

Old Phi Society at University Modeled After State's House
Greensboro Daily News, April 27 (?) 1947
Peter Gerns

Thinks Well Enough of Two-Thirds Clause to Keep It In Constitution

The North Carolina Legislature's famous gag rule, requiring a two-thirds vote to report out any bill given an unfavorable committee verdict, may be scheduled for annihilation by the next General Assembly, as predicted by Orange County's representative John W. Umstead, Jr., and some other solons, but the 150-year old Phi Assembly at the University of North Carolina thinks well enough of the two-thirds clause to include it among a number of features in its constitution just revised by amendments.

When a question has been acted on favorably or postponed indefinitely, it shall not be acted on again during the session, except by a two-thirds vote, says one of the amendments just adopted by the Phi Assembly.

In revamping its constitution the Phi, in fact, has tried to conform as nearly as possible to the present rules of the Legislature's house of representatives after which the debating society was modeled when it changed its name from Phi Society to Phi Assembly some years ago.

Some Other Changes

Other changes include provisions that every bill shall receive three readings before passage, that any member may be excused from serving on committees if he is a member of two standing committees, and that any motion must be reduced to writing if the speaker or any two members request it.

The comparison of the topics debated by the Phi 100 years ago with subjects being discussed today affords an interesting contrast.

Questions like "Id love without hope, or malice without revenge most injurious?" were a most serious matter. They debated whether female modesty is natural or affected and decided that mixed government is more effective than pure democracy.

A bill in the old days condemning Spain "because of malicious obstruction of Mississippi" was passed favorably, and the prevailing opinion was that treaties signed contrary to the laws of nations were binding.

Today most discussion bills have a more materialistic aspect; Shall a humor magazine be re-instituted at Chapel Hill was favored by a majority vote. The Phi upheld President Truman's policy toward Greece and Turkey and felt that the United States had the legal and moral obligations to destroy Hiroshima and Nagasaki with atomic bombs.

Other matters under discussion include the adoption of a unicameral system for the North Carolina Legislature, the establishment of A.B.C. stores in all counties, and the manufacture, sale and use of fireworks in the state.

Draw Large Audiences

The usual attendance at the meetings is from 30 to 60, but some of the debates draw audiences ranging up to 200. The spectators are invited to take part in the debate.

The university's two debating societies are as old as the institution itself, and more than half of the state's governors and a united States president have been members of one of the two organizations. In 1795, the year in which the university opened its doors to students, 31 students organized a group which was at first known as a Debating Society.

After a few meetings the organization split into two groups, the Concord Society, which later became the Philanthropic Society and then a few years ago the phi Assembly, and the Dialectic Society, which in recent years has been known as the Di Senate.

Di and Phi Organized

It soon became traditional for the boys from the eastern section of the state to join the Phi, while those in the west affiliated with the Di.

Both Societies had a strong influence on campus questions from the state and were the foundation for the system of student government that later developed. In the early days impeachment by either of the societies was tantamount to expulsion from the university.

In 1886 the Phi and Di, which had maintained their own separate libraries for the use of all the students, agreed to pool their books with those of the University Library. And that's why even now many books of the library are inscribed: "Endowed by the Dialectic and Philanthropic Societies." Together the Phi and Di gave the university its colors of white and blue and published on eof the first collegiate magazines of the south, forerunner of the Carolina magazine.

The histories f the Phi and Di have always been entwined. They had shared the same ups and downs for more than a century when they decided to modify their basic structures and model themselves after the upper and lower house of the state legislature at Raleigh. The Di in 1924 became known as the Senate of the Dialectic Literary Society and the Phi in 1919 assumed the name of the General assembly of the Philanthropic Literary Society.

[There is a grouping of eleven photographs of the officers of the Societies accompanying this article. The caption reads: This year's officers of the phi Assembly of the University of North Carolina's two debating Societies: Top row, left to right--Robert H. Morrison, Hickory, Speaker, John E. Giles, Glen Alpine speaker pro-tem; Charles G. Britt, Goldsboro, treasurer; Margaret H. Goodman, Concord, corresponding secretary; Lester M. Sneed, Raleigh, sergeant-at-arms. Bottom row-Peter H. Gerns, Canton, Ohio, parliamentarian; James H. Hill, Germantown, chaplain; Chester D. Zumbrunnen, Salisbury, critic; Orren W. Hyman, Jr., Memphis Tenn, membership chairman; Margaret Jean Taylor, Asheville, recording clerk, and Charles Cowell, Jr., Washington, page.]