By Gordon H. Haff

Editor's Note: This is the first of a three-part series on fraternities.

MIT's fraternity system started in the post Civil War period to deal with the lack of undergraduate residences. MIT, which was situated in Boston, followed the mold of most undergraduate colleges of the period in not having a dormitory system.

Even Yale and Harvard's renowned house systems had not yet come to pass. In fact, they would not exist until the late 1920's and 1930's when a man by the name of Harkness would set them up at Harvard after being turned down by Yale. When Harvard's program was proven successful, Yale subsequently followed suit.

MIT's first fraternity was Sigma Chi, founded in the 1880's. The system expanded to ten houses within a decade. Three more houses were added by 1910. At this time, aided by a 2.5 million dollar grant from a "Mr. Smith", eventually revealed to be George Eastman, the Institute was planning to make its move across the river to its present location. There, MIT planned to build it's dormitories in a quadrangular setup of classical design centered around an expanded Walker Memorial which would function as the student center.

However, this grand vision never came to pass. Richard MacLaurin, MIT's brilliant leader in the move across the river, died unexpectedly of pneumonia in 1920 and the resulting vacuum withered many ideas on the vine. The Walker quadrangle was one of those ill-fated ideas.

Under President Nicholas, who was in office for only seven months, and President Samuel Stratton, little was accomplished to alleviate the housing problems. However, in 1930, President Karl Taylor Compton guided an expansion program in spite of the Depression.

In the 1930's the East Campus quadrangles were built, and Student House, MIT's only cooperative living group, was established. During this period of time, the fraternities tended to be very elegant — complete with houseboys and cooks, and living costs to match.

The end of World War II and the resulting influx of veterans spurred the Institute's next housing drive. However, it would be predominantly the dormitory system which would expand. The fraternity system would never again grow in size as it did in its early days.

Westgate, a prefabricated home, not the present one, Westgate West, and Building 20 were all used to house the incoming surge of students. Baker House was built in 1948, and the Riverside Apartments which were to become Burton-Conner were acquired at the beginning of the 50's.

Somewhere in this period the concept of the dorm or part of the dorm as a cohesive living unit began to blossom. Little hap-