

HISTORICAL SKETCH

The Franklin Literary Society had its origins at the Germantown Manual Labor Academy in Pennsylvania. The Academy's first debating club, the Philomathean Society, was formed in July of 1830 and shortly thereafter renamed the Washington Literary Society. In November of 1831, twelve members resigned from this society and established the Franklin Literary Society. The new debating club was under the leadership of John J. Carrel '36. The name of the society was chosen because Dr. George Junkin, president of the Labor Academy and the first president of Lafayette college, had been associated with a Franklin Literary Society as a student at Jefferson College. Two possible reasons for the break from the Washington Literary Society have been suggested by college historians. The first is that a debate decision in the fall of 1831 caused dissension and the eventual resignation of the twelve members. The second is that the Franklin was formed in order to create honorable competition for students involved in the literary society. When the Labor Academy was moved to Easton in the spring of 1832 to form Lafayette College, eight of the original twelve Franklin members relocated as well. These students were meeting and debating before the college officially opened on May 9, 1832. The society continued to meet weekly until its dissolution in 1923.

The literary society was the first form of extra-curricular activity to appear on the Lafayette campus in the 19th century. Its importance to the student community was tremendous at a time when Greek fraternities did not yet exist on campus. Certain characteristics of the later Greek system could be found in the literary societies, such as rivalry and competition with the sister debating club, great secrecy at meetings, and the "rushing" of the Freshman class each fall. Both the Franklin and Washington Literary Societies provided the young men at Lafayette with an alternative to purely academic study.

Membership in the society was either on an active or honorary basis. Active members were undergraduates, while honorary members were either alumni, trustees, and professors of Lafayette College, or other eminent men elected by the society. Honorary members were asked to give the annual Commencement address before the literary societies. The active members were organized into three committees: the Prudential, which acted as a court of appeals for fines, the Criticizing, which reviewed compositions, and the Library Committee. Engineering students (Technicals) were permitted to join the society and were granted optional attendance as well as excuses from literary exercises.

The Franklin Literary Society, also called Franklin or Frank Hall, functioned mainly as a debating club. It provided the student with the opportunity to develop his oratorical, arguing, and writing skills outside of the classroom. From 1834-1881, meetings were held in a hall in South College. These weekly meetings consisted of certain literary exercises which remained basically the same throughout the existence of the organization. Members were required to deliver original orations, readings, declamations, essays, and debates. The debate topic was announced a week in advance and certain Hall members were assigned to argue either the "affirmative" or "negative" side of the issue. At the conclusion of the performance, the society voted on the winning side of the debate, as well as on the opinions about the issue regardless of who argued the best. This was usually referred to as the "merits of the question."

Functions of the society were not limited to those which occurred in the secrecy of the Hall. Public performances were frequent throughout the 19th century, where members recited essays and debated before the citizens of Easton. The Junior Oratorical contest was an annual event between the Franklin and Washington Literary Societies. This public debate was traditionally judged by the audience. Joint meetings between the two societies occurred more frequently by the turn of the century. These meetings included activities such as mock trials and a mock Republican Convention in May of 1908.

The literary society at Lafayette did not function merely as an extra-curricular activity for the student body; it also provided the college with the only library facilities it had for many years. The acquisition of books was based upon donations of students, alumni, and honorary members. A librarian was elected from the society and paid a minimal fee from the treasury for his services. Books were housed in the society library in Pardee. After the 1879 Pardee Hall fire, both literary societies were provided with new quarters in the West Wing, which were dedicated in May 1881. Franklin Hall continued to house its collection in this library until its dissolution in 1923. Approximately 2,000 volumes were given to Van Wickle Library at this time, including most of the records which are presently available in this collection.

The eventual dissolution of the literary society on campus appears to be related to the growth and popularity of the Greek system. Student involvement in "secret" organizations shifted from the debating society to the fraternity. The Lafayette student became more interested in an organization which emphasized social activities over intellectual pursuits. The records of the Franklin Literary Society reflect these changes in the concerns of the student. By the end of the 19th century, greater emphasis is placed upon social functions than literary exercises. Debates no longer occurred at every meeting and members appeared more interested in organizing dances and socials. Eventually attendance became a problem. In 1919, pressures from the college forced the two literary societies to call a special meeting to discuss a merger. The college felt that one of the Halls should be surrendered to provide badly-needed classroom space. The decision was postponed until 1921, when faculty members expressed their desire to see the societies merged as an honorary society. By 1923, all efforts to renew interest in the literary society ceased and Franklin Hall became defunct.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The Franklin Literary Society Records, 1831-1922 (6 linear feet), document the history of this debating club at Lafayette College. Materials span the life of the society from its establishment to its dissolution. Most of the records are in bound volumes, which are arranged by type--minutes, books of exercises, constitution and by-laws, early records, financial records, library records, roll books, and visitor's registers. Miscellaneous and unbound materials are located at the end of the collection.

The most note-worthy volumes in the collection are the minute books, constitution and by-laws, and early records. The minute books provide a comprehensive account of the business of the society throughout its existence. The constitution and by-laws outline the organization

**FRANKLIN LITERARY SOCIETY
RECORDS, 1831-1922**

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and regulations of the society. The volume of early records contains several valuable letters of prominent honorary members.

An index and appendices to the collection are located at the end of the description. Appendices provide listings of Franklin Literary Society debate topics and publications.

ARRANGEMENT

Box	1-9	Minute Books: 1831-1922
	10	Books of Exercises: 1877-1896
	11-12	Constitution and By-laws: ca. 1832-1908
	13	Early Records: 1831-1906(?)
	14-15	Financial Records: 1844-1910
	17-20	Library Records: 1846-1902
	21	Roll Book: 1870-1914
	22	Visitor's Register: 1858-1919
	23-25	Miscellaneous Records
	26	Gavels
	27	Diplomas (located in oversized section)

DESCRIPTIVE INVENTORY

Minutes: 1831-1922

The minute books contain entries which document the weekly meetings of the Franklin Literary Society. The first meeting of the society at the Manual Labor Academy in Germantown, Pennsylvania, on November 23, 1831, is the earliest entry recorded. The final meeting on March 27, 1922, appears in the minutes as well. The earliest minutes, those of November 1831 - June 1832 and December 1832 - August 1835, can be found in the "Early Records of the Franklin Literary Society" (Box 13). Minutes after August 1835 are in the bound minute books. The minutes are most complete between 1831-1849 and 1853-1915. During the period of 1850-1852 membership dropped dramatically and the society ceased to meet regularly. After 1915, students generally lost interest in the college debating societies and became involved with other extra-curricular activities.

The format of the minute entry remained basically the same throughout the existence of the Franklin Literary Society. The minutes mainly reflect the order of business for each meeting, without offering much insight on the actual orations, debates, and discussions. This varies over the years, with some secretaries providing a more detailed record of the business and concerns of the society. The format of most minute entries lists the exercises for the evening, such as declamations, orations, and debates, and those members responsible for each performance. Often there are references to committee business, but without great detail.

Perhaps the most valuable aspect of the minute books is the record of the weekly debate topic and decision found in each entry. The debate topics concern historical and contemporary issues, including politics, education, religion, and aspects of student life at Lafayette College.

**FRANKLIN LITERARY SOCIETY
RECORDS, 1831-1922**

**SKILLMAN LIBRARY
LAFAYETTE COLLEGE**

The group of students who most successfully argued for the evening is noted after each debate. A vote was also taken to find the opinion of the Hall on the debate question ("merits of the question").

Box 1 contains the most noteworthy volume of the minutes, Selden J. Coffin's "Abstract of the Minutes of the Franklin Literary Society: 1831-1856." Coffin, 1858 Franklin Literary Society alumnus, faculty member, and administrator of Lafayette College, provides not only an abstract of the society's minutes in this volume but also histories of the college and the organizations which had existed on campus prior to 1856. Coffin apparently never completed his abstract, as the minutes end in 1844.

Box 1	Minute Book: 1831-1856 (Abstract) 1835-1839 1839 (Nov)-1848 (Aug)	[See Box 13 for minutes from Nov. 1831 - June 1832 and Dec. 1832 - Aug. 1835]
Box 2	Minute Book: 1848 (Aug)-1854 (May) 1854 (May)-1859 (Mar)	
Box 3	Minute Book: 1859 (April)-1867 (July)	
Box 4	Minute Book: 1867 (July)-1873 (May)	
Box 5	Minute Book: 1873 (May)-1881 (Sept)	
Box 6	Minute Book: 1881 (Sept)-1890 (Feb)	
Box 7	Minute Book: 1890 (Feb)-1900 (Oct)	
Box 8	Minute Book: 1900 (Nov)-1917 (Nov)	
Box 9	Minute Book: 1917 (Dec)-1922 (Mar)	

Books of Exercises: 1877-1896

The Book of Exercises was kept by the Critic, who was responsible for maintaining a record of the performances each week. Performances vary over the years and include such exercises as declamations, essays, orations, addresses, readings, and debates. After recording the performances for the evening and those members responsible for each, the debate topic is stated. This is followed by a listing of students on the "affirmative" or "negative" side of the debate.

The information recorded in the Books of Exercises can also be found in the minute books. The Books of Exercises are most valuable as a summary of debate topics and literary exercises for the period of 1877-1896. The records of December 1885 to May 1886 have been lost.

Box 10	Book of Exercises: 1877 (Sept)-1885 (Nov) 1886 (June)-1892 (Oct) 1892 (Oct)-1896 (Nov)	
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Visitor's Register: 1858-1919

This register records the names and residences of all visitors to Franklin Literary Society events. Names include visiting honorary members, alumni, fellow members of the Lafayette community, and young women. It is interesting to note that after the turn of the century, as the society became more of a social organization, many of the names recorded are those of visiting young women attending "Ladies' Nights" and annual dances.

Box 22 Visitor's Register: 1858-1919

Miscellaneous Records

Miscellaneous records include loose and bound material mainly pertaining to the Franklin Literary Society. Some of these records have been published, such as the catalogs of members and hall dedication addresses. Other materials include two books containing lithographs and salt-print photographs of Hall members, an address given before the city of Easton called "The Reflector," various loose notes on the minutes of meetings, and memorabilia, such as the Frank Hall badge of membership.

Boxes 24-27 contain materials of both the Franklin and Washington Literary Societies. Annual Commencement addresses given before the literary societies can be found in Box 25. These addresses were generally presented by honorary members and were published by the society they were affiliated with after Commencement. A listing of these publications can be found in the Index. The gavels and diplomas of both societies are stored in Boxes 26 and 27.

Box 23 Catalogue of Members: 1836 and 1862 (1 folder)
 Dedication Addresses: 1840 and 1881 (1 folder)
 Essays: 1844 and 1845 (1 folder)
 Photographs of Members: 1860 and 1861
 The Reflector: 1871

Box 24 Correspondence: 1832-1895 (20 folders)

Box 25 Financial (4 folders)
 Library (1 folder)
 Memorabilia -General (1 folder)
 -Badges (1 folder)
 -Reunions (1 folder)
 -New Men Exercises (1 folder)
 Notes and Committee Reports (2 folders)
 Notes-Selden J. Coffin (1 folder)
 Publications-Addresses: 1833-1871 (15 folders)

Box 26 Gavels

Box 27 Diplomas (2 folders)
 1832 letter to Marquis de Lafayette (located in oversized section)

SAMPLE DEBATE TOPICS

The following debate topics have been selected from the Franklin Literary Society minute books dating 1831-1922:

November, 1831

"Should Georgia extend her laws over the Cherokee nations?" First debate.

ca. 1831

"Is William H. Harrison worthy to be elected President of the U.S.?"

Decided in the affirmative. College historian S.J. Coffin believes this decision illustrates that the FLS as a whole had been "Whig, American, Republican - in a word - anti-democratic from its founding to the present time." (1859)

January 22, 1836

"Are males more influential in promoting virtue than females?"

Decided in the negative.

May 20, 1836

"Should the free people of colour in Pennsylvania have the right of suffrage?"

Decided in the affirmative with regards to the argument, in the negative on the merits of the question.

March 3, 1837

"Are works of fiction capable of producing good moral effects?"

Decided in the negative.

June 26, 1840

"Should divorces be granted by the legislature of any state?"

June 4, 1841

"Was General Jackson justifiable in proclaiming Martial Law at New Orleans?"

November 24, 1848

"Would it be of ultimate benefit to Ireland to gain its independence under present circumstances?"

May 25, 1849 and June 11, 1852

"Should monasteries, nunneries, and the confessional be tolerated in the U.S.?"

Decided in the negative.

**FRANKLIN LITERARY SOCIETY
RECORDS, 1831-1922**

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June 15, 1849

"Should females be allowed the privileges of voting at our Presidential elections?"
Decided in the negative.

March 8, 1850

"Should the slaves of the South be set free?"

April 4, 1851

"Ought such secret societies as the fraternity of the Free Mason and the Independent Order of Odd Fellows to be abolished?"

December 12, 1851

"Would it be good policy for the U.S. to unite with any of the European powers to prevent the intervention of Russia in the Hungarian affairs?"
Decided in the negative.

September 24, 1852

"Should the Fugitive Slave Law be repealed?"
Decided in the negative with regards to the argument and the merits of the question.

November 10, 1854

"Is Catholicism antagonistic to the institutions of this country?"
Decided in the affirmative with regards to the argument, in the negative as to the merits of the question.

December 15, 1854

"Would a National University be beneficial?"
Decided in the affirmative with regards to the argument and the merits of the question.

December 14, 1855

"Ought the U.S. attempt to effect a peace between the Allied powers and Russia in the present war?"
Decided in the affirmative with regards to the argument, in the negative as to the merits of the question.

January 22, 1868

"Should President Johnson be impeached?"
Decided in the negative with regards to the argument, in the affirmative as to the merits of the question.

February 1, 1882

"Resolved that the life and character of Edgar A. Poe exerts a greater influence for evil than his works did for good."
Decided in the negative with regards to the argument and the merits of the question.

February 2, 1887

"Resolved that as a means of capital punishment, electricity should be substituted for hanging."
Decided in the negative.

January 25, 1899

"Resolved that hazing should be abolished."
Decided in the affirmative.

November 19, 1902

"Resolved: that a mine owner is justified in discriminating against a member of the United Mine Workers."
Decided in the negative with regards to the argument, in the affirmative as to the merits of the question.

October 29, 1919

"Resolved: that the U.S. should adopt the League of Nations covenant without reservations."
General discussion, no debate.

March 2, 1921

"Resolved: that the Gold Dust Twins should be made to wear more clothes in the winter time."
Decided on the affirmative.

APPENDIX - ADDRESSES, ESSAYS, AND PUBLICATIONS, 1833-1888

The following list of publications includes manuscript essays written by students as well as printed addresses delivered before the literary societies by honorary members at the annual Commencement ceremonies. Notation in parenthesis at the end of each entry indicates the collection (Franklin Literary Society or Washington Literary Society) and box number in which the work may be found.

Allen, R.P. "Benjamin Franklin." 1886. (FLS-25)

Banks, J. "Address." 1840. (FLS-25)

Breckinridge, R.J. "A Discourse on the Formation and Development of the American Mind."
September 20, 1837. (FLS-25)

Brewster, F.C. "Religio et Justitia His Dirige Te." July 30, 1861. (FLS-25)

Brown, Alexander E. "Dedication of the FLS Hall." December 20, 1839. (FLS-23)

**FRANKLIN LITERARY SOCIETY
RECORDS, 1831-1922**

**SKILLMAN LIBRARY
LAFAYETTE COLLEGE**

- Chapman, C.J.A. "Woman." March 20, 1844. (WLS-3)
- Clark, W.G. "Address." July 4, 1840. (WLS-9)
- Coulter, D. "The Influence of Benevolent Association Upon the American People." April 1, 1835. (WLS-3)
- Dallas, G.M. "Address." July 4, 1835. (FLS-25)
- Ditts, J.N. "The Triumph of Christianity - A Poem." March 22, 1843. (WLS-3)
- Dougherty, D. "Fears for the Future of the Republic." July 26, 1859. (FLS-25)
- Elliott, C. "The Effects of the Reformation on the Progress of Knowledge." March 31, 1837. (WLS-3)
- Hamill, S.M. "Address." February 22, 1867. (WLS-9)
- Harris, J.M. "The Egyptian Prince; and Hebrew Lawgiver." 1868. (FLS-25)
- Heckman, George. "Claudius of Turin; An Original Oration." September 17, 1844. (FLS-23)
- Heckman, George. "Passing Away." March 19, 1845. (FLS-23)
- Henry, S.C. "Address." July 27, 1852. (FLS-25)
- Ingersoll, J.R. "Address." July 4, 1835. (FLS-25)
- Levin, L.C. "Intemperance: The Prelude to Gambling and Suicide, as Illustrated in the Life of Rev. C.C. Colton, Author of Lacon." September 18, 1844. (FLS-25)
- Lewis, J.M. "The Divine Superintendence Manifested in the Discovery and Settlement of America." April 3, 1839. (WLS-3)
- March, F.A., Jr. "Dedication of the New Hall of the FLS." May 2, 1881. (FLS-23)
- McClure, A.K. "Everyday Life." June 20, 1871. (FLS-25)
- McPhaine, J.H. "On the Study of History." nd. (WLS-3)
- Mendenhall, H.G. "The Reflector." 1871. (FLS-23)
- M'Jilton, J.N. "The Path of Life." 1841. (FLS-25)
- Moore, J.G. "The Rise and Progress of Liberal Principles." March 24, 1842. (WLS-23)

**FRANKLIN LITERARY SOCIETY
RECORDS, 1831-1922**

**SKILLMAN LIBRARY
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Nairne, C.M. "The Morals and Manners of the Class Room." 1858. (FLS-25)

Porter, T.C. "Egypt: A Poem." March 25, 1840. (WLS-3)

Porter, W.A. "Address." September 20, 1843. (FLS-25)

Scott, J.M. "Address." July 4, 1834. (FLS-25)

Stein, F.D. "Joan of Arc, or, The Heroine." March 19, 1846. (WLS-3)

Wood, J.W. "Ancient Civilization on the Nile." July 25, 1865. (FLS-25)

Aula Washingtonia. "An Account of the Annual Reunion." June 26, 1883. (WLS-9)

Aula Washingtonia. "An Account of the New Hall and Library." April, 1881. (WLS-9)

Aula Washingtonia. "An Account of the Dedication of the New Hall." April 7, 1881. (WLS-9)