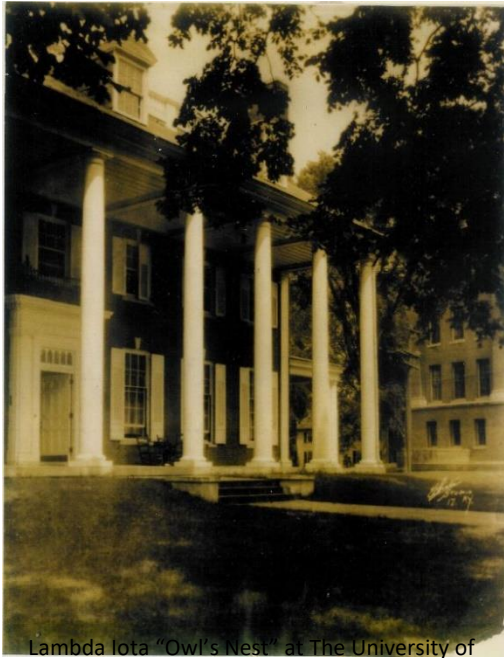


## The Owl of Minerva: Symbol of the Nation's Oldest Local Student Society



Lambda Iota "Owl's Nest" at The University of  
Vermont, Burlington

The Lambda Iota Society at the University of Vermont is **the United States' oldest local student society**, founded in 1836 by a group of 13 students. The Roman goddess of wisdom and strategic warfare, and the sponsor of arts, trade, and strategy, Minerva, is the society's muse; and the owl is its mascot. Lambda Iota began as secret society, dubbed Phyllos Kapnon ("lovers of smoke") in response to, then-UVM President John Wheeler's decision to ban the smoking of tobacco on campus. (No, there's no smoking allowed at Greybourne House!)

Over the years, the society's name changed from Phyllos Kapnon to Lorillard Institute and then, as Greek letter societies came into fashion, to Lambda Iota in 1844 and became a publicly recognized organization. Today, the university itself proudly cites the founding of Phyllos Kapnon in 1836 as the [beginning of Greek life at UVM](#). The Lambda Iota Society takes the goddess Minerva as its muse and her symbol of the owl as its mascot.

The home of the society is located at 440 Pearl St. in Burlington, Vermont. "The Owl House" or "The Nest"—it is referred to as both, was built by and for the Lambda Iota Society in 1913. Lambda alumni include a Governor of Vermont, [John Gregory Smith](#) (1863-1865), and a UVM President, [Lyman Rowell](#) (1966-1970).



The University of Vermont