

History of the Franklin Society of Denison University

FEW of the many institutions here at Denison have exerted such a powerful influence for good as has Franklin Literary Society, an institution of noble aims kept alive through the sixty-five years of its continuous existence by the efforts of many men, most of whom have done honor to the Society and to their Alma Mater.

In 1836, the date of the founding of the Calliopean Literary Society, there existed in Denison other, smaller, debating societies. These were looked upon with favor by the Calliopeans, as they trained debators who frequently entered Calliopes' ranks. Ezra H. Ferris, of the class of 1843, at that time a member of the Calliopean Society, becoming disgusted on account of the prolonged meetings of that Society, withdrew from membership and connected himself with one of the smaller debating clubs. He saw here an opportunity, so marshaled his forces, and in 1841 another society was formed, the Franklin Society. The members of this Society quietly solicited for membership the desirable men in the Freshman class, and then petitioned the faculty for permission to exist as a new literary society. This was refused on the grounds that one such organization was enough. Two years later a petition was sent to the legislature of the State of Ohio, signed by twenty-nine men, among them Ezra H. Ferris, '43; W. S. Wheaton, '46; W. P. Kerr, '45, with the result that on January 19, 1843, the charter of Franklin Society was granted them.

At the close of the winter term in 1843 the Society made its first public appearance. Each member appeared in chapel with the Franklin badge, a rose mounted on a blue ribbon bearing the name, "Franklin." The Calliopeans were greatly surprised, as they had looked upon Franklin as a mere feeder for their ranks. From this time on we find the two Societies competing with each other in every way. It is probably because of this competition that we find both Societies electing many honorary members. Franklin Society had over 150 in ten years, among them such men as Henry Clay, John Quincy Adams, Horace Greeley and Franklin Pierce. Both Societies collected libraries for the use of their members. In 1887 the library of the Franklin Society consisting of 2500 volumes, was turned over to the University Library.

Significant of the spirit of the Society have been the public performances, the exhibitions and extras given in the years past. The day called "Founder's Day" has been observed for many years by various kinds of public exercises. Significant also are the many questions considered in the discussions and debates that have taken place within the halls of Franklin. An instance may serve to illustrate: In 1869, when the impeachment of Andrew Johnson was in progress, the Franklin Society resolved itself into a court of impeachment and considered in due form the charges made against the President. After extended discussion