

The College Literary Society: The Athenian Society of Indiana University during the Nineteenth Century

James D. Gieser

The college literary society was one of the first extracurricular activities of the early American colleges. It was a student-created space where members gathered to explore intellectual concerns, refine oratory skills, and enjoy social companionship. This article investigates these societies in order to broaden our understanding of student life both historically and today. The article focuses specifically on the Athenian Society of Indiana University as an illustrative case.

The college literary societies of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries provided students with a space they could truly call their own. These student organizations filled the void left by a curriculum that was often disconnected from both the real world and the academic interests of the students; they provided a realm wherein students might take control of their intellectual and social development in meaningful ways (Harding, 1971; Hollatz, 1965; McLachlan, 1974; Rudolph, 1990). Highly organized and involving most of the student body, McLachlan (1974) called these societies “colleges within colleges” (p. 472). In stark contrast to the rote memorization typical of eighteenth and nineteenth century classrooms, the literary societies became spaces of exploration and freedom through a plethora of oral and other exercises (Hollatz, 1965). The literary societies, quite simply, “engrossed more of the interests and activities of the students than any other aspect of college life” (McLachlan, 1974, p. 472).

The purpose of this paper is to explore the context, features, and purposes of the college literary society in the nineteenth century, specifically as exhibited by the Athenian Society at Indiana University. Operating from 1830 to 1886, its archives will provide definition and description to this exploration and aid in illuminating student

life during this period. McLachlan (1974) identifies the student as one of the most overlooked subjects of the study of education prior to the twentieth century. In exploring Athenian Society activities within the wider context of nineteenth century literary societies, this paper will elucidate one small corner of that subject, thereby adding to our understanding of college student life in the mid-nineteenth century. By appreciating the kinds of spaces students created for themselves in the past, student affairs practitioners may enhance their understanding of the development needs of students in the present.

The paper has been divided into four sections. In the first, Institutional Contexts, an examination of the aspects of the colleges and curriculum that fueled the development of literary societies and served as the context for their activities will be presented. The paper will then explore the general features of literary societies in the following two sections, Literary Societies in Practice and Primary Activities of the Society, and conclude with Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research. I will draw upon the archives of the Athenian Society in order to make links between the typical features of college literary societies and the specific activities of this society at Indiana University. In this fashion I hope to flesh out a clearer understanding of the activities of these “little

republics" (Harding, 1971, p. 1) in general, and of this society in particular.

INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXTS

Curriculum

The nineteenth century curricular context from which the literary society emerged was narrow in scope, inflexible, and often irrelevant to the lives of students (Greenstreet, 1996; Westbrook, 2002). Student learning in these days was often rote and did little to encourage original thinking or genuine intellectual engagement (Greenstreet, 1996). Consisting mainly of Latin, Greek, mathematics, a few of the sciences, moral philosophy, and *belles lettres*, the typical curriculum was stultifying. Halloran (1990) writes that the classic curriculum assumed that a mastery of the classic languages would translate into a mastery of English. Reading and writing eloquently in English, it was believed, depended upon doing so first in Greek and Latin. The vernacular of real life – English – was considered unimportant in comparison to the classical languages. In fact, McLachlan (1974) writes, "by no educational criteria derived from any time, place, or philosophy, can the early 19th century college curriculum as actually taught be made to look attractive" (p. 466). With creativity discouraged and emotion forbidden, the curriculum was, in short, a stifling experience (Potter, 1954).

Social Control

Not only were classroom activities strictly organized: the college culture as a whole was designed to control nearly every aspect of student life. By the mid-nineteenth century the typical college abounded with rules meant to regulate student behavior and maintain order (Sack, 1961). Greenstreet

(1996) writes, "colleges functioned not so much to encourage intellectual development, as to foster moral piety" (p. 1). The proper moral development of a student's character was a primary concern for the early colleges.

In such a strictly regulated environment, any kind of extra-curriculum was almost entirely nonexistent (Potter, 1954). The types of permissible physical exercise were monitored; spending time with female friends was often off limits during the semester; a visit to the library for a contemporary periodical or novel would have been useless as the library contained only those volumes pertinent to the study of the classic works (Harding, 1971). Indeed, Greenstreet (1996) writes that today's students would regard early colleges as incredibly stifling; we may surmise that the nineteenth century student had similar views.

Students, however, are very good at finding creative ways to adapt to their surroundings. This was evident in the early colleges as literary societies blossomed on almost every campus across the country, the first appearing at Harvard in 1716 (Potter, 1954). These gatherings grew out of students' urges to explore beyond the prescribed course of study; they were places where creative expression was expected and English was freely used. The literary society provided a space for companionship, fun, and intellectual development, and served especially as a proving ground for those with future hopes for public positions in law, business, and politics (Potter, 1954; Snyder, 1904). These student-created spaces counteracted the strict social control of the colleges and provided a place of social and intellectual freedom.

Administrative Estimation of Literary Societies

The oratory and debate activities of the societies soon came to be well respected even by the college faculty. In fact, the students did such a remarkable job in this regard that a few institutions dropped oratory training from the curriculum altogether. For example, the trustees of Columbia decided in 1837 that "...no exercises in extemporaneous speaking or debating were required from the Students, as there are two Societies...of which these exercises constitute the principal objects" (cited in Potter, 1954, p. 245). Administrators and faculty at Butler University valued the activities of the literary societies so highly that until 1869 society members were exempt from attending rhetorical and composition courses. Weidner (1992) reports, "In fact, throughout the last century, Butler University's catalogue advertised the work of such societies as part of the school's attraction" (p. 2).

Other reasons for supporting literary societies existed, as well. The models of behavior encouraged by the literary societies were found to align comfortably with the kind of moral rectitude encouraged by the colleges. DeMartini (1976) writes that the literary societies "...perpetuated the more traditional goals of higher education, i.e., the transmission of high culture and maintenance of elite status, and the faculty expected these societies to complement the university's purpose rather than provide secular alternatives" (p. 529). To the faculty, society goals and exercises seemed to perfectly complement their own aims to guide the intellectual and moral formation of their young charges. However, as discussed below, literary societies were also places of social exclusion and ill behavior.

LITERARY SOCIETIES IN PRACTICE

Popularity

Rudolph (1977) states that no other aspect of the nineteenth century college, with the possible exception of the senior course in moral philosophy, was spoken of with as much enthusiasm as the literary society. One Athenian alumnus, writing in 1889, passionately opined,

Every Friday evening...how eagerly we flocked to these halls, ready to declaim some carefully committed oration, read profound essays, or indulge in heated debate over questions which we fondly imagined interested the world quite as much as ourselves. There too, we took our first lessons in parliamentary law... And the victories, how prized, talked of and long remembered they were.... But these societies were grand schools, replete with educating influences. (Wright, 1889, p. 8. Archives reference file: Athenian Society)

Through participation in these gatherings, students were able to enter a world wholly different from the curriculum typical of the era.

Public Speaking

Of the many activities characteristic of the literary societies, the most popular were those related to public speaking (Hollatz, 1965). Osborne and Gronert note that oratory was one of the fashionable public spectacles of the day:

Debating and public speaking were regarded everywhere as part of the social experience. Clay, Webster, and Calhoun were the models of political eloquence; budding young lawyers

strove to attain something of their wizardry. The appeal of the orator, whether preacher or politician, was all but universal. The idols of the day were the orators, the preachers, and the debaters... (cited in Harding, 1971, p. 123)

Participation in oratory and debate enabled students to develop this “wizardry,” a skill especially important for students planning to enter law, politics, or teaching. Membership in a literary society came to be regarded as simply in the student’s best interest. According to one student, “Whatever our plan of life may be we will do wisely to improve the opportunity of uniting ourselves with our literary society” (cited in Radke-Moss, 2008, p. 82).

A Typical Meeting

What might a typical meeting have been like? The weekly minutes are a rich source of data in illuminating the regular Society activities. For example, the entry dated May 10th, 1872, records that the meeting was opened with a reading from Scripture, followed by the review and approval of the previous week’s minutes, one oration and one essay, and one debate in which the participants debated whether “Caesar was justly slain” (Minutes: 1865-1876. Collection C135). At a special exhibition of the Society on Monday, March 25th, 1839, the order of exercises included six orations and six musical selections. The oratory topics of the evening were as follows: Early impressions and Female Education; Civil Rights and Obligations; Prejudice – its effects; The West; Progress of Liberty; Sources of Prosperity (Announcements/Programs, 1839-1866. Collection C135). The meetings were also places of spontaneity and fun, as will be discussed below.

Whether or not the curriculum at Indiana University was typical of the period, its students created for themselves a space in which to explore those subjects that they felt were worthy of attention. Thus an oration regarding Caesar’s death could be followed the next week by a rousing debate concerning education for women. Based on analysis of the archival collection, the Athenians debated, argued, and pronounced upon the subjects of their choosing, a freedom they exercised with great relish.

Society Constitution

Harding (1971) calls the literary societies “little republics,” as society meetings were democratically self-administrated and perpetuated (p. 1). The literary society typically had a constitution that stipulated the purposes of the society, rules for membership, guidelines for the appointment of officers, and conventions for the order of society meetings (Harding, 1971). Founded in 1830, the Athenian Society at Indiana University followed suit, establishing its own constitution and by-laws which governed practice. The front cover of the constitution states the aims of the society: “Constitutions and By-Laws of the Athenian Society of Indiana State University. Virtus, Humanitas, et Literatura [Virtue, Kindness, and Literature].” The Society’s Preamble reflects the high-minded aims of the societies towards intellectual and professional development: “To the end that virtue be cultivated, humanity benefited, and literature advanced, we, the members of the Athenian Society adopt the following...” The Constitution then covers, in numerous articles, various aspects of the Society’s features, such as an explanation of the roles of President, Vice-President, Recording Secretary, Corresponding Secretary, Treasurer, Sergeant-at-Arms, and Critics; the day of the week and time when Society

meetings would be held (usually Friday evenings); and the stipulation that a member of the Athenian Society could not join any other society (1873. Administrative: Constitution and by-laws, p. 3. Collection C135).

Guidelines for Behavior

Although society constitutions often stipulated strict behavior of members, Harding (1971) notes that “a continuous diet of such fare was too much for high-spirited young men... [It is not] remarkable that the minutes of the societies should occasionally record disorder” (p. 231). The young men who wrote the Constitution’s By-laws for the Athenian Society appeared to foresee such possibilities. Offenses such as spitting and smoking during meetings, lying down or leaning against the wall, or placing one’s feet upon the furniture incurred fines ranging from five to twenty-five cents (1873. Administrative: Constitution and by-laws, p. 3. Collection C135). Society records reveal that the By-laws were put to good use, such as this entry for the meeting on October 29th, 1852: “Mr. Wilcox was fined 10 cents for lying down; Wolfe: 10 cents for talking; Read: 25 cents for disorder; Spooner: 10 cents for reading” (Minutes: 1852-55. Collection C135). These proceedings remind the contemporary student affairs professional of the similar characteristics shared by these students and those who currently inhabit our college campuses: both exhibit sincere desires for personal and intellectual growth and, at the same, periodic demonstrations of youthful spontaneity.

Social Exclusion

Societies were not always places of openness and social tolerance (Little, 2002). Although societies had methods of policing their own, as noted above, when it came to outsiders

they presented a united front. There often existed bitter rivalries between the societies on campus, the groups competing for new members or hotly battling one another over a collective bruised ego. For example, the Athenian Society was founded at Indiana in 1830, followed a year later by the Philomathean Society. The two remained keen rivals throughout their existence.

This social exclusivity was felt most keenly by students who did not belong to any society (Little, 2002). The societies acted as exclusive cliques, barring nonmembers from participation in any society activities. Since the literary society reigned as the most significant extra-curricular involvement on college campuses for over a century, those excluded from its ranks must have felt sharply the alienation and scorn of being outsiders. In addition, although women gained admittance to higher education beginning in 1837, they too were typically excluded from joining the established societies. They were viewed by both faculty and students as distractions to the primary purpose of the colleges: the intellectual and moral formation of young men (Lucas, 2006; Rudolph, 1990; Thelin, 2004). Although Indiana University was one of the first Midwestern universities to grant admission to women (Lucas, 2006), the Athenian Society remained exclusively a men’s gathering.

These reasons, among others, may have contributed to the growth of other clubs and activities in which students could invest themselves, such as the *Indiana Student*, the student newspaper founded in 1867 and ancestor to today’s *Indiana Daily Student*. The exclusiveness of the literary societies was a contributing factor to the broadening of alternative social opportunities, including the rise of athletics and fraternities. The growth of these and other extra-curricular outlets precipitated the decline of the literary

societies in the second half of the nineteenth century (DeMartini, 1976; Potter, 1954).

PRIMARY ACTIVITIES OF THE SOCIETY

Debate

The debates of the literary societies broadened the parameters of the accepted disputation procedure of the curriculum (Potter, 1954). They took place in English, not Latin, and made use of linguistic methods unwelcome in the classroom, such as humor and emotional appeal. In short, Greenstreet (1996) writes, "society debates were less formal, more fun, and more spontaneous than formal curricular disputations" (p. 4).

Some societies limited the duration of an argument to fifteen minutes (Oberlin, in 1839), while others allowed an hour and a half (Western Reserve, in 1840) (cited in Potter, 1954). Although not regularly noted in the Athenian minutes, one secretary recorded the duration of the debates that took place on October 12th, 1860: "Regular debate occupied 2 h 20', irregular 40'" (Minutes: 1856-1865. Collection C135). Although these times may have been noted due to their unusual length, it is also possible that the Athenian youth may have been especially long-winded or particularly contentious. Either way, the length of these debates suggests the intensity in which students engrossed themselves in their weekly meetings.

Debates topics were chosen by the students themselves, another feature entirely absent from the classroom curriculum (Potter, 1954). Although subjects initially mirrored those of the Latin disputations of the classroom, they soon widened to include many other issues pertaining to contemporary and personal interest. The Athenian records reveal debate topics ranging from historical and philosophical issues to contemporary political and social

concerns. The Athenians took on many difficult issues, as the following demonstrate: "*Resolved*, That universal *amnesty* and universal *suffrage* should henceforth be the policy of our government" (original emphasis; 1867-1885. Publication: Announcements/Programs. Collection C135); "Which has the greater right to complain of the Whites the Indians or the Negro's [*sic*]" (Minutes: 1856-1865. Collection C135); "Should the Constitution of the United States be so amended as to limit the eligibility of the Presidential Chair to a single term" (Minutes: 1856-1865. Collection C135); "*Resolved*, that Andrew Johnson, President of the U.S., should be impeached" (original emphasis; 1867-1885. Publication: Announcements/Programs. Collection C135). In their meetings, the Athenians did not shy away from squarely addressing the issues of the day. The Society provided for them a space of self-determination and independence, a space that granted them freedom to explore issues of personal relevance and contemporary importance (Potter, 1954).

Library

The literary society library came to play a vital function for students in the colleges of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Rudolph (1977) states, "Literary society libraries almost everywhere were larger, more accessible, and broader in range of interest than the college libraries" (p. 96). The typical college library of that era was narrow in content, its volumes limited to the dead languages and other dusty subjects of the classic curriculum; few contemporary works were to be found. Moreover, student access to the college library was limited in the extreme. Because the college regarded its titles as a priceless collection requiring careful protection from the grubby hands of students, the volumes were typically stored

in a locked room that was opened only once each week to borrow and return books (Harding, 1971).

The literary societies themselves supplied the solution to these restricting and discouraging circumstances: they simply began libraries of their own. Students chose volumes that enabled them to venture into intellectual territory uncharted by the official curriculum, such as current political and social affairs, fiction, and drama (Greenstreet, 1996). Harding (1971) writes, “these student libraries frequently became larger, well-selected and carefully arranged collections, and the books were used and thumbed to an extent to which only the class text-books of that day afford a parallel” (p. 58).

By the mid-nineteenth century the Athenian and Philomathean Societies at Indiana University both maintained well-stocked libraries of their own. In fact, Harding (1971) surmises that their collections may have exceeded that of the University Library proper. Unfortunately, in 1854 most of the holdings of all three libraries were destroyed by fire.

Publications

In addition to collecting literature that was of personal interest, students also produced a variety of written materials of their own. Societies regularly produced newspapers, society “scandal sheets,” and collections of essays or orations (Greenstreet, 1996; Harding, 1971). These publications provided further opportunity to practice important communication skills and enabled students to exhibit for others the real concerns of their lives. Such latitude resulted both in the high-minded and serious and in the silly and superfluous.

In the 1840’s the Athenian Society published *The Athenian*, a collection of essays written by society members for monthly distribution to members and to the

university community. The student editors sought to maintain high standards for their small journal. In the introduction to a bound volume containing the twelve *Athenians* published in 1845, they write,

Those articles only will appear in our columns which are of a high literary character: nothing abusive or personal shall ever be published. Indeed, we wish to make the Athenian an advocate of a chase [*sic*] and elevated literature, and, at the same time, a fair exponent of the abilities of the honorary and regular members of our society. (1845. Publications: *The Athenian*, vol. 1. Collection C135)

Sample essay topics include “Synopsis of the Education of the ancient Greeks and Romans;” “Contentment;” “Money;” “Fancy;” “Old Bachelors;” “Man’s Destiny;” “The Loafer;” and “Philanthropy” (1845. Publications: *The Athenian*, vol. 1. Collection C135).

The Athenian provides evidence that members of the Athenian Society sought to address issues that were intellectually satisfying and provided edification for their readership. However, only a single collection from 1845, along with a small number of loose reprints of essays found in the same bound volume, are extant in the archives. It is possible that the 1854 fire is to blame for the absence of further publications of *The Athenian*.

An advertisement for a joint meeting between the Athenian and Philomathean Societies is also extant amongst the surviving publications of the Athenian Society. Printed in the student newspaper, this advertisement is strikingly different from typical society announcements. As stated earlier, whereas the purposes of the societies were often of a mature and intellectual nature, these were

still young people who sought to insert periodic levity into their normal routine.

The extant clipping makes for fascinating reading. The format and contents are based on the advertisements used to announce the periodic debate exhibitions that took place between the Athenian and Philomathean Societies. However, this is where the similarities end. A sarcastic, mocking tone runs throughout the announcement, in which the societies poke fun at themselves and their normal activities. It is also brimming with crude jests directed at specific members, which presumably were received good-naturedly. The headings in the announcement are variations of the customary ones: "Urine libations" instead of "Orations," "Ass brays" in place of "Essays," and "Dead formations" substituted for "Declamations." The contents of each section are given in detail, such as the question to be debated in the "De-But" section, with farcical musical numbers slotted in between (Archives reference file: Athenian and Philomathean Societies Annual Exhibition). Portions of the announcement have been provided in an Appendix for the interested reader. This announcement illuminates a very different side of society life.

The publications of the Athenian Society provide evidence that its members were capable of being serious and civic-minded young men, the sort of which Indiana University would be proud. At the same time, boys will be boys: these young men felt a need to subvert social norms and expectations, to let their sense of mischief run wild, to turn the standard practice of the society squarely on its head.

Drama and Music

Other important activities that arose in the life of the societies were dramatic and musical performances. Although drama was regarded with suspicion in the early colleges,

a view that was echoed by the newer colleges in the West, dramatic productions of various kinds appeared in society activities in the Midwest as early as 1838 (Hollatz, 1965).

The Muses were found to be active in the Athenian Society, at least on special occasions. The periodic contests between the Philomathean and Athenian Societies often included musical numbers interspersed between the evening's debates and essays (1847, September 28. Publication: Announcements/Programs, 1839-1866. Collection C135). In addition, on at least two occasions the Society minutes record plans for musical demonstrations for upcoming Athenian Society reunions. One entry, dated February 7th, 1868, states, "It was moved that a committee of fifteen (15) be appointed to produce 'music,' arrange the Chapel, and make the other necessary arrangements for the anniversary address" (Minutes: 1865-1876. Collection C135). Five years later, in January, 1873, students were again assigned the duty of preparing music for the impending anniversary festivities (Minutes: 1865-1876. Collection C135). Although not welcomed on some campuses, the young men of the Athenian Society demonstrated open-mindedness in their pursuit of these dramatic and musical expressions.

LIMITATIONS AND CAVEATS

The Indiana University Archives was the source for all Athenian Society information used for this article. However, the archives for the University's nineteenth century literary societies are not abundant. In contrast to the problem encountered by McLachlan (1974) in his study of Princeton University literary societies – "their manuscript records," he writes, "occupy almost 200 feet of shelf space" (p. 474) – the entire archive collections of the Athenian and Philomathean Societies, the two largest

societies at Indiana University, could fit comfortably into three or four file boxes.

Additionally, although I have sought to provide accurate retrieval information for all archive references, strict adherence to APA style was not always possible. The vast majority of archival information used in this paper can be found in a single source: *Athenian Society records, 1830-1886, Collection C135*. Three *Archives Reference Files* from the Indiana University Archives reference section were also used. These four archival sources are listed in the References section of this article. Unless a citation is noted to be found in one of the three *Reference Files*, it may be assumed that the material can be located in the primary source, *Collection C135*.

Masculine pronouns are used throughout the paper due to the simple fact that women were not members of the Athenian Society. Women were not admitted to American colleges until 1837, and thereafter gained admission only in a slow trickle (Lucas, 2006; Rudolph, 1990; Thelin, 2004). Even after Indiana University began to admit women, the Athenian Society continued to remain exclusively a men's gathering.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

According to McLachlan (1974), "beyond the merely anecdotal, the history of the student before the 20th century would seem to belong to the history of the inarticulate..." (p. 459). McLachlan suggests that this history has been largely dependent upon anecdotal evidence and the perspectives of administrators and the elite few. According to McLachlan's assertion, which he made in the 1970's, historians had yet to expend serious effort in understanding the actual life of the college student in

history. It is hoped that the foregoing exploration of literary societies, and of the Athenian Society at Indiana University in particular, has in a small way contributed to this effort.

A study of this kind is useful not only for illuminating the history of student life but also for its implications for current practice. Understanding how students created spaces that met their social and intellectual needs encourages contemporary student affairs professionals to allow the same sort of latitude today. Rather than yield to the temptation to initiate yet another program, practitioners may do better by providing students with the support and resources necessary to pursue their own interests by their own methods, with minimal professional interference.

Additional archival research on student life at Indiana University may continue to advance our understanding of student life, both then and now, and serve to further enhance contemporary practice. The records of the Philomathean Society, the Edgeworthalean Society, the Adelpian Society, the Century Literary Club, and the Independent Society may yield useful insight in this regard. Another promising source are the records of the student newspaper, then known as the *Indiana Student* and today called the *Indiana Daily Student*, which began publication in 1867. An additional and important development in student life was the rise to dominance of athletics and fraternities in the latter half of the century (DeMartini, 1976; Potter, 1954). How they came to challenge the literary societies, eventually replacing them as the most popular activities on campus, may also be worthy of further scholarly attention. Research on how students created new extra-curricular possibilities for themselves and negotiated a widening array of options may contribute to a greater understanding of student organizations on today's campuses.

One area of particular interest are those few literary societies that admitted women. Although women were often restricted to the periphery of student life in the nineteenth century, several societies at Indiana University freely admitted women into their ranks. For example, the Edgeworthalean Society was established solely by and for women and was active at Indiana from 1841 to 1844 (Archives reference file: Edgeworthalean Society). The Independent Society, begun in 1885, was explicitly open to both women and men from its founding (Archives reference file: Independent Literary Society). How these associations contributed to the lives of college women is another topic deserving further study. If the history of student life has typically received little attention from scholars (McLachlan, 1974), the history of student life for women students has been all but ignored. Further historical research on the lives of college women in general, and at Indiana University in particular, is an important undertaking.

The highly-regarded historian, Frederick Rudolph (1977), writes that literary societies "...imparted tremendous vitality to the intellectual life of the colleges" (p. 95). The Athenian Society was a student-created space for intellectual exploration, an alternative to the classroom that enabled members to hone their debate and oratory skills and to prepare for public vocations. These gatherings allowed students to enjoy the kinds of meaningful social interaction and creative expression they desired but which were not available in the highly regulated life of the college. The journey into their activities undertaken here serves as a reminder of the creative possibilities that young people have always possessed, and encourages the contemporary practitioner to remain ever receptive to student initiatives.

REFERENCES

- DeMartini, J. R. (1976). Student culture as a change agent in American higher education: An illustration from the nineteenth century. *Journal of Social History, 9*(4), 526-541. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3786729>
- Greenstreet, R. (1996, Nov.). *Students and intellectual life: An historical perspective*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Speech Communication Association, San Diego, CA. Retrieved from eric.ed.gov
- Halloran, S. M. (1990). From rhetoric to composition: the teaching of writing in America to 1900. In J. J. Murphy (Ed.), *A short history of writing instruction: From ancient Greece to twentieth-century America*. (pp. 151-178). Davis, CA: Hermagoras Press.
- Harding, T. S. (1971). *College literary societies: their contribution to higher education in the United States, 1815-1876*. New York: Pageant Press International.
- Hollatz, E. A. (1965). *The development of literary societies in selected Illinois colleges in the nineteenth century, and their role in speech training* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Northwestern University, Evanston, IL.
- Indiana University Athenian Society records, 1830-1886. Collection C135. Office of University Archives and Records Management, Indiana University, Bloomington. Retrieved fall semester, 2009.
- Indiana University Archives reference file: Athenian Society. Office of University Archives and Records Management, Indiana University, Bloomington. Retrieved fall semester, 2009.
- Indiana University Archives reference file: Athenian and Philomathean Societies Annual Exhibition. Office of University Archives and Records Management, Indiana University, Bloomington. Retrieved fall semester, 2009.
- Indiana University Archives reference file: Edgeworthalean Society. Office of University Archives and Records Management, Indiana University, Bloomington. Retrieved fall semester, 2009.
- Little, M. H. (2002). The extra-curricular activities of black college students, 1868-1940. *The Journal of African American History, 87*, 43-55. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1562490>
- Lucas, C. J. (2006). *American higher education: A history* (2nd ed.). New York: Palgrave.

- McLachlan, J. (1974). *The choice of Hercules*. American student societies in the early 19th century. In L. Stone (Ed.), *The university in society. Vol. 2. Europe, Scotland, and the United States from the 16th to the 20th century* (pp. 449-494). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Potter, D. (1954). The literary society. In Karl R. Wallace (Ed.), *History of speech education in America* (pp. 238-258). New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts.
- Radke-Moss, A. G. (2008). *Bright epoch: women and coeducation in the American West*. Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press.
- Rudolph, F. (1977). *Curriculum: A history of the American undergraduate course of study since 1636*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Rudolph, F. (1990). *The American college and university: A history*. Athens, Georgia: The University of Georgia Press.
- Sack, S. (1961). Student life in the nineteenth century. *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 85, 255-288.
- Snyder, H. N. (1904). The college literary society. *The Sewanee Review*, 12(1), 78-91. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27530606>
- Thelin, J. R. (2004). *A history of American higher education*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins.
- Weidner, H. Z. (1992, March). Members of literary societies are exempt from rhetorical exercises: Claiming literary societies for the history of rhetoric and composition. Paper presented at Annual Meeting of the Conference on College Composition and Communication, Cincinnati, OH. Retrieved from eric.ed.gov
- Westbrook, B. E. (2002). What nineteenth-century college literary societies can teach us about critical pedagogies. *Rhetoric Review*, 21(4), 339-356. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3093022>

James D. Gieser is a first-year doctoral student in the Higher Education and Student Affairs program at Indiana University. He received a B.A. in Interdisciplinary Studies from Wheaton College in 2001; a M.A. in Theology from Wheaton College in 2007; and a M.Phil. in Higher Education Studies from the University of Cape Town in 2009. He is currently serving as a program associate for the National Survey of Student Engagement at the Center for Postsecondary Research at Indiana University.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to James Gieser at jgieser@indiana.edu.

APPENDIX

Selections from an undated farcical advertisement of a society meeting, printed in the Indiana University student newspaper

GRAND EMPTYING OF PHILO. AND ATHENIAN THUNDER MUGS.

At Indiana STATE NECESSARY, Thursday evening, April 25th, '72.

Old Doc's gone and don't give a damn.

Squirtus, finger ass et urinam.

MUSIC – I am bound to be a Bishop – by Old Doc.

CUSSIN IN – By Dam High Buck Water.

MUSIC – We must respectively resign – by Gay.

URINE LIBATIONS.

The first mug emptied will be that of the celebrated A. Wiper Fullerton, who will bounce forth in his night apparel and belch out upon the unsuspecting audience the mighty and odiferous treasures of his rational mug...

MUSIC – Gua-ard well the clappers my boy – by Spicer...

DE-BUT.

Res[olved], That (God Almighty) Thompson should be promoted for his hell rousing defence [*sic*] of the flea infected barracks of Cincinnati, by G-D.

The first to show his But on the Affl, will be Jug Winded Ewing. This long winded, lantern jawed, knock kneed, pigeon toed, bandy shanked, god forsaken renegade, who, after having damnably kidnapped, with the assistance of his belly backer, his adversaries stink, will for thirty minutes throw the rotten contents of his Thundering mug over the woe bestricken [*sic*] multitude in defence [*sic*] of bully, buck cat Jeems...

DEAD FIRMATIONS.

The first declamer [*sic*] will be Hell Monster Logsdon, who, in his usual, sore eyed, big headed, d-d awkward style, will dash from the mouth of his offensive mug, a 'Regular Roman Senate.'...

EVIL'S BLESSING – by Richard the T(h)ird.

(Archives reference file: Athenian and Philomathean Societies Annual Exhibition)