

Club Changing Image to Increase Visibility
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Buried deep in the recesses of the department of computer science and the department of city and regional planning, a part of UNC's history lies hidden and all but forgotten. Here survives the remnants of the Dialectic and Philanthropic societies, better known collectively as the Di-Phi.

The Di-Phi Societies have a long and colorful history dating back to the creation of the University.

When the school's doors first opened in 1795, the curriculum consisted only of a study in the classics. Many students felt a need for something to facilitate the free exchange of ideas on current topics. The Debating Society, which later changed its name to the Dialectic, arose out of this need June 6, 1795. Two weeks later the Concord Society, later called the Philanthropic, was formed as a rival faction.

The Di and Phi Societies are the second oldest at any school, public or private. The oldest is the Whig and Clio Societies of Princeton.

Meetings were held in Old East, which was then the only building on campus and comprised The University of North Carolina.

Growth of the Societies was rapid, and their influence increased fantastically. By the 1820s, membership in one of the two societies was made mandatory and each society was given total responsibility for the behavior of its members by the University's administration.

The tremendous growth of the societies facilitated moving to bigger and better chambers. By this time, Old West had been completed and the Dis moved to the counterpart of Old East. The rivalry between the two buildings still exists. This division of the societies reflects a division of the campus as a whole.

One of the prerequisites for the founding of the university was that it be constructed as close to the middle of the state as possible. On the campus there is a straight line running from Silent Sam to the Davie Poplar and the Old Well that divides that divides the campus into two distinct halves. If this line was continued across the width of the state, it would divide the state almost cleanly in half.

Students who live in the western part of the state stayed in Old West and were members of the Di, while those living in the east stayed in Old East and were members of the Phi.

The tremendous growth of the societies continued and in 1848, the north towers were added to Old East and Old West. The construction of the towers was funded completely by the societies so they could house their chambers and libraries.

The meeting chambers were on the second floor of the new towers, while the libraries were on the third. Living quarters and class rooms made up the rest of the building.

At this time, the Di-Phis owned most of the books on campus, their collection far exceeding those of the University.

In 1859, the continued expansion resulted in the construction of New East and New West. Again, the societies paid for part of the construction and moved their chambers into the center section.

During this, the heyday of the organizations, rivalry between the two societies was intense. In the 1852 national presidential election both the vice presidential candidates were Carolina alumni. William Alexander Graham, for whom Graham Dormitory is named, was a Di and William R. King, who ran with eventual president Franklin Pierce was his rival from the Phi.

James k. Polk, the only president to have graduated from UNC, was a member of the Di. Thus the Di can boast of having a president while the Phi has a vice president.

Thomas Wolfe and Thomas Clingman, for whom Clingman's Dome is named, were members of the Di. Clingman's rival in the Phi was Elisha Mitchell, who proved to his counterpart that the mountain that today bears his name is the highest east of the Mississippi.

Gradually, the influence of the societies began to dwindle, as fraternities, organized sports, and other organizations began to spring up. In 1891, the administration did away with mandatory membership.

As the societies dropped in importance and in membership, the buildings were renovated. Finally, in 1959, the Di and Phi merged and formed the Joint Senate of the Dialectic and Philanthropic Societies.

The Di-Phi reached its lowest point in 1970, when the membership fell to only one. Membership is now up to around 25, and the Di-Phis have great plans for the future, Davis Cooke, ex-historian of the Di-Phi, said.

Today, the members meet in the Di chambers in New West and have a large study area in the Phi chambers in New East. Although these buildings have been renovated to house the department of computer science and the department of city and regional planning, the chambers have been untouched and remain basically the same as they were 100 years ago.

Thick, plush carpet covers the floors, while far above the rooms is a skylight. The walls of each chamber are filled with portraits of the societies' alumni. The furnishings are exquisite, hand-carved works of art by Thomas Day.

The walls of the Di Chamber are blue, symbolizing excellence, while the walls of the Phi chambers are white, symbolizing purity. This is the origin of "Carolina blue and white."

Cooke said that sometimes the history of the societies is a bit overwhelming. "People tend to think of us as only part of Carolina's past. This is true, but we're also a part of Carolina's present."