Early Frat Life at Albany Law

Schenectady's Union College is considered to have the nation's first "general fraternity," back in 1825. Union College would not only become the home to the first three "general fraternities" in the country, but would go on to found more fraternities than any other college at the time, prompting the nickname "the mother of fraternities." ■ Albany Law School started its first frats in 1902, many affiliated with the Union College system. These were no different than college fraternities—organized mainly for social purposes. By 1924 there were seven fraternities at Albany Law, with 128 students participating out of a total student body of 345 students.

■ Such popularity was not to last after legal education transformed from an undergraduate to a graduate level, drawing an older group less interested in social connections. Also, with the outbreak of World War II, there were less students to fill the fraternal ranks, leading to the permanent disappearance of most law school frats—at least the social kind. ■ These frats should be distinguished from the first Greek-letter student society, credited to William and Mary College in 1776, created to discuss topics not covered in the college's curriculum. Indeed, Phi Beta Kappa's main purpose was classical education and most of its members were familiar with Greek, Latin and Hebrew. ■ Today most law fraternities are professional organizations focused on networking and advancing one's legal career, or on legal ethics for example. Gone are the days of pledging at Albany Law.—*By Michael Fortes '07*