

**Guide to the  
Papers of the Philomathean  
and Phrenakosmian Societies**



**Gettysburg College, Musselman Library  
Special Collections & College Archives**

**Processed by Melodie Foster & Christine M. Ameduri  
March 2000**

## **MS - 006: Papers of the Philomathæan and Phrenakosmian Societies**

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### **Provenance:**

The papers of the Philomathæan and Phrenakosmian Societies were given to the College when the societies disbanded in 1924.

### **Agency Sketch:**

In the mid- to late nineteenth century, literary societies were an important part of college life. Committed to moral and intellectual pursuits, they were seen by faculty as a supplement to regular studies, and many campuses founded two to foster competition. The Philomathæan and Phrenakosmian Societies were founded on February 4, 1831 at the Gettysburg Gymnasium and carried over into Pennsylvania College in 1832.

Membership was open to all students of the College and the Theological Seminary and to all preparatory students over twelve (later raised to fifteen). Faculties were granted honorary membership in both societies, an honor also bestowed by invitation upon men of note in nearby cities. The societies were each given a hall and library room on the fourth floor of the new College building in 1837 and 1839 which were moved to the New Recitation Building in 1889 and 1890.

Members were required to compose and present essays at weekly meetings in addition to participating in the annual inter-society contests that included essays, oration and debate. The purpose of the two societies always remained centered on improvement in these areas, but was altered over the years to include the fostering of friendship, moral and liberal principles, and a mastery of parliamentary procedure. The societies sponsored speakers and founded libraries whose collections rivaled the College's own and were, in many cases, more relevant to the curriculum. The use of the books was a privilege granted to members only.

Though membership remained high into the twentieth century, the societies saw a decline in popularity after the 1870s. The arrival of fraternities and the YMCA and increased social emphasis on athletics and dramatics drew students away from the strictly intellectual pursuits of the literary societies. The issue of saving the societies came up frequently in student publications between 1900 and 1910, but the final verdict was that they had changed too little since their formation in 1831 and no longer fit into campus life. The Phrenakosmian and Philomathæan Societies were officially disbanded at a joint meeting in the spring of 1924. Their meeting rooms and libraries were turned over to the College.

### **Scope and Content Notes:**

The collection is divided into three Series. I. Philomathæan Society, II. Phrenakosmian Society and III. Inter-society. Each Series is arranged into categories: Constitution, Recording Secretary, Accounts, Library, Correspondence, Activities and Miscellaneous.

The bulk of the collection consists of the official record books of the two societies and their libraries. Constitutions, minute books, account books and library circulation records cover the period 1831-1924 (with gaps). There are several library catalogues, arranged both alphabetically and numerically. Also included are correspondence spanning the societies' years of existence in the form of letters received and copies of letters sent, and evidence of society activities including event programs, debating topics, and copies of essays, poems and addresses delivered before the societies.

Series III consists of inter-society correspondence from 1852-1890, programs of inter-society contests held between the 1830s and 1914, a bound volume of speeches given before the societies and a typed report of the Joint Committee on the Betterment of the Societies.

### **Series I : Philomathæan Society**

#### **Box 1**

- 1-1 Constitution - constitution 1838, member list: honorary, undergraduate includes 82 names and founding members, library catalogue: 1-3000 scattered throughout book, with note from 1870 about revised catalogue and new number system
- 1-2 Constitution - constitution with new society purpose, active member list to 1848 with founders and deaths noted
- 1-3 Constitution - constitution 1849, mutual regulations, by-laws, duties of officers, rules of performance, duties of committees, fines, library rules, order of exercises, active member list by class 1831-1853, list of honorary members
- 1-4 Constitution - constitution, by-laws, active member list Fall 1875, indexed
- 1-5 Constitution - constitution, by-laws, active member list by session Fall 1863-Fall 1874, resolutions relating to "Thousand Dollar Fund" 1864
- 1-6. Constitution - constitution and by-laws 1881 and rough draft, active member list Jan. 1882-Jan. 1892, form for installation of officers and initiation ceremony

#### **Box 2:**

- 2-1 Recording Secretary - minute book 1831-1833, includes original constitution, member list, by-laws, mutual regulations
- 2-2. Recording Secretary - minute book, March 17, 1841-December 15, 1847
- 2-3 Recording Secretary - minute book, January 24, 1855-December 26, 1860
- 2-4 Recording Secretary - minute book, January 2, 1861-March 28, 1866

#### **Box 3:**

- 3-1 Recording Secretary - minute book, April 4, 1866-October 19, 1870
- 3-2 Recording Secretary - minute book, October 26, 1870-March 4, 1885

**Box 4:**

- 4-1 Recording Secretary - minute book, April 8, 1885-January 19, 1900
- 4-2 Recording Secretary - minute book, February 2, 1900-October 24, 1919

**Box 5:**

- 5-1 Recording Secretary - minute book, October 21, 1921-November 10, 1922
- 5-2 Recording Secretary - roll book 1901-1917, records attendance, includes meeting notes at end
- 5-3 Accounts - account book 1842-1855, records fees, fines and payments by members, organized by date and name, also includes mutual regulations, constitution and by-laws, active member list by year 1831-1864, list of honorary members
- 5-4 Accounts - account book 1855-1867, records debits and credits of each member alphabetically by class
- 5-5 Accounts - account book 1867-1882, same as above, includes pp. 5-18 of a history of the society, list of presidents 1841-47 and 1866-1870, papers regarding a piano order 1893

**Box 6:**

- 6-1 Library - catalogue: alphabetical, includes Catalogue of the Philomathæan Society 1882
- 6-2 Library - catalogue: alphabetical, includes Catalogue of the Philomathæan Society 1862
- 6-3 Library - catalogue: biography, poetry and romance
- 6-4 Library - catalogue: theological and religious
- 6-5 Library - catalogue: voyages and travels
- 6-6 Library - catalogue: Supplement to the Library Catalogue
- 6-7 Library - catalogue: 1-6456

**Box 7:**

- 7-1 Library - catalogue: 1-6874, 1-2380 (different numbering system)
- 7-2 Library - Librarian's Record 1835, circulation record organized alphabetically by class, check-outs are registered by book number
- 7-3 Library - Librarian's Record 1849-1858, see above

7-4 Library - Librarian's Record 1868-1890

**Box 8:**

8-1 Library - Librarian's Record 1881-1893

8-2 Library - Librarian's Record 1890-1903

8-3 Library - Librarian's Record 1900-1907

8-4 Library - Librarian's Record 1903-1917

8-5 Correspondence - corresponding secretary's book 1841-1858, "All letters sent by the authority of the society shall be carefully copied into a book provided for that purpose," letters inform men of their election to honorary membership, invite speakers, alert parents and guardians of delinquent behavior, request donations and subscriptions and issue thanks

**Box 9:**

9-1 Correspondence - corresponding secretary's book 1858-1866

9-2 Correspondence - corresponding secretary's book 1866-1872

9-3 Correspondence - 1852-1915, includes letters associated with society events and speakers, the Thousand Dollar Fund, the library, honorary membership, society business, invitations and general correspondence

9-4 Activities - Catalogue of the Philomathæan Society 1846 (3), 1853 (4), 1862 (4), includes library catalogue, active and honorary member lists

9-5 Activities - Catalogue of the Philomathæan Society 1882 (9)

**Box 10:**

10-1 Activities - invitations and programs, unused, for 60th anniversary June 16, 1891

10-2 Activities - "Messages, Orations and Debates by Active Members" 1848-1849, includes transcriptions of 5 presentations and library catalogue 1-5289 (with gaps)

10-3 Activities - Activities - poems and addresses read before the society: "The uncertainty of literary fame" by Charles West Thompson, "The utility of classical studies" by N.C. Brooks, "The advancement of ethical philosophy" by Albert C. Ramsey, A.M., "Time is a seedfield: Eternity the harvest" by Henry W. Thorp, A.M.

10-4 Activities - Activities - poems and addresses read before the society, bound collection of pamphlets, see list.

10-5 Miscellaneous - papers, includes petition to trustees (no date), lists of presidents, speakers, prize winners, events, membership numbers

10-6 Miscellaneous - Visitor's Register 1861-1888

**Series II : Phrenakosmian Society**

**Box 11:**

11-1 Constitution - constitution and by-laws 1837

11-2 Constitution - constitution, by-laws, membership lists 1842  
11-3 Constitution - constitution and by-laws 1850s, includes essay "The Love of Systems," p. 35  
11-4 Constitution - constitution and by-laws 1860s, library catalogue 1852, includes partial post-war essay  
11-5 Constitution - constitution and by-laws 1870s  
11-6 Constitution - constitution and by-laws 1880s  
11-7 Constitution - constitution and by-laws 1895-1901  
11-8 Constitution - constitution and by-laws 1902

**Box 12:**

12-1 Constitution - constitution and by-laws 1902, 1912  
12-2 Recording Secretary - minute book, February 4, 1831-January 13, 1839  
12-3 Recording Secretary - minute book, March 1, 1839-February 4, 1846  
12-4 Recording Secretary - minute book, February 11, 1846-April 2, 1851

**Box 13:**

Recording Secretary - minute book 1851-1860

**Box 13.5:**

Recording Secretary - minute book 1860-1869

**Box 14:**

Recording Secretary - minute book 1869-1882

**Box 14.5:**

Recording Secretary - minute book 1882-1906

**Box 15:**

Recording Secretary – minute book, February 2, 1906-October 12, 1923

**Box 16:**

Recording Secretary – minute book, January 5, 1848-January 14, 1855

**Box 17:**

17-1 Day Book, February 13, 1867-March 1, 1882  
17-2 Day Book, September 1, 1843-February 6, 1867

**Box 18:**

18-1 Accounts - cash books (6) 1837-8, 1865-6, 1871-6, 1876-1881, 1881-7, 1887-1901, account of society money  
18-2 Accounts - treasurer's ledger 1839-1841, individual accounts  
18-3 Accounts - treasurer's ledger 1844-1847  
18-4 Accounts - treasurer's ledger 1849-1852  
18-5 Accounts - treasurer's ledger 1852-1863

**Box 19:**

19-1 Accounts - treasurer's ledger 1863-1881  
19-2 Accounts - treasurer's ledger 1881-1903  
19-3 Library - catalogue: alphabetical, includes book numbers in the 7000s

**Box 20:**

20-1 Library - catalogue: alphabetical, incomplete  
20-2 Library - catalogue: 1-5503, 5717-5761  
20-3 Library - catalogue: 1-5716  
20-4 Library - catalogue: 5717-6568  
20-5 Library - catalogue: 1-5623, new numbering system  
20-6 Library - catalogue: 1-7051, new numbering system (same as 6-2.29)

**Box 21:**

21-1 Library - Librarian's Record 1838-1850, circulation record organized alphabetically by class, check-outs are registered by book number  
21-2 Library - Librarian's Record 1851-1858, see above  
21-3 Library - Librarian's Record 1874-1898, see above  
21-4 Library - Librarian's Record 1898-1903, see above  
21-5 Library - Librarian's Record 1906-1912, see above

**Box 22:**

22-1 Correspondence -letter books (2) 1856-1875, 1875-1894. "The Vice Pres shall be required to write copies of all letters that may be sent away by him in a book kept for the purpose," letters include charges against members, requests for additions to the library and reading room, notifications of election to honorary membership and invitations. The second volume contains similar letters by the Corresponding Secretary.

22-2 Correspondence - 1832-1842, incoming correspondence concerning honorary membership, society-sponsored speaking engagements, library, general business, resignations (6-2.39)

22-3 Correspondence - 1843-1853, see above for details

22-4 Correspondence - 1854-1915, see above for details

22-5 Correspondence - 1834-1897, removed from pages in 6-2.15 after 1871 entries, includes acceptances of honorary membership and general business

22-6 Correspondence - Lincoln Letter (photocopy) March 30, 1861, President Lincoln's acceptance of honorary membership

22-7 Activities - "Catalogues of Members and Library" (7), printed for the society in 1846, 1849, 1852, includes society background, lists of library books and members by class from 1831

22-8 Activities - "Charge Book" 1855-1861, cases against members, includes verdicts

22-9 Activities - Phrena Debating Club constitution and by-laws 1891-1908

**Box 23:**

23-1 Activities - "Questions for Debate," organized alphabetically

23-2 Activities - programs: anniversaries, biennial exercises, reunion 1840-1911

23-3 Miscellaneous - papers, includes handwritten music, two essays

**Series III: Inter-Society**

23-4 Correspondence - 1840-1890 includes invitations and challenges, notifications of new honorary members, and letters regarding rule violations and disagreements (see March 1870)

23-5 Activities - poems and addresses read before the societies, bound collection of pamphlets, see list

23-6 Activities - programs: Inter-society Literary Contests 1840-1914

23-7 Activities - Report of the Joint Committee on the Betterment of the Societies

23-8 Miscellaneous - library catalogue, unbound pages, rough copy

23-9 Miscellaneous - papers, includes programs, letters, receipt

## **Philomathaeen and Phrenkosmian Society items in other collections**

### **Pamphlet Collection**

#### **Philomathaeen Society**

##### Addresses:

1. Ramsey, Albert C., "Advancement of ethical philosophy," February 16, 1838
2. Thorp, Henry W., "Time is a seedfield: Eternity the harvest," February 15, 1842
3. Allen, William H., "Our country's mission in history," September 19, 1855

##### Catalogues:

1. Catalogue of the members and library of the Philomathaeen Society of Pennsylvania College, 1849
2. Catalogue of the Philomathaeen Society, 1862
3. Catalogue of the Philomathaeen Society, 1882

#### **Phrenkosmian Society**

##### Addresses:

1. Reid, John H., February 1834
2. Johnson, Ovid F., February 22, 1839
3. Baker, C., February 21, 1840
4. Lex, Charles E., February 22, 1841
5. Smith, Henry I. "Education of the heart," February 29, 1843
6. Black, J.S., "Religious liberty," September 17, 1856
7. Burnap, G.W., "Influence of literature in a republic," September 16, 1857
8. Coppe, Henry, "Academic fallacies," September 4, 1859
9. Haer, John Seely, "Some of the mistakes of educated men," Biennial Address, 1861
10. Sprague, William Buell, August 9, 1865

##### Catalogues:

1. Catalogue of the Members and Library of the Phrenokosmian Society of Pennsylvania College, 1849

**Inter-Society**

Addresses:

1. Biddle, James Cornell, 1838
2. Todd, John, "Foundations of success," September 19, 1843
3. Reynolds, William M. "American literature," September 17, 1845