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Glatfelter Hall: A Colorful History

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Glatfelter Hall: A Colorful History

Description

"I had facilities paint over the ugly pink leafy border that went all around my office." With that statement it seemed as though my lead had hit a dead end. But what Professor Ben Bruce, the current head of the Management department, had just told me was just the beginning of a puzzle waiting to be pieced together. Professor Dan DeNicola of the Philosophy department had shared with me a story describing a stenciled artwork located on the fourth floor of Glatfelter Hall with roots stemming in a secret literary society. Immediately this story captivated my interest and that afternoon I headed up to the Management Department. With a determined face I searched the floor looking for any abnormality that colored the white walls. Judging by my confused expression, Professor Bruce stopped to ask if I needed help with anything. Once I told him what I was looking for he, looked down and shook his head. [*excerpt*]

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- Academic Term: Spring 2010
- Course Instructor: Dr. Michael J. Birkner '72

Hidden in Plain Sight is a collection of student papers on objects that are "hidden in plain sight" around the Gettysburg College campus. Topics range from the Glatfelter Hall gargoyles to the statue of Eisenhower and from historical markers to athletic accomplishments. You can download the paper in pdf format and click "View Photo" to see the image in greater detail.

Keywords

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Disciplines

Public History | United States History

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Glatfelter Hall

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Hidden in Plain Sight
Glatfelter Hall: A Colorful History

History 300

Historical Methods

Dr. Michael Birkner

By

Kaitlyn Roman

Spring 2010



“I had facilities paint over the ugly pink leafy border that went all around my office.”¹

With that statement it seemed as though my lead had hit a dead end. But what Professor Ben Bruce, the current head of the Management department, had just told me was just the beginning of a puzzle waiting to be pieced together. Professor Dan DeNicola of the Philosophy department had shared with me a story describing a stenciled artwork located on the fourth floor of Glatfelter Hall with roots stemming in a secret literary society. Immediately this story captivated my interest and that afternoon I headed up to the Management Department. With a determined face I searched the floor looking for any abnormality that colored the white walls. Judging by my confused expression, Professor Bruce stopped to ask if I needed help with anything. Once I told him what I was looking for he, looked down and shook his head.

“The stenciling on the wall looked like a seventies country wallpaper. It was for some type of reading club. I moved into the office in 2005, painters came up and didn’t know if they should try and re-paint flowery border. I told them not to worry about it, and just paint over it.”² With the artwork gone, it seemed Professor Bruce had closed the door on my research. In doing so, he opened up a window. He led me to a small set of stairs leading down to the offices on the eastern side of the fourth floor. Within the newly constructed brick walls, there were four stone blocks with intricate leaf designs carved into them. I immediately connected the stencil to the stone blocks, and concluded the stencil was most likely mirrored from these, explaining the “leafy design.” Professor Bruce commented these old stones were added to the design of the floor to commemorate the literary clubs as well. Skeptical of what I could find, I left the Management Department with a new motivation to learn more about the multifaceted past of Glatfelter Hall.

¹ Ben Bruce, personal interview, February 9, 2010.

² Ibid.

“The border was really very nice; I don’t know why they covered it up. It looked like sort of an Amish inspired stencil. It was purple, and green with some burgundy color. But it was a faded dull shade.”³ Karen Frey, also a member of the Management Department, described the artwork to me. She had a vague memory of the pattern, for it was now five years it had been gone. However, she did remember that her daughter, an art student, drew an impressionistic replication of it on a post-it note in her office. After retrieving the design, I had Professor Frey draw a rendition herself as best she could of what she could recall of the stencil’s design. When I compared her drawing, and her daughter’s to that of the stone, they differed enough to tell that they were not the same. I had asked her to come take a closer look at the blocks laid in the brick walls, and she confirmed it was not at all an identical design. The idea I had initially dismissed had now had developed into the beginnings of a story. Could the painted border on the walls, or the stone blocks really be a part of a secret literary society that had once met in the attic of Glatfelter Hall? It was an exciting thought that only the college archives could shed light on.

Upon entering the Gettysburg College Archives for the first time I was immediately drawn to the enlarged photos that enveloped the back wall. The first ones that grabbed my attention were rooms elaborate in design captioned “Literary Societies.” The display in the College Archives made it obvious these societies were far from secret, and a well known component of the college’s history. The Philomathaeian and Phrenakosmian Literary Societies, as they were named, were a staple of both academic and social life on campus. They provided a competitive edge to the curriculum for professors and students to engage in together. These

³ Karen Fry, personal interview, February 9, 2010.

bodies, I learned are unfamiliar to not only our generation of students at Gettysburg College, but to present day students on the whole.⁴

“Many early and mid-nineteenth century colleges had two literary societies, to one or the other of which almost the entire student body belonged and whose interests might actually be wider than those of the curriculum itself.” Colleges similar to what Gettysburg would become such as Dickinson, Jefferson, Washington, Allegheny and Marshall each had dual literary societies. Before Gettysburg College, or even Pennsylvania College, was founded, professors Michael Jacobs and John H. Marsden took thirty-five students into the Gymnasium⁵ and proposed an idea. They wished to establish societies of their own.

Marsden then took half of the students, those whose last names were at the beginning of the alphabet, and organized the Phrenakosmian Society. Jacobs took the other half, those whose names were at the end of the alphabet, and organized the Philomathæan Society. Both Phrena and Philo, as they were called, were carried over to the College in 1832 upon its founding.⁶

Very quickly the two societies took hold on the campus. Each formulated their own constitutions and governing bodies within them, making them entirely student run. The goals of each were established with their founding. They varied slightly, but ultimately determined to accomplish the same goals. The Constitution of the Philomathæan Society’s first section states, “The object of this Society shall be to cultivate and diffuse among its members liberal principals, and to promote the great objects of social, moral and intellectual improvement.”⁷ Likewise, the Phrenakosmian Society’s reads, “The object of this Society shall be the promotion of friendship,

⁴ Dr. Charles H. Glatfelter, personal interview, February 20, 2010.

⁵ Dr. Glatfelter explained during the interview that Gettysburg was simply a classical school in 1827. In 1829 the Gymnasium was added which provided the site for more courses and faculty members in which it could then manifest into a College.

⁶ Charles H. Glatfelter, *A Salutary Influence: Gettysburg College 1832-1985*, Vol. 1 (Mechanicsburg: W & M Printing, 1987), 159.

⁷ Constitution Philomathæan Society, 1849, 11. Found in Gettysburg College Archives.

the attainment of knowledge and improvement in composition, declaiming and debating.”⁸

These opening lines to the constitutions speak to the integrity of each society while catering to almost every aspect of student life.

Each society aimed to cover a broad spectrum of academic and social endeavors. Among the minutes of both Societies, there was evidence of student speeches, debates, essays and performances. Just as the founding professors had hoped, a competitive rivalry fueled students to immerse themselves in their work. Once perfected among their own, members would challenge the other Society. With this competitive edge, surprisingly, the societies remained balanced. This can be attributed in part to the following “Mutual Agreements” initiated in 1831.

1st When the roll of one Society exceeds that of the other by one third – the Society containing the greater number shall close its doors until the other shall have received a number equal to one half the difference.”

2nd No individual can be elected to honorary membership by both Societies except the faculty of the college “ex officio.”

3rd Upon any public occasion in which both Societies are concerned the members shall walk a Philo with a Phrena.

4th The Societies shall occupy the “left side of the Church upon entrance, alternatively – (Phrenas ’46) (Philos ’47).

5th Neither Society shall receive as an active member any student not matriculated, unless he be under fifteen years of age, in which case he must have been connected with the “Institution” six weeks.

6th The admission fee shall be five dollars.

7th A list of honorary members shall be exchanged at the commencement of each winter session.

8th There shall be an annual contest at the end of the winter session by an essayist, speaker & debater from each Society whose productions shall be original. The challenge shall be given alternately within three weeks from the commencement of winter session. The Society challenged shall return a question for discussion within three weeks after the challenge shall have been received (Phrenas challenge for ’46) (Philos for ’47).

9th There shall be an address delivered annually at the close of the Summer session by an Honorary Member of one Society to be chosen alternately (Phrenas ’46) (Philos 1847).⁹

⁸ Constitution and By-Laws of the Phrenakosmian: Society of Penna. College 1837, Gettysburg College Archives.

⁹ Henry Cline, Constitution Philomathæan Society, 1849, 1-3, It should be noted that In Dr. Glatfelter’s *Gettysburg College*, it is stated on pg. 160, “Over the years the initiation fee grew from 50¢ to \$5.” The accessed archival Constitutions must contain an updated amendment.

These terms made the societies primarily equal. An interesting stipulation was the obligation for one society to limit the addition of new members until the other reached a quota. Such laws prove that neither society was truly meant to outshine the other, nor become exceedingly more popular. Their purpose was to remain solely in the interest of student growth and development.

With academic equivalence, there was bound to be unavoidable deviance among the sister organizations. For example, in the June 1886 issue of Pennsylvania College Monthly, it is stated explicitly that the “misuse of the society libraries is against the common principle of morality and a growing evil.” The article explains, “For some time our Literary Societies have been occasioned much trouble and some loss by a flagrant abuse of their respective libraries. If the Society men would be more alert for these open violations of their rules, they would soon be of less frequent occurrence.”¹⁰ This article suggests the rivalry continued outside of formal debate. Stealing books from the opponent’s library should be expected amongst competing college students, and such “misuse” of the books remained a tradition throughout their existence.

Perhaps the strongest material assets of the literary societies were their libraries. Philo and Phrena, as they were nicknamed, both took great pride in their collections. Students were determined to compile the best resources in their respective libraries. Outnumbering the other was always an added incentive. Faculty often utilized the student resources. “In 1855 the College catalogue listed for the first time the size of the Philo (2,850 volumes) and the Phrena (2,950 volumes) libraries. In that year there were

¹⁰ P.M. Bikle, Ed. *Pennsylvania College Monthly*, Vol. X, No. 6 (Gettysburg: J.E Wible Steam Printer, June 1886) Gettysburg College Archives. A note of interest was that of the Associate Editors, there was one Philo and one Phrena staff member, the same for the Business Managers listed as well. This is an excellent example of the maintained balance of the two societies on campus.

but 3,000 volumes in the College library.”¹¹ The increased growth in membership and library holdings between both Philo and Phrena forced the school to accommodate them in terms of space. Now that almost every enrolled student had become a member, the College edifice, Pennsylvania Hall, could no longer satisfy their needs.¹²

“As early as 1880 the editor of the Pennsylvania College Monthly, Professor P.M. Birkle, wrote of the need for a structure that could house libraries, recitation facilities, and a chapel.”¹³ When ample funds from the College were raised, “the contract was awarded to W.A Slage, of Hanover, PA on November 10, 1887 for \$77,457.00, and work began on Wednesday, June 27, 1888 at 4pm.” A large crowd met outside of Pennsylvania Hall to hear the address given by J. G Morris, the last living founder of Pennsylvania College.”¹⁴ He laid the corner stone in which John A. Dempwolf would use to build an architectural masterpiece, reviving Gothic and Romanesque styles that became popular in the 1880’s. The building was completed in September of 1889, and the College quickly took advantage of the new space.¹⁵

It contained six large halls—one for the libraries, one for the museum, two for the literary societies, and two reserved for unspecified future needs. It had four classrooms on the first floor, four on the second, and one on the third. The College President’s office lay to the left of the main entrance and a reception room to the right.¹⁶

¹¹ Glatfelter, Gettysburg College, 1: 161.

¹² Ibid., 163.

¹³ Dr. Norman O. Forness, “Glatfelter Hall: Gilded Age Building Reflects a Past Era in Academic History,” Gettysburg College Bulletin, Alumni Issue, 3-7. Found by Professor Joanne Myers, her copy given to me after an interview.

¹⁴ Martha E. Epley, Glatfelter Hall Report, May 28, 1924, 1-3. A student’s paper from her sophomore year for a History of Education class. Gettysburg College Archives.

¹⁵ I attempted to locate original, or scanned copies of the 1888 blueprints. However the College’s copies were destroyed by water damage. Currently, I am waiting to receive a scanned image from Mark D. Shermeyer, the president of SAA Architects, located in York, PA for he has an interest in the Dempwolf architecture. I am still waiting to hear back from the York County Heritage Trust, who does have original Dempwolf blueprints, however I am unsure if any are actually of Glatfelter Hall.

¹⁶ Forness, “Glatfelter Hall: Gilded Age,” 3-7.

The Literary Societies made use of the New Recitation Building as it was called, and were eager to move into their new spaces. Both societies' reactions were shown in the 1892 *Spectrum*.¹⁷ The Phrena page celebrated their new room, "The Hall is on the 3rd floor South end. The room was furnished with oak furniture and maroon leather upholstery. The seating capacity is ninety-five, with marginal room for a hundred more." The students recall, "We were ushered into the new Phrena on June 11 '90 and on this festive occasion, twenty two candidates were initiated."¹⁸ In the Phrena Minute Book, on this date, the recording secretary noted at the beginning of the page, "For the first time in the fine and beautiful new hall."¹⁹

As content as Phrena was, Philo could not argue the same. They were unsatisfied with their designated hall on the northern end. The Philomathæan page elaborates, "When it was found that this hall had fallen to her lot, in the shape in which it then was, it was unfit for literary purposes. The first move was to notify faculty and architect to have that changed, which was done, though not completed until the middle of the next year."²⁰ The reaction of the Philo society upon receiving its new room seems unbelievable. For a student run organization to convince the College to rehire an architect to design the room a "better fit" room is astonishing. On the other hand, with faculty support, and more books than the College library itself, it becomes a different story. The completed room was described as decorated with "the finest velvet carpet, suitable moquette border and large gold-colored chenille curtains. The walls frescoed in oil of a delicate pink tint."²¹

¹⁷ The Archives oldest *Spectrum* dates back to 1892, in the Editorial on page 7, it is clear that it is the College's first yearbook.

¹⁸ *The Spectrum* (Gettysburg: Gettysburg College, 1892) 77. Found in Gettysburg College Archives.

¹⁹ Minutes Phrenakosmian Society, June 11, 1890 Minutes. Found in Gettysburg College Archives.

²⁰ *The Spectrum*, (Gettysburg: Gettysburg College, 1892) 83. Found in Gettysburg College Archives.

²¹ *The Spectrum* (Gettysburg: Gettysburg College, 1892) 83. Found in Gettysburg College Archives.

The addition of the new halls helped membership across campus to skyrocket. “The 1899 Spectrum stated that of 1,068 graduates, 562 belonged to Philo, 479 to Phrena, and only 27 to neither. Every graduating member of the class of 1904 was affiliated with one or the other of these societies.”²² This period was the apex of both societies; for they enjoyed a greatly influential presence on campus. However, their reign would slowly come to an end. An increased interest in Greek organizations and athletics was taking the college by storm. The 1924 Spectrum reported,

Like her sister organization at Gettysburg, Phrena is not at this time enjoying a period of prosperity and popularity, the greatly increased number of “extra-curricular activities” has occasioned the literary society to be among the first to be shoved to the background.²³

Furthermore the caption reads, “To the score or more now composing the backbone of Phrena, she has never ceased to be the fountain of inspiration and knowledge, rivaled only by her sister society, Philo.” The dedication and remorse of the members to these societies can be felt within these passages. The page ends with “Phrena again will return to its own and be a strong factor in advancing among the students on campus.”²⁴

Unfortunately, Phrena never fully returned to campus fully the following year.

The 1925 Spectrum would be the last yearbook to grant the societies their own pages. The captions beneath their photos both showcase their strengths and contributions to the College. The Phrenakosmian page insists

Organizations of such caliber cannot die. Resorting to the “war measure” of combined meetings may be a step backward but we feel confident that the societies are ready to battle for their ultimate

²² Glatfelter, A Salutory Influence, 1: 332.

²³ *The Spectrum* (Gettysburg: Gettysburg College, 1924) 186. Found in Gettysburg College Archives.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

individual existence and in so doing lofty positions in sunlight will be their reward.²⁵

The college mandated the two societies and their skeletal members merge to one. Membership within the incoming class was not substantial enough to sustain even the joined group which thereby warranted the official close of both the Philomathaeon and Phrenakosmian Societies in 1924. The Gettysburgian published in a September 1924 issue an article titled: “Literary Societies Pass into the Ages.” The article explained that as the College expected, the attempted revival of the Societies each fall for the past few years had failed to restore student interest. After their last meeting, it was decided the furniture from each hall, along with Philo’s piano, would be sold to finance new books for the College’s collection. Phrena’s piano, one of the best in the country, would be given as a gift to the school and housed in Brua Chapel. The article also reported that “Phrena Hall, now three classrooms, each with a capacity for about thirty-five students, is ready for use. Philo Hall will have books lining each wall, about a dozen reading tables, equipped with desk lamps, will be at the disposal of the students.”²⁶

With the new found space and growing student body Glatfelter Hall underwent an extensive renovation in the summer following the 1928 academic year. In the 1920’s the College had reached approximately 500 students. New faculty was hired that needed office space. Consequently, the building was gutted to the extent where Robert Fortenbaugh, the head of the History Department, worried about its stability. He lived on

²⁵ *The Spectrum* (Gettysburg: Gettysburg College, 1925) 198. Found in Gettysburg College Archives.

²⁶ “Literary Societies Pass into the Ages,” *The Gettysburgian*, September 24, 1924, 3. Found in Gettysburgian Newspaper Archives.

Broadway, just a block from Glatfelter Hall, and used to walk over every morning (especially on weekends) to make sure that the building had not collapsed.²⁷

The Gettysburgian's November 21st article announced the opening of the newly remodeled building for the following Monday. It describes the building's new uses in great detail.

The first floor is described to be occupied by the offices of the college administration, and by the Mathematics, Greek and German departments. The classrooms on the second floor were designed to house the English, Latin, History and Philosophy, Romance Languages and Bible departments. The third floor would be home to the Economics, Engineering and Education departments where the former reading room had once been. Additionally, the attic and basement were now made to be accessible. The basement now held classes relating to the Military Sciences and Electrical and Mechanical Engineering. The attic, given a new concrete floor was intended to be used for storage, and no classes would be held there.²⁸

“I didn't really notice the walls; I was worried about falling through the floor. There were steps missing on our way up to the attic. I remember I was wearing a skirt and heels that day. There were empty bottles, dead pigeons and dust everywhere.” Ruth Miller, currently working in the Facilities Services office describes her first time seeing the Glatfelter Hall attic in 1988. At the time she was working in Financial Services under William Van Arsdale. He had been working on maximizing space within the college without constructing any new buildings pending financial constraints. With the addition on Weidensall Hall, he insisted the Glatfelter attic would make a great new location for his Financial Administration and Financial Services offices. Upon taking his entire staff up to see it, Ruth described her co-worker's reactions as identical to hers. No one wanted

²⁷ Glatfelter, interview.

²⁸ “New Interior,” *The Gettysburgian*, November 21, 1928, 1-4. Found in Gettysburgian Newspaper Archives.

to move from the comfortable first floor of Penn Hall.²⁹ Van Arsdale did not stop after his office refused to move. He went across campus asking various professors if they would consider relocating to Glatfelter Hall. All of them declined upon hearing that he really meant the attic. But when he approached management Professor Bill Rosenbach, he received a different response.

“Show me what you are going to do.” Professor Rosenbach jumped at the opportunity to isolate the Management Department from the crowded first floor of Glatfelter Hall, which he shared with the Economics and English Departments. “The opportunity was there, and he showed me some preliminary plans. I liked his ideas, but I would only agree under two conditions.” Professor Rosenbach told the architect that he would only take the space if “we [Management] were the only ones up there, and there was no aluminum or plastic.”³⁰ Professor Rosenbach explained that he absolutely wanted to maintain the character of the building.³¹

“There was artwork on the bricks. The stenciling that was replicated later was all around the upper wall all around the ceiling.” Professor Rosenbach explained that upon finding it, Professor Agard, in the Visual Arts Department, came in to take pictures. After the new drywall was finished, he used the photographs to replicate it. Together with his students he made

²⁹ Ruth Miller, personal interview, February 16, 2010.

³⁰ Professor James Agard had played a major role in the 1988-1989 renovation of Glatfelter Hall. He has an undergraduate degree in architecture, and helped the architect to design the space.

³¹ Bill Rosenbach, phone interview, February 25, 2010. Professor Rosenbach has also informed me that he has an original copy of the Glatfelter Hall floor plans. He is away on vacation, our phone interview was from South Carolina, but I plan to meet him when he comes back to town. I intend on scanning a copy for the College Archives.

templates so they could stencil the design up there, and then match the paint. “It was because of him and his students that the artwork was not all lost to begin with.”³²

“It was a pale shade of red, green, with some blue in it.” David Swisher, the Assistant Director of Access and Special Projects described the artwork border to me in his office as he could. He was well aware of its [former] existence³³ for he had been directly involved with Professor Rosenbach and the architects that restored the Glatfelter attic. Mr. Swisher explained some details of the project such as: the floor had to be jack-hammered, re-poured and equipped with steel beams. They added an elevator, new windows and a new roof from Italy to the building.³⁴ In order to join the new section they had to break through the exterior walls. In order to preserve the architecture, the design team did this as strategically as possible. For example, the open archway leading into the Management Department was once a window, which allowed the design to remain intact. He explained the origin of the carved stones that had captivated my initial interest. He personally had made sure that they were saved from the exterior renovation and “put back into the building” as he put it. “They were hand-carved made of sandstone, and should be preserved along with the history of the building. And that’s why we incorporated them into the walkway leading down to the offices.”³⁵

Throughout the duration of my research, I learned an immense amount of information about the Gettysburg community I am a part of—past and present. I went from researching a mythical secret literary society that met in an attic; to discovering a part of college history that

³² Until this segment of the interview, I had been under the impression that professional artists had come in and replicated the design. Upon learning it was a professor and team of students who restored the artwork, I intend to interview Professor Agard, who is still a faculty member at Gettysburg College.

³³ David Swisher informed me that if the painters had used latex paint in 2005 to cover the border around the Management offices, it could be dissolved for the artwork underneath was done in the original medium of oil paint.

³⁴ On an interesting note, the roof imported from Italy is guaranteed to last 100 years. Additionally, in 1990, the rest of the floors were renovated again as well in part from a government grant.

³⁵ David Swisher, personal interview, February 18, 2010.

helped to shape Gettysburg's foundation as a liberal arts college. Through the interviews I conducted I analyzed different perspectives and ultimately found the meaning behind both the stenciled border³⁶ and the elaborate carved stones mounted in the bricks. Although there is still much more to the story, I found their purpose remember the Philomathaeian and Phrenakosmian Literary Societies³⁷ along with the accompanying history. I would be interested to inquire whether physical plaques may be put in selected spaces on the fourth floor of Glatfelter Hall, so students in the future will have the opportunity to enjoy the same experience.

³⁶ Refer to the Philomathaeian Hall photograph, in the upper left-hand corner it is just clear enough to notice the original stencil from the hall.

³⁷ Philomathaeian Hall and Phrenakosmian Hall photographs, Ca. 1890. Found in Gettysburg College Archives.

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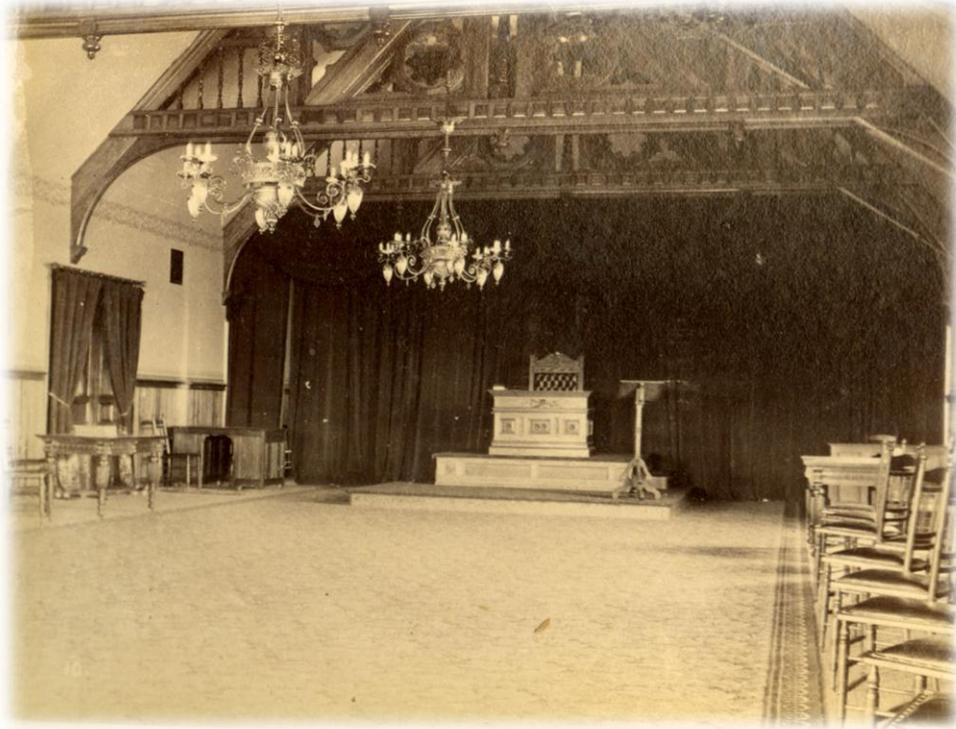
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Philomathean Society Hall



Phrenakosmian Society Hall