

## **The Founding of Arrowmont**

In April 1943, thirty-one years after Pi Beta Phi first took up the task of educating the people of Gatlinburg, Tennessee, the “Squires” of Sevier County voted to assume financial responsibility for primary and secondary education in the Gatlinburg school district. This move was more symbolic than substantive, for the county lacked the funds necessary to affect an immediate takeover while still maintaining the school’s state accreditation. But the decision freed the fraternity to begin planning for the future -- a future that would see it play a less prominent role in the community, if not withdraw altogether.

As it happened, the “day of reckoning” was still over twenty years away. During the interim, Pi Beta Phi gradually withdrew its support from basic academic programs such as the “Three R’s,” liberal arts, and the sciences, and instead engaged in the cultivation of a “finer type of scholastic service” at the settlement school -- namely the fine arts, physical education, a joint school/community library system, and the Arrowcraft program. It was also during this period -- in 1945 to be exact -- that Pi Beta Phi, working in conjunction with the University of Tennessee’s Department of Home Economics, launched its annual Summer Workshop in Crafts and Community Recreation. This program, also known as the Summer Crafts Workshop, provided for-credit arts and crafts classes to college students, teachers, recreational therapists, retirees, and others interested in indulging their creativity. So successful was the program that by 1965, the year Pi Beta Phi at last handed the settlement school over to Sevier County officials, it seemed only natural -- at least to those involved -- that the fraternity seek a means to continue its operation, and perhaps even convert the now-defunct settlement school into a permanent, year-round arts and crafts academy.

There was, of course, no guarantee that the fraternity at large would support such a proposal. Members were more or less evenly divided on the issue of what to do with the settlement school, with some advocating that the fraternity withdraw from Gatlinburg at once, sell off its land and other assets, and then devote its energy to “establish[ing] some entirely different philanthropy.” In the end, however, Pi Beta Phi had too much money invested in looms, workshops, land, and other infrastructure, and too much time invested in building up its reputation as a leader in the American Handicrafts movement, to simply abandon the proposed arts and crafts school without at least giving it due consideration. And so, the idea was submitted to the newly-appointed Centennial Project Development Committee during the fraternity’s 1954 National Convention -- along with thirty-four other proposals -- in the hope that it would be chosen as the fraternity’s next great philanthropic project.

Not surprisingly, given Pi Beta Phi’s longstanding involvement in the arts and crafts community, the idea of establishing an arts and crafts academy on the old settlement school campus resonated with Pi Beta Phi actives and alumnae. The project proposal survived an initial Centennial Project vote, and so was included among a list of four proposals submitted for a final consideration during the fraternity’s 1962 National Convention. Following a spirited debate, during which advocates spoke out on behalf of the arts and crafts school, an “Indian School” similar to the original settlement school, a medical research project, and a benevolent foundation, members agreed that the fraternity would be wise to remain in Gatlinburg, carrying on with its decades-old mission of promoting arts and crafts literacy and handicrafts preservation. Also, the fraternity would continue operating Arrowcraft, lest Gatlinburg artisans, many of whom depended on the program as an important source of income, suffer a significant decrease in their standard of living.

The decision having thus been made, all that remained was for Pi Beta Phi to appoint a governing body on behalf of the new school, give it a suitable name, and establish the rules by which it would operate. The first task was completed in 1968 when Pi Beta Phi disbanded the Settlement School Committee and replaced it with a Board of Governors. The board immediately appointed Summer Crafts Workshop director Marian Heard to head up the new school, and put Pi Phi alumna Lucille Woodworth in charge of Arrowcraft. Shortly thereafter, in 1969, the Board of Governors settled on a name for the new school -- "Arrowmont" -- which was considered "euphonious" to the ear, and which could "be known by the single word to match the name Arrowcraft." Finally, the board decided on a set of guiding principles for the school, which were articulated by Heard in the January 1968 edition of *The Arrow of Pi Beta Phi*. They were: "to sustain and preserve the native American crafts which originated in the Gatlinburg, Tennessee area of the United States"; "to pioneer in a program of teaching the arts and crafts to the greatest number of interested persons"; "to provide University accreditation for courses in the arts and crafts"; "to train teachers in the field of art and crafts, preparing them to work either professionally or as volunteers in school and community programs"; "to serve as an additional source of economic stability in the Gatlinburg area"; and "to provide local craftsmen with an outlet for the merchandise they produce."

The matter of housing Arrowmont was somewhat more complicated, for although existing settlement school structures such as the Teachers' Cottage, the Red Barn, and the Ruth Barrett Smith Staff House could be used as dormitory space for teachers and students, there was simply too little space available to meet the new school's needs. With this in mind, the fraternity hired architect Hubert Bebb of Community Tectonics to design a central building for the Arrowmont campus -- one that would be as aesthetically pleasing as it was practically functional.

By all accounts, Bebb more than fulfilled this commission. The 38,200 square foot “Emma Harper Turner Building,” which Bebb designed to undulate gently across Gatlinburg’s hilly landscape, and which housed an ample amount of classroom, office, and studio space, earned him an Award of Merit from the American Institute of Architects. Pi Beta Phi representatives formally dedicated the building on June 23, 1970, an event which Heard considered the single greatest “highlight” of her involvement with Pi Beta Phi.

Thus the Arrowmont School of Arts and Crafts was born, ushering in a new era of service for Pi Beta Phi in Gatlinburg, Tennessee. For more on the growth and development of the school, please see the essays entitled “Arrowmont Curriculum,” and “Arrowmont Student Life.”