaptation of the trusted and familiar classical style. This may contribute to the explanation for his ordered and disciplined composition of historical detail in his designs. "One of the strengths of the good eclectic architects, and Birdsall Briscoe in particular, was careful attention to detail. Briscoe's concern for craftsmanship is apparent in every project."<sup>21</sup>

His understanding of architectural design came mainly through apprenticeships with Houston architects C. Lewis Wilson and Lewis Sterling Green. While Briscoe partnered with various architects during his career, he was best known for the independent work he did starting in 1912. He was the first president of what is now the Houston chapter of the American Institute of Architects (AIA) and was elected a fellow of the national AIA in 1949. Among his works listed on the National Register of Historic Places are the Judson Taylor House, the William L. Clayton Summer House, the W.T. Carter, Jr. House, the J.J. Carroll House, and numerous homes in the South Side Residential Historic District and the Broadacres Historic District—all in Houston. Briscoe worked in tandem with John Staub to design Miss Ima Hogg's Home at Bayou Bend and remodeled the Patton-Varner House, Miss Ima's country house in Brazoria County (both of which are also NR listed).

There are more than fifty extant Briscoe-designed homes that exist in Houston. His home at 1829 Sharp Place, which he designed and built, was designated a historic landmark by Houston City Council in 2012 in recognition of Birdsall P. Briscoe as "one of Houston's most important architects."<sup>22</sup> "His ability to mold a number of eclectic elements into a style which was uniquely his own was a cultivated talent based on his many years of practice. His mastery of proportions, massing, the elements of form and a variety of eclectic styles is personified in many of the outstanding homes in Houston."<sup>23</sup> Briscoe died in September of 1971 at 95 years of age; he is buried in a family plot in historic Oak Hill Cemetery in Goliad County, Texas.

## Significance of the Kappa House

One of the very few homes outside Houston to be designed by prominent architect Birdsall Briscoe, the Kappa House is significant at the local level of significance under Criterion C as a notable example of eclectic American architecture so popular in elite residential design during the interwar years. Drawing masterfully from the historic classical styles of both Colonial and Classical Revival, Briscoe even alludes to the Greek Revival with the use of the ornamented pediment and columned entry portico—fitting for a building which would house

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<sup>20</sup> James Charles Susman, *The Architecture of Birdsall Parmenas Briscoe* (Thesis, University of Texas at Austin, 1979), 9.

<sup>21</sup> Susman, 13.

<sup>22</sup> Hargrove, Suzy "Homes of noted architects Staub and Briscoe as well as Schneider House receive historic designation"

City of Houston Planning and Development Office. June 6, 2012.

[http://www.houstontx.gov/planning/AboutPD/news\\_releases12/schneider\\_briscoe\\_staub\\_houses.pdf](http://www.houstontx.gov/planning/AboutPD/news_releases12/schneider_briscoe_staub_houses.pdf)

<sup>23</sup> Susman, 72.

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a Greek Letter Society. The refined, period revival styles are befitting of such an organization and provided the dignified image these organizations sought, as they firmly believed that this well-designed environment would enhance the members' educational experience. This refinement was carried to the interior design and furnishings, as well. These elements have been carefully preserved in the Kappa House, which remains largely unchanged since its original construction. Although a large room was added in 1972, it is not visible from the primary elevation of the building and it did not alter the original public purpose of the space. Thus the house retains a good degree of integrity, especially that of materials, workmanship, location, feeling, and setting.<sup>24</sup>

Throughout the twentieth century, Greek Letter Societies had a visible presence in the setting for American higher education at The University of Texas. Chapter houses such as this one embody a way of life that complemented higher education by providing housing when the university could not, but also by contributing to students' social and cultural development, which was increasingly seen as an important element of a student's educational growth. Thus, the Kappa House is also significant under Criterion A in the area of education.

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<sup>24</sup> Of the five sorority chapters to embark upon a large building campaign in the 1930s, only two remain, and only the Kappa House retains the necessary degree of integrity for National Register eligibility.

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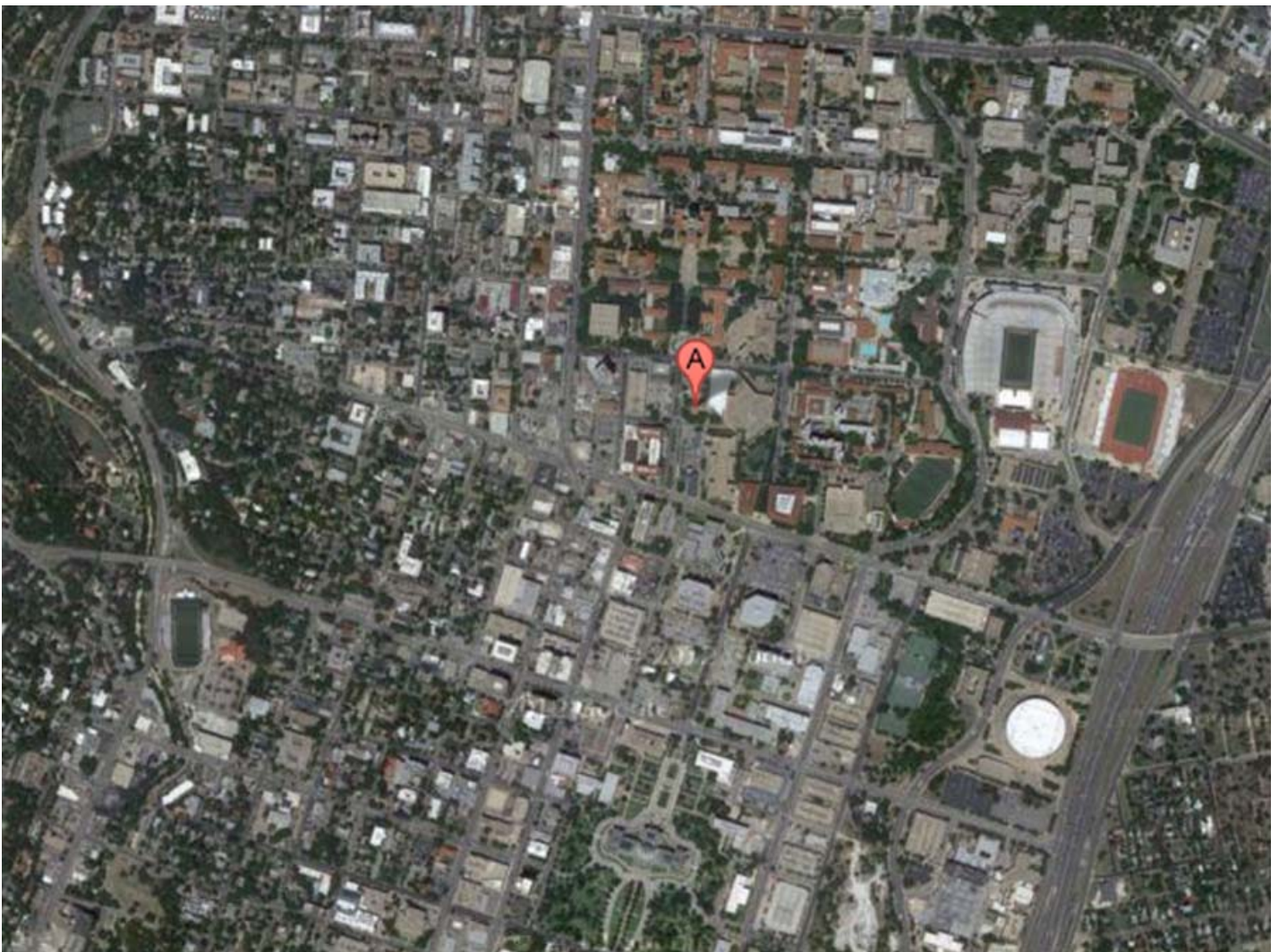
Kappa Kappa Gamma House, Austin, Travis County, Texas

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Map 1: Travis County (shaded) is located in central Texas.

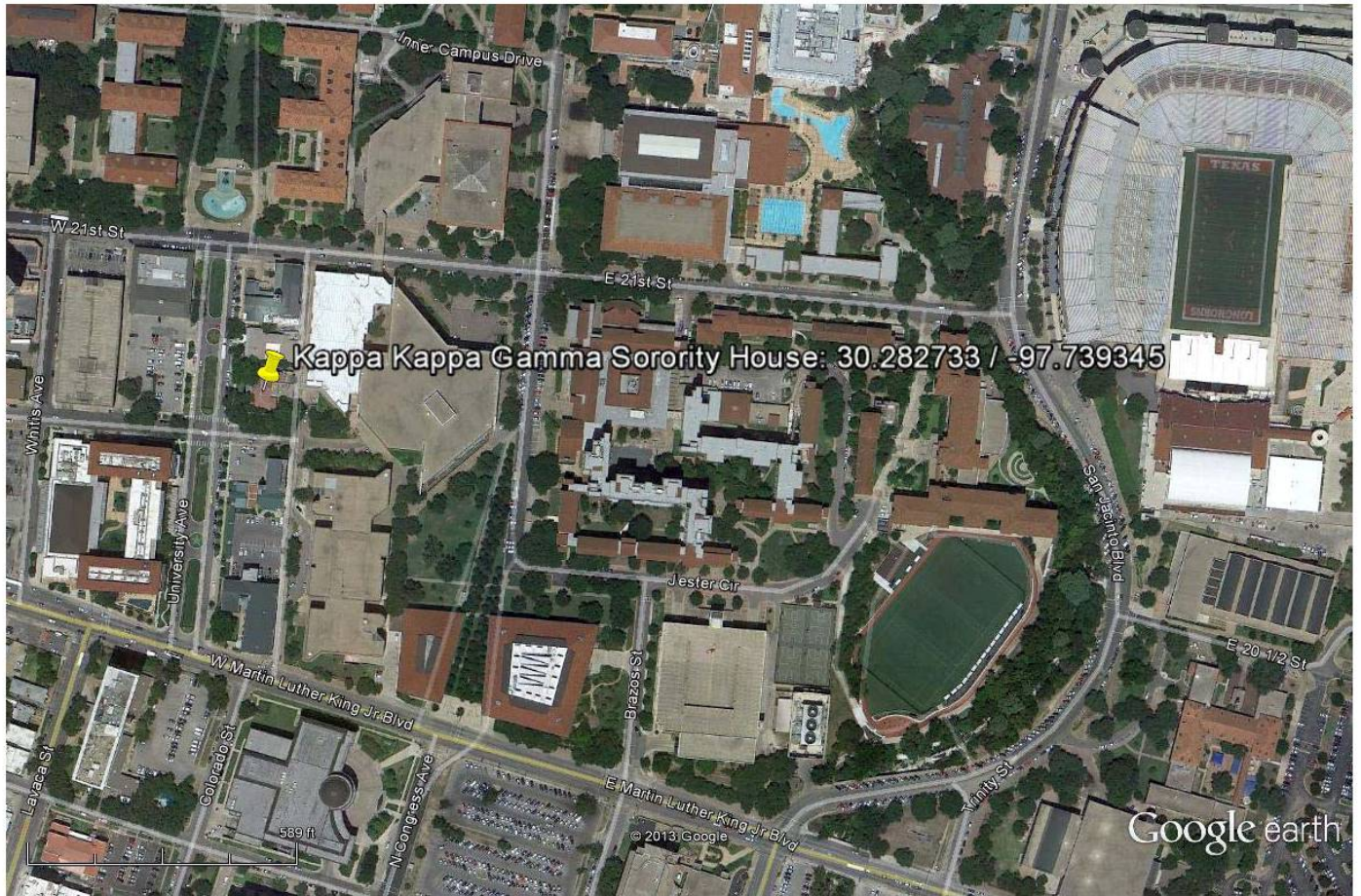


Map 2: The Kappa Kappa Gamma House (pin A) is located in the heart of Austin, between the Texas State Capitol (bottom center) and the historic core of the University of Texas campus. Google Map aerial view accessed November 25, 2012.



Kappa Kappa Gamma House, Austin, Travis County, Texas

Map 3: Scaled Google map depicts locational data for the Kappa Kappa Gamma House, located at 2001 University Avenue, Austin, Travis County, Texas.

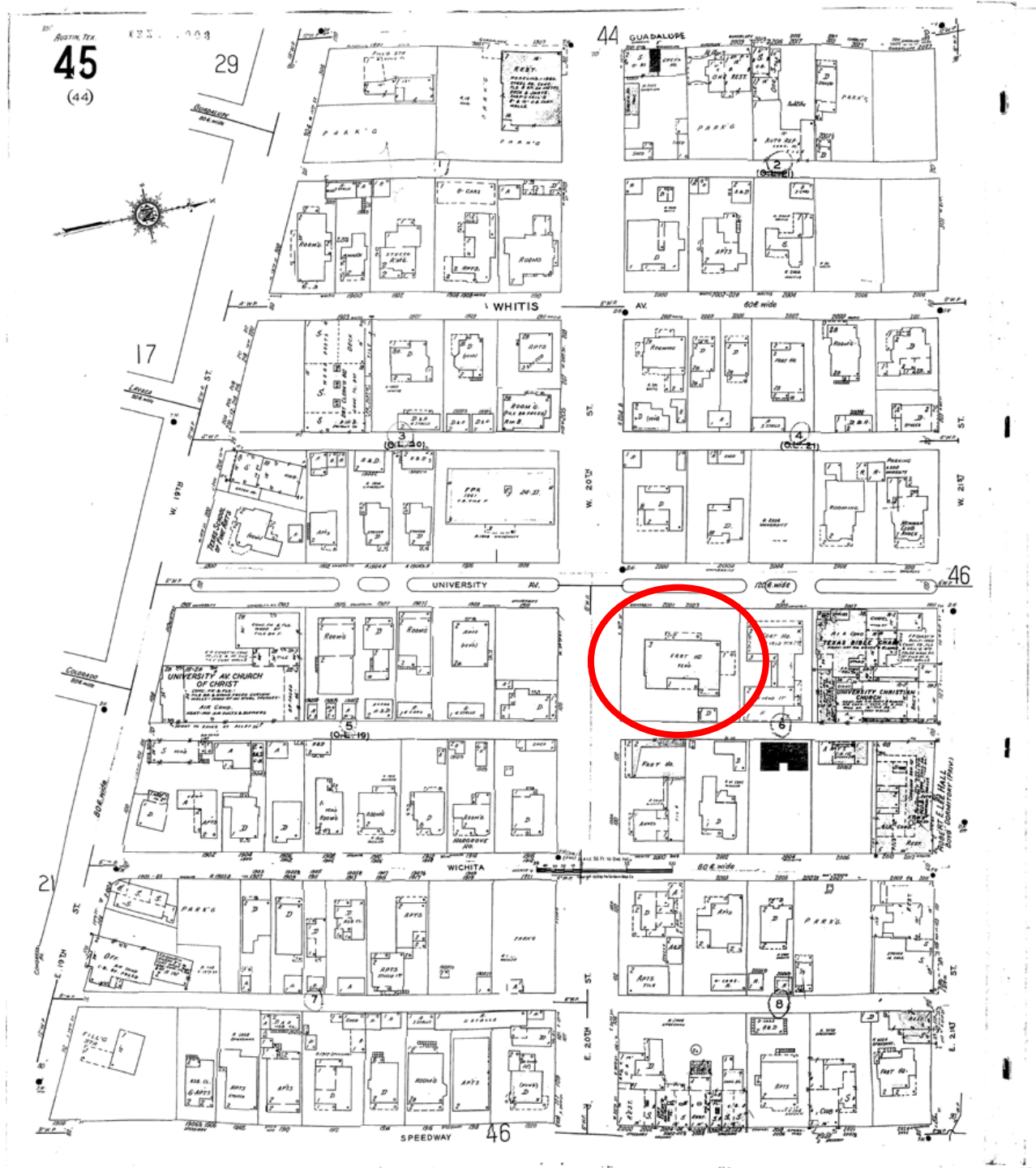


Google earth



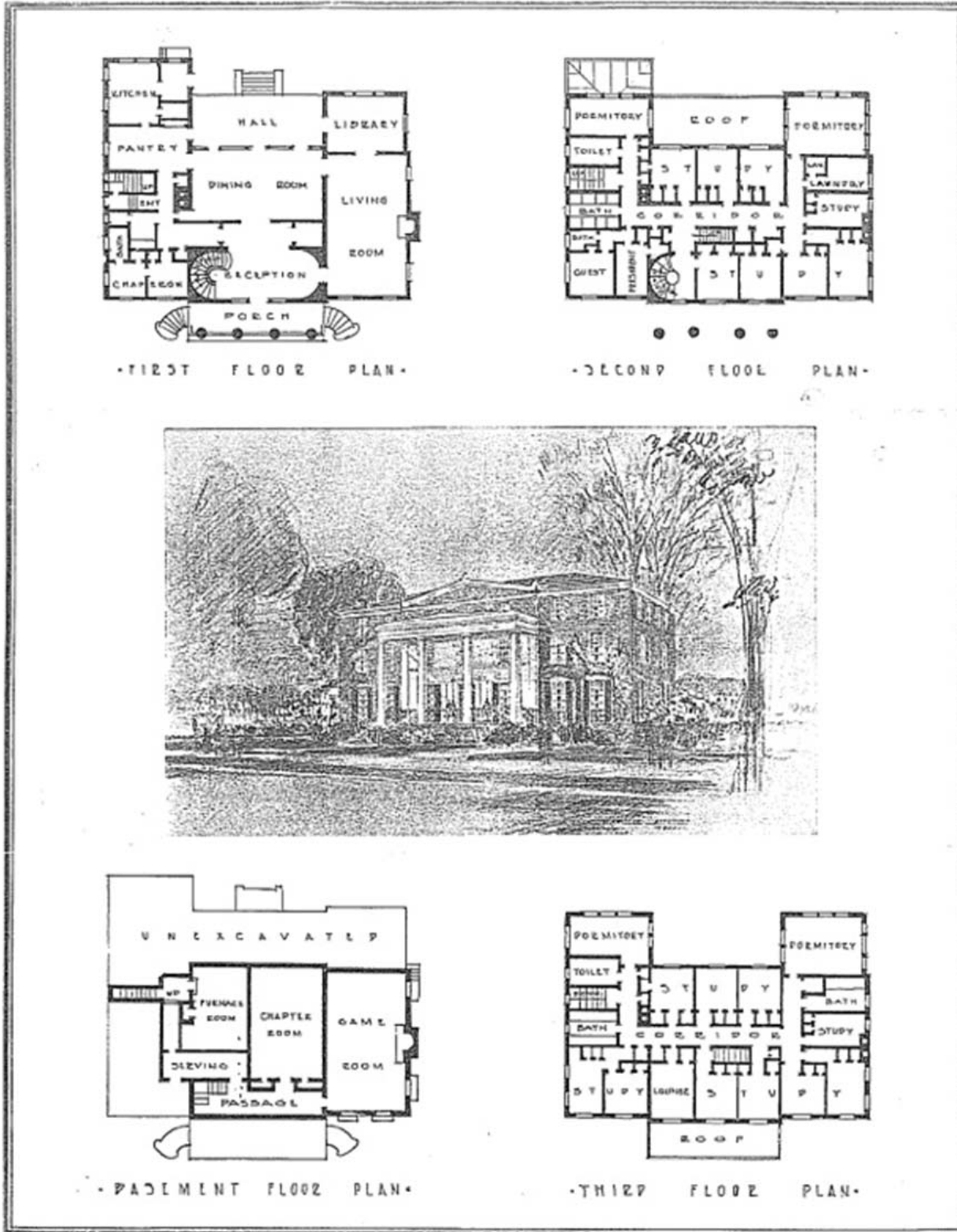
Kappa Kappa Gamma House, Austin, Travis County, Texas

Map 4: The 1935 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, shown here with 1961 updates, was the first to depict the Kappa House. Kappa House circled near center.



Kappa Kappa Gamma House, Austin, Travis County, Texas

Figure 1: Original plans and rendering of the Kappa House. From the Beta Xi House Association collections.



Kappa Kappa Gamma House, Austin, Travis County, Texas

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Figure 2: Historic photo of the Kappa House, circa 1940. From the Beta Xi House Association collections.





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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

REQUESTED ACTION: NOMINATION

PROPERTY NAME: Kappa Kappa Gamma House

MULTIPLE NAME:

STATE & COUNTY: TEXAS, Travis

DATE RECEIVED: 6/28/13      DATE OF PENDING LIST: 7/23/13  
DATE OF 16TH DAY: 8/07/13      DATE OF 45TH DAY: 8/14/13  
DATE OF WEEKLY LIST:

REFERENCE NUMBER: 13000602

REASONS FOR REVIEW:

APPEAL: N    DATA PROBLEM: N    LANDSCAPE: N    LESS THAN 50 YEARS: N  
OTHER: N    PDIL: N    PERIOD: N    PROGRAM UNAPPROVED: N  
REQUEST: N    SAMPLE: N    SLR DRAFT: N    NATIONAL: N

COMMENT WAIVER: N

ACCEPT     RETURN     REJECT    8-13-13 DATE

ABSTRACT/SUMMARY COMMENTS:

**Entered in  
The National Register  
of  
Historic Places**

RECOM./CRITERIA \_\_\_\_\_

REVIEWER \_\_\_\_\_ DISCIPLINE \_\_\_\_\_

TELEPHONE \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

DOCUMENTATION see attached comments Y/N see attached SLR Y/N

If a nomination is returned to the nominating authority, the nomination is no longer under consideration by the NPS.

**TEXAS HISTORICAL COMMISSION**  
*real places telling real stories*



TO: Edson Beall  
 National Park Service  
 National Register of Historic Places  
 1201 Eye Street, NW (2280)  
 Washington, DC 20005

FROM: Carlyn Hammons *ch*  
 Texas Historical Commission

RE: New Submission, National Register Nomination  
 Kappa Kappa Gamma House, Travis County, TX

DATE: June 21, 2013

The following materials are submitted:

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Original National Register of Historic Places form and electronic locational data (in .kmz format) on CD. The enclosed disk contains the true and correct copy of the nomination for the <u>Kappa Kappa Gamma House</u> to the National Register of Historic Places. <i>ch</i>
	Resubmitted nomination.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Original NRHP signature page signed by the Texas SHPO.
	Multiple Property Documentation form on disk.
	Resubmitted form.
	Original MPDF signature page signed by the Texas SHPO.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	CD with eleven (11) TIFF photograph files.
	Correspondence

COMMENTS:

- SHPO requests substantive review (cover letter from SHPO attached)
- The enclosed owner objections (do ) (do not ) constitute a majority of property owners
- Other:

