

MARKING its 70th anniversary this year is Berkeley's International House, informally known as "I House." The imposing period-revival-style residence complex, next to Memorial Stadium at the top of Bancroft Way, is home to 600 students and visiting scholars from countries around the world.

A \$1.8 million gift from John D. Rockefeller Jr. resulted in the establishment of I House in 1930. Founder Harry Edmonds intended the facility to be a congenial setting for students from many nations to live and study together -- forming bonds of understanding to last a lifetime.



The first I House opened in New York City near Columbia University in 1924 (also with a gift from Rockefeller). The success of the New York I House led Edmonds to travel west to inspect locations for a second house.

Berkeley was selected because the Bay Area was the primary point of entry for Asian visitors and at the time claimed the largest number of foreign students on the West Coast. The plans were drawn up by prominent local architect George William Kelham (1871-1936). The choice of Kelham was particularly apt. He had served as chief of architecture for the 1915 Panama Pacific Exposition, and at the time of his death he was chair of the commission planning the layout for the 1939 Golden Gate International Exposition.

Both events brilliantly showcased art and architecture of many nations and were attended by hundreds of thousands of visitors.

The site selected for the new hall directly faced the Pacific, and with rooms for 338 men and 115 women, it was not only the largest student housing complex in the Bay Area, but also the first coeducational residence west of the Mississippi. As word of the new facility spread, neighbor resistance soon made itself known.

There were concerns over men and women living under one roof and suspicion, if not outright hostility, toward "foreigners," especially those of color, moving to a residential district previously "all white." At one meeting held to protest racial integration in the proposed I House, more than 800 people gathered to make their feelings known. Speaking at the meeting was Delilah Beasley, active with Bay Area civic women's clubs and author of a regular Oakland Tribune feature, "Activities Among Negroes." Her remarks were said to effectively counter the racist views held by members of the audience.

I House officially opened on Aug. 18, 1930, and immediately attracted applicants from around the globe. There are many reflections of the Moorish/Spanish culture to be found throughout the building -- painted tile stair risers, iron chandeliers and decorated beamed ceilings in the Great Hall, stately stone fireplaces and wrought iron doors leading to the tranquil inner courtyard, flanked by leafy olive trees, the tree of peace. In the auditorium, tiny patterns in black and white stenciled on the rafter beams replicate the mother of pearl and ebony ceilings found in the palaces of Spain. A photo display in the gallery next to the auditorium highlights the past seven decades; various alumni (an estimated 50,000 have lived here) who have made their mark on the world stage are also profiled. Among them is Jerry Brown, former governor and now Oakland mayor. "I was a resident for three semesters," he recalls. "I remember the large dining hall, where everyone gathered for meals and socializing." Brown first met Rose Bird while both were living at I House.



According to Executive Director Joseph Lurie, there are lots of ways for members of the public to participate in I House activities and programs. "We have a community membership for \$33 per year, entitling entry to most of the events without charge or at a discount."

Lectures, slide shows, forums, theater, music and other performances, as well as classes and tours, are held year-round. An events calendar keeps members abreast of all the activities. Coming up: a special African-American Dinner and "Gospel Extravaganza" this Thursday (February 24, 2000).

For more information on upcoming events, call (510) 642-9460 or check the web site at ihouse.berkeley.edu

