

The Philanthropic Society
William Edward Cox
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Originally there was but one literary Society at the University and it was known as "The Debating Society." It was soon considered expedient, however, to have two societies, so on July 5th, 1795, a division was made, and on August 1st, The "Concord Society" was organized. A year later on August 29th, 1796, its name was changed to the "Philanthropic Society."

The Society had no alls of its own so its meetings were held weekly in the old chapel (Person Hall), and its library, consisting of a few half-worn volumes presented by sympathizing friends, was kept in an old cupboard and moved from room to room as the librarian was changed. In 1815 the South Building was completed and a hall for the society was provided on its third floor, the library occupying the walls.

For thirty-three years the Society met in that hall. During that time the University grew rapidly both in wealth and in the number of students, and with it grew the society. New and larger quarters became necessary and consequently a new section was added to the Old East building solely for the accommodation of the phi Society. The first meeting in the new hall was held August 15th, 1848. The hall and the library occupied different apartments, the former being on the second floor and the latter on the third.

The period from 1848 to 1860 marks one of the most prosperous eras in the history of the University. The number of students was greatly increased, and the membership of both Societies increased in proportion. Even larger halls than those then occupied became an imperative necessity, and about the beginning of the war the Phi Society moved into the beautiful hall it now occupies in the New East building.

At the very high tide of our prosperity, the lowering war clouds cast a gloomy and ever darkening shadow over the University and the Society. Young men as well as old ones shouldered their muskets, and ere long scarcely a handful remained to hold the Society together. They struggle don faithfully for a year or two, but in 1868 they gave up the ghost, and the Phi Society ceased to exist.

The Society was not reorganized until the re-opening of the University in 1875. Even then the University and both Societies were repaired and re-opened by private subscriptions from friends who rallied around them and refused to let them die. Since that time the Phi Society has continued to grow, and to broaden its sphere of usefulness and influence, with perhaps the single exception of the year 1896.

For various reasons, both attendance and duty were made optional during that year. At first this new arrangement worked like a charm, as only those who did little in the Society dropped out. But at length a spirit of indifference pervaded the whole Society. The very best and most enthusiastic members began to neglect their Society work, excusing themselves on the grounds that they were busy and that *their* absence would not be noticed. Soon nobody scarcely attended the meetings, and fewer still came on duty. The fines for non-attendance and non-performance of

duty having been abolished, there was little source of revenue and the Society was on the brink of ruin.

Fortunately, a reaction took place toward the end of the year and the old regime was practically restored. Immediately new life and vigor permeated the Society, and work began again in earnest. To-day it is stronger than ever before. It has an able corps of debaters in every class, from seniors to the freshmen, and all work with such zeal that nothing but success can follow. Great interest is taken in all its literary work, and especially in the inter-society and inter-collegiate debates.

The Society color is white, and its motto is, "Virtue, Liberty and Science."

The objects of the Society were and have continued to be two-fold. First, the improvement of its members in the science and art of debating, in English composition and the attainment of good style, in the knowledge of parliamentary rules and modes of conducting public business. Secondly, the cultivation of moral and social virtues, and the formation of lasting friendships founded on co-operation in honorable works. In order to further these great ends, the Society has used every effort for the accumulation of good books and the collection of portraits of its members, who after leaving its halls have attained high positions.

In all these aims the Society has been wonderfully successful. In 1886 it turned over to the University 8,000 choice volumes to be combined with the University library, and in its halls it has over twenty oil portraits of distinguished members. Throughout the Southern states the influence of its members has been felt in government affairs, and in both public and private enterprises. And more than that, it has contributed many leading men of the Union. As Vice-president, Cabinet Officers, Foreign ministers, Senators, and members of the House of Representatives, they have been conspicuous for their wise and faithful service.

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