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The Elimination of Fraternities at Williams College

by

Robinson A. Sawyer

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May 23, 2003

Williams College

Williamstown, Massachusetts
Introduction

Fraternities first came to Williams College in 1833 and flourished for almost 130 years. Yet as important as the arrival of fraternities and their long life was their departure. As one person who knows Williams well has remarked, “the phasing out of fraternities may have been the most divisive issue in Williams history – even more so than the trustees’ 1819 petition to move the College to Northampton.”¹ This thesis looks at the record of this historical event and explores the unique set of factors that led Williams to eliminate fraternities.

The history of Williams College remains tied to its fraternities even though they have not been part of the Williams campus since 1968. Frederick Rudolph, today’s most knowledgeable student of both Williams history and the development of American colleges, has stated, “Greek Letter fraternities were not invented at Williams, but no other American college allowed itself to be more thoroughly defined by them.”² The first chapter will review the development of the fraternity system at Williams. In 1833 the first fraternity was established and 14 more would follow over the next ninety years. They offered an escape from the daily rigors of the classroom as well as a sense of family at this isolated school in the Berkshires. The growth of fraternities put a number of strains on the college, and there was opposition to them from the beginning. Fraternities proliferated nonetheless. At the same time both Williams College and the students grew more affluent and fraternities helped support this trend.

The second chapter addresses the changes that occurred nationally as well as at Williams during and after the Second World War. Not only did the war and its aftermath challenge the long established patterns of discrimination, but it also made college
education increasingly available to Americans. This change in turn changed the types of students attending Williams and made it increasingly selective, which put new stresses on the fraternity system. And although a number of temporary solutions were implemented to alleviate the resulting problems, none of the solutions solved the underlying issues raised by fraternities. Then in 1961, a student petition named after Bruce Grinnell, who first conceived of it, asked for a committee to be created to review the fraternity question.

This petition appeared just as President James Phinney Baxter was stepping down after 24 years at Williams, to be replaced by his former student John Sawyer. Chapter Three is concerned with Sawyer’s background and covers his time at Williams from his undergraduate years to his service on the Board of Trustees. It also traces his administrative experience in World War II and his years at Harvard and Yale. Finally, there is a comparison of the leadership styles of Baxter and Sawyer.

Chapter Four discusses Sawyer’s response to the Grinnell petition, the work of the Angevine Committee and its major recommendations: that the college take over housing, eating, and social functions at the college. Finally, Chapter Five explores the implementation of the new college-run housing system that ultimately replaced fraternities. It also discusses the opposition to the change by students and alumni and how the college administration dealt with it.

Thankfully, there is a great deal of information concerning fraternities and their elimination in the Williams College Archives and Special Collections. Of particular benefit has been the Williams College Oral History Project. This project, funded by Anne W. Sawyer, President Sawyer’s wife, includes a number of interviews of faculty
members, trustees, and presidents. The archivists were also able to obtain special permission for me to see heretofore-closed materials on the subject.

There are a number of people who made this thesis possible. I would especially like to thank: Professor Robert Dalzell, my thesis advisor, for his countless revisions and helpful insights; Sylvia Kennick-Brown and Linda Hall for letting me spend innumerable hours with them in the archives and their useful suggestions on sources; Professor Frederick Rudolph, whose books were invaluable in composing the history of fraternities through the 19th century, for meeting with me and reading over drafts and offering suggestions. I would like to thank as well my family: my grandmother, for helping where she could, and my parents, for everything they have done for me, not the least of which was to correct and offer encouragement on my thesis.

I would also like to offer a disclaimer for those who read this thesis. A glance at the title page will indicate that my last name is the same as John Sawyer’s, the president who initiated the elimination of the fraternity system at Williams. I am proud to say that he was in fact my grandfather. Unfortunately, he passed away before I could fully appreciate his love for Williams, which I now share, and what he helped it to become.
Fraternities Become Entrenched at Williams: 1833-1940

As recorded in the history of the Kappa Alpha fraternity, in the fall of 1833, a group of undergraduates from Williams College traveled across the Taconic Range to Union College in Schenectady, New York. They went for the purpose of securing a Phi Beta Kappa charter. However, this proved impossible, since chapters of Phi Beta Kappa only had the power to grant charters within the limits of their own state. In the place of a Phi Beta Kappa membership the undergraduates came back to Williamstown, bringing with them a charter from Kappa Alpha. President Edward Dorr Griffin, a proud member of Phi Beta Kappa in the Yale class of 1790, gave them a warm welcome. At the time, President Griffin’s health was beginning to wane and he would step down in less than two years. Although he was curious about why the Kappa Alpha key hung by the corner while his Phi Beta Kappa key did not, nonetheless, it had a “kappa” on it- so Dr. Griffin thought it must be “all right”.

The Spread of Fraternities

Fraternities had come to Williams. In the next year Sigma Phi followed, and in the ensuing 35 years chapters of Chi Psi, Alpha Delta Phi, Delta Psi, and Delta Kappa Epsilon would make Williams their home. Why did fraternities come into being at this time? Fraternity histories have suggested that it was to address an intellectual void that colleges at the time were not filling. College life was arduous, starting with prayers before sunrise and ending with more prayers after sunset. Classes consisted of hours of rote memorization. That fraternities offered an escape from this drudgery is without question, but at Williams they did not fill an intellectual void, for that had already been done by literary societies. Since shortly after the founding of Williams, the Adelphic
Union began to function as a healthy debating and literary society. In 1795, due to intense interest and a corresponding lack of space, the Union had split in two, forming the Philologian and Philotechnian Societies. Both had private libraries that were better managed than the college’s own library. By 1835, the literary societies had amassed 10,000 volumes on a broad range of subjects compared to the preponderance of narrowly defined religious works in the Williams library.³

But if fraternities did not fill an intellectual void, they did meet other needs. As colleges student bodies grew the family atmosphere that had existed on early campuses began to erode. Between 1800 and 1832, Williams grew in size from 100 to 132 students.⁴ Growth caused colleges to change and, “Despite their dedication and commitment to their students, college officers were simply inadequate substitutes for family life, and fraternities arose to fill the emotional and social void left by the absence of family.”⁵ They provided a close knit community that offered an escape from the monotony of the classroom. They focused less on literature and debate and more on the secret associations that had been part of the early literary societies, creating a clubhouse atmosphere where drinking, smoking, and card playing with other “brothers” became cherished distractions.⁶

The growth of the fraternity movement was also tied to the Masonic movement, which had swept through America in the 1820’s. Some of the Masonic rituals were actually incorporated into fraternity rituals. Even more important, perhaps, fraternities reportedly brought together the most urbane members of each class. Fraternity men on average were reputed to be less pious and better-looking than the non-fraternity men. On
the rural campuses where many fraternities first sprang up, the message was clear: “among the barbarians, we are the Greeks.”

Opposition To Fraternities

As fraternities took hold of the Williams College campus, even before the administration could fully grasp their importance, a student organization formed in opposition to them. In November 1834, thirty students united to oppose fraternities because they were convinced that fraternities posed a threat to democratic notions of equal opportunity, fair play, and to the ideal of a community of professing Christians. The group called itself the Social Fraternity of Williams College, and was also known during its long history as the Anti-Secret Society, the Equitable Fraternity, the Oudens, and finally as Delta Upsilon. The Constitution of the Social Fraternity stated the case unequivocally: “Believing that secret societies are calculated to destroy the harmony of College, to create distinctions not founded upon merit, to produce strife and animosity; we feel called upon to exert ourselves to counteract the evil tendency of such associations.” The success of the new organization was greatest in the first decade of its existence. From 1838 to 1848, its membership outnumbered the total secret society membership. But then in 1849 the Social Fraternity fell behind the secret societies in membership, and by 1850 it had fallen to third place behind the secret societies and the “neutrals.”

The Social Fraternity declined in favor in part because of its tendency to mimic the enemy. Membership requirements became stricter and stricter. Up to 1842 anybody could join the open meetings, while after 1842 members had to be proposed. Yet more stringent membership requirements pass in 1850 led to the organization’s temporary
collapse a dozen years later. In its early years, the pious members of the Social Fraternity fought for democratic values, but as Frederick Rudolph argues:

Its lack of secrecy, its early open-door membership policy, did not answer the need which the secret societies so capably fulfilled. Its early success can be attributed in part to widespread hostility to the principle of secrecy, but as the fraternities grew in membership, and the Social Fraternity itself increasingly took on certain attributes of its rivals, it lost its hold on the anti-fraternity group.¹⁰

In 1864, having largely abandoned its mission, the association was dissolved by its members. Some twenty years later it was revived as a chapter of the fraternity Delta Upsilon, completing its transformation into that which it had been created to oppose.

The Williams College Administration

Students were not the only ones to have reservations about the fraternity system. In 1845, the president of Amherst College asked the president of Williams a telling question: “Would it be desirable to have these societies cease in our colleges?” Mark Hopkins replied, “At an early period I was in favor of taking strong measures . . . but was overruled.”¹² He was probably overruled by the Board of Trustees, which had deep connections with the fraternities. In any case by 1845 Mark Hopkins evidently felt that fraternities were too deeply imbedded in college life to be attacked successfully.

Unchecked by Hopkins, fraternities continued to grow, creating open factions at the college, and turning every campus election into a hostile event. Indeed, as Rudolph notes:

By 1865 fraternity politics were so successful in keeping merit out of the prize rhetorical contests that the faculty could think of no solution other than to take the election of speakers away from the classes and make up the speaking slate themselves.¹³
In July 1868, the Board of Trustees received a student petition asking that the fraternities be abolished. A committee was created to look into the petition but failed to report, and the issue was dropped. This result was not surprising. As noted above the board had strong fraternity ties. In fact, “Every trustee who was elected to the board during the presidency of Mark Hopkins and who was a member of a class graduating after the arrival of Kappa Alpha in 1833 was a fraternity member.”

Still, the issue would not die. On September 6, 1868, Professor John Bascom gave a sermon attacking fraternities. Bascom was a former fraternity member who went on to become president of the University of Wisconsin. He believed that fraternities led “very easily to and very inevitably to certain farther evils” and that they restricted “true freedom, individuality, and integrity of action.” Ultimately, however, this speech, given by a popular member of the faculty and a former member of a fraternity himself, had little effect on the growth of fraternities at Williams.

The Growth of Fraternities

Between 1836 and 1872, fraternity men constituted on average 42% of the Williams student body. The rapid growth of fraternities revealed that they represented values which appealed to a large section of the college community. No doubt, too, they were especially attractive because of the changing characteristics of Williams College. It had been founded to educate a student body consisting mainly of farmers' sons. As the college grew with the country, its students became more cosmopolitan in character. Increased efficiency of the transportation system and changing social values also played a part. In 1875, the Hoosac Tunnel was completed and became the main railroad line between Boston and points west, linking Williamstown directly to Boston. As cities
became increasingly crowded, wealthy individuals began to own houses in the countryside. They also began sending their children to colleges similarly located, a trend sufficiently evident at Williams that it acquired the reputation of being a rich man’s college. This fact so upset President Franklin Carter that he addressed the issue in a report in 1887, stating, “It is not praise but a misrepresentation that ‘the college has become a place for rich men’s sons’.”\(^{16}\) His statement notwithstanding, the transformation of Williams was undeniable. It no longer produced the “Country graduates, - rough, brown-featured, schoolmaster-looking, half-bumpkin, half-scholarly figures, in black ill-cut broadcloth,” that Nathaniel Hawthorne described in 1838- at least not as its typical product.\(^{17}\)

And a great deal of the change had to do with the increased influence of the fraternities. Carter’s statement shows a lack of awareness of the strong relationship between powerful fraternities and the appeal of Williams to the rich. They allowed wealthy individuals the opportunities to live quite comfortably. Fraternities also institutionalized many of the social standards valued by the elite of the time. They helped turn out polished and confident graduates in an increasingly secular and competitive age. They developed social skills that were largely overlooked by the spiritually minded college earlier in the century. Even Mark Hopkins had to agree that fraternities “were characteristic of the present age.” In a letter to President Edward Hitchcock of Amherst in 1846, he argued, “I have reason to suppose that one object of some of the Societies here is the cultivation of manners, and so far they have improved.”\(^{18}\)

Fraternities benefited the college in more direct ways, too. They housed, fed, and provided social lives for a large part of the student population. This allowed the
administration to concentrate on the education of its students, although until Franklin Carter the educational philosophy of the institution was conservative and unchanging. Fraternities also played an important role in keeping alumni associated with the college and gave them a place to meet and call home when returning to campus. These built in alumni networks recruited students for their fraternities and therefore Williams.

Thus, despite the sometimes hostile reaction to them, fraternities had become an integral part of Williams College. In 1868, when John Bascom was delivering his sermon on the dangers of fraternities and students were signing petitions for their elimination, there were only 6 fraternities on the Williams campus. By 1915 their number had increased to 14. Most had expensive chapter houses which provided room and board for many of their members. At the same time, however, new problems were beginning to develop, as well – new problems that would plague the fraternity system for the next half-century and would eventually lead to its demise.

The Administration Tackles Problems Associated with the Fraternity System

A critical difficulty was the rejection felt by students not in fraternities at a college increasingly dominated by them. The Commons Club was created in 1909 to solve this problem, although its creation was an acknowledgement of a two-caste college community. For a long time both fraternity and non-fraternity men were left to arrange their own meals: mostly at boarding houses in town, with the families they were living with, or if they were wealthy, at local inns. But increasingly, as fraternities began to construct their own houses, students began to eat and live at them. (The first fraternity house in America constructed for that purpose was built at Williams in 1857.) To counteract this trend the college created a boarding house in 1872 located where Stetson
Hall now stands. Known as “College Hall” or the “Hash House,” it provided affordable food for non-fraternity men until around 1900. Then for almost a decade non-fraternity men were once again cast out on their own to find places to eat. At the end of that time, the Commons Club was established in the newly constructed Currier Hall. It was hoped that the new building and club would make “the neutrals” a more tightly knit group.

Currier had clubrooms and dining facilities. Membership grew slowly, but with the outbreak of World War I the club all but disintegrated. After the war membership in the Commons Club began to increase slowly, and during the twenties came under increased strain because of the growing number of students attending Williams.

To look into the current fraternity-neutral situation at Williams, in 1925 President Harry Garfield (1908-1934) created the “Committee of Ten,” a group of 6 fraternity members and 4 neutrals. In the introduction to the report the committee’s opening statement declared what was obvious to everyone:

Our purpose is to assure every man in Williams of equal opportunity in academic, extra-curriculum and social activity, in so far as this is compatible with the ability of the men concerned . . . Yet we know that the result of rushing season makes a vast difference, and that the Neutral has not the opportunities of the Fraternity man.

The reason for this divide, the report declared, was “obstacles resulting from the natural inferiority of some men.” Elitist statements such as this revealed all too plainly the philosophical and ideological underpinnings of the fraternity system and only reinforced the “us vs. them” mentality it fostered.

In a more constructive vein, President Garfield remained a strong proponent of the Commons Club. Indeed, in recognition of that fact it was renamed the Garfield Club in 1935 the year after his retirement. Unfortunately, while the Common’s Club
welcomed many neglected members of the student body, it cast aside others. Clinton
Knox, a black student and future U.S. ambassador to Dahomey (Benin) and Haiti was one
of them, and to protest the situation he requested a meeting with President Garfield. He
met with the students and responded, “I think you gentlemen should realize that
gentlemen do not go where they are not wanted.” This unfortunate incident shows the
level of division and ingrained racism not only in fraternities but also in the
administration of the college itself.

Yet Garfield also wanted his entire student body to be content, and to achieve that
goal he mandated that only 75% of the school could be part of fraternities in hopes that
the remaining 25% would be a large enough group to limit their pariah status and let them
form a healthy social life outside of fraternities. In effect he was mandating a two-caste
system. At the same time the 75% quota promised to limit the influence of fraternities
because Garfield knew they could get out of control if let loose.

During Garfield’s time at Williams prohibition was passed, but the fraternities
found various ways to get around it, causing a ruckus at many House Parties. The college
finally had to ask the government to close down the local stills being run in Vermont.
Garfield was also concerned about the negative impact fraternities had on the academic
side of life at Williams. A faculty member sent a letter to the Dean about the students’
lackadaisical performance during rushing period:

The students in the various courses seemed to assume that the scholastic
demands made upon them during the period were theoretical; that, in
accordance with tradition, they might look at assignments, but that they
were privileged to come to the class unprepared, while their minds
psychologically engaged elsewhere.
The letter went on to estimate that the students were performing at about a third of their normal capacity.

Dennett ‘Nice Boys’ Speech

The perception of Williams as a rich man’s college, which 50 years earlier President Carter had resolutely disputed, was something with which Garfield’s successor, President Tyler Dennett, would have resolutely agreed. In a speech he gave on March 11, 1937, to the Boston Williams Alumni Association he stated, “Too many ‘nice boys’ are making Williams ‘not fully representative of the American people.’” Asked to clarify what constituted a ‘Nice Boy,’ he said a “‘well mannered, sophisticated, and generally well disposed young men’ now apparently on the ascendency here . . . In these respects they are superior to the average American boy but such differences from the average are superficial and are usually due to the good fortune of these men, not their efforts.”

Mainly they were wealthy boys who had gone to private schools. Dennett, in other words, was challenging the homogeneity of the student body, which in turn was concentrated in the fraternities, while heterogeneity, whether ethnic, religious, or socioeconomic led to the Garfield Club.

Dennett’s “nice boys” were coming to Williams for a number of reasons, but the fraternities and the style they supported were a prime motivation. They had a direct bearing on the type of students who attended Williams College. Fraternities cost more than living in a boarding house or being part of the Garfield Club. The Reverend John Knox Tibbits, in a letter to President Dennett three days after the ‘Nice Boys’ speech, voiced his concerns. He told of a member of his congregation whose son was working his way through college and was finding the social side of things difficult without being
in a fraternity. He had wanted to leave Williams but had been persuaded to stay. In response to this letter, President Dennett said that other non-fraternity students found it similarly unsatisfactory. A recent graduate from Buffalo told him of a time when he “had invited some non-fraternity friends to dine with him at his fraternity house at Williams and . . . they had been snubbed by his fraternity brothers who resented their being invited there.”

Dennett thus had cause for concern over both the character of the student body and the reputation of Williams as a snobbish school. And the problem was not correcting itself. The number of students admitted from public schools was declining, not increasing, as he hoped. From 1933 to 1936, public high school admits fell from 26.2% to 18.7% of the entering class. Williams had a four-year Latin requirement till 1933, but then began to loosen restrictions. This requirement had excluded many high school graduates of the time, keeping out many talented high school students, and insuring that just the cream of the crop came to Williams. As a result students from public high schools constituted 36.7% of those on the Dean’s list whereas they made up only 21.7% of the entire student body.

Conclusion

Fraternities had come to Williams College and flourished despite constant criticism. In fact a little over twenty years before their eventual elimination, they were attracting more students each year. When the Special Committee on Campus Social Conditions reported in 1936, the first question it sought to address was whether the elimination or modification of the fraternity system was desirable. Their answer was a clear negative. “We do not believe that the question merits extended discussion. There
are many reasons, both material and psychological, which would render any such intent unwise.\textsuperscript{30} It would take the disruptive effects of World War II and its aftermath to change such attitudes.
World War II and its aftermath: 1940-1960

Williams College, like all of American society, was transformed by World War II. In August of 1941, President James Phinney Baxter 3rd, who had replaced the active and outspoken Dennett in 1937, went to Washington to head up the Research and Analysis branch of the Office of Strategic Services. When the United States entered the war in December 1941, many students and professors followed him into the armed services.

The college’s fortunes declined precipitously until January of 1943. In this environment, fraternity life was pushed to the side because of the lack of student members; all the houses were closed in 1943. Only two fraternity houses remained open to serve food to all the enrolled students. The college was saved by the Navy’s use of the college’s facilities. “By the summer the campus was swarming with students in uniform—600 aviation cadets, 460 apprentice seamen or midshipmen – plus 200 civilian students.”

The college was running at full bore with three semesters a year. The extent that Williams was on a war footing is striking: the Class of ’45 produced only 4 graduates. In comparison, the college turned out 3,580 graduates over the three years of Navy Programs.

With victory came a sense of celebration but also loss. Williams’ men had heeded their nation’s call to arms, with over 3,700 in military service. One hundred and eighteen had died for their country. In a larger sense, too, the end of the war brought the realization that nothing would be the same again. World War II had a profound impact on Americans and their attitudes. Among other things it changed views on democracy and discrimination. The wartime experience of the veterans also altered American attitudes in this and other ways.
And the changes in the post-war period were every bit as sweeping. America emerged from the war as a superpower with unparalleled influence. Those years were further defined by the emergence of suburbs, large industries, and the fight against communism. The social criticism of the day, which directly related to fraternities, was concerned with the domination of the individual by the group. In 1950, David Riesman, disturbed by the changing dynamics of American society, wrote *The Lonely Crowd*. People were becoming less influenced by cultural and religious traditions; instead they paid the most attention to the behavior of their peers. Riesman wrote that this sheep-like behavior led to a tyranny of the group over the individual. Another influential writer of the time was William Whyte, who in 1956 wrote *The Organization Man*, which was concerned with the corporation and how Americans were pursuing personal security through conformity. While none of this criticism directly pertained to fraternities, it is important to note such themes in American writing and how it relates to fraternities and group behavior.

G.I. Bill and more mature students

In 1944, the so-called G.I. Bill was enacted to ease the transition from war to peace. One of its major achievements provided $500 a month for up to 48 months to pay for higher education for veterans. At that time $500 a month could easily pay the tuition and board at even the most expensive colleges in the United States. (The annual cost of tuition, fees, and room and board at Williams was $1,008 in 1946)² The net result of this bill was that about a million veterans went to college in the years after WWII. This had an enormous effect on Williams. It democratized the college, making it for the “first time appreciably selective [in who they admitted].”³ Consequently, the students were
“academically more talented, socially and economically and geographically more diverse.” The effect of this was to put even more of a strain on the fraternity system.

Meanwhile only a month after V-J day The Record polled the faculty on whether fraternities should be abolished, stay unchanged, or be modified. Of the 27 answers received, 6 voted for the elimination of fraternities outright. One faculty member wrote, “I can see no valid reason for the continuance of an outmoded and undemocratic institution in the Williams of the future.” Five faculty members voted for the continued existence of fraternities unchanged. The remaining 16 faculty members suggested a number of changes. Some proposed delayed rushing, common eating spaces for all classes, and the extension of fraternity bids to all students. The fraternities opposed all of these changes, but surprisingly some form of all three proposed changes would be implemented by 1960.

Shriver Committee, 1946

To address the faculty’s concerns about fraternities and their role in a post-war Williams, the Board of Trustees created the Committee on Post-War Extra-Curricular Activities, more widely known as the Shriver Committee. It was composed of the President, three members of his administration, one faculty member, two trustees, and twenty-two alumni. After a year and a half of study, the committee issued a report in January 1946, which recommended continuing with the current social system with, albeit some changes. It also acknowledged the charges against the fraternity systems: “first, that fraternities are anti-intellectual in their influence; second that fraternities are the cause of much unhappiness among students because of their discriminatory practices.” The committee proposed two important modifications to counteract this anti-
intellectualism and discrimination. The first, in a contentious 14-10 vote, was a recommendation to postpone rushing until sophomore year. At this time freshmen were rushed before they had gone to their first class at Williams. If this proposal was adopted then a new dining facility would have to be constructed for students to eat in. It would make the freshman class a more tightly integrated group and more egalitarian in nature. The rest of the report was unanimous and it stressed the importance of a strong Garfield club and recommended that a new building be built to house a larger, more prestigious club. The Shriver Committee hoped these modifications would address the unhappiness felt by students not chosen.

In the fall of 1947, fraternities reopened to this new environment. Of the 1107 students on campus, 53% were veterans. These older, more mature students brought unparalleled experiences and, in a few cases, wives and children. These veterans were less enthusiastic about fraternities than their fellow students. An article about the problems fraternities were facing nationwide in *Collier’s Magazine* was especially illuminating.

Many a fighter pilot, infantryman, and paratrooper has turned in his pledge pin when a plushlined punk has tried to 'make a man out of him.' One veteran quit rather than memorize page upon page of fraternity flummery. ‘I’d rather memorize a little history and economics,’ he quietly stated.  

Ferdie Thun ’30, a Williams Trustee in the 1950’s, agreed, saying, “The last thing that [veterans] wanted was something that had a great deal of class consciousness about it, they didn’t want to have some people elevated to a preferred position and other people relegated to a very poor position.” While veterans changed the demographics at Williams, the elevated age of students was brief and not a long lasting trend. By the fall of 1947, of the 278 men in the class of 1951, only 34 were veterans, while 74% came
from prep schools. In the rushing season of that year (1947), which included all the classes but mainly the freshman class, 218 joined the 15 fraternities and another 72 joined the Garfield Club.

Discriminatory Practices

More important and long lasting than the addition of older veterans, World War II had a profound effect on peoples’ views on the subject of discrimination. As a result of the Holocaust, many US citizens realized that bigotry directed at Jews was wrong and unwarranted. Another result was the glaring contradiction of continuing segregation in a democracy, which denied at home what soldiers had fought to protect and defend abroad. The result was a rising awareness of the need for civil rights for African-Americans. World War II put African-Americans in both the armed services and important jobs in the wartime economy. Although there was still a separation of races in the armed forces during World War II, things were changing. On July 26th, 1948 President Truman issued Executive Order 9981, establishing equality of treatment and opportunity in the armed forces and federal government regardless of skin color. Even though Williams College in rural and some might say backwater Massachusetts did not attract many black students, the national conversation on race was important. African-Americans were slowly coming to Williams and having a greater impact. The College’s first black graduate was Gaius C. Bolin of the class of 1889, and in 1964 Williams conferred a degree to its sixtieth black graduate. While there was only a small number of African-Americans at Williams, there were other minorities at the school, the largest being Jews, who constituted roughly 10% of each class. In the end these groups had a large influence on the fraternity debate.
A number of the national fraternity constitutions had “Aryan” clauses prohibiting non-Christian whites. These restrictions were unacceptable to many who found them similar to Hitler’s decrees on race. The outrage over this was expressed in a letter to the editor in *The Williams Record*, stating “The great majority of the Jewish students at Williams – and the occasional Negro gaining admittance shares this plight – have been, by the laws written or unwritten, barred from membership in fraternities, irrespective of their worth as individuals.”

Through the Shriver report, the Williams administration reiterated that it did not approve of discrimination based on “race, color, or creed.”

Some fraternities made noteworthy steps toward opening up their membership to a more diverse group of students by rescinding restrictive clauses in their constitutions. The efforts led to all 15 fraternities extending bids to Jewish rushees in 1955, up from 5 fraternities in 1950.

**Sterling Committee, 1951**

Unfortunately, most of the recommendations of the Shriver Committee went unimplemented due to a lack of money and the divided decision on delayed rushing. The postponement of rushing till sophomore year, urged by a majority of the committee, would have thrust additional financial responsibilities on the college since fraternities and the Garfield Club fed the freshmen class. It was financially prudent for President Baxter’s administration to follow the minority position and leave the current system in place. The creation of a new Garfield Club and postponing rushing till sophomore year would have cost Williams a large amount of money. Baxter was also a dyed-in-the-wool believer in the fraternity system. By comparison, Amherst after the war took a more pro-
active policy and created a central dining hall where all of its students, fraternity and non-fraternity members alike, ate together.

For all intents and purposes, then, the status quo was maintained, and the unhappiness of non-fraternity men grew. Some student leaders and faculty also became increasingly frustrated and, in April of 1950, submitted two reports to President Baxter. Both cited,

The lack of a strong feeling of community on the Williams campus, the disparity between the college’s educational potential and its actual achievement, an increase in intellectual apathy, and the harmful effects—especially on freshmen—of a social system which magnified social inequality.\textsuperscript{15}

The petitions further argued that it was essential that a committee be appointed to reevaluate the college’s educational and social policies. Thus in 1950, only four years after the Shriver Committee’s recommendations, the Committee on Campus Problems was created, more commonly referred to as the Sterling Committee. It was a large committee, members of which included three Trustees, seven members of the faculty and administration, 16 alumni heads of the social units (Presidents from the 15 fraternities and the Garfield Club), 16 undergraduate heads of the social units, and ten alumni members. The committee met throughout 1950 and reported to the trustees on May 6, 1951. It more forcefully recommended the same changes the Shriver committee had: deferred rushing till sophomore year, freshmen dining in a college facility, and a new Garfield Club. The committee voted against central eating for the three upper classes and a system of complete fraternity access in which any Williams student who so desired could become a member of a fraternity.
In opposition to the report, the members of the Garfield Club, believing that a new building would only entrench the current unfair and undemocratic system, took a radical position. They voted 160-32 on December 5, 1951 to dissolve unless every student who wanted to join a fraternity could. The administration said that it would be up to the current student body to vote on the issue. The vote on total access failed to pass, with 509 against and 390 for. The breakdown in the Garfield Club was very different with 12 against and 176 for total rushing.¹⁶

As a result of the failure of the total rushing resolution, the Garfield Club proceeded to disband. As a result the college became responsible for providing meals for the former Garfield Club members, and President Baxter’s administration shifted its attention from the creation of a new Garfield Club to the creation of a Student Union, since a new building, with a large dining hall for freshman, was needed if the Sterling Committee’s plan on delayed rushing was to go into effect. The building progressed quickly, and in 1953 there was no freshman rushing.

The end of freshman rushing had a large impact on both the college and fraternities. It created a greater sense of being a Williams man; it led to greater differences among fraternities; and let a greater percentage of the upper classes participate in fraternities. Before deferred rushing students rushed the various fraternities prior to the first days of class. This had the effect of making them fraternity men first and Williams men second. The change over to delayed rushing also put a larger emphasis on being part of a coherent class. A second effect of delayed rushing was that it stratified houses, making some appear stronger than others. Previously, the different fraternities had been relatively equal because they rushed students before knowing much about them.
Each house had thus ended up with a fairly broad range of students because of the absence of perfect information. After the change over to deferred rushing, however, both the fraternities and freshmen could make more informed decisions. The fraternities actually began to keep file cards on each first year student and knew by the end of freshman year who they wanted to have join their ranks. The freshmen meanwhile were keeping tabs on the fraternities and which had good reputations and which were unpopular. As a result some fraternities rose in standing while others fell. And yet another effect of delayed rushing was that it allowed fraternities to pledge more upperclassmen. Before deferred rushing there were four classes of about 15 members each in each fraternity. Since the economics of the system didn't change and houses still needed to pay for their rent, cooks, and custodial staff, to meet these expenses they had to increase the number of students in the three remaining pledge classes. This change, in turn made total opportunity seem more possible.\textsuperscript{17}

Reform from the Fraternities, 1957

Though changed, the fraternity system continued with many hoping that delayed rushing would create a stronger sense of class spirit and would overcome some of the rejection felt by non-affiliates. In reality, however, the problems were not solved and there was increasing disenchantment with fraternities. In the fall of 1957, therefore, another plan to reform the fraternity system was instituted. It was called total opportunity, and was exactly what the Garfield Club had hoped for a few years earlier. Henceforth all who wanted to join a fraternity could. However, it soon became clear that there were administrative and hierarchical problems with total opportunity. Under the new system, during rushing, fraternities had to list all the members of the sophomore
class in the order that they wanted to accept them. Students were supposed to list all fifteen fraternities in the order that they would like to be members. However, many students listed only their top 5 choices because, after visiting the fraternities, they realized that they would not fit in or enjoy being part of the other ten fraternities. The result was that sometimes, if the fraternity had already filled their allotted number of spots, the student would not get a bid from one of the five fraternities that he wanted to join. A second problem associated with total opportunity was that it made the hierarchy in the fraternity system even more pronounced. Some houses had always been more prestigious and popular than others but deferred rushing and total opportunity exacerbated the situation. The stronger houses could pick and choose among the student leaders and more popular members of the student body.

In spite of the problems, the administration embraced the changes, saying that it was up to the students to make these decisions. Some alumni were less enthusiastic. For example, Eugene M. Horn, class of 1907 was so appalled at total opportunity that he threatened to take legal action. He argued that total opportunity destroyed the notion of fraternities as selective brotherhoods.

Another unintended consequence of deferred rushing and total opportunity was a rise in disciplinary problems at Williams. Since World War II fraternities had begun to lose their mystique and did not command the respect they had before the war. Once people had felt an obligation not to do something that reflected badly on their fraternity. As Williams historian, Frederick Rudolph, said about fraternity badges prior to World War II, “[fraternity members] were proud to wear them, they were ostensible, ostentatious one might even say, but, there was an obligation that went with them and
they knew it. But speaking about the change in attitude that came with total
opportunity Rudolph made this observation.

    One view of fraternities may be that what made them work was who they
kept out. But when you stop keeping people out . . . once you make it
democratic, then you've lost whatever it was that kept people in line [and]
made those badges mean something.\textsuperscript{19}

Phillips Report, 1957

Meanwhile the problem of creating a fraternity system that welcomed minorities
and Jewish students continued to plague Williams throughout the period. In 1955, the
Board of Trustees reaffirmed the policy that fraternity selection must be based on the
merit of the individual. The board also stated that no national fraternity could operate on
campus if the Williams Chapter was not free to elect any individual on this basis. Two
years later on May 13, 1957 a College Council committee produced the Williams College
Council Committee on Discrimination Report, also known as the Phillip's Report. It
found that Jewish and African-Americans still did not have equal opportunity for
fraternity membership. The existence of unwritten agreements with the national
fraternities or with alumni was the cause of this continued discrimination. The Phillips's
Report found that three houses had unwritten agreements that effectively prevented the
pledging an African-American and two houses had such agreements regarding Jewish
students. The report urged the Board of Trustees "require that all locals with such a
provision [to] have it removed as a prerequisite for continuing on the Williams
campus."\textsuperscript{20} At the next meeting of the board a deadline of January 15, 1958 was imposed
for house presidents to put in writing that they were in fact free to choose their members.
Committee of Twenty-Two, 1957

In the spring of 1957, a group of students, who became known as the Committee of 22 or the “Terrible 22”, proposed a radical change in the social system. A published plan was distributed around campus as an open letter to President Baxter. It called for the total elimination of the fraternity system with the college fulfilling many of the functions fraternities had once performed. The most important role the college would take over was the random assignment of students to social units. Freshmen would still belong to social units, too; and would take part in social events, but they would eat in the student union. Housing in the social units would be done by seniority, with the excess capacity living in two or three dormitory entries associated with the social unit. Once the college assigned the various members to their social units, the social unit would be autonomous. In this way every student would be affiliated with a social unit, while eliminating the influence of fraternities and the sense of rejection felt by those who were not members.

The plan proposed to convert fraternities into dormitories while retaining the advantages of the existing system, “such as de-centralized eating, intra-mural competition, the experience of self-government, and the opportunity to form close and lasting friendships.” The Committee of 22 devised this plan hoping to get rid of what its members saw as the six negative aspects of fraternities:

1) Fraternities misdirect too much time and energy;
2) Fraternities lead to unfair standards, cruel to both upperclassmen and freshmen, and a shattering rejection to a small minority;
3) Fraternities are traditionally undemocratic (referring to Discrimination);
4) Fraternities destroy college unity by splitting Williams into 15 socially-competing units and isolating freshmen;
5) Fraternities submerge the individual beneath the narrow standard inherent in such a system;
6) Fraternities place severe financial strain on many members.
There were three main constituencies the committee members had to win over if they wanted their plan to succeed. The first was the student body, where fraternity membership in the upper classes was over 90%. The second was the faculty, who had a vested interest in the social system and how it affected students’ performance in the classroom. The third and most influential constituency was President Baxter and the Board of Trustees.

A majority of the student body was hostile to the idea. A Record editorial commented that the plan had merit, but observed that it would be almost impossible to enact, calling it “totally unrealistic and impractical.” The college would never be able to afford to buy all the fraternity houses, and it was highly unlikely that the fraternities would donate their houses. The other problem would be the major decline in alumni contributions to the college. Fraternities, The Record stated, served as the main tie between alumni and Williams College. The article ended, “Although the proposed new social system could never become a reality here, the report does indicate that our present fraternity system is far from perfect.”

In contrast to the students, a majority of the faculty supported the plan. Professor Robert Barrow of the Music department stated, “It is a change for the better in that it provides for more mixing of students with different tastes and social backgrounds.” However, the most influential segment of the Williams community had yet to be heard from. After meeting with the Board of Trustees, President Baxter issued a statement that unconditionally condemned the anti-fraternity plan, stating that the proposal “does not, in our opinion present a convincing case. We believe that the social units on campus are serving a useful purpose, and we hope that they will continue to do so.” Later in the
statement he called the proposal “totally unrealistic.” While unsuccessful, the Committee of 22 did, it turned out, significantly heighten student opposition to the continuation of the fraternity system.

**Grinnell Petition, 1961**

While the 1950’s and 1960’s were tumultuous times for fraternities, the response to the Committee of 22 shows that fraternities were still seen by many as an integral part of Williams life. This would all change within ten years, and the catalyst for change was the so-called Grinnell petition.

Early in 1961, Bruce Grinnell was calling to order his first meeting as President of Alpha Delta Phi (AD). As one of his first orders of business, he proposed making Myong-Ku Ahn ’63, known as ‘Charlie,’ and at the time a social member of AD, into a full member. Socials members enjoyed all the privileges of membership except they could not join the brothers in the goat room for the monthly meetings, vote on house policies, or live in the house. Ahn was a North Korean student who traveled to South Korea to escape the Korean War, and he eventually came to the United States. He was liked in the fraternity and participated in many of its events. However, when Bruce Grinnell proposed upgrading Ahn’s membership, three men “buttered” him. At the time, AD, while not having a blackball system, did have a butter system. A butter vote said essentially “that I like him but I could never live with him.” If three men “buttered” a man, he could not become a member.

The buttering of Ahn led Grinnell to question the whole fraternity system at Williams. Reflecting on it later, he said, “It was really one of the most disillusioning experiences I think I’ve ever had.” Besides being president of Alpha Delta Phi, a
Gargoyle (a member of the prestigious senior honor society), and Co-captain of the football team, Grinnell was a Junior Advisor. Returning to the freshman quad after the meeting, he began to seek out other JA’s to see whether their fraternities had bylaws allowing two or three students to reject a person’s membership. What he found was even more disheartening: some fraternities had black ball provisions where just one person could keep another out of a house. The more these six or seven JA’s consulted, the more they became disenchanted by the discriminatory and anti-intellectual influences of the fraternity system. Soon the word was out that a group of students was looking critically at the fraternity system and brainstorming ways to make it better. The original group quickly grew in size and by May had come to include 60 members who varied from pro-fraternity men to non-affiliates. Around exam time in May of 1961, it all came to a head with the signing of the Grinnell Petition and its submission to the administration.

The petition was less tightly structured than that of the Committee of 22’s, but its more open-ended format had some advantages. The Committee of 22 had issued a report declaring exactly how fraternities should be eliminated. It even included budget numbers and went into a lot of detail. The Grinnell petition instead suggested goals that should be achieved. It asked for the “elimination of undergraduate decisions on the membership of social units” with the administration taking over this responsibility. Its most important request, however, was for the creation of a committee of trustees, students, faculty, and alumni to investigate how to reform the current social system and recommend a plan to accomplish this.
While the Grinnell Petition offered more leeway to the administration, it also asked emphatically for results. At the end of the petition there was an ultimatum stating, "If significant and constructive steps toward the adoption of some such proposal have not been taken by the end of the first semester of 1961-1962 we, the undersigned, will resign from our fraternities." At the bottom of the petition 45 Williams upperclassmen signed. The list had many prominent fraternity members and leaders of campus organizations.

President Baxter, who was about to leave office, returned the petition promptly with remarks that Grinnell recalled went something like, "When I came, there were fifteen fraternities; when I leave there will be fifteen fraternities." Thus it would fall to a new administration to tackle the problems the Grinnell Petition had raised with such earnest intent, and in the process Williams College would be profoundly altered. Ironically, too, the man who presided over the change had once been seen as Baxter’s handpicked successor.
In the fall of 1961, *The Berkshire Eagle* published a story regarding the new President of Williams College and how he would fit in nicely and not stir things up. The paper quoted a Yale colleague saying, “Sawyer won’t shake up Mount Greylock or even ripple the Ivy on Lawrence Hall.”¹ This was the farthest thing from the truth. President Sawyer came to Williams College at a pivotal point in its history. Fraternities, which had long dominated the social life at Williams, were under attack and in five years’ time would effectively cease to exist. Sawyer’s life experiences and personal history made him an ideal candidate to preside over this difficult transition.

John Edward Sawyer, commonly known as “Jack,” was born on May 5, 1917 in Worcester, MA, the youngest of three children. His father, William H. Sawyer ’08, was a civic leader and Yankee businessman who ran the retail lumberyard that his grandfather had started in Worcester. Sawyer described him as, “a very honorable man, conscientious and strong in his lifelong loyalties to people and principles and for me a loving father.”² He noted that another influence in his life was his maternal grandfather, who had gone to Harvard in the Class of 1885 and served as a Congressman from Worcester’s Fourth Congressional District. The polar opposite of Sawyer’s father, he was an enormous, fun-loving man who was careless about business and debts. Sawyer later stated that his administrative style was deeply influenced by these two men.

My kids and closest administrative associates would identify me mostly with my father, in my commitments to thrift, prudence and balanced budgets and to pretty strict principles. But in my more expansive moments and ways of going at objectives, as in timing and shaping of programs, I was usually alert to the political context, and mindful (wherever possible) not to overload the circuits.³
Sawyer had a strong sense of Williams College and fraternities throughout his childhood. As an adolescent, he visited Williamstown often with his father and older brother. They went to Williams-Amherst football games, baseball games, and reunions. His father would reminisce during these trips and often tell Jack Sawyer about the golden age of fraternities, with "seniors acting as mentors and tutors to the freshmen, and the whole membership sitting around Saturday evening in front of the fire reading literary papers to each other." Fifty years later these recollections proved to be a useful insight into the minds of older alumni. They remembered the way fraternities were, not what they had become.

**Fraternity Ties**

Sawyer attended Deerfield, where he became class president, editor of the newspaper, and a keen student of history. He went on to Williams and accepted a bid at Zeta Psi fraternity. Reflecting on it later, he said, "I would guess they had very little choice about extending a bid, my brother was to become head of the house as I was to be later, and my father had been head of the house before us." In Sawyer's junior year President Baxter came to campus, and believing that he would be too busy to teach a class fulltime, decided to take on one honors student. The history department suggested Sawyer, and this suggestion proved to be the start of a relationship that would continue for the next 24 years, until Sawyer himself became president of the college. He graduated from Williams in 1939 with highest honors in history. He was also a member of Phi Beta Kappa and an editor of the *Williams Record.*

Sawyer's interaction with Baxter and his active participation in the fraternity system were both important for the future. Because of his ties to Baxter he would remain
in close contact with the college, becoming a trustee at a young age due to the high esteem in which Baxter held him. With regard to eliminating fraternities, the fact that he had been president of his fraternity and had historical ties to the College made him knowledgeable about the issues involved. In the end his past helped him attain the presidency, empowered him to deal with fraternities, and protected him from criticism. Sawyer remembered having a conversation with John Kemeny, who was then President of Dartmouth. Kemeny stated at the time, “The problem is I’m a Hungarian Jew who did not go to Dartmouth, and the alumni would never believe that I was [eliminating fraternities] for educational purposes; they would say it’s a hostile personal action.” In this respect, Sawyer would have an easier time of it at Williams.

Anne Swift, Harvard, and the OSS

During his undergraduate years at Williams, Sawyer had been dating Anne Swift, who attended Smith College. In June of 1941, they were married. For the rest of his life she would be his most trusted confidant. While not having gone to Williams, she had visited Sawyer often there and had long family connections with the college. Her father, E. Kent Swift, was the Williams Class of 1900, and her mother was related to the Lasell family, several generations of which had graduated from Williams and whose generosity to the college was memorialized in the name of its gymnasium. Also, the house that later became the President’s house had once been owned by Edward Lasell, the first Professor of Chemistry. One of Anne Swift’s older aunts, on hearing that she and Jack Sawyer were moving to Williams, remarked, “Well, it’s nice to think of you living in uncle Edward’s house.” With this deep family connection and time spent here as an undergraduate with Jack, Anne Sawyer understood how the college operated and this
helped a great deal. After the Sawyers left, she became the first winner of the Ephraim Williams Award, which honors exceptional contributions to Williams from a non-alumnus.

After Williams, Sawyer went on to Harvard, where he had completed all the requirements for a Ph.D., except his dissertation, when the US entered World War II. At that point he was asked to join the Research and Analysis branch (R&A) of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), forerunner to the Central Intelligence Agency, which President Baxter at the time was running. The R&A division of the OSS was composed of well-known intellectuals who were developing in-depth analyses on a broad range of topics. They recruited recent graduates whom they thought were intelligent, knowledgeable in languages, and highly regarded. Sawyer’s first posting in the division was in Algiers, where he came in contact with the French resistance and Emile Depres, a future Williams professor, who was also working for the OSS. Depres would turn out to be a valuable ally in helping Sawyer attain the Williams presidency.

Following the liberation of Paris, Sawyer went on to head the R&A division in France and, eventually, for all of Western Europe. This was a prestigious assignment for a man who had just turned 27. While the similarities between the positions might not be readily apparent, Sawyer’s experience in the war proved to be valuable training for being President of Williams College. In Europe he directed the efforts of 90 people, many of them distinguished intellectuals and much senior to Sawyer. Nevertheless, he gained their trust, and they were supportive of his decisions. Looking back on his time in the OSS for the Williams College Oral History Project, he remarked “Because I’d found
myself respected and effective in running the R&A Paris office, I may have sensed administration as a possible future option."

At the wars end, Sawyer was decommissioned as a Lieutenant with a Bronze Star and took a job with the State Department as head of the surviving Western European Section. By this time Jack and Anne Sawyer were the proud parents of two children, Catherine and John, and were enjoying their time living in Georgetown. They would have two more children, Stephen and William, born in 1948 and 1953, respectively.

Return to Academia

In 1946, Sawyer was offered a junior fellowship in the Society of Fellows at Harvard. Lawrence Lowell, the retiring president of Harvard, had founded the society in 1933 because he felt that Ph.D. programs had become too rigid in their coverage of academic thought. The Society of Fellows was a high-powered and exclusive group, with only 8 people accepted each year. Many continued on in the academic world, and of the fellows of Sawyer’s time two later won Nobel prizes. In keeping with the spirit of the program, from 1946 through 1949, he took courses in a wide-range of academic disciplines. This broad base of knowledge, while preparing him for teaching, also trained him to look at problems from a number of different angles and disciplines. Later he stated, “Looking back, I feel almost as if I’d planned an intellectual . . . background for later responsibilities as a college and foundation president.” In 1949, as he was about to complete his time with the Society of Fellows, Sawyer was approached by Ed Mason, a senior economist at Harvard who had known his work in the OSS, and asked if he would be interested in teaching American economic history. He agreed and began to teach and write at Harvard.
Throughout this time Sawyer kept in close contact with Williams. When applying for positions in the Naval Reserves and the State Department, he had asked President Baxter for support and continued to exchange letters with him regularly. Baxter gave him glowing recommendations, stating, “I have known John Edward Sawyer intimately for the past ten years. He is, in my opinion, the ablest student who has graduated from Williams during that period.” Indeed, just before Sawyer received a position in the State Department, Baxter had tried to woo him back to Williams. He had turned the offer down because at that point he had just been offered a position in the Junior Fellows program and felt it was too good an opportunity to miss.

In 1952, after completing the Junior Fellows program and becoming an assistant professor of economics at Harvard, a new opportunity was presented to Sawyer: he was asked to become a member of the Williams College Board of Trustees, the youngest permanent trustee ever named. His time on the board helped him become aware of the problems facing Williams and made him knowledgeable about the intricate relationships between the president, faculty, trustees, students, parents, and alumni that shaped events at the college. In retrospect, he felt keenly that:

The really enormous advantage I benefited from was having been on the board for several years before becoming President . . . It gave me first hand knowledge of strengths and problems of the College and a chance to assess the people on the board and administration, their strengths and their natures, and who could be counted on for what. You also learned, which I would not have properly guessed, the key role of the Trustees’ committee system. Everything comes to the board, at least it did at Williams then, through the committees, and if you want to get something through the board, you’ve better get the relevant chairman and one or two committees that have thoroughly absorbed and are supportive of what you’re ready to bring forward.
Sawyer’s appointment as a trustee enforced the common belief that he was next in line for the presidency. Studying for his Ph.D. at Harvard in 1939, he had heard something interesting through the grapevine. Baxter had evidently told his good friend, President Conant of Harvard, that he thought Sawyer would be the “fellow who would probably succeed him.”12 This was a provocative statement, considering Sawyer was barely 22 at the time! Thereafter he heard it again and again from people who had heard Conant say it to somebody who had said it to somebody else. While this put a lot of pressure on such a young man, it also started him thinking early about ways to improve colleges in general and Williams in particular. He admitted later, “It undoubtedly entered into my thinking.”13 Also, in the 1950’s he was approached to be the President of a Quaker college and had feelers from a few other colleges as well. The possibility of being a college president, he commented, “Persisted while I was still pursuing the classic track of teaching and research.”14

After 4 years at Harvard, Sawyer in 1953 was denied tenure but was nearly simultaneously offered an assistant professorship at Yale. He would continue at Yale from 1953 to 1961, before becoming president of Williams. His service at both Harvard and Yale was valuable to him at Williams. He was able to see the house system at Harvard and the college system at Yale. As he put it later, this experience made him realize there was a “Better way to organize the campus.”15

Shortly after arriving at Yale, Sawyer was put on the Curriculum Committee, where he had the opportunity to befriend Bill Devane, who was Dean of Yale College and a dominant force at Yale. When Sawyer asked Lloyd Reynolds, chairman of the Economics department, about the committee, he stated, “Well, the chairmen and the
issues change, but wherever Bill DeVane sits is the head of the table.’’16 Being able to see this administrator tackle difficult issues and work towards a consensus must have been quite an education. When leaving Yale to become President of Williams, he asked Devane if he had any advice to offer. Devane told him, “Doing it successfully takes the right combination of high principle and low cunning.”17

The Search for President Baxter’s successor

In 1960, President Baxter decided to retire after 24 years at Williams. He set his retirement date as July 1, 1961, but the search for his successor began immediately. A total of 50 people were interviewed, and Sawyer’s selection’s was not in fact the sure thing it had once appeared to be. Baxter had begun to shy away from supporting him because they disagreed on three major issues: curricular reform, fundraising initiatives, and, above all, fraternities.18 In a letter to Baxter, Sawyer had written on the benefits of deferred rushing and that it would “help create greater class solidarity.”19 But his feelings went even deeper than that. He had candidly shared with members of the board his opinion that the fraternity system “had become a serious divisive presence, it retained intolerable discriminatory provisions, veiled and actual, and it was the center of a kind of behavior and anti-intellectual attitudes and stereotypes that ran counter to the purposes of the college.”20

As the presidential search took shape, Baxter was leaning towards Vince Barnett. Two powerful groups, however, supported Sawyer: the Board of Trustees and the faculty. The board had spent a great deal of time with him and knew of his strong administrative skills and keen judgment. Meanwhile, Sawyer worried about Baxter’s opinion and its effect on the college. In a talk with Henry “Stubby” Flynt, the senior trustee on the board
and a good friend of both Jack Sawyer and his father, he stated, “Look, I don’t want to see this place get torn apart over the succession. If there’s a majority of the board who would rather make another choice, we are quite happy right here at Yale.”

Flynt responded, “a number of us feel strongly that you and Anne are the combination we want to get in that job, and you let me handle this.”

The other constituency that supported Sawyer was the faculty. Emile Depres, who had known him during OSS days and who was now on the Williams faculty, spoke to a board member on behalf of a sizeable element of the faculty. Ferdinand Thun, the trustee with whom Depres conferred, told the Williams Oral History Project that, in effect, Depres was “throwing the weight of the faculty behind the Sawyer appointment.” In the end the faculty and the board prevailed, and Sawyer was unanimously elected to be the eleventh President of Williams.

Leadership Styles: Sawyer vs. Baxter

The transition from Baxter to Sawyer brought a sharp difference in administrative styles. Where Baxter was relatively heavy-handed, Sawyer ran things through committees and was more open to discussion. He was also more pro-active in taking on difficult issues.

When Baxter left Williams it was generally thought that he had stayed too long. In the last ten or fifteen years of his administration there had been very little change. Ferdinand Thun described Baxter as, “by and large . . . for the status quo.” The Sawyer administration had to make up for this stagnation. However, Sawyer was cautious about implementing changes. He didn’t like answering the telephone, because he felt he was going to be put on the spot. When at home he routinely had his wife or children answer
the phone so that this wouldn’t happen. Also, there was his way of expressing himself in memos and public statements, which Dorothy Kirkpatrick called “Sawyereeze.” Dudley Bahlman described Sawyereeze as a “lingo all its own and it always moved in the direction of vagueness, of not being utterly decisive and clear.”

Bahlman describes one time when a reporter from an Albany television station came to Williams to get a statement about some crisis that was occurring. They “asked him a question and he made a statement. It was never used because he had so obscured his meaning, had made it so much fluff, that it was difficult to know what he meant. And you know, that’s what he wanted to achieve.”

Of Sawyer and Baxter’s leadership styles Bahlman wrote, “[Sawyer] was open minded about such changes [fraternities, chapel, coeducation] in a way that Phinney [Baxter] certainly was not.” Baxter was extremely warm and personable, but when he made up his mind that was it: “Phinney made decisions just like that, and stuck by them no matter what. And you could present all sorts of evidence that it was the wrong decision [but] he’d stick by it.” Sawyer, on the other hand, was more reserved and patient. His style was one of careful preparation and he was always willing to discuss things at length, hearing multiple opinions. However, when difficult decisions needed to be made, he made them. Then he proceeded step by step to achieve them. Perhaps he was following the advice of his father, the lumber mill owner, that it was better to “measure twice and cut once.” The effect of this was to make him appear to be a patient conservative who was bringing about difficult changes that had to be made.
This then was the man who became the eleventh President of Williams College. And on his first day in office the Grinnell Petition and another one strongly favoring fraternities were on his desk.
Angevine Committee, 1961

One of Jack Sawyer’s first actions upon becoming President was the creation of the Angevine Committee. Before his arrival in the spring of 1961, the Grinnell Petition and the counter petition had been widely circulated. Together they had already created a whirlwind of discussion, and Sawyer quickly set out to quell the rising anxieties on campus. By appointing a committee chaired by Jay Angevine to study the fraternity system in depth, he hoped to slow the process down and calm tensions. Few predicted that the Angevine Report would effectively eliminate fraternities.

The Formation of the Committee

The committee was composed of eleven members and a non-voting secretary. They were chosen because they represented a broad range of views and a variety of constituencies. Describing how he chose committees in general Sawyer stated:

[I] was very careful . . . in picking chairmen and weighing the balance of personnel on committees to try to see not only what judgment and background individuals would contribute to the committee’s action and discussions but what constituency they would either bring with them or be effective at communicating with.¹

The Angevine committee was very much chosen this way, and all the people asked accepted. It was a prestigious and diverse group. There were two trustees, two former trustees, two faculty members, and two current Williams students, while the remaining four were respected alumni. Ten of the eleven voting members had been in fraternities, and overall they represented every decade of Williams’s history back to the 1910’s. Of the twelve people, seven had been Phi Beta Kappa and eleven in the Gargoyle Society. There were two faculty members who were chosen primarily because they were Williams alumni. Hodge Markgraf ’52, professor of Chemistry, and the committee’s non-voting
secretary, stated, “[Sawyer’s] point of view was he full well knew what the faculty felt about fraternities and he wasn’t going to constitute a committee that ultimately could be criticized for having too many faculty [and] whose outcome would’ve been foreordained.”

In fact, the desire to distance the faculty from the Angevine committee extended so far that Bill Gates was prohibited from speaking about it at the Faculty meetings.

In forming the committee, President Sawyer stated later, “There wasn’t any feeling out of how they felt, but we were looking for people who had been active in their fraternity and loyal Williams people and who had a larger vision.”

The one thing all the members, except Frederick Nathan, had in common was that they had been associated with the college in recent years. They were either trustees, faculty members, recent graduates, or the fathers of recent graduates.

The Committee Members

The chairman of the committee was Jay Angevine ’11. He had been a trustee from 1951 to 1960 and worked closely with Sawyer on the board. Both had served on the Committee on Instruction from 1952 to 1960 and the Executive committee from 1957 to 1960. Sawyer had a great deal of respect for Angevine, later stating, “I felt that getting Jay Angevine to accept the responsibility was ideal – he’d been carrying a lot of these negotiations for the board and was a marvelously wise, fair minded, and principled man, as well as a good lawyer.”

The same high opinion of Angevine was held by Ferdie Thun, who described him as a, “very nice New England lawyer, operating out of a very simple office and he had an awfully nice sense of humor and was completely fair . . . and I don’t think they could have had a better chairman for that thing.”

Describing his
leadership style, Hodge Markgraf said, "Jay Angevine was one of the most brilliant but cagey senior committee members, to chair a committee I’ve ever worked with. He had a way of controlling everything by appearing to control nothing." At Williams, Angevine had been a Gargoyle, Phi Beta Kappa, and a member of Phi Gamma Delta.

John Osborne ’25 had just been named a trustee in 1961. He was president and director of Central and South West Corporation. He had two sons then attending Williams, John S. ’63 and David B. ’64. Markgraf, reflecting on Osborne, said he was "a dyed-in-the-wool fraternity member" who "was the rock on the right that the other fraternity members on the committee held onto." In the end he had the longest journey to make, but he made it. While at Williams he had been on the Interfraternity Council and a member of Kappa Alpha, and, upon graduating, he had become an Alumni Trustee for the fraternity.

Ferdie Thun ’30 was the other trustee on the committee and had been on the board since 1950. He and Sawyer had been members of the Committee on Grounds, Buildings, and Improvement while trustees from 1956 to 1961. At Williams he had been a Deke fraternity member and his father-in-law had been national head of the Dekes. Looking back on the outcome of the Angevine committee he said, "I had nothing but the happiest connections with the fraternity, but I still was convinced that we were doing the right thing." Thun was Chairman of the Board at Berkshire Knitting Mills. His brother had also gone to Williams and his son, Peter ’59, had recently graduated. He too had been a member of Delta Kappa Epsilon.

Edward Stanley ’37 was a former Class president and a member of the football, basketball, and baseball teams. He was vice-president of Provident Mutual Life
Insurance Company. His son, Peter G., had recently dropped out of Williams because he had been too involved in his fraternity, Alpha Delta Phi, and his grades suffered. His father, Ed Stanley, had also been a member of AD while at Williams.

William Gates '39 was in President Sawyer's graduating class from Williams. He was the William Brough Professor of Economics and Chairman of the Department. At Williams he had been a member of Phi Beta Kappa, Gargoyle, and Phi Gamma Delta.

Fred Nathan '43 was the lone non-fraternity member on the committee. He was a lawyer with Greenbaum, Wolff & Ernst. At Williams he had been a member of the Garfield Club and had served on the Sterling Committee. He was from a well-respected Jewish family in New York City, which had a long history at Williams.

M. Michael Griggs '44 had been an alumni trustee from 1956-1961 and Vice-Chairman of the Alumni Fund 1957-1961. He was a vice president at Batten, Barton, Durstine, & Osborn, an ad agency. He had been a member of Kappa Alpha.

Dickinson Debevoise '46 had been class president and a member of the Sterling Committee. He was a lawyer with Riker, Danzig, Marsh, & Scherer. After his graduation from Williams, his fraternity house had burned down, and he helped spearhead the fundraising effort for a new house. While at Williams he was involved in Student Activities Council, Outing Club, debating, soccer, and was a member of Delta Kappa Epsilon.

Another former member of the Sterling Committee and serving on the Angevine Committee was Robert Geniesse '51. Recalling the Sterling Committee he embarrassingly admitted, "I was on the other end in the whole issue of fairness and discrimination and the need to do something to make the system more equitable."
Geniesse was a United States assistant district attorney in New York. At Williams, he had been on the football team and a member of Alpha Delta Phi.

The two undergraduates on the committee were Robert Durham ’62 and Bruce Grinnell ’62. Durham was President of College Council, a Junior Advisor, and President of Chi Psi. Grinnell, of the Grinnell Petition, was asked by President Sawyer in July 1961 to be a part of the Committee and readily accepted. He was a Gargoyle and Co-captain of the football team and had been a Junior Advisor and president of Alpha Delta Phi.

Fact-finding

The Angevine committee met for the first time in September of 1961. In announcing the creation of the committee, Sawyer stressed that it was under no constraint to report any particular findings. The committee was created to recommend what was best for the college in the long run. He offered a broad range for what this might entail—everything from going back to the old concept of fraternities to doing away with them as a college institution. He also made clear that the trustees did not need to implement what the committee recommended but would weigh its recommendations heavily in any decision they made.10

The first task of the committee was to review all the reports on fraternities issued during the Baxter presidency, the latest being that of the Sterling Committee. After this was completed, it met one weekend a month throughout the first fall of the Sawyer presidency. At these meetings the members heard from a broad range of people: fraternity members, faculty, and non-affiliates. They put ads in The Record and the Williams Alumni Review asking people to write in their opinions. They also invited a
number of different groups to speak in front of the committee. They heard from fraternity members who were enthusiastic and also from some who were apathetic. Angevine described the difference later at a Class agents dinner: some fraternity men “found a creed in their Constitution, drama and poetry in their ritual, and great values in their national affiliation.” However, the committee was more impressed by the number of fraternity men who stated there were real problems in the current system. They told of “morale that was at a record low in many of the houses, that house discipline had disappeared, that endless hours were being wasted on matters of no real importance or worse, and that it was almost impossible to study in the houses.”

Clearly recent changes in the fraternities, such as total opportunity and the elimination of discriminatory clauses, had not solved the system’s problems. In fact, more problems had developed because of the changes, like the growing gap between a few prestigious houses and a large number of weaker ones where morale was low. The breakdown in house discipline in particular made the older alumni realize that the fraternities were different from the way they remembered them. Before World War II, fraternities had published volumes of poetry and sponsored Saturday evening debates on literary topics. All of that had changed and, when “[The older alumni] heard it was basically a dating club and a drinking operation, they simply turned their back and said that was not a fraternity as they understood the meaning of brotherhood and fellowship.”

After meeting with students on campus, the Angevine Committee turned to the alumni. Jay Angevine encouraged them to write the committee and express their views. In mid-winter the committee began to meet with alumni at the Williams Club in New
York City. Many came to these lively meetings. Hodge Markgraf, secretary of the committee, said of one, “I remember one that was standing-room-only. ... Lots of tension in the air that night. Jay Angevine remained unflappable, imperturbable, and just beautifully, skillfully allowed people to vent all kinds of views from, as I recall, 7 o’clock to well after midnight.”

The reason there was so much tension in the air that night may have been because it was becoming clear that the committee thought the college should take over the responsibility for room and board. The discussion really was directed towards whether the fraternity system would be a part of this future. But the process was not yet over. In January 1962, the committee split into six two-man teams and evaluated the social systems at a number of schools. One person of each pair wrote a report to Jay Angevine, who took these reports, edited them, and sent them out to the rest of the committee. This system allowed the committee to look at how undergraduates lived at a broad range of schools and examine what systems worked best.

Deliberations

After all these meetings and fact-finding missions, the committee began its final deliberations. It had two functions to perform. As Angevine later described it, “One was to diagnose, the other to prescribe.” Each person on the committee was asked to submit a report on how they saw the facts and the problems of the current system. The results were similar, and as Angevine noted, “The variances in these were minor – which may give you some idea of the clear preponderance of the testimony.”

Agreeing on the diagnoses, the committee followed the same procedure in crafting a solution. Each person wrote out a prescription for the problems outlined, and
again the differences were few. Next, the best parts of the different independent reports were compiled into a composite draft. The draft was then circulated through the committee several times. It was important that all members feel comfortable with the report, because they knew that a large portion of the Williams community would disagree with their findings. If the committee’s decision was not unanimous it would be hard to convince the alumni of the need for major change.

Describing the final draft, Angevine said that the committee went over it in detail, and “Not a word was left in it to which any member had an objection.”\(^{19}\) Of the results of such painstaking deliberation, Geniesse remarked, “I was amazed that it came out as unified and unanimously as it did, which was one hundred percent. Without any acrimony.”\(^{20}\) He went onto say about the whole process that, “It was really one of those remarkable situations where a somewhat disparate group arrived at a strong consensus through a discussion and through listening to others, because we listened to a lot of people.”\(^{21}\)

The Final Report

On May 5\(^{th}\), 1962 – Jack Sawyer’s 45\(^{th}\) birthday – the Angevine Committee voted unanimously on the final draft of its report and presented it to the Board of Trustees at the end of the May meeting. The completed version was a groundbreaking document. It started with the committee’s conclusions and recommendations. It then went into great detail about the thought process that led to that outcome.

After studying fraternities, the committee had come away with two conclusions. The first was that they played a “disproportionate role” at Williams and did not allow the college to fulfill its primary educational purpose. The second was that the chief cause of
These problems was the “delegation to the fraternities by the College of a large part of its responsibility with respect to the housing, eating, and social accommodations of the student body.”

The committee went on to recommend a number of changes to rectify the problems with the current system. The first was the most important and shaped the rest of the report:

That the President and the Board of Trustees adopt and announce a firm policy to assume, at the earliest feasible date, complete responsibility for providing housing, eating, and social accommodations for the entire student body in units owned and operated by the College.

This was the key resolution; six others went on to support and clarify its implementation. Thus the committee asked for the policy to be put in place as soon as possible, with the Board of Trustees creating a Standing Committee to implement it. It also recommended that the college construct new buildings and acquire the existing fraternity houses. What the Angevine committee did not do, however, was recommend the abolition of fraternities. Instead, it proposed to take away many of their chief functions while leaving them free to operate on campus under this new system. A final resolution called for the college to explain the “reasons for and merits of the above recommendations,” which would prove to be one of the harder recommendations to carry out.

The second part of the report, which comprised the bulk of it, was concerned with explaining the committee’s thought process. The heart of it was a statement of the college’s mission and an explanation of how to best attain it. The message was clear: “Williams can do no less than provide a social framework that will advance its educational goals in the most effective way possible. The existing fraternity system must
be evaluated in terms of its effect upon the attainment of this end.”25 And on this basis
the system was seriously wanting.

The Board of Trustees received the Angevine Report at the end of its May
meeting. This allowed the members some time to read and think about it before
reconvening on June 8-10, 1962. At that time, after extensive discussion, the board
agreed with the essential analysis of the report that fraternities “are different in kind and
play an entirely different role than in an earlier era.”26 However, it should be noted that
the trustees never formally passed the Angevine report; they simply agreed with its main
conclusion that the college should take over the housing, eating, and social
accommodations of all students and went about providing the implementation of that
plan.

Was the Committee Independent?

The outcome of the Angevine Committee’s deliberations has always been a
matter of debate. How could a group composed of fraternity men come out with such a
result? A lot of people have speculated that Sawyer influenced the committee in its
decision. There is no direct proof of this. It seems that in all formal ways the committee
was independent. A number of the Angevine committee members have been interviewed
and have said that the committee never met with the president and was autonomous.
Sawyer said much the same thing, stating, “You can see reasons why I would not only
have thought it inappropriate to be trying to call and con these people, but they would
have resented it and it would simply not have been prudent for me to do that.”27 Some of
the Committee members have speculated that Angevine apprised Sawyer of the progress
of the committee but thought he did not influence it. In truth, there is evidence
suggesting there was one letter and one conversation between Sawyer and Angevine. The letter from Angevine to Sawyer was to make him aware of how things were progressing in the middle of February and included his draft report, stating:

I can think of no greater disservice than to foist on you a report so far from your own convictions that it would only serve to embarrass you. The enclosure is, I hope, not of this character. If in any respect it is, let me know. It is not a final report and there is still time for further considerations.  

The only direct interaction between Sawyer and Angevine was in a conversation that occurred later and was about the committee’s final decision. Sawyer stated, “I had only one conversation with [Angevine], when he called shortly before he presented the Committee’s report at . . . [the] board meeting to give me a sense of what was coming.”  

Sawyer further stated that the only other member of the committee he met with was Professor Gates, who sent a draft of the Angevine Committee report to Sawyer. Sawyer remembers telling him, “I think you’re out in front of where the students who launched this thing are, and this is going to present some difficulties, perhaps real difficulties on campus, if they think you’ve gone farther than they wanted to go.” In response to this Gates stated, “Maybe so but it’s now too late, we have reached our conclusions.”  

As can be seen from interviews of the participants, the committee for all intents and purposes appears to have been independent. However, while in all formal ways the committee was independent, one can still speculate that informally the committee was less independent. Sawyer had been on the Board of Trustee’s for nine years with Angevine and Thun, and they surely knew his opinions about fraternities. Throughout the 50’s the Board of Trustees continually talked about them and the state they were in.
Ferdie Thun, remembering that era stated, “Every now and then something would be said to the board that something was obviously way out of order in one or another of the fraternities.” He then went on to describe two incidents involving a prostitute and food that looked like dog excrement. It seems most unlikely that Sawyer, Angevine, and Thun had not spoken to each other about such matters and ways to resolve them. One must remember, too, that one of the main reasons Sawyer fell out with Baxter was because of his opinions about fraternities. In this way it would make sense for Sawyer, after picking the Committee, to be as hands-off as possible to avoid speculation that he influenced it in its decision, knowing, however, that his views would still be well represented.

Yet, Sawyer did not stack the committee to come out with one decision or another. When Bruce Grinnell was asked to be on the Angevine Committee in July 1961, his first reaction was, “boy, there are a lot of fraternity members on this thing, we don’t stand a chance.” He thought he knew how they would come to their decisions.

Jeez, if these older guys are on the committee, they all had a great time in the fraternities that they were in here, therefore, they’re going to say ‘what’s wrong with them, they were, they were great when we were here, they’re great now.’

But what Sawyer did do was pick people who had shown the ability to think critically and not just sweep problems under the rug. Markgraf stated, “[Sawyer’s] genius was in appointing the committee.” Ferdie Thun added, “Sawyer clearly picked people he thought might have some ideas and I think that he picked them from both sides of the spectrum and that obviously, the fact that you had a committee like that, you had to be prepared for it to come out for change.” Most importantly, he chose people who would put Williams first, and would institute a policy that was best for the school as a whole and not just the fraternity system.
Conclusion

Though it did not call for an outright elimination of fraternities, the Angevine Committee’s report represented a radical break with the past. It set a strong foundation for the abolition of the more detrimental aspects of fraternities. As a result, the Board of Trustees and the committee were about to face a whirlwind of opposition from both student and alumni groups. The smooth implementation of the report would indeed be a difficult task. In the end, however, the way had been opened for a final and total end to fraternities on the Williams College campus.
The Response and Implementation

The first major hurdle was passed. Evidently without serious dissent, the Board of Trustees accepted the recommendations of the Angevine Report, agreeing to assume responsibility of the housing, feeding, and social accommodations of all students. In so doing, however, the board took on a singularly difficult task. To start with a broad campaign was needed to educate alumni and help them understand the merits of the report. President Sawyer looking back stated, “We had been so close to these problems, and the administration and the faculty so familiar with them, that we didn’t realize how far ahead we’d gotten of where most alumni understanding remained.” This challenge was compounded by the need to implement the report while educating and communicating with alumni. It was necessary, too, to bring the alumni up to speed while at the same implementing a report that was met with mixed reactions to say the least, otherwise too much time would be lost. Also, opposing what was rapidly becoming a fait accompli was harder than opposing a mere proposal.

Pre-Release

After the board agreed in early June of 1962 that the college should take over the feeding and housing of students, the decision was kept confidential while a full-scale offensive was planned. Though the board had voted a week before, Sawyer did not mention the results at the annual society of alumni meeting. He merely stated that a letter would be sent to all undergraduates and alumni shortly. In a letter from Sawyer to students dated June 18, 1962 they were also kept in the dark. The announcement of an upcoming report on fraternities was buried in the middle of a full-page, single-spaced
letter. Placed between the announcement of the end of compulsory chapel and the moving of the admissions office, the short paragraph was easily missed.

The Committee of Review on Fraternity Questions has also submitted its report. That report, together with a statement by the Board of Trustees, will be sent to all Alumni, Faculty, and current undergraduates in the near future. The problems are significant and deserve thoughtful consideration by all concerned.  

There were a number of plausible reasons for this delay. The first was the need and desire to address all sections of the Williams community at the same time. The report and board’s decision represented a drastic change and required advanced planning before implementation. Another reason, pointed out by John Walsh '54, was that by the time the report was released it was the middle of summer. Undergraduates and alumni received it over July 4th weekend. Students could not effectively protest while away from Williams and many alumni were on vacations away from their offices. As a result, both constituencies had time to digest and understand the report before protests could be launched.

On June 30, 1962, the Report of the Committee on the Review of Fraternity Questions, as the Angevine Committee was formally known, was released along with a statement from the Board of Trustees. The board’s statement noted that the board agreed with the conclusions of the Angevine committee. However, the statement made it clear that the trustees did not wish to rush into hasty decisions. They realized the benefits fraternities had provided in the past, citing “long history and deep attachments, for the fraternities have made significant contribution to the life of the college.” The statement further noted that several important steps had to be taken before anything could be done. The main one was a study of the physical plant and the question of whether the fraternity
houses would be made available to the college to facilitate the changes proposed by the Angevine Committee. Also, meetings had to be held between the college and undergraduate and alumni representatives of the various fraternities on campus to discuss the report and its implementation. As yet another step, a standing committee to create a preliminary proposal had to be appointed. Finally, the treasurer with the help of the standing committee had to estimate the cost of the proposed changes. These were concrete steps but they pointed to a cautious and gradual implementation process.

Response

On July 9 the Office of the President released a report titled, “Initial Responses to the Angevine Report (Confidential)”, describing the report’s reception. It declared that responses in Williamstown were far more favorable than expected, running around nine or ten to one in support of the report. It noted that Williams Alumni who lived in Williamstown, even those of an older generation, seemed to accept the report, with some describing it as “statesmanship.” Most Williamstown residents were supportive of the change, though some were anxious about the tax implications. Several alumni-controlled fraternity corporations had positive ideas about implementing the report. Indeed, Sawyer noted, “Some of the oldest and strongest houses have indicated to various people very generous and affirmative thoughts about the lines of response they were prepared to initiate.” The reason for this support was that these three constituencies – Williams alumni in Williamstown, Williamstown residents, and alumni fraternity corporations – were intimately aware of all the problems the fraternity system had involved in the past two decades. Reflecting on the matter later Sawyer stated, “We hadn’t realized how much better informed the Committee and Trustees and we in Williamstown were,
through a state of cumulative awareness,” but, he added, “we soon learned [that awareness] was missing among alumni across the land.”

The older alumni would take it the hardest. One of Sawyer’s initial reactions to the Angevine Report was, “I knew how greatly things had changed since their day, but also could feel how painful this would be for some of those loyal pre-World War I alumni, and for me to have to tell them.” He was right on all counts. As it turned out alumni who had not been intimately connected to the college in recent years but remembered fondly their own time at college would provide stiff opposition to change. They were and would remain staunchly opposed to the Angevine report and its implementation.

The “Initial Responses to the Angevine Report (Confidential)” also included information on the Standing Committee (as it was called) on implementation and what was occurring at other colleges. It stated that the Standing Committee had had its first meeting and considered many creative ideas on implementation. As for activities at other colleges relating to the Angevine report, Wesleyan was planning on taking freshmen out of fraternities, and Amherst was inviting fraternities to transfer their houses to the college subject to leasebacks.

The report did not sugarcoat its findings and noted that there had been some letters voicing strong dissent. It also reported that the National Interfraternity Conference had been meeting in Miami, and requests for reports had come from various chapters. The latter, however, did not seem to concern Sawyer, who remarked, “Their reactions, however, seem remote from our task of running a fine college in the Berkshires.” What
was a pressing concern, on the other hand, was the alumni fund and capital program.

Sawyer went on to explain how to make the best out of the current situation:

The answer as I begin to see it now, must be based on putting forward the positive potentials as affirmatively as we can, and perhaps bringing to Williams a recognition for vision and courage that will attract new friends and support as we work to persuade our old friends to stand by.  

Still, threats to withhold donations to the alumni fund would plague the administration for the next year – and beyond.

School Resumes

By the end of summer a number of other things had occurred. In a memorandum from the President to the Board of Trustee dated August 30, 1962, Sawyer outlined what had occurred at the college with more than half of the five-page report devoted to fraternities. It highlighted letters received from alumni, actions taken by fraternities, and the proceedings of the standing committee.

Altogether, the college received between 150-200 letters with responses ranging from very positive to thoroughly negative. The positive letters were, Sawyer explained, “expressing relief that the matter has been settled or applauding the forthrightness and clarity of the Report and the board’s courage in facing an issue whose future could only be in the direction indicated.” The board had sent copies of the Angevine report to 50 preparatory headmasters and the overwhelming response from them was “enthusiastic.” Another prominent group, the Gargoyle Alumni Officers, had issued a letter of support. The negative letters from fraternity members came from a number of sources. The most offensive had been written by non-Williams people associated with the national fraternities. Williams alumni have offered more “thoughtful” if still “troubled letters.”
Where there were misconceptions over the present fraternity system, the school tried to correct them.

Throughout the summer the board had been trying to strengthen its position on the implementation of the Angevine Report. The alumni officers of two houses (Theta Delta Chi and Psi Upsilon) registered their dissent and remained unconvinced. On a more positive note, Kappa Alpha, the oldest fraternity on campus, on July 30th became the first one on campus to donate its house and land to the college, effective the summer of 1963. There was only one dissenting vote, and even former President Baxter spoke for the move, stating, “he’d tried to hold the system together but felt that now the time had come for such a transition as was proposed.”

Five other fraternities had begun negotiations with the college to transfer their properties. In response to this Sawyer was optimistic about the future, stating, “Should this happen – and let’s not omit caution on this score – the probable effect on other houses suggests a much earlier possible resolution of an extremely difficult situation than any of us had envisaged.”

The August 30 memorandum concluded with a report on the progress of the Standing Committee. It had met with many different groups in Williamstown and New York City and had hired Donald Gardner, one of the members of the Committee of 22 in 1957, to help with its correspondence. Finally, the committee had begun to encourage student involvement in the process.

Student Reaction

In the fall of 1962, students came back to a different Williams, with fraternities still conducting “rush” for a system that was being phased out. The college tried to make
the transition as smooth as possible, allowing the existing system to continue because, among other things, it still housed the majority of the students.

At the same time, the Standing Committee wanted students to become involved in the reform process. Before the school year began Talcott Banks, chairman of the Committee, sent a letter to all undergraduates. It stated that the task of the Committee was to implement the Angevine Report and “propose the organization of existing and projected buildings into new social units as centers of college life.” Banks asked for the help of the students in performing these duties and set up five committees. The response was positive with 152 undergraduates applying for the 40 positions on the committees. They represented a diversity of undergraduate opinion, which the standing committee hoped would dispel “doubts and criticism would contribute as much as initial enthusiasm for and acceptance of the proposed changes.” The five student committees’ chief contact was with Donald Gardner, and he would prove to be indispensable both in meeting with students and in handling alumni correspondence.

Gardner was the staff assistant to the Standing Committee. The Committee itself was composed of an impressive group of administrators, faculty, and alumni. Its members included Talcott Banks ’28, chairman of the committee; Charles A. Foehl ’32, the college’s treasurer who was entrusted with technical financial matters; Whitney Stoddard ’35, of the Art Department who was in charge of the “aesthetic planning”; Frederick Rudolph ’42, a professor of history and author of *Mark Hopkins and the Log* and the *American College and University: A History*; Dickinson Debevoise ’46, a New York lawyer and Angevine Committee member; and Hodge Markgraf ’52, who continued his role as the non-voting secretary from the Angevine Committee.
Despite the efforts of the college to get students involved in the process of change, a great number of them were unhappy with the Angevine Report and the board’s decision to implement it. The “Undergraduate Committee for the Best Interests of Williams College” was created by some of these dissenters and was headed by John Donovan ’63. It circulated a four-page paper entitled “Williams Affairs” which had a number of articles in opposition to the Angevine Report. One of the more powerful parts of the document was a petition against the Angevine Report signed by four-fifths of fraternity members at Williams. It had been presented to the President and Board of Trustee’s before their October meeting. It stated:

We firmly assert our allegiance to Williams College. We strongly feel, however, that the best interests of the college are to be served by a continued evolution within the present fraternity system. It is our earnest belief that the fraternities provide the opportunity for a true realization of the total educational experience fostered by Williams College. We feel confident that we will assume responsibility to correct the faults of the existing system as we become aware of them.53

The “Undergraduate Committee for the Best Interests of Williams College” also included a letter of support from the Kansas City Alumni association and an anonymous letter explaining the committee’s reasons for forming. The other committee that opposed the school’s plans was the Social Council, which voted 14-1 against the Angevine Report, stating, “The Williams College Social Council affirms its support of the fraternity system as it is presently constituted and therefore opposes the conclusions and recommendations of the Angevine Report.”54 This stance was not surprising, since the committee was comprised of the fifteen fraternity presidents.

Besides these student committees there were a number of other student protests, including several memorable incidents. The first occurred on the night of September 19,
1962, when a bitter demonstration of fraternity members, including the entire Phi Gamma Delta membership, chanted, “Hit the road, JACK” in front of the President’s house. Throughout Williamstown there were also bumper stickers on cars and stop signs that either reiterated the same message or just simply, “We like fraternities.” Other incidents occurred during football weekends. At a rally before the Wesleyan game, a poster facsimile of the Angevine Report Cover was tossed into the bonfire while fraternity members chanted, “We like fraternities.” There was a march on Spring Street where fraternity members protested the Angevine Report, where one sign was a facsimile of a Western Union telegram message that stated, “ATT Len Watters, In best interest of Williams as Whole STOP Do not let team exercise disproportionate role in Middlebury game, signed Jay B. Anchovy.”

However, not all the student responses were negative. The Gargoyle Society and College Council endorsed the Angevine Report. The September 26, 1962 issue of The Record carried an Editorial titled “In Support of the Future” expressing hope. It evinced support for the decision of the trustees, albeit with some doubts. “There are certain honest fears and reservations which must be borne in mind when implementation of the report is considered . . . Many will be unwilling to give up a system which seems comfortable for one which is totally unknown.”

Alumni and Fundraising

Meanwhile the campaign to win the support of the alumni continued. They had the ability to impede the implementation of the Angevine Report in two ways. The first was not giving the various fraternity houses to the college. The second was to stop donating to the college and especially to the alumni fund. The college administration was
worried about both of these possibilities and went on the offense to discourage them from not happening.

Several things were done to this end. A concerted effort was made to insure that alumni understood how the Angevine Committee came to its conclusion. As an example of the practicality of this, President Sawyer cited Ed Stanley, speaking at the Alumni Golf tournament, explaining how he had gone “180 degrees as a ‘fraternity man’ on the Committee.” At the Class Agents’ dinner on October 6, 1962, Jay Angevine spoke and carefully addressed the 17 points that critics had made about the report. He knew the Class Agents would run into these arguments, so it was important that they hear the answers from him.

Not to be outdone, the alumni who disagreed with the proposed changes made a coordinated effort to unite others against the report. The two demands voiced most often were that a vote of all alumni be recorded on the issue and the implementation of Angevine report be postponed. Those in favor tried to influence the college by threatening not to contribute to the alumni fund.

Ultimately there were two major alumni groups that tried to organize opposition. The alumni of Psi Upsilon and Theta Delta Chi published and sent to all alumni a document dated November 8, 1962, titled, “A Report to the Williams College Family Containing Additional Information and Some Alternative Views on the Williams Fraternity System.” The report argued that fraternities had already reformed themselves. The authors further argued that the Angevine Committee was out of touch with the current system, since everyone on it had graduated from Williams before 1951 except the two student members.
The other mailing was from the “Williams Alumni Action Committee.” This was signed by 36 alumni and went out on November 7, 1961. It offered a number of criticisms of the current Williams administration and the fact that it was implementing a policy the signers felt was wrong. The first was that alumni had not been allowed to comment on the report before action was taken. The second was that the college was providing only one side of the discussion. As an example of this they pointed out the mailing to all alumni of the September 26th and October 10th copies of The Record, which had a number of pro-Angevine Committee articles. Stating that, “These incidents are dictatorial in their nature and smack of totalitarian doctrine that if a minority can control the means of communication and can act quickly, the opposition will find it very difficult to become effective.”\textsuperscript{59} The Committee therefore urged the alumni to do two things. The first was not to hand over their fraternity houses to the college and, as a further act of defiance, to hold back donations to the alumni fund. The second was to fill out an attached card and vote on three questions: whether to defer implementation; whether alumni agreed with the Angevine Report; and whether implementation would hurt fundraising. Over the next two years, the Williams Alumni Action Committee would prove to be a significant thorn in the side of the administration.

Despite these unfavorable reactions from students and alumni, the Board of Trustees agreed on October 6, 1962 to proceed with plans to provide for the housing, eating, and social accommodations of all students. News of this decision, with the first report of the Standing Committee, was sent out on October 29, 1962 to all alumni, undergraduates, and parents.
Given the way matters stood in the fall of 1962, Sawyer had become increasingly anxious that the alumni fund might fail to reach its overall goal. In an example of “high principle and low cunning,” he confessed in later years that he had privately made arrangements with members on the Board of Trustees that they would cover whatever shortfall there was in the fund. When donations closed on January 31, 1963, they had set a new record in giving, with $377,405 raised. Hodge Markgraf has said, “I don’t know to this day whether Jack had to call on this small group of men who would cover the shortfall, and I don’t really care at this point. Jack had all the bases covered and we were going to set a new record for giving.” Whatever the reality, the result was that Sawyer could proudly announce that the new social system had caused no defection in support from alumni. In fact, it showed a renewed confidence in Williams College.

But despite this high note, the first few months of 1963 proved a difficult time for Sawyer. Increasingly he had to travel to present the arguments for change to concerned alumni, on top of the extra demands involved in implementing the transition back at Williams. Recalling it all, Sawyer later stated, “I remember being over-stretched on a swing that included Denver, San Francisco, and Los Angeles, when I in effect passed out at the Los Angeles dinner.” In the end, he was all right, but this incident emphasizes the strain that the whole administration was experiencing.

By the time alumni reunions came along in 1963, however, things had begun to settle down. At the 141st meeting of the Society of Alumni, Sawyer gave a detailed explanation of the proposed new social units and was met by a standing ovation from the 500 alumni present. This response was quite a surprise to the Alumni Action Committee, which had hoped to present a resolution calling on the Society (which becomes a voting
body once there is a quorum) to debate the future of fraternities at Williams. One the committee’s chief contentions was that the college had never let alumni discuss the matter. But Sawyer’s speech was so well received that the committee decided not to present its resolution. Instead, the class of 1913, which was celebrating its 50-year reunion presented a resolution that stated, “[We] are hopeful that the many involved and important problems concerning the residential system at the college which have been raised will be resolved to the satisfaction of the great majority of the students, alumni, faculty, and trustees.”63 It went onto express the class’s “continued devotion to the college and our faith and conviction that it will in the next 50 years show fully as much leadership as in the past in the forward-looking development of the liberal arts ideal on a small college campus.”64

Creation of a New Housing System

Surprisingly, the various fraternity alumni associations began to give, sell, or lease many of the houses to Williams relatively quickly. By December 19th 1962 Delta Kappa Epsilon became the tenth to express willingness to cooperate. But the actual process of transfer took longer. Not until the end of 1968 would the college own seven of the fraternities while leasing the remaining six, which slowly came into the college’s possession. There had initially been 15 fraternities. Of the remaining two, the Phi Gamma house was sold to the town and the Kappa Alpha house, the first to be given to the college, burned down. The houses had come into the college’s possession by artful house-by-house negotiations carried on by the Standing Committee. Two incidents illustrate the difficulties involved.
The first involves the Phi Gamma house, which had originally offered to sell its house to the college. But when the college failed to offer enough money, the alumni decided to sell the house to Williamstown to use as a town hall. In the second incident Theta Delta Chi fraternity, apparently out of spite, offered its house to the fraternity’s national organization to use as its headquarters. The following story is of uncertain veracity, but according to Hodge Markgraf, “[Sawyer] supposedly called the national president and, in no uncertain terms, explained what it would mean to have the national headquarters smack dab on the edge of campus, right across from the freshman quad. From his point of view such officials would persona non grata.” In the end the Theta Delta Chi fraternity turned over its fraternity to the college.

As each fraternity house was transferred to the college, there were three concerns that needed to be addressed. The first was the town’s loss of income when these properties stopped paying taxes. The second was what was going to happen to the employees of the fraternities. The third was what to call the houses, the administration having decided that keeping the old fraternity names would be inappropriate. In all three cases the college tried to make the transition as smooth as possible. In regards to the taxes, the college phased out the amount that fraternities paid over a number of years. The college also agreed to continue the employment of all fraternity employees. And in renaming the fraternities, the attempt was made to be duly cognizant of the past. Sawyer on this issue said, “We did try to sustain the inter-generational ties and encourage some social connections.” Thus the houses along Main Street were named for Philip Spencer, Belvedere Brooks, Karl Weston, Perry (for all the Williams Perrys) and Hamilton Wood
(co-author of “Yard by Yard.”) – all individuals with long-standing associations with Williams.

Nor was that the end of the decisions to be made. Once the college gained a property, it had to determine where it fit in the college’s overall residential plan. Indeed at every turn the implementation and creation of the new housing system was carefully orchestrated. Throughout the 1960’s the college continually added to the physical plant with Prospect House and Driscoll Dining Hall that begun in fall of 1962 and 1963 respectively. After a careful design process, Greylock quad was completed in 1966. All of this, too, helped maintain excitement about creating a new residential living system, one that would incorporate the best aspects of the fraternity system with the added benefits of a college run system.

The Death Knell

As their functions were gradually absorbed, the fraternities were allowed to linger on until October of 1968, when the Board of Trustees voted to discontinue rushing and phase out membership with the graduation of those who still belonged in June of 1970. At the time of this vote there were only six fraternities left. By then they were fulfilling purely fraternal roles, and only 10% of the undergraduates – all juniors and seniors – were involved in fraternities. The vote was taken in response to “repeated requests from both undergraduates and alumni corporations for a clear-cut decision on the longer future.” The board made the decision because it believed that the new residential system was a success, stating, “While there are no utopias in educational or social life – and none were expected – it clearly has brought the residential organization of the campus into closer and more fruitful relation to the educational purposes and programs of

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the College." Formally and officially fraternities at Williams College had ceased to exist.

However, fraternal organizations continued in the background. There was not much spontaneous student interest until a few of the more militant alumni organizations began to use their own treasuries to finance weekend parties and other social activities in a couple of rented houses in Pownal, Vermont. This proved to be divisive to the campus and the new residential system. Citing continued problems the Board of Trustees issued a new statement in 1976. It declared that students should be able to associate freely but that these groups must be, "appropriate to this college community and consistent with Williams' educational program." It then went on to say that fraternities were not a group that fell into this category, and that violators would be subject to the appropriate penalties. The faculty unanimously adopted this statement. In 1989, the college, addressing recent trends to revive fraternal organizations at other schools and the apparent interest of a few students at Williams, reaffirmed this policy once again:

It has now been twenty-seven years since the Board of Trustees of Williams College determined that the academic aspirations of the College, and the educational and social needs of our students, would best be served by abolishing fraternities and inaugurating the residential house system. The Trustees note with particular pleasure the role the residential house system has played in insuring that all Williams students would be fully integrated into the life of the College. In making all important decisions over nearly three decades, the College has had as its central goal the sustenance of a community characterized by openness, academic vitality, and equality of opportunity.

Today, the Williams handbook has a long section addressing fraternities. It includes both the 1976 and 1989 statements and threatens disciplinary action and possible expulsion for students violating this college policy in this regard.
Conclusion

For almost 130 years fraternities were a fundamental part of Williams College. They provided much of the housing, eating, and social arrangements for the student body. It was not until World War II and the changes that followed it that the status quo was seriously challenged. The change occurred for a number of reasons. American attitudes on race and discrimination were changing, and more importantly so was the type of student who came to Williams. Higher education before World War II had been limited to a select few. The GI Bill and rising American prosperity made a college education possible for more people, even at elite schools like Williams.

In turn, the growing numbers of those applying, for the first time, allowed Williams to become increasingly selective. However, President Baxter, a great educator in some ways, did not meet the changes in American society with changes at Williams College. Instead, the college in the 1950’s continually tried to modify the existing social system, by deferring fraternity rushing, eliminating discriminatory clauses, and allowing total opportunity. Yet, the basic problems remained, and refusing to meet them head on hurt faculty morale, the intellectual life of the college, and student happiness. When the trustees were searching for Baxter’s successor they found that in recent years the reputation of Williams had begun to slide in the academic world. Something had to be done.

Role of Sawyer

Jack Sawyer has been called the “Transforming President.” He could simply have taken Williams’s historically strong reputation and worked to regain it, but he did much...
more. He was a transforming president because ultimately aimed he at making Williams great. As Hodge Markgraf recently stated,

Jack took us out into the passing lane and we passed everybody in the 1960's, in my highway metaphor. And I think it started with the courage of a now 45-year-old president to make a decision, which, at that time, did not have to be made. We could have continued with the fraternity system with yet one more patch, one more jerry-rigged arrangement to iron out the perceived difficulties, but Jack made a bold decision. It wasn’t universally popular, but it amazingly became so very soon.¹

Sawyer made the decision he did about fraternities because he realized the benefits of getting rid of them. He also decided that half-measures could hurt Williams and leave it in limbo. This occurred at other institutions like Amherst, Bowdoin, and Colby, which eliminated fraternities, but only much later. Dartmouth and Colgate still have not addressed the issue, even though there are continual problems associated with fraternities. Though it was unknown at the time, eliminating fraternities in the 1960’s was actually much easier than it would be later because of the increasing use of lawsuits in America.

The main benefits of doing away with fraternities at Williams were academic. It helped professor/student interaction, curricular reform, and faculty morale. It also helped improve Williams’s standing in the larger world by allowing it to attract the best and brightest students in the nation. The faculty, while the college had fraternities, did not want to loosen its rigid curriculum because it was a way to control students. Frederick Rudolph stated, “I would say not until the fraternities went were the faculty prepared to think of the student body as partners in a learning enterprise rather than almost the enemy.”² One can see this in the curricular improvements achieved after the elimination of fraternities. The 4-1-4 semester structure was implemented and there were exciting new course offerings like the new Environmental Studies Program. The new system also
allowed Williams to become more distinctive and take full advantage of the small college experience, with close student-faculty interaction.

The elimination of fraternities, too, was a symbol to students. Williams’s reputation had begun to slide in the outside world because its image was so tied to fraternities. In 1962, right before Williams implemented the Angevine Report, an article in the *New York Times Magazine* described it as “a gentleman’s school – fashionable, mildly snobbish, not too obtrusively intellectual.” By removing the system the college changed the perception of Williams and highlighted a “new” Williams based on merit. A more diverse group of students began applying, and the college subsequently became more selective. Also the new housing system made it easier for these students to interact outside the classroom. Sawyer said, talking about the effect of the new housing system; “These are and should be years to grow in a lot of ways, and living with people of different outlook and background and interests – to have a chemistry major and a political science and a jock and musician in the same friendship group and dinner group – can contribute to it.”

How much of all this did Sawyer envision beforehand? In 1992 he stated that he had had a number of objectives on coming to Williams as president. The most radical of these were the elimination of fraternities and admission of women. In this regard he stated that he wasn’t sure how these changes would be accomplished, but he was determined to move,

Toward an open residential house system, as soon as we could, to terminate the intellectual drag and divisions of the fraternity system and some of the very unpleasant things that had produced such a gulf between the faculty and students living in this lovely town.
But unlike Baxter, Sawyer was not a “bully pulpit” president. Instead, he worked behind the scenes, carefully composing committees and shaping constituencies. As a result he was less of a lightning rod toward which his opponents could direct criticism. Describing his leadership, Sawyer said, “I wasn’t a radical on any of these goals – more a purposeful worker on directions in which I felt Williams should be moving.” His careful preparation for all possibilities allowed him press on in the face of strong opposition. One can see this in the Angevine Report. The committee met over a long period without reporting to Sawyer or the Board of Trustees. Upon receiving its decision the board accepted its recommendation and went on to implement its major conclusions. The alumni and students did not unanimously agree with the decision, but there never was a vote on the issue. By moving decisively on issues and always thinking a few steps ahead, the administration successfully countered all attacks on its plans. But what Sawyer led was less a charge than a steady, determined march forward.

Fringe Benefits

Academically Williams gained a great deal with the elimination of fraternities. There were other important benefits as well. Sawyer, having accomplished the difficult transition from a housing system based on fraternities to one run by the college, gained greater latitude for other projects he wished to undertake. In psychology this is called idiosyncratic credit. The change also made it much easier for Williams to become a coeducational institution. While admitting women, the college did not have to deal with problems associated with the fraternity environment and already had a housing system that could begin to accommodate women. Eliminating fraternities also made sororities a non-issue.
Altogether, doing away with fraternities at Williams enormously strengthened it. It let the college take full advantage of its resources and focus on its primary mission of educating students. And Williams’s faculty and administrators were not the only ones who thought so. In 1967, representatives of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges visited Williams College. On the subject of eliminating fraternities they stated that while it had been a “painful decision and went through a difficult process of implementation, ‘Williams has strengthened itself immeasurably.’” When the senior officers of the pentagonal colleges (Amherst, Bowdoin, Dartmouth, Wesleyan, and Williams) came to Williams in 1966, they were amazed at the morale of faculty and students. Truly, Williams had become a very different and far better place.

Influence?

Did the elimination of fraternities at Williams have implications beyond the institution itself? Quite possibly it did. While Williams was eliminating fraternities American higher education was going through a period of transition. One of the major changes was that liberal arts colleges were facing increased competition. In regards to this Frederick Rudolph states, “The independent liberal arts college, traditionally ‘the nucleus and backbone of American higher education,’ was now challenged on the one side by the great university complexes and on the other by the new community colleges.” How was this challenge to be met? What made liberal arts colleges different was their reliance on intimate small-scale residential living. Yet at Williams and other schools fraternities ran undergraduate life outside the classroom – until, that is, Williams decided that the school needed to have as much control as possible over this part of its
students’ experience. This in turn meant that the college had to eliminate fraternities and
take over their role on campus.

Sawyer saw this in part because he had spent time at Harvard and Yale, where the
school, through the house and college systems respectively, ran the residential system.
He recognized, too, that to attract the best and brightest students, you needed to become a
school with an excellent reputation. A college run housing system would help make this
possible. In this regard Williams became a trendsetter and implemented a better system
that other schools began to copy. At the time it was still unusual for a school to feed and
house all its students. In taking over these functions, including the social aspects of
college life, Williams became a bellwether – as the once grand old fraternity school – for
things to come. And in the process it reinforced the growing perception that the college
was not just the classes you attended, but an overall experience that inculcated values,
beliefs, and the free exchange of ideas.

Fraternity brothers, too, when defending the system would comment that college
was more than just studying, that it should be a time to learn how to get along with
people. Unfortunately, the fraternity system was only teaching students how to get along
with people that were like themselves. Sawyer and others at Williams realized that the
value system imposed by fraternities was skewed and did not produce a desirable
outcome. It produced instead values that were the opposite of the egalitarian and
democratic values of American society. Williams as an institution that hoped to be
educating the nation’s future leaders, needed to impart these values. In the end
eliminating fraternities gave the college an opportunity to shape not only the mind but
also the entire person. Increasingly other liberal arts colleges would aspire to do the same.
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