

Grand Trustees: Delivering Key Resources

By Board of Grand Trustees Chairman Rich Thompson, MONTANA 1970,
and Grand Trustee Bruce Morgan Casner, GEORGE WASHINGTON 1977



Since its creation 97 years ago, the Board of Grand Trustees has evolved from a body that oversaw chapter house loans to one that delivers key resources to house corporations.

The Board of Grand Trustees was born at the 26th Grand Chapter in Detroit from July 29-31, 1903, to oversee the (Chapter House) Endowment Fund, which provided loans for the acquisition or construction of chapter houses.

In Collett's *The Centennial History of Sigma Chi: 1855–1955*, it is written, “[The permanent Board of Grand Trustees] shall establish regulations under which loans are made to chapters, and under which chapter house property shall be held and owned. They shall keep a careful supervision over all such property and loans and the security to conserve the best interests of the Fraternity and [its] respective chapters.”

Today, Constantine Capital Inc. makes use of Fraternity and Foundation endowments by providing loans for chapter house improvement, and the role of the Grand Trustee has evolved. Grand Trustees operate with the mission to “assist our house corporations in the acquisition, construction, renovation and maintenance of chapter houses that are appropriate residences for our brothers and worthy of the reputation of Sigma Chi.”

Grand Trustees offer assistance and advice to house corporations, and they have helped to find creative solutions for chapters. In the mid-1980s, undergraduate chapters and house corporations experienced challenges in getting liability and property insurance at a reasonable cost. The Grand Trustees studied the issue, made the recommendation to offer insurance “in-house,” and the Grand Council established the Risk Management Foundation (RMF). Not long after, to provide chapter property financing options, the Grand Trustees formulated the concept of a Sigma Chi mortgage bank and CCI was born.

As the Fraternity grew over the years, so did the Board of Grand Trustees, which began with five members. In 1936, the board was enlarged to include nine members. At the Centennial Grand Chapter in 1955, the number was set at 15. In 2009, the board increased to 18 members.

Key resources

Grand Trustees represent a broad collection of talents and experience in areas such as law, property management, planning and finance, bringing their knowledge to house corporations. Resources including the annual House Corporation Officers Training Seminar (HCOTS), *The Sig House* quarterly newsletter and thesighthouse.org, which houses an archive of articles, key forms, standard operating procedures and other resources, have been developed to educate house corporations.

The Board of Grand Trustees also encourages the use of best practices among house corporations

by presenting the annual House Corporation Award. The board also created the following committees to provide services to house corporations: the 501(c)(3) Assistance Committee, which assists house corporations with tax-deductible fund-raising options; and the Corporations Compliance Assistance Committee, which helps with compliance issues such as state filing, annual reporting and the development of bylaws.

Are you serving on the board of a Sigma Chi house corporation? Let the Grand Trustees hear from you and tell you how they can make your life easier. E-mail Board Chairman Rich Thompson at rich@regenesiis.net

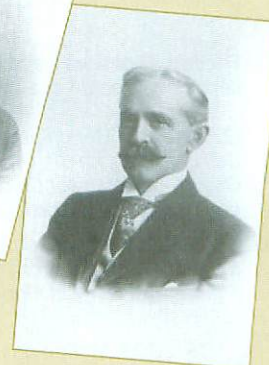
The first Grand Trustees

Nearly 100 years in existence, the role of the Grand Trustee has evolved to include further responsibility in chapter housing, and the board has grown from five to 18 members. Following, we explore what the original Grand Trustees brought to the board.

Grand Consul Joseph Cookman Nate, **ILLINOIS WESLEYAN 1890**, is credited with conceptualization of the Endowment Fund and served as Grand Quaestor from 1890-1899. Nate logically belonged on the first Board of Grand Trustees, serving from 1903-1909. Nate practiced business law during the 1890s, and joined the clergy of the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1899. In 1909, he joined the church's board of managers for education, raising funds for and overseeing acquisition of new school buildings.

Second Grand Consul Howard Ferris, **DENISON 1876**, served the Fraternity for years when he became a Grand Trustee. Ferris oversaw the formation of the Endowment Fund and served on the board until 1920. Ferris was an attorney from 1879-1890, then was elected judge of the probate court of Hamilton County, Ohio. In 1902, he became a Superior Court judge, but retired in 1908 to return to private practice. Ferris was a board member on several corporations in the Cincinnati area.

Before Third Grand Consul Orville S. Brumback, **MICHIGAN 1877**, was a Grand Trustee from 1903-1915, he was president of the house corporation that acquired the first chapter house for University of Michigan undergraduates in 1899. He was active in the Michigan house corporation for much of his life. Brumback was admitted to the Ohio Bar and became a practicing attorney in 1879. He specialized in corporate law, representing banks



and public libraries. Brumback was heavily invested in real estate and was known in the Toledo, Ohio, area as the developer of large portions of the city's west end.

Herbert Perry Wright, **NORTHWESTERN 1887**, was a Grand Trustee from 1903-1915. As an investment banker, Wright specialized in the formation and capitalization of industrial firms and utility companies such as Sheffield Steel Corporation and American Power & Light Co. of New York. Wright also was president and chairman of the Kansas Gas and Electric Co., and was director of the former Frisco Railroad. In 1910, Wright was one of the organizers of the Investment Bankers Assn. of America and served as the group's vice president.

Serving as a Grand Trustee from 1903-1905, little is known of William Henry Peer "W.H.P." Conklin, **COLUMBIA 1895**. Conklin is listed in 1902 in the Fraternity's directory as the manager of American Bonding and Trust, a financial services firm. He was also listed as receiver, or handler of the business affairs for financially challenged companies. By 1915, Conklin was listed as a building contractor, and retired by age 54 in 1929.

~ Noah Phelps, **NORTHWESTERN 2008**

From left, Joseph Cookman Nate, **ILLINOIS WESLEYAN 1890**; Howard Ferris, **DENISON 1876**; and Orville S. Brumback, **MICHIGAN, 1877**.