
**B'nai Chaim
Brothers for Life**

**A Personal, Anecdotal History of Kappa Beta
Fraternity
1937-1974**

by

Arnold Newman and the Kappa Beta Brothers

Introduction

In the January 2001 issue of UAlbany Magazine I read an interesting article by Christine Hanson McKnight, "The Boys of Kappa Beta," in which the early years of Kappa Beta Fraternity were described, largely through the eyes of Haskell Rosenberg '40, one of its charter members. In June 2002 I had the opportunity to meet Haskell and some of the other KB brothers from the 1930s and 1940s and a few from the 1960s for the first time, as well as renew friendships with KB brothers I had known from the 1950s at the 65th Reunion of Kappa Beta. Another founding member who attended this reunion, Nahum Lewis '38, offered to send me some material he had written about the beginning of Kappa Beta, which he did. In the Spring of 2004 I read a fascinating book by Marianne R. Sanus, Going Greek: Jewish College Fraternities in the United States, 1895-1945 (Wayne State UP, 2003) which documented the rise and decline of Jewish college fraternities from the late 19th to the mid-20th century and gave me some perspective on the early history of Kappa Beta. Finally, while trying to contact fraternity brothers from the 1960s and 1970s, I was introduced to the excellent Kappa Beta website at (<http://www.kappabetasunyalbany.com/>) that provided me with a great deal of information about the fraternity in the 1960s and 1970s. This series of readings, events, and "discoveries" inspired me to write this history of Kappa Beta.

As an active member of Kappa Beta from the Spring of 1953 through the Spring of 1957, I got to know KB brothers from the 1950s but had little knowledge of the origins of the fraternity and none of its subsequent history. I got to know a lot more of KB's history as I corresponded with o. spoke by phone to many brothers who were members, from its beginnings in 1937 to its disbanding in 1974. Although a number of Kappa Beta brothers sent me copies of articles, photos, newsletters, pledgebooks, documents, and memorabilia, no one knew where the files or boxes containing the official records of the fraternity were located. If anyone has any knowledge of their whereabouts, please get in touch with me or, better yet, Geoff Williams, University Archivist (g.williams@albany.edu). It would be most appropriate to deposit the Kappa Beta records in the University Archives.

Much of this history is produced verbatim or almost so from letters, e-mails, and phone conversations with a substantial number of brothers and from my own memories. I appreciate the information and reminiscences that my KB brothers have shared with me and hope I have reproduced what they shared accurately. I also appreciate the editing done by my wife, Barbara Hillman Newman (Class of 1959), who was my date at the Kappa Beta formal dance in 1957. I have many fond personal recollections of life with Kappa Beta and consider this brief, anecdotal history my effort to memorialize the fraternity. I hope you enjoy reading this booklet as much as I have enjoyed compiling, editing, and writing it. Please send me your comments.

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In the Beginning

Kappa Beta started as an all-Jewish fraternity in 1937. During the 1936-37 academic year, a group of about 15 Jewish students met in a Draper Hall classroom with the hope of forming a local Jewish social fraternity. Some wanted to rent a house where they could live and eat kosher food and in other ways maintain their Jewish identity. All believed, with justification, that they were excluded at that time, either explicitly or implicitly, from joining the other fraternities on the Albany State College for Teachers campus. Like so many students who attended Albany State before and after them, most were first generation college students from financially poor families, attracted to Albany because it offered a high quality education without tuition, and like so many other Albany students, they were looking for ways to live cheaply and without the restrictions imposed by residence hall living. The desire for cheap living was intensified by the Great Depression which still imposed economic hardship on the great majority of Albany State students and their families.

Probably none of the students who were meeting to organize this local Jewish social fraternity realized that all-Jewish fraternities (and sororities) had been formed on hundreds of college and university campuses since 1895 for exactly the same reasons as theirs and had peaked in popularity during the 1920s. (Sanua.) Nor were any of them probably aware that the Theta Chapter of a National Jewish fraternity, Kappa Nu, had been established at the New York State College for Teachers at Albany in March of 1918. The Theta Chapter never appears to have had more than six or seven members and disappeared in a couple of years. There were few men attending Albany State at that time, about 10% of the school population, and very few of these men were Jewish. (Williams.)

Officers were elected to lead the newly formed fraternity, and a committee was formed under the chairmanship of Edgar Perretz '38 to explore renting a house. The name of Kappa Beta was chosen as the inverted Greek letter form of B'nai Chaim, which in Hebrew means Brothers for Life. In early June 1937 Perretz phoned Nahum Lewis '38, newly elected Vice-President of Kappa Beta, to inform him that he had signed a one-year lease on an unfurnished two-story house at 264 Western Avenue and that he was turning over the keys to the new officers because he had to leave Albany to take a summer job. The new officers, President David Smith '38, Vice President Nahum Lewis '38, Secretary Paul Sapolsky '40, and Treasurer Albert Architzel '39, faced with the crisis of how to pay the rent during the summer months, came up with two ideas. First, they met with Harry Bergstein '39 who planned to attend Summer School and who offered to manage the house, without pay, in exchange for remission of the three-dollar-a-week room rent. And second, they developed a plan in which the four officers would go on a door-to-door canvass requesting beds, dressers, tables, and other items needed to furnish the empty Western Avenue house so that rooms might be rented to students attending Albany State that summer.

When Smith, Lewis, Architzel, and Sapolsky went door-to-door on Western Avenue, they did not have much success; however, door-to-door solicitations on Madison Avenue, between Partridge and Main Streets proved highly successful. They loaded the furniture into Architzel's 1935 Pontiac, and after many trips, they found they had acquired enough miscellaneous furniture to furnish several of the rooms in the newly rented fraternity house. Flushed with success, the

quartet of young urban pioneers made the mistake of expanding their search to Ontario Street, where they inadvertently made a solicitation call at the home of an administrator at Albany State College for Teachers. Dean Moreland was less than pleased with the way in which the four young men were going about furnishing their new fraternity house. She insisted that the door-to-door furniture search be stopped immediately and scheduled a session in her office at the college with the four recently elected officers of Kappa Beta at which she suggested that the local Jewish community should be asked to involve themselves with the furnishing of the KB fraternity house. She also indicated in no uncertain terms that if the project failed and became a community disaster, it might delay some graduations in the Class of 1938.

Lewis, who later became a successful Albany businessman, followed Dean Moreland's suggestion and sought help from Rabbi Bernard Bamberger of Temple Beth Emeth in Albany who recruited four generous ladies of the Congregation to help out. Mrs. Frederick (Nan) DeBeer, Mrs. Louis (Kate) Mayersohn, Mrs. Avrom (Rhea) Jacobson, and Mrs. Emmanuel Baere, after hearing about Kappa Beta's financial plight, each offered to lend the group \$100, a large sum at that time, to be repaid, interest free, over a two or three-year period. The first three women went with Nahum Lewis and Harry Bergstein to the Fern Furniture Company on the corner of South Pearl Street and Hudson Avenue in Albany and talked Ruben Wallenstein, the owner, into selling Kappa Beta \$400 worth of new beds and chests of drawers at his cost. This new furniture, mixed with what had been scavenged, enabled the officers of KB to furnish enough rooms to house 15 students and saved them from embarrassment or worse. Bergstein succeeded in renting all of the rooms to graduate students attending Summer School in 1937 for \$3.00 a week, which provided enough income to cover the summer rent for the house.

After this somewhat shaky start, the fraternity moved forward and in September 1937 with active recruiting by Bergstein, who remained as House Manager, and Harry Karchmer '40, who served as Assistant House Manager, rented all of the rooms to Jewish students. The students insisted on kosher food as part of the room and board for which they paid \$8.00 a week. Consequently, Ida Cohen of Albany, an aunt of fraternity member Abba Koblenz '44, was hired to run the kosher kitchen. Harry Bergstein later earned his Ph.D. and taught in the Education Department at Oneonta State College; Harry Karchmer became a Certified Public Accountant in Tucson, Arizona.

Toward the end of 1937, the four stalwart officers discussed with Dr. Ralph Clausen, Dr. Earl Dorwaldt, and Mr. G. Elliot Hatfield, faculty members of Kappa Beta, the idea of renting a large house on the corner of Quail and Morris Streets. With encouragement from their faculty advisors, Kappa Beta decided to move to these larger quarters that would have many more rooms to accommodate more residential members. This move was very successful and enabled the fraternity, at the end of its first year in the Quail Street house, to repay the \$400 loan that the generous women of Temple Beth Emeth had made to them a year-and-a-half earlier. In 1938 Kappa Beta was welcomed as a full-fledged voting member of Albany's Interfraternity Council, a sign that KB was now recognized as an established fraternal organization on campus.

Life was not easy for Jewish or non-Jewish students at Albany State as the country struggled through the last years of the Great Depression. During these difficult years, Jewish students,

many of whom came from New York City or vicinity, found Kappa Beta and the fraternity house a source of economic, emotional and religious support. Hyman Meltz '41 recalls riding up to school in September 1937 the evening after Yom Kippur in a friend's chicken truck with \$25 in his pocket. Only the fellowship of Kappa Beta, he believes, enabled him to stay and graduate in four years. (Meltz served as an English teacher and assistant principal in the New York City school system for 25 years.) KB members who lived in the fraternity house pooled their resources, maintained a kosher kitchen, and found jobs for one another as shoe salesmen, waiters, day laborers, or anything else available. (Sanua, 178.)

Haskell Rosenberg '40, a charter member of Kappa Beta, recalls that almost all of the members worked, sometimes long hours for low pay. Rosenberg himself made five-cent sandwiches most days from 7 to 9 a.m. in the cafeteria located in the basement of Husted Hall. He also stacked books in the library for \$15 a month, which he estimated worked out to about 20 cents an hour. But his best gig was selling shoes on Saturdays from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. at the Miles Shoe Store on South Pearl Street—for \$5.00. Rosenberg, who graduated on the day that Hitler entered Paris, returned from service in World War II and went on to establish a large, successful wholesale shoe business in Rochester, New York. Rosenberg became a grand opera buff and was instrumental in founding the Opera Theatre Society of Rochester. He remembers his college years fondly. He believes he would not have made it through life nearly as well as he did without the fine education he received at Albany State, and would not have made it through those college years nearly as happily without the support of Kappa Beta.

Rosenberg further recalls that even though all students attending Albany State at that time were enrolled in a teacher education program, few brothers from Kappa Beta expected to secure jobs as teachers because of an implicit anti-Semitism in the hiring process, especially in upstate New York. So they made their marks in other fields or entered academic life through less direct routes. Ironically, they often did better, financially, than their non-Jewish friends and classmates who secured teaching positions and established their careers in secondary education. Herman Kleine '41, a brainy 15-year-old whose "bedroom" was an upper stairwell in KB's first fraternity house, went on to become a top-level U.S. State Department official. Bernard Arbit '42 became a successful businessman and, not long ago, established the Bernard Arbit Fund, an endowment administered through the University's Charitable Gift Annuity Program. Harry Passow '42 became a Distinguished Professor of Education at Columbia University. Recently, his widow, Shirley Siegel Passow B.A.'46, M.A.'52 set up an endowment in memory of her husband. Sol Greenberg '43 served as Albany County's district attorney for 25 years. Louis Rabineau '45 became President of the College of the Atlantic in Maine, and George Erbstein '47 became President of Dutchess Community College. Calvin Zippin '47 became a distinguished Professor of Epidemiology and Biostatistics at the University of California School of Medicine in San Francisco and recipient of the National Cancer Institute's Lifetime Achievement and Leadership Award.. More than half of the young men who were Kappa Beta brothers between 1937 and 1941 went on to earn doctorates. (McKnight, 3-5.)

However, the most famous Kappa Beta brother from the 1930s and 1940s (159,000 entries on [www. google.com](http://www.google.com) in September 2004) was Harold Goldstein who, when he decided to become a full-time professional actor, changed his name to Harold Gould. Harold started out in the Class

of 1945, served two years in the military during World War II, and returned to Albany State as part of the Class of 1947. He was a protege of Prof. Agnes Futterer, the dominant figure in the Theater Department at Albany State from the 1920s through the 1950s. Under her tutelage, he developed a love for classic drama. Recently, he and his wife, Leah, established the Futterer-Could Endowment in honor of Agnes Futterer. Administered by the Theatre Department, this fund supports speech and voice training for students. He did graduate study in Theater at Cornell University and went on to teach at several small colleges. Then in 1960, at age 37, he decided to become a full-time actor. Harold, who was always good at playing older men, gained his most enduring national attention as the father on the television series, Rhoda, and gained further renown as Katherine Hepburn's lover in the TV movie, Mrs. Delafield Wants to Marry. However, he loved the stage and continued to act in plays by Shakespeare, Shaw, O'Neill, and many other playwrights. Though he lived at home when he was in college (his father worked for the post office), he enjoyed his membership in Kappa Beta—"good on scholarship, tremendous in tennis."

By 1941, Kappa Beta was an established fraternity at Albany State with more than 40 members.

Then on December 7, 1941, the Japanese Air Force, without warning, bombed Pearl Harbor, sunk most of the American Navy's Pacific Fleet, and pushed the United States to declare war on Japan as well as the other Axis powers—Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy. The lives of most of the "boys" of Kappa Beta as well as their classmates were suddenly and dramatically changed as the U.S.A. plunged into World War II.

Sources

I am deeply indebted to Nahum Lewis '38 for almost all of the material on the founding of Kappa Beta Fraternity in 1937. In 2002, he generously sent me copies of all his historical notes and many of his archival photos. Sadly, Nahum died on November 22, 2003 and therefore did not have an opportunity to read this history of the fraternity that he was so instrumental in founding.

I am equally indebted to Haskell Rosenberg '40 for his memories of the early days of Kappa Beta. These memories are described in an excellent article by Christine Hanson McKnight in the January 2001 issue of UAlbany Magazine titled "The Boys of Kappa Beta," pp.3-5.

An article by Eleanor Koblenz, wife of Abba Koblenz '44, titled "Kappa Beta B'nai Chaim to Note Depression Era Aid" published in the June 5, 1997 issue of The Jewish World gave me a new perspective and extra information about the founding and early years of Kappa Beta.

A recent book by Marianne R. Sanua, Going Greek: Jewish College Fraternities in the United States, 1895-1945 (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 2003) provided me with an overview of Jewish college fraternities in the United States and a context in which to place Kappa Beta Fraternity. I have used material from Sanua's book here and there in this chapter.

Geoffrey Williams, University Archivist, provided me with the information about the founding at Albany State of the Theta Chapter of Kappa Nu Fraternity in 1918 and its brief life.

Most of the material on Harold Gould is derived from an article written for the Albany State Alumni Magazine in 1986.



Upper Photo: By May 1946 all State College servicemen had been discharged. To celebrate the end of the war, Kappa Beta held a reunion dinner in downtown Albany. Top Row, L-R: Steve Greenwald '40, Maurice J. Levin '43, Irwin Swire '47, Harry Kensky '43, Art Flax '43, Watt Stewart (faculty advisor), Sol Greenberg '43, Herman Kleine '41, George Stangler '40. Middle Row, L-R: Harry Passow '42, Dick Ribner '39, Earl Dorwaldt (faculty advisor), Gadlin Bodner '41, Ralph Clausen (faculty advisor), Bernard Bernhardt '45, Moe Sweetgall '38, Paul Wagner '48, Herbert Frankel '39, Jack Shapiro '41, Dan Preston '41, Baird Poskanzer '41, Abe Savitsky '41, Bernard Arbit '42, Allen Woodell '42, Unidentified, Morris Gerber '43, Louis Greenspan '41, Henry Brauner '42, Percy Forman '38. Front Row, L-R: William Miller '47, Al Stiller '42, David Slavin '43, Ira Friedman '43, Ainar Gelbond '42, Bernard Palmer '42, Haskell Rosenberg '40, Arnold Ellerin '41, and George Pearson '41. (Gift of Ira Friedman '43.) (From Birr's History of Excellence.)



Kappa Beta Composite Photo. 1939
Pedagogue. (Gift of Nahum Lewis '38.)