



BENTSPEdition

A 'MONUMENTAL' ADVENTURE — BY NICHOLAS R. DIVILBISS, KANSAS GAMMA '25

INTRODUCTION

“Hello Kansas Gamma...” our Instagram followers have grown accustomed to hearing that lately. My name is Nick and I have the honor and privilege of serving as the 85th president of the Kansas Gamma Chapter at Kansas State University (K-State). Some say I’m obsessed with Bents; of that I will let you be the judge. **By March 2025, I will personally have visited every collegiate chapter in the world.** With this article, I humbly bring you: *The Bentspedition*

This is an unprecedented adventure of a scale that I’ve never experienced. However ridiculous it may seem, I can tell you wholeheartedly that it has been a life-changing experience. Technically speaking, it can be achieved by anyone with a driver’s license and a passport, and my rules are quite simple: Personally visit all active collegiate chapters; no flying unless driving is impossible; and finally, hotels are off limits.

Following these three rules, I have to date, visited 103 of 257 active collegiate chapters. That is every chapter in Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia,

Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, Nebraska, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Puerto Rico, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and Wisconsin, along with many chapters in Indiana, Ohio, Texas, and West Virginia. Geographically, much has been accomplished with more than 13,500 miles driven and 2,200 miles flown since the journey began on December 17, 2023.

I don’t wish to bore you with a complete recollection of events, so this article focuses on just a few key happenings. While reading the article, you will learn about some highlights of the Bentspedition and a few of its objectives. You will also gain insight into the KS Gamma Chapter and me. Finally, you will, in the (map) image above, see the routes traveled thus far.

A HUMBLE BEGINNING

Initially, I never intended this to be such a wild adventure. The idea to visit a few chapters arose when I decided to visit family in Raleigh, NC, for Christmas. Kansas Gamma had been encouraging its members to explore the Bent-O-Rama website (**see sidebar**

on page 42), so it was apparent that I should stop at the chapters along the way to (a) maintain our social media presence over winter break, and (b) ensure our members’ exposure to chapters around the country. I also figured that I’d investigate the schools with no listed Bent monuments to see what I could find.

FIRST DAY

If you’re wondering when the term Bentspedition came to be, I’ll tell you. I left Manhattan (Kansas, not New York) at 6:15 a.m. on December 17 and gassed up “Tortillo the Tacoma” at the Topeka rest stop on I-70 just as the sun was peeking over the horizon. It was light enough to make the first post on our chapter’s Instagram story; I pondered what to say.

In planning, I called it the “Great Kansas Gamma Bent-O-Rama Expedition of December 2023,” which didn’t exactly roll off the tongue. Hold up... Bent-O-Rama, expedition... the Bentspedition! Aha, on the side of I-70 in the middle of nowhere in Kansas, a new word was born! Then off to the KS Alpha, MO Delta, and MO Alpha Chapters I went.

I've met many wonderful people while traveling the country and the first was **Audrey P. Horner**, Missouri Alpha Chapter president at the University of Missouri (**Figure 1**). She and I met in St. Louis at Fitz's on Delmar. (Side note: I tried their key lime soda and it's incredible.) We visited the two chapters in St. Louis together, and she's a hidden Easter egg in the video taken at Washington Univ. (the MO Gamma Chapter). One can barely see her head peeking out behind a column as the camera pans around to their Bent. Together, we also experienced the first setback. The Bent monument at Missouri Epsilon (Saint Louis Univ.) was locked away inside their building; all I could see was its reflection off an interior window. How frustrating it was to be stopped, just inches short of their Bent! Partially defeated, I moved on from St. Louis, but the defeat didn't last long.

I had my first breakthrough at Southern Illinois University (SIU) in Carbondale. The IL Epsilon Chapter's Bent was the first unlisted monument that I found (**Figure 2**), and nothing will replace the satisfaction of that discovery. Let me paint a proper picture: it was below freezing with northerly wind gusts of up to 30 mph that night. I arrived just after 9:30 p.m., all alone but for the police officer watching me from across the street. Shaking in the icy wind, I snooped around for about 20 minutes. The SIU Applied Science Building looks like a 1980s architectural experiment, and I was most intrigued by the wacky structure. Less interesting was each passing minute in which I found no Bent. That's when I realized: maybe they don't have a Bent. Wait... maybe they do, and I just won't find it... Uh oh. Hope was quickly diminishing and the officer was finally circling around to confront me. That's when it happened. I found it! Excitedly, I snapped some photos, noted the Bent's coordinates, and updated KS Gamma with the great news. My flash photography combined with the miserable wind chill convinced the officer that the situation wasn't worth investigating, so with my first major victory accomplished, I pressed on towards Nashville, TN.

I pushed myself a little too far that first night, and I was lucky to make it to Nashville without falling asleep at the wheel. I arrived around 1:30 a.m., after leaving SIU at 10:00 p.m. I had planned to get a motel room, but it was way too late for that. I'll just sleep in the truck, I said. No big deal, right? Well, with no planning, it's harder than you might think to find a decent spot to park and sleep. Most places you'd like to sleep at don't allow overnight parking, and vice versa. I fueled up in midtown by Centennial Park and had zero energy to drive much further. After about 30 minutes, I found a dark and quiet spot on Parthenon Avenue just west of Oman Street. I'd never spent the night alone in a vehicle. It was terrifying and incredibly uncomfortable. I'm 6'3" and we are talking about an extended cab Tacoma with no pillows and one undersized throw blanket on an unusually cold and windy winter night.

Waking up drained from an effectively sleepless night, I was thankful to have made it through safely when the first light of day arrived the next morning. Aside from driving through the strongest crosswinds I've encountered, nothing too noteworthy happened the following day as I visited the Tennessee Beta, Eta, Zeta, Gamma, and Alabama Delta Chapters while en route to Knoxville. I don't typically drive through Huntsville and Chattanooga on the way from Nashville to Knoxville, but the scenery itself was worth the extra distance.

STUCK IN KNOXVILLE

On January 27, 1974, the KS Gamma Chapter of Tau Beta Pi was installed, and history was made when the Epsilon Chapter of Sigma Tau merged into KS Gamma immediately thereafter, in the first of such mergers. This year marks the 50th anniversary of the historic national merger. As we neared 2024, our chapter was excited to celebrate its 50th year at K-State, but that was dampened by our lack of historical knowledge. At some point, most of our records were unfortunately discarded. Furthermore, the chapter experienced a heavy turnover of advisors throughout the early 21st century. Because of these issues, we effectively



Figure 1: The Bent monument on the University of Missouri-Columbia campus.

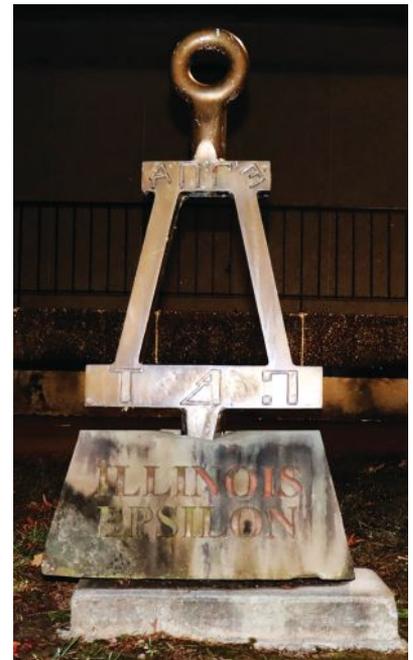


Figure 2: The Bent monument on the Southern Illinois University (Carbondale) campus.

BENT-O-RAMA

Imagine an interactive map with which every Tau Beta Pi and Sigma Tau monument can be explored. "It'd be really great to have a website to share Bents and post where they are." That's what Neal T. Bussett, *CA X '09*, thought at a District 16 meeting in 2018. He and Paul H. Kimpel, *DE A '70*, then created the Bent-O-Rama website: bents.tbp.org

The website provides chapters with a proper place to share their history, photos of activities, goals, and information about their Bent monument(s) and/or Sigma Tau pyramid(s), if applicable.

It also allows individuals to log their personal visits and upload a picture at each monument. Much progress towards completion has been made since the site debuted in 2019, but it won't be fully useful until all chapters have entered the details of their Bents since Tau Bates can't log visits at icons with no information.

The KS Gamma Chapter would love to see a completed Bent-O-Rama map because it will be a useful tool in showing prospective members the grand scale of the professional network provided by Tau Beta Pi.

Figure 3: (below) A selfie taken with Executive Director Curt Gomulinski outside the TBPI Headquarters in Knoxville, TN.

Figure 4: (below/right) "Tortillo the Tacoma" also known as "Hotel Tacoma" refueling in Daytona, FL.



knew nothing about our past, and it's hard to celebrate 50 years of KS Gamma without knowledge of the chapter's history.

To rectify this issue, I emailed Tricia Gomulinski, Director of Alumni Affairs, a few weeks before leaving Kansas. First, I asked whether TBPI Headquarters (HQ) kept any permanent records for the chapters. They do. Then, I asked if it was possible for a chapter officer to comb through their chapter's records. It is. Knowing this, I asked if I could visit HQ (**Figure 3**) for a couple days to see what I could learn about our chapter. Before leaving Nashville, I let Tricia know that I'd be in Knoxville by the end of the day and that I'd be living out of my truck. However, Tricia and Curt graciously offered one of their guest rooms to me. That was much appreciated and no offense to *Hotel Tacoma* (**Figure 4**), but beds win over passenger seats.

I knew right away that the stay in Knoxville would be fruitful when I arrived at the Gomulinski's residence on December 18. Curt had a bound copy of *The Bent* magazines from the 1970s and flipped it open to show an article about Kansas Gamma's installation ceremony. Sure enough, there was our first president, **John R. Schlup, Ph.D., KS G '75**, standing next to the last president of the Epsilon Chapter, **John D. Wilson, KS G '74**, at K-State in 1974. I had no idea just how much information there was to come.

Two days quickly evaporated as I paged through every Sigma Tau *Pyramid* magazine from 1915-74 and every copy of *The Bent* magazine from 1973 onward. It was information overload. To my great surprise, HQ had records of all important chapter reports and correspondence from the present day all the way back to 1909!



Immediately, our chapter's origin story was transformed. We knew that the Epsilon Chapter was founded in 1912, but had no idea that K-State had tried to start the Kansas Alpha Chapter in 1909. Wow, just a few more Carnegie units in 1909 and KS Alpha would've lived at K-State! Then, in 1928, Kansas Beta was to be founded at K-State. Accreditation was no longer an issue and there was local support for a chapter, but the matter was dropped because of the Association's certain belief that the Sigma Tau merger of 1928 would be approved. There was, then, no reason to start a new chapter, they said, since our Epsilon Chapter would certainly be converted into a TBPI chapter that year.

I found original photographs of our installation ceremony and images and programs from the 1998 National Convention ("K-State in '98") hosted by KS Gamma. Curt surprised me with a flash drive containing PDFs of every handwritten KS Gamma catalog card. Also on his drive was every Sigma Tau catalog card in existence. Mind you, we have no idea when K-State lost its Sigma Tau records, so we may have a complete Epsilon membership record set for the first time in five decades. What truly blew me away though, was what I found under a tall stack of boring 1950s Sigma Tau financial records. Alone in its existence, an original hand bound March 1941 Epsilon Chapter pledge book from John M. St. John (**Figure 10, page 45**), a former mechanical engineering student at K-State.

Speaking of the Epsilon Chapter, I also aim to locate all surviving Sigma Tau monuments. Revealed to me in Knoxville were photographs of all those historic monuments across the U.S. I've since reached out to chapters across the country in search of any clues. My favorite Sigma Tau discoveries so far are at the WY Alpha and TX Gamma Chapters, where the bases of those chapters' Bent monuments were formed in the shape of a Sigma Tau pyramid.

It's tough to get strangers to take cold emails seriously; especially when asking about a monument that was probably destroyed 50 years ago. However, I did receive a response from Professor Emeritus **Raymond G. Jacquot, Ph.D., P.E., WYA '60**.



Figure 5: (left) The Bent monument on the Clemson University campus.

He seemed a bit skeptical of my inquiry at first. Through our exchange, I learned that he was a student member of Wyoming's Omega Chapter. I believe he would tell you that he was most surprised when I sent him a copy of his handwritten Sigma Tau catalog card from 1959. After that, we worked together and determined that Omega's pyramid was removed from its pedestal and replaced with a Bent monument in the late 1970s; that the base of their Bent was cast in the shape of a pyramid; and that affixed to it are the original 1932 plaques from the Omega pyramid. Therefore, WY Alpha has one of the newest Sigma Tau pyramids in existence.

TO CLEMSON AND BEYOND

After what seemed like a never-ending mountain of information, I finally moved on and continued the Bentspedition on December 22. The route took me directly through Gatlinburg and the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Words don't convey how beautiful that drive is. Past the mountains, I found myself at Western Carolina Univ., home to the North Carolina Eta Chapter. They don't have a Bent yet, but by then I had picked up on the pattern of steel sculptures from the American Institute of Steel Construction scattered around American universities. Theirs appeared to be new.

Figure 6: (right) The original 1903 Sigma Tau Minutes Book with paperweights and keys.



I made it to South Carolina just after nightfall and worked my way through the hills to Clemson. SC Alpha's concrete Bent monument stands about 8 ft. tall and is elegantly painted white (Figure 5). Outside of Clemson, I stopped at a Walmart to buy a sleeping bag and some pillows. By Charlotte, I was ready to put them to use, so in a Cheddar's parking lot just off I-85, I got the best sleep I'd had in days. *Hotel Tacoma* was now officially lavish.

The days leading up to Christmas were productive, as I visited chapters in North Carolina, with the second most ridiculous experience taking place at Virginia Tech (VA Beta) in Blacksburg. Due to the holiday season, every building there was locked. That didn't work very well, considering that their Bent marker was pinned inside a building. To make a long story short, I wound up spending over an hour finding a way inside and through a highly secured building just to discover, oh, this is the University President's office... Hmm... It's probably not in here. Eventually, thanks to an architectural clue in a photo from Curt, I found their Bent monument, which is actually located across the courtyard from that building. What a way to spend a morning!

ROUND TWO

The remaining chapters on the first leg went smoothly, and I got home just before New Year's, as expected. It didn't feel right though as there were still two weeks of break left, and so many listings were still incomplete. My restlessness took over and quickly I mapped out another leg and set off again on January 2. The first stop (44th chapter) was the NE Alpha Chapter at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

While at TBP HQ, I learned a great many things, including that Angie Boles makes the best sweet tea around. I also learned that NE Alpha has a large chest of old Sigma Tau stuff. Curt said he didn't have time to sort through all of it the last time he was there, but that there was probably some good stuff in it worth looking at. When I tell you he was onto something, I mean it! The NE Alpha Chapter president, **Rylie P. Steffen**, and I spent five hours reviewing every document in that chest and what we uncovered was profound. Curt had spoken of a long-lost Sigma Tau ritual. Rumor was that it was supposed to be passed down from Bob Nagel to Jim Froula to Curt, but Froula had no recollection of the ritual's existence. Ry and I located a 1965 printing of the Sigma Tau ritual handbook, which details multiple types of rituals, not just initiations. Curt was blown away by the finding and even more, we found the original record book (Fig. 6) containing minutes dating back to the first 1903 brainstorming meeting when the Sigma Tau founders met for the first time over a year before it was founded. The historical significance of our finds cannot be fully comprehended yet, but I look forward to learning more about Sigma Tau in the future.

Through the remaining days of the second leg, I visited both Iowa chapters, all five Wisconsin chapters, all of the remaining Illinois chapters, all but one Indiana chapter, and all Southern Ohio chapters, except for Ohio Eta (Air Force Institute of Technology). A word of advice: **READ** the Bent-O-Rama listings and make sure you phone ahead if a chapter is located on a military base. Ask me how I know. Let's just say I technically have one chapter left to visit in Dayton, Ohio.

The second leg was full of ups and downs. I fell in love with Chicago and am looking forward to returning this summer. During my stop at the Illinois Beta Chapter's Bent at Illinois Tech, I was thrilled to be back on solid ground because minutes earlier I was standing in a glass box hanging off the top floor of the Willis Tower. I'm not a huge fan of heights, so it was stressful. (Figure 7)

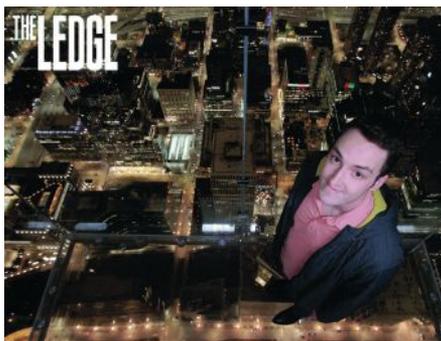


Figure 7: "The Ledge" glass box at the top of the Willis Tower in Chicago, IL.

One of my favorite encounters was with Jennie Klumpp, undergraduate advisor at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (UWM). I was directed to her office while inquiring about the location of WI Gamma Chapter's Bent, and she didn't really know what I was referring to until I showed her a picture of another Bent monument. We then walked down to the main hallway where it hangs on the wall, and we had a conversation about Tau Beta Pi and the Bentspedition. Here are her thoughts on the exchange:

I have been an academic advisor in the College of Engineering & Applied Science at UWM for 24 years. So, of course, I have always had an awareness of Tau Beta Pi. However, it was not until Nick wandered into our office over winter break that I really gave the organization's Bent much consideration. In fact, when Nick said he was looking for it and wondered if I could lend an assist, I had to ask him what he meant when he said "Bent." I am embarrassed to say, I didn't know that the large bronze "thing" hanging in one of our main halls was a Bent.

I must say when Nick explained what he was doing, I was both shocked and impressed! And, as a mom, a little bit concerned. Traveling the country, living out of his truck to take pictures of the Bents spread throughout the country—that is true commitment.

As a result of meeting Nick and seeing his commitment to finding Bents on campuses across the country, as well as his commitment to Tau Beta Pi, I have a newfound appreciation for the organization and its impact on students.

Jennie has since located an informative plaque describing their Bent monument's dedication and she and other UWM employees are ensuring that it is hung near their monument, so everyone may understand what it represents.

There were a few other notable encounters on the second leg. I had the chance to talk with the chief advisor of the Ohio Xi Chapter at Miami University as well as the deans of engineering at both Bradley University (IL Delta) and the University of Illinois-Urbana Champaign (IL Alpha). There were some low points too. I spent the coldest night of the trip at the I-70 rest stop in Greenfield, OH. I was woken up by the cold that morning, after which I turned the truck on for warmth. That experience made me think about those who don't have that luxury. Then, later that morning, I got a flat tire on I-70 just before my exit in Richmond, Indiana. There's nothing like lying under your truck on the shoulder of the interstate as semis blow past you in both lanes.

ROUND THREE

Spring break was consumed by leg three of the Bentspedition, and I'm still amazed that I made it back to Kansas on time. I drove 5,000 miles through Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Florida, Puerto Rico, Arkansas, and Missouri. It was a wonderful surprise to wind up at Texas Xi (UT Dallas) as they were hosting the District 10 Conference (Figure 9, page 45).

Kansas Gamma doesn't make it to D10 Conferences often, so I enjoyed meeting the people there very much and what an opportunity to ask all the chapters about their monuments. Walking into a situation like that is a Bent hunter's dream.

There were many highlights in the Southern states, but my favorite experience of all was visiting Puerto Rico Alpha on Pi Day. I had a contact there named Luis F. Torrens Sotomayor who has been an Engineering Futures



Figure 8: Nick (middle) in Puerto Rico during the PR Alpha Pi Day festivities. On the left is PR Alpha Chapter president, Yaleyry K. Garcia Rivera, and on the right vice president, Yaziel A. Rodríguez Suárez.

Facilitator for some time. He hosted our session at Kansas Gamma last fall and we really enjoyed having him, so it was a true pleasure getting to hang out with him for the morning. Also, their chapter was giving away pizza for Pi Day, and I enjoyed showing up unannounced as a random chapter officer from Kansas. They don't get very many visitors, which doesn't make much sense to me. Personally, I'm looking for any excuse to visit Puerto Rico again. (Figure 8)

CONCLUSION

The Bentspedition is the greatest adventure I have ever tackled. It has taken me to places I never would have gone; introduced me to people I never would have known; and broadened my horizons and helped me better understand the world we live in. Whether you're interested in pursuing a Bentspedition or not, it is my hope that this story will inspire you to set a goal and accomplish it despite all obstacles.

This summer, I will visit many other chapters in the Midwest and the Northeast. A video of every visit can be found on KS Gamma's Instagram story highlights. "BoR #1" contains videos from the first leg. "BoR #2" contains those from the second, and so forth. Our Instagram handle is [@ksutbp](#) (QR code available on page 45). Follow us if you'd like to tag along on this wild ride!

Bentspedition: Author Info and Additional Images

NICHOLAS R. DIVILBISS is a senior studying architectural engineering at Kansas State University. Next year, he will continue at K-State towards a master's degree in the same subject. Nick enjoys kayaking, singing, and litter cleanups. Growing up in foster care, after an abusive childhood, he didn't believe he could succeed in college. Before trying, he pursued a law enforcement career as a 911 dispatcher and a volunteer fireman, only to be told that his foster care background disqualified him from LEO positions. After selling real estate for a few years, Nick committed to going to college and doing whatever was required to be successful. Through much sacrifice, he's maintained a 4.0 GPA while gaining his first leadership experiences through Tau Beta Pi and for that reason, he's extremely grateful for TBI's role in both his personal and professional life.

More images will be posted to the Tau Beta Pi website at:
www.tbp.org/?Bentspedition



Follow along on Nick's journey using the QR code below.



(Above) Nick sitting on the Pyramid monument for the Sigma Chapter of Sigma Tau at Oklahoma State University.

(Below) Figure 9: Nick (far left) with the group of Tau Bate leaders in attendance at the District 10 Conference in Dallas, Texas.



Figure 10: A Sigma Tau 1941 pledge book from the Epsilon Chapter at K-State.

