Beloit College Archives

Guide to the Beloit College Forensics Records

AC 52

Unique ID: us-wbb-AC052

Repository: Beloit College Archives

Collection Title: Beloit College Forensics records

Creator: Beloit College


Extent: approximately 7 linear feet (10 boxes)

Access Note: This collection is open for research; however, certain materials are fragile and require Archives staff for handling, or use may be restricted altogether.

Language: English

Publication Info: Beloit College (Copyright 2012)

Beloit College Archives
Colonel Robert H. Morse Library and Richard Black Information Center
731 College Street
Beloit, Wisconsin 53511-5509

Abstract: These records collect documents relating to Beloit College's involvement in forensics, oration, extemporaneous speaking, and debate, primarily in the 19th and early 20th centuries. The College once had several oratory clubs, then called literary societies (not to be confused with literature-based organizations), a few of whom are represented here: the Archaean Society, which later split into two groups, the Alethean Society and the Delian Society, who, when combined for joint events were called the Archaean Union; the Cliosophic Literary Society; and Delta Sigma Rho (the academic honorary society). Materials include debate and oration programs, prize declamation programs (including the Rice Prize), group record books, meeting minutes, public meeting notices, constitutions and by-laws, and extensive published versions of speeches given at various contests hosted by Beloit College, the Wisconsin State Oratorical Association, and the Interstate Oratorical Association.

This finding aid was completed in June 2012 by Michelle Tom. Contents of finding aid are subject to changes and updates as necessary.
**Historical Note**

Beloit College has had a long and successful history in the area of debate and oration. During the 19th and early 20th centuries, there were several oratory clubs, then called literary societies (not to be confused with literature-based organizations), many of which existed simultaneously. The most prominent of these groups was the Archaean Society, later known as the Archaean Union, which itself comprised of two separate clubs, the Alethean Society and the Delian Society.

"Public speaking was a major aspect of student life, from class recitations to festivals of oratory held before a 19th-century public conditioned to sit through lengthy speeches. The Annual Prize Declamations included, among others: “The Emancipation of the Irish Catholics” and “The Relations of Slavery to Our Nation’s Future.” Even more popular was the annual Junior Exhibition which featured Greek and Latin orations as well as many in English." [Fridays With Fred – Beloit College Register, a wartime publication, September 27, 2012]

…It was Prof. Blaisdell who persuaded a friend to provide the prizes for the Prize Declamations, which for 34 years has been a most powerful agency in starting in the Sophs and Frosh the ambition and the power to speak…this last having been maintained for the past 8 years by Rev. Walter Rice [class of 1862]. [Rice Prize-Extempore Speaking]

…1873, when the impulses of the civil war were spent, the movement for inter-collegiate contests in oratory began. The story of these contests…is summed up in the Round Table 3/11/1892, 5/10/1893.”

[from Codex 1897, p. 41-45]

**Delta Sigma Rho** is a national forensic fraternity, and Beloit College’s chapter was granted a charter in 1909.

After the demise of the debate organizations and literary societies, Delta Sigma Rho carried on Beloit College’s tradition in forensics until around 1956.

On September 20, 1897, a woman’s literary society held its first meeting—the Aristonian Literary Society, lasting into 1914—at which time it turned such balance as existed in its treasury into the endowment fund. A Delphic Literary Society was credited with a membership of 17 women in the 1913 Codex [1911]. Despite an able membership, in number practically that of the Aristonian, it can have enjoyed but a brief existence.”

[Richardson’s history book, p. 933-935]

The college students had two literary societies, the Alethean and the Delian, the Preps had one called Junta.

**Scope and Contents**

This collection is arranged into five series based on organization or program name, with one series of general information.

**Series 1. General**

Beloit College students were also members of other regional oratorical associations (Wisconsin State Oratorical Association, Interstate Oratorical Association) and participated in debates representing them. Many debate programs, which include the topic for discussion, lists of
speakers for and against, and judges names. Orations events programs list speakers and their topics, as well as music programs and other highlights. The bound volumes from state and interstate oratorical contests contain published versions of orations given by participants, including Beloit College and non-Beloit speakers.

**Series 2. Alethean Society**

This series contains bound, handwritten record books with meeting minutes, some in a very fragile state.

**Series 3. Archaean Union**

This series contains a sizeable collection of public meeting notices and other announcements for debates and orations. They kept detailed record books in the 1800s that included their Constitution, Preamble, and By-Laws. Robert K. Richardson also transcribed relevant materials from Round Table articles, Senate minutes, and other publications as part of his research for his update of the Beloit College history book.

**Series 4. Cliosophic Literary Society**

This series contains bound, handwritten record books with meeting minutes, some in a very fragile state.

**Series 5. Delian Society**

This series contains bound, handwritten record books that include their constitution, by-laws, and meeting minutes.

**Arrangement Note**

This collection has been compiled over the years through many separate accessions of various sizes from various offices and individuals, none of which has any accompanying documentation. The original order of the documents is unknown. The arrangement order presented here has been imposed by the College Archives staff.

**Related Collections**

- Beloit College Academic Honor Societies records (AC 2)
- Beloit College Junior Exhibition records (AC 70)
- Beloit College Presidents' Files – Irving Maurer papers (MC 4)
- Beloit College Publications collection – Round Table (AC 19)

**Subjects**

- Beloit College—History
- Debates and debating--United States--Societies, etc--History.
- Delta Sigma Rho
- Extemporaneous speaking
- Forensics (Public speaking)--Competitions.
- Speeches, addresses, etc.
References
Codex 1890
Codex 1897
Codex 1901
Fridays With Fred – Beloit College Register, a wartime publication, September 27, 2012
Richardson, Robert K. History of Beloit College, 1844-1942 (unpublished manuscript)
Round Table, November 18, 1896
Round Table, November 20, 1896
Round Table, January 26, 1916

Collection Inventory


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Series 2. Alethean Society, 1860-1909

Historical Note
There were two debating societies, the Delian and the Alethean, which held their weekly meetings for the discussion of all sorts of questions; and these jointly formed the Archaean Union, which once in each term had its public debate.
The Alethean Society was organized December 15, 1859. This society comprised one of the two divisions of the Archaean Society, which existed from 1851 until the division took place.

September 21, 1870, 9 men…resigned from the Alethean on account of some misunderstanding. These men formed the members of the Utropaean, but became members of the Alethean again by signing the constitution during December, 1870.

Joint meetings were held from time to time with the Delian Society, in which very fine, interesting debates arose.

[from Codex 1890 p. 59-62]

Prominent members include J.W. Blodgett, George B. Ingersoll, C.E. Peet.

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Series 3. Archaean Union, 1848-1964, bulk 1850-1907

Historical Note

The Archaean Union was the governing body overseeing publications and debating. They published the Round Table, sponsored oratorical contests, and ran a reading room, among other activities.

Archaean Union was founded December 15, 1859. Before that it was known as the Archaean Society. The Archaean Society held its first meeting on October 18, 1848, and at this time steps were taken for the formation of a constitution and the making of other preliminary arrangements. On December 7, 1848, a constitution was adopted and officers chosen. The first officers of the society were: President Joseph Collie, Vice President G.R. Clark, Secretary Stephen D. Peet, Treasurer W.C. Hooker, and Librarian Strong Wadsworth.

Public meetings began to be held soon after the formation of this organization, and, at the meeting held on December 12, 1849, the Archaean Magazine was read. This manuscript doubtless formed the beginning to which was later the Beloit College Monthly, and today, the Beloit College Round Table. This monthly magazine was first issued as a regular publication in November, 1853.

The interest in literary work was increased by public contests and public exercises of various kinds. But the results were not so beneficial where the competition was within a single society. Furthermore this one organization was doubtless fast increasing in numbers. Hence, a separation of the Archaean Society was effected December 15, 1859, becoming the Delian and the Alethean Society. The two societies although rivals, united in maintaining a joint society known as the
Archaean Union for the purpose of carrying out exercises of interest to both under a common name. The Archaean Union had a separate constitution, and officers elected at stated times.

Home contests were held each year in Beloit, and a select number of speakers are chosen to contest for the privilege of representing the College in the Wisconsin State Oratorical Contest. So often did representatives from the Archaean Union depart with the palm of victory from the state contests that the other associations withdrew from the State organization, leaving Beloit as the only member of the State Oratorical Association for two years.

At the Interstate Contests, which in 1890 had seven states represented, Beloit commanded recognition among the best. Debates were generally held once per term.

The Archaean Union also hosted lectures by prominent speakers during Commencement week.

Library and Reading Room. Perhaps no influence is more potent in maintaining the cordiality between the two societies and serves better to preserve community of interests than the Archaean Library. It is the custom to furnish the Reading Room with those periodicals and books that are not to be found in the College Library.

[from Codex 1890, p. 63-66]

“The Archaean Society—later, by fissure, the Archaean Union—was in existence almost as soon as there were students, its name was meant to indicate that it was the society of the earliest days. It did an invaluable work in teaching oratory until it was killed by the evolution of the social and the athletic sides of student-interest.

Archaean Union replaced by Associated Students. [1916 RT]

“It centralizes the student activities and leaves the power where it belongs, namely, in the hands of the students.”

Separate the duties of the Union into boards governing debates and oratory, the Round Table, and the reading room. Other boards representing the Associated Students of Beloit College included the General Board, Athletic Board, Library Board, and any other boards later to be created.

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Historical Note

Cliosophic Literary Society. Appears in 1901 Codex.

[from RT 11/18/1896] “The Cliosophic Literary Society is not dead nor dying. Also the spirit that pervades it is not the “old literary spirit” and has no connection with the names “Delian” and “Alethean,” which, however much they may have been honored by students a decade ago, are meaningless to the present members of the Cliosophic. The Delian and Alethean societies had died before the present backbone of the Cliosophic had entered college and a union of all that was left of the their earthly remains under the name, Beloit Literary Society, shared a like fate in less than 4 months after its organization.

During the spring term of 1895, nine students, feeling a desire for literary training along a line not furnished by the prescribed work of the college organized what was known as the Theta Eta Club. This club prospered through the efforts of those who were willing to give, not ‘periodic efforts’ but continuous effort and who had foresight enough to see that the value of a society demanded not upon number but upon the faithfulness of its members.

On November 20, 1896, a week after the conference that lay the basis for the Century Debating Society, and a week before the formal organization of the Century, the Cliosophic “showed its colors” in the first public debate of a literary society (Academy Junta notwithstanding) since the Alethean and Delian days, and the affair was a great success.”

“A Civics Club was started by interested students and professors in April, 1909. On its executive committee were Professors Chapin and Way. A notice of May 16, 1913 indicated an expected affiliation of the club with the Delians and the Cliosophs, the two older clubs having voted through a plan whereby ‘the two societies should devote one meeting a month, in joint session, to the interests of a civic department whose officers [should] be elected from the membership of the two societies.’ A plan to unite the two societies was ‘frowned upon by both organizations.’

RT 1/26/16: “One of the professors casually remarked about the passing of so many activities with the last college generation with nothing to take their place. In looking over the 1913 Codex we find that the following activities that existed have now passed away: …Delian and Cliosophic literary societies for men, Delphic and Aristonian literary societies for women…Today we have intergroup bowling and basketball…What takes the place of all those clubs and societies which then were well attended? The answer is easy to find. More emphasis on social functions and group activities has sapped the vitality of our students who formerly devoted their energies to the development of an intellect.”

The editorial was slightly misworded: the vitality was present, but it was being diverted into new channels. Both Delian and Cliosophic Societies had lists of members in the Codex appearing in 1915, though with dwindled numbers.
Series 5. Delian Society, 1860-1906

Historical Note

Delian. Prior to 1859, the Archaean society was the literary society of Beloit College. When the class of '63 entered, they desired the organization of two rival societies, thinking that by such rivalry a decided stimulus would be given to literary work in the College; but, on account of the strong attachment of the members for the old Archaean Society, no change seemed possible at that time. However, in December, 1859, the Archaean Society was divided, its constitution altered to meet the new arrangement, and itself re-christened the Archaean Union. The division was effected as follows:

Two seniors were chosen to represent the two societies respectively; these two then cast lots as to which should have first choice of the members; the one to whom the lot of first choice fell was to be known as Society Number One and the other as Society Number Two, until each should adopt a name of its own.

Society #1 met January 16, 1860 when they adopted a constitution and elected officers. On February 29, 1860, the Society adopted the classical name Delian. Besides having readings, debates, etc., the Delians have had lectures, mock trials and mock congresses. They have tried to fit themselves for active citizenship when they should leave these college walls.

Prominent members include President Edward Eaton, A.S. Wheeler, A.W. Whitney, J.A. Blaisdell.

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Delian Society - Record Book, 1876-1887  10
Delian Society - Record Book, 1887-1906  10
Photographs - Delian Literary Society  file cabinet