

# **“Sadie” The Fire Truck – From Conception**

by William R. Mitchell ‘60



**“Sadie” on parade down High Street, Homecoming, 1963.**

**R to L: John Dixon, Linda McMorrow, Rick Robinson, and Specially Privileged Pi K A Sweethearts**

## **The Greek's Tale – John Allevato - Wildwood**

**“John Allevato was a serious player,” boomed Jim Laughlin as he launched into his account of Sadie’s Beginnings. And indeed John “Greek” Allevato was a serious player, which takes us to Wildwood, NJ., the Summer of ’62. That Summer found a rather large contingent of Alpha Theta Pikes at the seaside resort where they found seasonal jobs as waiters, bellhops, busboys, etc.**

**Larry Neylon had his pilot’s license and rented a plane to fly Sonny Yatsko over to Wildwood in early May that year to rent a large apartment for a summer crew of at least eight to ten Alpha Theta Pikes planning to go “downshore” to seek summer jobs. Below is a photo of seven of them leaning against the rail atop the sundeck of the Rio Motel where they were working.**



**Pictured are Sonny Yatsko, John Allevato, Bill Mitchell, Bill Jones, Bud Swiger, Bill Byrd, and Fred Swiger.**

**But wait, you clamor! This is supposed to be a story about the Fire Truck. And right you are! But I just couldn't resist giving you a taste of the Wildwood story for that place loomed large in the history of Alpha Theta for many summers of the sixties, and it was indeed there in the summer of '62 that the idea of a fire truck for Alpha Theta was first conceived, and those Alpha Theta Pike's Wildwood days deserve an entire chapter in our history book. Hopefully this little tickler will encourage one of those guys to take on the task of writing the entire Wildwood Story. It is a good one. It needs be written!**

**And Wildwood IS THE BEGINNING of the "Sadie" story. The guys there in the summer of '62 had recent editions of the Shield and Diamond. John Allevato tells us how the guys shared the Shield and Diamond, viewing page after page of stories and pictures about the other Pike chapters that already had a fire truck. They were amused and wistfully expressed their agreement that a fire truck was a great idea. (Read the story in John Allevato's article titled 1930 LaFrance which is available at [www.wvupike.net](http://www.wvupike.net). Just click on the Mountaineer Pike tab, and go to the May 2000 issue.) John was a Journalism Major and knows how to tell a story, so be sure to see his article.)**

**Everyone liked the idea, but it was John's imagination that really caught the spark and fanned the flame, and it was John Allevato, the golden "Greek" who brought the notion back to Morgantown for the first meeting of the Fall Semester which began just after Labor Day. It was "Greek", a moniker that had stuck during those Wildwood days of '62, who shepherded his motion for an Alpha Theta fire truck through to passage by the Active Chapter. It was "Greek" who took on the task of finding our Fire Truck. It was "Greek" who found what was to become "Sadie" listed in the classified ads. It was "Greek" with Joe Brand who found our fire truck in a narrow garage dug into a hillside in Limestone, WV just north of Moundsville, and it was "Greek" in his fully packed little black Volkswagen who led an expedition including Jim Laughlin following in John Dixon's little white Volvo, with 6 crisp \$50 bills, back up to the Limestone VFD to finalize the acquisition.**

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And now, I'll turn it back over to Jim Laughlin, a storyteller magnifico. He is at his console in Arlington, VA and I am at my laptop, communicating via Skype from my tiny pensione room in Uruguay, with a table top barely large enough for the laptop and a cup of coffee, a clipboard in my left hand, and pen in my right. I had jotted down a list of questions, but I didn't need them. Jim took off with his mesmerizing account of Sadie's beginnings, and all I had to do was take notes as fast as I could, while Jim without pause or interruption answered all my questions and more with his fascinating account of Sadie's beginnings. Here is Jim's tale as transcribed from my notes.

## **The Chief's Tale - Jim Laughlin**

**"I was SMC and Roger Galloway was IMC. You remember Roger don't you? John Allevato was a serious player. He brought up the matter of the fire truck at an Active Meeting early in the fall Semester of 1962. As I recall our active meetings were held at 11PM on Sunday evenings. My immediate reaction was negative---too many liability problems. Insurance will be expensive. Where would it be kept? You recall how much trouble we had guarding the bell. It was a constant target of prank theft by the other fraternities---so it was secreted deep in the closet of one of the third floor front bedrooms.**

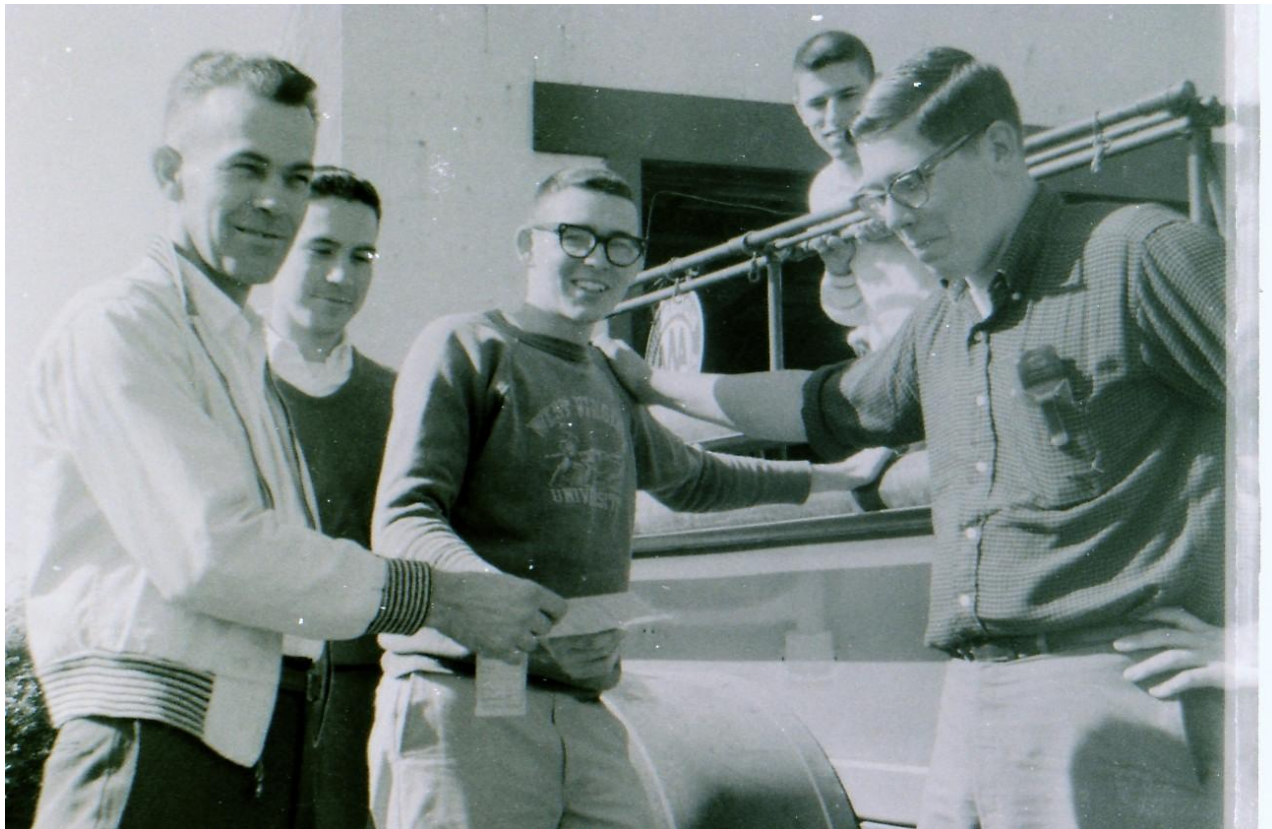
**Well I avoided a vote that night, and appointed Allevato (John Thomas Allevato, hereinafter John, "Greek", or JTA) to investigate the possibility of a fire truck for Alpha Theta chapter. Frankly, I was hoping he would get distracted by something else and forget about it. He was late for the following Sunday's meeting, but Bruce Smith and Jack Russell were pushing the issue of the fire truck. Finally, John arrived toward the end of the meeting, it was put to a vote, and it was passed that the chapter should find and acquire a fire truck as a spirit symbol for Pi K A at WVU just as many Pi K A chapters throughout the US were doing at that point in history. I thought about it, and put "Greek" in charge.**

**"The following week John came to my room. It was the room at the third floor rear of the house at 36 Campus Drive, straight ahead from the top of the steps. He came in. He had found a fire truck for sale for \$300. The ad said it was in good running condition, and John had been assured by its owner, the**

**Volunteer Fire Department in Limestone, WV, that the 30's vintage American LaFrance fire truck was sound and a fine example of what was the premier fire truck mark of its day.**

**John Dixon(John Alexander Dixon '61, hereinafter, John Dixon or JAD) drove me up there to get the truck. He had that late 50's model Volvo you remember. I had volunteered to drive the truck to Morgantown. I was insured on my own car, and I knew my insurance covered me no matter what vehicle I was driving.**

**I had six crisp \$50 bills, which was the payment I gave the people of the Limestone VFD for the truck.**



Sealing the Deal - October 19,1962, Limestone, Moundsville, WV.

L to R: The Man from Limestone Volunteer Fire Dept., Nick Lozano, Hank Wagner, Leslie Shearer, Jim Laughlin. Jim Laughlin, SMC, had just handed the six crisp Fifties to the Man from Limestone. You can see them dangling from his fingers as the MFL hands the Title to Hank Wagner, ThC. I suspect the man behind the camera was John Thomas Allevato, Photo Journalist Extraordinaire! This Photo is a Masterstroke for this chapter of Alpha Theta History. Photo Credit: John T. Allevato.



**We started off for Morgantown. It was a very difficult vehicle to drive. It took a lot of muscle. It had old mechanical breaks with no hydraulic assist. They worked fine once you got the pedal down, but it took some muscle to get the pedal down. Very hard to work; that is, it took a lot of strength and physical exertion, unlike vehicles of the 50's and 60's equipped with power steering, power brakes and automatic transmission.**

**"I think it was a 12 cylinder engine, but I'm not certain. [Ed. Note: Actually, it was a 6 cylinder engine with a dual electrical system and thus twelve wires leading to two spark plugs for each cylinder, perhaps creating the appearance of twelve cylinders.] It was intended to be used as a pumper and had a big engine.**

**"We took the old winding, narrow, secondary, state road over to Route WV 2. Route 2 came down along the river to Route 250. We turned right somewhere to bring us over to the road that came into Morgantown through Star City. We were just on the outskirts of a little town called Hundred. I remember it had a high school.**

**"Suddenly the engine made a loud noise and stopped dead--- the truck came to a screeching halt, throwing me forward into the steering wheel. It stopped dead in its tracks. John (JAD) opened the hood, poked around a bit, and announced the truck had thrown a rod.**

**"I had a telephone credit card. I'd been referred to Wilson Chevrolet in Morgantown for a tow truck big enough to haul our Fire truck. A rather rude fellow from Wilson told me he was not about to send out his tow truck for some fraternity fire truck. So I called Bob Burchinal, the Chapter's Alumnus Financial Advisor.**

**"He was not happy. I had been both House Manager and Treasurer and so I had had a fair amount of dealing with Burchinal---especially in the matter of getting checks signed by him each month to pay the fraternity's bills. Kicking and screaming all the way, he finally did call Wilson Chevrolet, and they did wind up sending their truck to our rescue. It was a big one. The tow truck crew first had to get our truck out of gear by disconnecting the drive shaft. They then picked it up by the front and towed us in. I don't remember where they took the fire truck that evening, but I believe the initial repairs were done in a shop on the Westover side of the river.**

**"Well, the next day was Saturday, and I found myself in the phone closet, beneath the back stairs, and between the vestibule and the dining room, calling**

to American LaFrance in Elmira, NY. Luckily, their office was manned that day by an old retiree, who worked only on Saturday. The old timer said he would not be able to help us from the stock in the store I was calling, but that he knew where four rod and piston assemblies for that particular engine were available at \$7.50 each. I indicated our immediate need for one of them and inquired about payment and shipping.

The old timer replied, "That's not possible. If you want one, come and get it." And as I recall, John Allevato and John Dixon did drive up to Elmira to get those parts. [Ed. Note: Both JTA and JAD tell me that they did not make that journey and JTA sent me an email advising that he does not think any of our guys made that trip, but that we received the parts via the mail. If anyone can recall anything about a trip to Elmira, please email to [mitchline@yahoo.com](mailto:mitchline@yahoo.com). That would be a very special highlight to the story. Everyone loves a good "road trip story"]

"Well it turned out the engine needed more than just a new piston assembly. It needed to be rebuilt. And this involved using Babbitt metal, a special porous metal alloy which was used with high heat, high friction engine parts to assist in their lubrication. The porosity increased the adherence of oil to the moving engine parts and somehow, this re-babbitting was essential in the rebuilding of the engine. [JAD fills us in on the technical details of Babbitting in his account below.]

"Fortunately, we were also able to find an old retired mechanic who knew that engine, and he supervised its rebuilding. There were very few still living who knew how to "re-babbitt".

Many were involved in the mechanical work. I remember Bob Feeman and John Dixon in particular being involved in the mechanical and restoration work. But the assistance of the old retired mechanic was essential to the rebuilding of the engine. Only he had the required technical knowledge and expertise to see that the Babbitting was performed properly.

I do recall that we were able to find paint to match the original shade of fire engine red, and a very fine original restoration was well under way by the time our fire truck had its paint job.

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*Author's Note: I spoke to not less than 10 brothers and emailed another half dozen in trying to develop an accurate sequence of events and locations in the repairs and restoration, but was never able to do so. There were a few discrepancies from one account to another. The discrepancies derived simply*

*from lapses of memory, and in every case when differences of memory occurred, each was willing to defer to the memory of the other, frankly admitting that time had taken its toll.*

*The most likely sequence is that the fire truck was towed from Hundred, WV to Wilson Chevrolet in Morgantown. Enquiries were made to locate an appropriate shop for the opening of the engine to determine what parts were needed. That was probably the same shop where the rod and piston repair was made. Jim Laughlin's memory is that this initial repair, that is, the installation of the new rod and piston assembly, was made at a shop on the Westover side of the Monongahela River. The truck was then driven briefly, but the loping, thumping operation of the engine quickly signaled that there were more serious problems. The truck was then taken back to the shop in Westover where the problem was diagnosed as the Babbitt material being worn and "out of round". (The Babbitt material housed and supported the crankshaft within the engine block and served the same purpose as "main bearings" serve in later engines.) The "old timer" with "Babbitting" expertise was located and that repair was made. JAD thinks the babbitting was done in a shop on the Morgantown side of the river.*

*After those repairs, the fire truck was taken to the Dick Burnside shop on Third Street near Chico's dairy and across from the Ice House. Here "Sadie" to be resided until a frame up restoration to virtually mint condition was completed, original color multi-coat lacquer was applied, fittings and pewter trim were polished to their original luster, and "Sadie" was brought back to virtually new in appearance. The gold leaf detailing was added later. We all have fond memories of that sight, and have those memories preserved in a few photos.]*

## **The Foreman's Tale - John Dixon**

**[Ed. Note: Skype, or probably more accurate, my internet connection was not cooperating, so telephonic communication became impossible. Probably a blessing in disguise, as the technical detail which John Dixon very accurately provides, would have been lost in translation from my notes. John gives us a really excellent account detailing the repairs and restoration, and provides us wonderful technical insight into precisely how the old worn out engine was overhauled and brought back to life.]**





L - R, Nick, Lozano, Bill Chitum, John Dixon

**“My memory is in sync with Jim's (JHL) on the trip up to Moundsville to buy the fire truck and bring it back to Morgantown. It was a beautiful Fall Friday afternoon. I drove us up in my white Volvo. About a '58. At least one other carload went up, and that would have been John Allevato and those in his little black Volkswagen.**

**“The day's adventure came to a screeching halt in Hundred, WV. A connecting rod broke which caused the engine to suddenly stop, putting Jim out of his seat. When the rod broke, it jammed the engine, that is, locked it up, which in turn locked the entire drive train including the rear (drive) wheels, and had the same effect as suddenly slamming on the brakes full force. This is what threw Jim (Jim Laughlin, hereinafter Jim, JHL or Laughlin) from the driver's seat and into the steering wheel. The entire drive train was locked solid throughout, and the tow truck crew first had to disconnect one of the universal joints on the drive shaft to free the wheels so the truck could be towed. I don't remember where it was towed.**

### **Dick Burnside**

**“I think my car's radiator was leaking so I took it to Dick Burnside's radiator repair shop. That Burnside shop was located somewhere close to High Street. [Ed. note: This Burnside shop was located on Chestnut Street, the street just west of and parallel to High Street, near the intersection of Chestnut with Walnut.] He mainly repaired radiators off of heavy equipment used in mining and road building. Somehow he agreed to house the truck while we were in the process of preparing it to be painted. I believe that he was the one who painted it. He was a big help to us for many months and in many ways. We owe him a deep debt of gratitude.**



**John Dixon preparing "Sadie" for her new paint**

**I do not recall exactly how it came about, but anyway, he agreed to let us house Sadie in another shop he had recently opened near Chico's, and that's where we did the restoration. [Ed. Note: This new shop was across from the Ice House on Third Street, toward the river from Chico's Dairy on Beechurst. This is where the truck was housed for many months, and is where many of us went to help and just to visit, give moral support and enjoy watching the work in progress, as day by day, Sadie was brought back to almost new.]**

**Dick Burnside was very helpful to the chapter in many ways during the restoration process. He is often mentioned and credited highly by many who have memory of those times. And indeed, he is the fellow who applied that fine multi-coat finish of the original color fire engine red lacquer once the metal work was complete. Just look at the pictures to see the fine restoration the brothers achieved. We can only imagine the envy of the other fraternities as that lady rolled down High Street in her debut.**

## **Detailing the Babbitting Process and those Involved**

**The engine did have to be re-babbitted. That process involved pouring molten metal. John(JAD) gives us a full account of that process:**

**“The babbitt material (various metal matrixes primarily of tin, lead, & antimony) was poured into a form which was placed around the main bearing locations with caps installed and torqued to the engine block. After the babbitt cooled the block was chucked up on the line-boring lathe and line bored providing proper diameter and center alignment for the five main bearings. As I recall, the biggest issue with the engine was that the connecting rod throws on the crank were out of round which caused the engine to thump when running. The crank shaft mains and throws were therefore trued-up on a lathe where a fine grinding wheel was used instead of a cutting tool. I don’t think that the connecting rod throw bearings were Babbitt, but instead were an insert.**

**"Unfortunately I don’t remember any of those outside the chapter who were involved with the engine rebuild. I believe the shop that did the work was somewhere down by the river on the Morgantown side."**

## **About the Engine and the Truck**

**The truck’s engine was a six cylinder. There were two spark plugs per cylinder. There was a small lever on the steering wheel column which allowed the operator to retard the timing during starting. It had no starter but used a large hand crank just below the radiator between the bumper and radiator. We would stand on the bumper to operate the crank with our foot to turn over the engine during starting. Its flywheel weighed over 275 pounds. The transmission was three speed forward plus reverse and considered a “crash-box” because it was not synchronized. The crank shaft weighed 175 pounds.”**

**[Ed. Note: Bill Chittum has filled us in on some technical details learned after John’s graduation. The engine was indeed six and not twelve cylinders, and it had a dual electrical system with two spark plugs at each cylinder. The two**

electrical systems were a magneto system and a conventional six volt system consisting of coil, distributor, generator, and battery. The truck was missing its battery during the restoration process, and thus the necessity for the hand crank. However, once a battery was installed, the truck's starter motor did function, and the manual crank was necessary only if the battery went dead.]

John has several anecdotes about the truck during the months it was undergoing restoration--- one event was potentially quite dangerous.

"One day, as I approached Beechurst Ave. while driving down Campus Drive back to Dick Burnside's shop where the bodywork was being done, the brakes stopped working and the truck coasted into Beechurst. Jim Graham was with me (he lived in the room across from mine on the second floor in the front of the House. I also remember that he was going to flight school for his pilot's license at the City's small airport because I went flying with him a couple of times) Both of us stood on the brake pedal while at the same time pulling back on the steering wheel trying to get stopped. It didn't work, and we coasted out into the intersection. I think Dick Burnside told us where to take it to have the brakes checked, but I can't remember how we got the truck there. The guys at the brake shop discovered that the vacuum assist unit had an exhaust port that had become plugged with crud. They cleaned it out and we were good to go again. It all happened in one day. I don't remember if I ever knew what was suspected of causing the exhaust port to become fouled."

"One day Dave Vaughn & I (he was my roommate in an apartment on Beechurst---I think it was during first semester of 1964) took the truck down to the River to try out the pump. We rigged it up so the intake hose was in the Monongahela River and the other hose was on the output end of the pump. We engaged the pump. It actually worked, so we started squirting water around. During our experiment a train came down the adjacent track. The train crew got a big charge watching us squirt water back into the river and I think were curious as to whether we were gonna squirt them. We didn't, but must confess the temptation was hard to resist."



**Pictured with the newly restored "Sadie" are Unidentified, John Dixon in the bed, Larry Saunders, Rich Simmons, and Bill Jones in foreground**

**John continues, "Many of the brothers contributed to the effort of "Sadie's" restoration. I remember particularly Bob Feeman, Bob McDaniel and Nick Lozano. They provided many hours of TLC and lots of elbow grease on "Sadie" as did some others including Roger Broadwater and his girlfriend and later pin mate. [Ed. Note: Bob McDaniel has been noted by many for his contribution to the engine rebuild. Jim Graham has also been noted in this regard. Unfortunately, I have been unable to contact either of them as of this date. Contact information, especially email addresses, would be greatly appreciated.]**

**John also added in response to my questions, when we finally did succeed with a telephone conversation, that he became the supervisor of the restoration**



more or less by default simply because he was there the most, and thus best informed on the steady progress and what needed to be done next. He says we owe an abundance of gratitude to Dick Burnside, not just for providing the garage for the restoration, but also for his day to day technical advice on how to proceed, and as a resource person for locating parts and materials and professional mechanical assistance when needed.

Dick Burnside was not a Pike, but rather just a local business man who must have loved old FireTrucks. Wish I could have garnered more information about the man. We do owe him a huge debt of gratitude. Gathering and writing his story could be a very worthy pledge project.

## **Bill Chittum's Never Ending Tale**

I have added “never ending” to Bill’s heading, because he has been Alpha Theta’s continuous presence in Morgantown for well over 50 years now. He has been, and remains on the job 24/7/365 to this very day! He is to Alpha Theta as was Lou Gehrig to the Yankees and Cal Ripken to the Orioles. He is our “Iron Man”! But unlike Gehrig and Ripken, Bill is also Alpha Theta’s premier “Unsung Hero”. I know there are many others, but Bill has no peer in this category. It has been rare to never that Bill has received public recognition for all that he has done for Alpha Theta over the years, beginning even before his initiation on February 18, 1962 and continuing to this moment. It is a rare day that Bill does not do something for this fraternity, and I dare say there has not been a single day that Alpha Theta has not been, not only in his heart, but also, actively on his mind. The insertion of photos into this article is thanks to the effort of Bill Chittum as is much more. I have a file folder started many years ago titled Alpha Theta history project. I have as a very high priority to do an historical sketch of Bill Chittum. He deserves it, and Pi Kappa Alpha and Alpha Theta NEED to learn from the example of this dedicated AlphaTheta Pike. He is the living incarnation of “Once a Pike, always a Pike.”

He is indeed one of the few Brothers that I refer to as a “Garnet and Gold Glasses Man”. That is, he is a Pike (as I once heard Bob Burchinal say about Bob Louderbeck) who “sees everything through ‘Garnet and Gold Glasses’”. In fact, he comes to the top of my list in this category. Should the Good Lord call me before the task of Bill’s Pi K A biographical sketch is completed, I implore someone to take on that task.



**“Sadie” in her very early days before the gold leafing. PiKA in white tape. Foreground: Dick Heid, Nick Lozano?, Marty Work. Second Tier: Jim Laughlin, Bill Chittum, John Dixon, ?Frank Julian or Bob Elliott?, Hank Wagner, Bob McNeil, Sonny Yatsko, unknown face hidden by hand, Chuck Rea, possibly Jack Debolt. Photo taken from directly across the street from 36 Campus Drive, under the old Mountaineer Stadium and looking uphill at the Forestry School Building.**

**Bill has been of immeasurable assistance to me in the preparation of this article. It is Bill who: initially provided me with the names of the key people; provided me with the referral to John Allevato’s article; jogged my memory with reference to dozens of details of the “Sadie” story; provided me with access to a treasure trove of photos of “Sadie”; reminded me of the names of over a dozen brothers who were a part of this story in a variety of ways; and assisted me time and time again in keeping my computer working and in teaching me how to use it to save files and reduce the paper load weight of my bags as I travel from country to country.**

## **Another Unsung Hero's Tale**

**Another story related to me by Bill Chitum: An alumnus who visited the chapter probably Homecoming of '63, and seeing the wonderfully restored '30 American LaFrance, immediately contributed a very significant sum to have the gold leaf detailing you see in the photographs professionally done. Someone please step forward and identify this wonderfully thoughtful and generous brother. And if you are that Brother, please put modesty aside, step forward and be recognized so that credit can be given where due! [An important aside from an old Alumni Relations Chairman: Always give published credit where credit is due. Doing so builds alumni relations by shining light upon examples of love of, and loyalty to our magnificent fraternity---examples which should and will be followed in the future. Failing to do so, sends yet another Brother away---sometimes forever. Ingratitude is despised by all.]**

**Another anecdote related by Bill Chittum: I have already referred you to John Allevato's article, 1930 LaFrance, which John concludes with reference to Sadie's triumphal trip from the Airport to the Hotel Morgan with her rich, famous, and "debonair to a fare thee well" passenger, Nelson Rockefeller, 1968 Presidential candidate Bill Chittum's brief anecdote adds to the spontaneity of this occasion: "Rockefeller got off the plane, and as he touched ground, his staff greeted him and began to escort him to their limousine, when Rockefeller stopped in mid-stride and exclaimed loudly (paraphrasing), "No. There's the thing I want to ride on". And thus "Sadie" made her debut on the National political scene. I expect that there will be many encores as "Sadie" is currently being refurbished and restored to her role of spirit symbol not just for Pi K A and Alpha Theta, but for WVU, her alumni, and West Virginians around the world.**

**Pi K A and the University, through the WVU Alumni Association and WVU Foundation, have entered an arrangement to see this done. You are invited to contribute to this exciting new chapter in Sadie's continuing parade. Not just your dimes and dollars, but mechanical expertise and advice re the restoration, and a few are needed for hands on management and the establishment of usage and maintenance policy for "Sadie" going forward. Contact Gary Earp, Alumni Association Secretary. Contact information is provided at the end of this issue.**

## The Christening



**It was a beautiful Fall day in October, 1964. Hank Wagner was the presiding SMC, but it was Lady Sadie “Mom” Henderson who reigned as the Queen that day, as she energetically broke a bottle of vintage champagne over the front bumper, thus christening the Alpha Theta prized Fire Truck, with the name “Sadie” in honor of herself. A proud new Pike tradition was formally launched, and like the Pi K A Bell, was soon embraced by the University at large.**





**“Mom” Henderson driving  
--- smiling and laughing all  
the way to the fire**

**Beside her, Hank Wagner,  
SMC, also enjoying the  
ride and navigating for  
“Mom”**

**"Mom" Sadie  
Henderson  
Christens "Sadie"**







**L to R from lower right toward McLean Av: first three unidentified, Warren Current holding a tablet, Bill Chittum's back. Trenton Pauley, Joe Burford flanked by his Mom and Dad. In front of the Burfords: Leslie Shearer and unidentified lady. "Sadie" with paint so new it looks wet. Hank Wagner, SMC, standing on passenger side, Mom Henderson driving. From upper left down the curb line: Bob McDaniel, Ed Arnott, unidentified lady, Ed Bowling, Bob Bobst, Jim Riffe's Dad, Jim Riffe, Jack Russell, Marty Work, Kingsley Smith in front of Marty, Ken Phillips, and Dick Rawlings. Unidentified couple walking down McLean. Photo credit: John Dixon**

**“Sadie’s” christening was in the Fall of 1963, and it was very well attended, especially by Actives and Pledges, and also a few parents and recent alumni. One of the photos in Bill Chittums’s archives depicts a crowd of at least forty, plus there were more on the fringes and just out of the photo. “Mom” was loved by all. She was our Housemother for a period of about a dozen years from the mid ‘50’s to the late 60’s.**

**She did not play her role as the typical, sterile, aloof “chaperone” maintaining order. She left that to the Chapter Officers, who performed excellently at their task. Instead Mom was a very “loving mother” to us all who planned our meals, managed the kitchen and housecleaning staff(Esther and Martha), managed the ordering of food and supplies within the Chapter’s allocated budget, made curtains from scratch, played bridge when a fourth was needed, provided a sympathetic ear for homesick freshmen (Tom Freeman once noted during a Rush Week meeting, “Don’t underestimate what a valuable asset “Mom” is to our Rush effort. Many of these young guys are drawn to her motherly attention, especially these first week’s away from home”), and stepped up to assist the brothers and the chapter in any way she could. In short, Mom did anything and everything she could to make our college days more pleasant and productive. And, all this was done with such great tact and discretion that one hardly realized, except in retrospect, what a powerful influence she had upon us all.**

**Indeed “Mom” was as near perfection, as one could ever be in the role of House Mother. She was a great maternal spirit, who well understood young men and boys, and fostered their development into fine young men intuitively. Who could not love Sadie “Mom” Henderson? And naming the Fire Truck “Sadie” is now a “perpetual tribute” to this wonderful woman and the love she showed us.**

**Mom Henderson was a great “Pike”. She loved us all, and more, she also loved the Spirit of Pi Kappa Alpha and of Alpha Theta. She loved our great Fraternity even more than did some of our initiates. We were privileged to honor her with the christening of the Alpha Theta Fire Truck, as “Sadie”, a name which will ring in perpetuity as she takes on her newly acquired role of Spirit symbol of not just Alpha Theta of Pi Kappa Alpha, but of WVU and West Virginians at large. May God rest and keep Lady Sadie “Mom” Henderson.**

## **The Scribe's Tale - Bill Mitchell**

**You have heard me make reference before to the history project file. I once had as a goal to write a complete, accurate, footnoted, leather bound volume of the Alpha Theta History. At the age of almost 72, I must recognize that I will never complete that task. However, I can layout an outline, and with the contributions of many, we can now, while the information is available, preserve much of that history in articles and sketches done by many of us. I have in that project file, a list of not less than 20 separate biographical sketches, events, and stories that deserve a chapter in our history. Jim Laughlin is already working on a sketch of Bob Burchinal. Mrs. Sadie Henderson, our beloved Housemother of the late 50's and early 60's comes near the top of the list. We have a brother eminently well qualified to do her biographical sketch, but I will not publicly volunteer him until I have contacted him personally.**

**Jim Laughlin reminded me of several other details during our conversation about "Sadie's" beginnings. It was Jim who told me of the difficulty the chapter had in obtaining historical tags for "Sadie" back in '63---a long story unto itself. The West Virginia DMV had denied the Chapter Historic tags, and was insisting that it must buy regular commercial vehicle tags at far greater expense than the Historic tags, to say nothing of the exorbitant increase in insurance rates for commercial vehicle class. I have been unable to find the names of the State Senator or of the Brothers who were politically savvy enough to contact him for assistance in what might have dealt a death blow to Sadie very early on had this huge financial burden not been averted. The cost of commercial class insurance would have been impossible for the Active Chapter to bear.**

**I asked several if they could fill us in on the Senator's name or other details. John Dixon responded. "I think it was Tom Freeman who came up with the idea and between him and Tom Wetzel they put something together to get it done. I can't remember who the Senator was."**

**I have been unable to identify the name of that Senator, or to confirm the involvement of either Brother Freeman or Brother Wetzel, but certainly they were our two chief politicians of that time. Brother Wetzel was Chief Justice of the Student Court and Brother Freeman was Speaker of the Student Legislature the same year, and ironically there was a clash on some constitutional issue between those two branches. To read the Daily**

Athenaeum, you would have thought they were ready to make blood. Meanwhile, the brothers lunched side by side in the Chapter House dining room each day, exchanging jokes.

I do not have Tom Freeman's current email address, but Tom Wetzel responded to an email as follows: "Bill, I was Chief Justice of the Student Court. Tom Freeman was Speaker of the Student Legislature. The issue, I think, was whether WVU should join NSA (National Student Association). I deemed it needed a majority vote of the Student Body. Freeman deemed the legislature could accomplish it. The other Justices supported me and it is history."

The only Alpha Theta Pike I am aware of ever having served in the West Virginia Senate is W. Broughton Johnston of Princeton, Mercer County. He was President of the Senate of West Virginia in the late 40's. In 1964, he was still practicing law in Princeton with Brother Bob Holroyd. Brother Johnston was a very loyal Alpha Theta Pike. He was a 1925 Charter member, a very active alumnus in the 30's and right up to 1964 when he assisted me with fund raising while I was in Princeton in August of that year. He put me up in his home, and permitted me to use a desk and phone in his office for fund raising efforts in Southern West Virginia. He may very well be the State Senator who provided the assistance re the Historic tags. He had not been in the Senate for years, but still bore the title of Senator to the day of his death. He bore that title easily. He was a man of great presence. I remember his very refined Southern lady secretary saying over and over during the day I spent in his offices, "No, Mistuh So and So. The Senatuh's in co'uh't today. I can have him call you when he gets in." (Princeton was very Southern in those days---only ten miles from southwestern Virginia and less than 80 miles from Tennessee "as the crow flies".)

Senate President Brother W. Broughton Johnston very much deserves a chapter in Alpha Theta's history.

Anyone having information about the Historic tags problem, please email me to [mitchline@yahoo.com](mailto:mitchline@yahoo.com)



**Excellent picture of the old Campus Drive “Pig Pen” taken the Fall of 1964 following an Alumni Association Meeting at which the historic decision was made to proceed with negotiations with the National Fraternity pursuing an agreement under which Alpha Theta’s assets would be transferred to National’s Real Estate arm, and they would build and lease back to the Chapter what became the 117 Belmar Avenue Chapter House. L - R, Jack Debolt, Jerry Hamill, Tom Wetzel, Bill Mitchell**

**Another story I will have to do myself, as it is comprised of four personal memories that coalesced in my mind over a span of 37 years to produce in a flash of realization which connects Alpha Theta very intimately with greatness. I shall simply refer to that as “The Shinnston Story”, but I will give this hint. “Sadie” began with an idea conceived in the mind of John Allevato in Wildwood, the summer of ’62--- a Fire Truck for Alpha Theta. John believed in that idea and presented it to the chapter in the form of a motion for vote. That motion passed and the Chapter achieved John’s idea within weeks. And the flame of that idea is now a living legend being resurrected in a grand new role!**



## END NOTE

Most of us recognize how very much Pi Kappa Alpha and especially Alpha Theta have added to our lives. And, just think how very much our Alma Mater has added to our lives, our families' lives, and our personal and financial successes. We are aware and deeply appreciative of how much and how well we have been able to provide for our children and grandchildren. And we are well aware of how much Alpha Theta of Pi Kappa Alpha and Alma Mater have contributed to all these blessings. Somewhere, we all have a tender spot in our heart for Alpha Theta and for WVU and for our Mountaineer heritage. Touch that spot now and be generous in your support of this new, and now magnificently expanded role of "Sadie" the Fire Truck as she makes a grand new debut to Mountaineers around the world. Look for her on TV at the next broadcast of Mountaineer Football! Send your dimes or dollars---only you know your pocketbook and your heart. But send your contribution now, so that "Sadie's" refurbishment can be completed in time for this fall's Football season. Added serendipity: Your contributions are tax deductible.

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Hopefully, there will be many sequels to this bit of Alpha Theta history. Future chapters could include tales of "Sadie's" adventures over the years. And now we are witnessing her preparations of her new and vastly expanded role which began over a year ago with her rediscovery in a trailer in Sabraton.

Many, not only alumni, but also actives and pledges can contribute to our History by taking on an article about an historical topic. Just a few examples: The 1909 Chartering, The 1925 Chartering, The 2003 Chartering, The Showboat Party tradition dating to 1909, The Police Raid Party of 1949--- Bob Louderbeck's day, the long struggle to mount Pikes Peak with the beautiful structure dedicated in 1967, the biographical sketches of some of our more prominent and loyal alumni, etc. And one day, just the right person, with just the right talent, just the right love of the fraternity, just the right time schedule, just the right vision, and just the right dedication and perseverance, will take all of our combined efforts, add his own splendid efforts to bring into reality that dream of a "leather bound volume known as The History and Traditions of Alpha Chapter of Pi Kappa Alpha", into reality---in much the

same way that John Allevato's idea of an Alpha Theta Fire Truck became a spirit symbol in perpetuity: "Sadie" the Pi K A Fire Truck of Alpha Theta Chapter at West Virginia University, Morgantown, West "by Gosh" Virginia!

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By William R, Mitchell, May 9, 2013. Copyright. All rights reserved.

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