

Katelin E. B. Ceronie. "Voices on the Third Floor": The Literary Society Libraries of Miami University, 1825-1873. A Master's Paper for the M.S. in L.S. degree. April 2014. 54 pages. Advisor: Ericka Patillo

Nineteenth century American colleges and universities placed heavy restrictions on their students. Students' academic work was rigidly laid out for them, and college administrators did not feel that students required access to books outside of the textbooks they used in their courses. Thus, undergraduate students were barred from most academic libraries. The students themselves began to form literary societies in order to expand upon their college educations; these societies focused on debating and speech making, skills students did not learn in their coursework. Often the literary societies founded their own libraries, giving student members access both to texts that supplemented their collegiate learning and to modern texts for their extracurricular enjoyment. This paper looks at the history of the literary societies at Miami University, in Oxford, Ohio—the Erodolphian Literary Society and the Miami Union Literary Society—and the libraries they founded, between 1825 and 1873.

Headings:

Walter Havighurst Special Collections Library (Miami University) – History.

Miami University (Oxford, Ohio). Miami Union Literary Society – History.

Miami University (Oxford, Ohio). Erodolphian Literary Society – History.

Academic libraries – Ohio – Oxford – History.

Literature – Societies, etc. – Ohio – Oxford – History.

Society libraries – Ohio – Oxford – History.

“VOICES ON THE THIRD FLOOR”: THE LITERARY SOCIETY LIBRARIES
OF MIAMI UNIVERSITY, 1825-1873

by
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List of Abbreviations

Throughout this paper, I will refer to archival documents by abbreviated titles in parenthetical citations. The following list shows the shortened title along with the full title for each of these documents, in the order in which they appear in the paper.

Harding "I"	"College Literary Societies: Their Contribution to the Development of Academic Libraries, 1815-76: I. The Golden Age of College Society Libraries, 1815-40"
Harding "II"	"College Literary Societies: Their Contribution to the Development of Academic Libraries, 1815-76: II. The Decline of College Society Libraries"
"Erodelphian Minutes"	"Minutes of the Erodelphian Society"
"MU Record Book"	"Miami Union Literary Society Record Book"
"Miami Library Accounts"	"Accounts of the Library of Miami University 1841-1901"
"Minutes II"	"Minutes of the Miami University Faculty, Volume II (1841-1845)"
"Erodelphian Catalogue"	"Catalogue of the Erodelphian Society Library beginning 1826"
"Erodelphian Librarian"	"Erodelphian Literary Society Librarian's Book"
"Erodelphian Treasurer"	"Erodelphian Literary Society Treasurer's and Financial Records, 1826-1890"
"Minutes III"	"Minutes of the Miami University Faculty, Volume III (1845-1860)"
"BOT Minutes II"	"Miami University Board of Trustee Minutes, Volume II"
"MU Library Register"	"Miami Union Literary Society Library Register"
"MU Account Book"	"Miami Union Literary Society Account Book"
Reid "Letter"	"Letter Representing the Erodelphian Literary Society, to the Miami University Board of Trustees"
"BOT Minutes III"	"Miami University Board of Trustees Minutes, Volume III"

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Introduction

In the universities of nineteenth America, college was not viewed as the carefree time for developing independence and studying personal interests that we often think of today. Instead, students were held to strict moral and behavioral codes, and their fields of study were rigidly defined as well. In order to expand both their social and educational college experiences, students formed literary societies. These societies remained a popular extracurricular activity throughout the nineteenth century.

In addition to providing students with experience in areas like debating, which their studies did not cover, the literary societies began to collect their own libraries. Because the academic libraries on nineteenth-century college campuses were generally only open to faculty, undergraduates were left without access to a library. The literary society libraries collected materials related to students' coursework, as well as current popular material. The literary societies took great pride in their libraries, often competing with each other to amass the largest and most complete collection.

This paper will focus on the literary societies established at Miami University, in Oxford, Ohio. As at many other universities in the early nineteenth century, students at Miami University formed two rival literary societies soon after the university was founded. The two main literary societies at Miami, the

Erodelphian Literary Society and the Miami Union Literary Society, were prominent in students' extracurricular lives throughout much of the nineteenth century. Each society created a library, and was very proud and protective of its collection. The history of the creation and dissolution of Miami University's literary society libraries is comparable to that of other universities of the nineteenth century United States.

Literature Review

Literary Societies in American Universities

Literary societies played a prominent role in the lives of nineteenth century American college students. They allowed students to supplement rigidly laid out college curricula with skills like debating and essay writing. In addition, the libraries that many literary societies collected provided undergraduate students with access to books and other materials that would otherwise have been unavailable to them. The literary societies and their libraries remained the prominent extracurricular activity on university campuses throughout the nineteenth century.

Development of Literary Societies

Throughout the nineteenth century, the curriculum taught in American colleges and universities was very rigid, highly focused on the classics. The majority of students attended college with relatively few career paths in mind—they hoped to become doctors, lawyers, ministers, or professors. The lives of students outside of their studies were equally austere; there were no athletic or social activities for students to take part in. Into this atmosphere came the college literary society. Students are excellent at adapting their experiences to what they find most important, James Gieser writes in “The College Literary Society: The Athenian Society of Indiana University During the Nineteenth Century,” and “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” (Gieser 6). In “College Literary Societies: Their Contribution to the Development of Academic Libraries, 1815-1876,” Thomas Harding adds that the literary society was a widespread phenomenon: “In the history of almost every college, even the most poverty-stricken and primitive, two rival literary societies sprang up almost as soon as the first classes began” (Harding “I” 1).

For students, the literary societies provided a welcome respite to the dull nature of their studies. Gieser writes, “The nineteenth century curricular context from which the literary society emerged was narrow in scope, inflexible, and often irrelevant to the lives of the students” (Gieser 6). Students were not given the freedom to explore majors or topics of interest; their coursework was firmly laid out for them. Gieser continues: “With creativity discouraged and emotion forbidden, the curriculum was, in short, a stifling experience” (Gieser 6). With nowhere to turn for creative outlet within their formal studies, students put their energy into founding literary societies that fulfilled their own needs. And, because “prior to the Civil War, the major, and frequently the only, extracurricular activity of American college students was the literary society” (Harding “I” 1), the literary societies grew and quickly became one of the most important parts of college students’ social experiences.

Function of Literary Societies

As discussed above, the literary societies were one of the first experiences that early American college students had with extracurricular activities. The

literary societies acted as “a student-created space where members gathered to explore intellectual concerns, refine oratory skills, and enjoy social companionship” (Gieser 6). It is interesting that the students of the nineteenth century chose to spend their free time on such academic matters, but

These gatherings grew out of 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. These student-created spaces counteracted the strict social control of the colleges and provided a place of social and intellectual freedom. (Gieser 6)

Because college courses were often conducted in classical languages, and focused on memorization and recitation rather than class discussion, the literary societies really did give students the opportunity to explore new interests, and to do so in the company of other like-minded students, as well as in their own language.

As Gieser suggests, the main function of the literary societies was debate and speech making. Harding writes, “The heart of the literary society was debate...In the debating society students prepared themselves for the ministry, law, and public life” (Harding “I” 2). In “The College Literary Society,” Henry Snyder also speaks to the importance of debating in literary societies, and to the importance of debating and oration in the early American university. He writes, “But it should be steadily kept in mind that the literary societies formerly aimed to develop the orator, and that the orator was the hero of the campus and the unfailing wonder of admiring audiences. And this supreme position of the orator and the fame he won were sufficient to furnish a vital atmosphere for the abounding life of that which produced him, the literary society” (Snyder 79). In the early nineteenth century, it was the victorious

debater, rather than the victorious athlete, who enjoyed admiration from fellow students. This admiration only served to increase the importance of the literary societies on college campuses. Snyder also alludes to the importance of oratory and debating skills in the professions common to college graduates of the day: students generally flocked to professions like law and politics, where those skills—which they did not learn in their traditional coursework—were highly prized (Snyder 79).

There was both positive and negative feeling toward the literary societies on nineteenth century college campuses. “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” (Gieser 7). The literary societies provided an educational experience that the traditional college courses were not able to provide, and the faculty appreciated that. The students debated political and moral issues of the time, which allowed for the “moral formation” Gieser mentions. In addition, the literary societies took up so much of students’ time that they did not get into as much trouble as they might have with more time on their hands. From the viewpoint of the faculty and administration of colleges and universities, the literary societies were the perfect extracurricular activity for students. However, there was negative feeling toward the literary societies, at least on some campuses: “The societies acted as exclusive cliques, barring nonmembers from participation in any society activities. Since the literary society reigned as the most significant extracurricular involvement on college campuses for over a century, those excluded from its ranks must have felt sharply the alienation and scorn of being outsiders” (Gieser 9). Though this does not seem to have been the case on all campuses—some

literary societies seem to have been less restrictive than others, to the extent that the entire student body at some colleges seem to have belonged to one of the literary societies on campus—it is true that some literary societies were very selective, which may have created negative feeling among those students who were not admitted.

Decline of Literary Societies

Though literary societies had been such a central and important part of college life during the first half of the nineteenth century, they began a slow decline during the latter half of the nineteenth century. The literary societies were the most active and important on college and university campuses before 1840. Their decline began first in the eastern colleges, where the societies were older and more entrenched, and moved westward—perhaps the literary societies on Midwestern college campuses lasted longer because they had been started more recently (Harding “I” 4).

The decline of the college literary society has been attributed to many different factors. Snyder attributes the decline to the industrial revolution and the changing nature of the careers college graduates were entering. He writes,

In the new industrial revolution and economic adjustment men have busied themselves with what they are pleased to call practical affairs, and the law and politics have not wholly monopolized men of talent and ambition as they once did. These conditions, moreover, do not call for emotion and imagination as did the dramatic conditions of the older days. They ask of the speaker if he really has anything to say—information, instruction, and the dry, matter-of-fact details that concern the building of factories and developing of mines. (Snyder 80)

Snyder lists multiple other factors that played into the decline of the literary society, including an increased workload for students—an increase that Snyder argues was too great—(Snyder 80); the inclusion of scientific courses in the college curriculum, which required more time spent in the laboratory and also led to a more practical way of thinking, which in turn did not leave room for the type of analysis needed for success in debates (Snyder 81); the introduction of elective courses, which allowed a student to specialize instead of gaining a more broad-based college education (Snyder 82); professors were no longer so focused on being good speakers as they had been in the past, leading students to also place less importance on good speaking skills (Snyder 83); development of athletic programs (Snyder 84); and that students had more opportunities for other social interactions, through fraternities and other clubs (Snyder 85). Snyder concluded that it would be impossible to return literary societies to their former stature within the university (Snyder 86), but that it was worth trying to revamp them to avoid losing that aspect of the college experience altogether (Snyder 90).

Like Snyder, Harding attributes the decline of the college literary society to multiple factors. He argues:

Parallel with changes in the curriculum of higher education were changes in the extracurricular interests and activities of the students...Largely responsible for their decline were the rise of athletics; the popularity of social fraternities; the competition of music clubs, dramatic clubs, and similar specialized organizations; the slow but gradual liberalization of the curriculum with a consequent influx of non-forensic minded students; the spread of periodicals and other competing forms of communication; and the relaxation of administrative regulations which removed many of the initial causes for the founding of the societies. (Harding "II" 105)

In the end, Harding places less importance on the changes brought on outside the American university by the industrial revolution, and more on changes within the university itself. He identifies three major events that sounded the death knell for literary societies:

First, debating and public speaking activities became part of the curriculum, thereby depriving the literary society of its major justification for existence. Second, the college or university administration assumed responsibility for the annual commencement activities, which included securing well-known speakers. Along with this development, the honorary degree took the place of the honorary membership in the societies. Third, other student groups assumed responsibility for editing or publishing the college magazines, which were often started by the literary societies. Finally, most of the society libraries were absorbed by the college or university libraries. (Harding "II" 111)

Whatever combination of factors may have ended the literary societies on individual campuses, it is clear that the changing nature of college education and of American society as a whole left little room for the literary society in college life by the end of the nineteenth century.

Literary Society Libraries

In "The Relation of the College Library to Recent Movements in Higher Education," Floyd Reeves writes,

It is only in comparatively recent decades that the maintenance of a library has been recognized as a necessary function of a college. Two or three generations ago institutions of higher education, particularly those which were somewhat distantly removed from the influence of the older colleges in the East, boasted no great libraries. Such books as were available for the use of students were for the most part in the private libraries of members of the faculty, or in small collections which had been started by the literary societies of that day. (Reeves 57)

It is upon these literary society libraries that this paper will focus.

Formation of Literary Society Libraries

The need for the literary society libraries was great in early American colleges. The college libraries in existence were small, restrictive in terms of whether students could use them and borrow books, and often held books not suited to student work. In "The Evolution of the Concept of Special Collections in American Research Libraries," William Joyce writes:

Well before the advent of sophisticated library services and the development of extensive research collections, institutions of higher education were small colleges with limited enrollment, a library with a small number of volumes, and virtually none of the services that we now assume every library provides, whether it be checking out, ordering, or borrowing books. Until the late nineteenth century, American college libraries had little to offer, especially where recitation and memorization were central parts of the curriculum. (Joyce 19-20)

With little access to the books they needed, the students attending early American universities had no choice but to provide their own books. The literary societies, already organized and accepted within the university, were in a prime position to accomplish that goal.

Like Joyce, Sharon Weiner cites the lack of financial resources, as well as the restrictive hours and borrowing policies at early American colleges as drivers of the literary society library: "The colonial college libraries were characterized by small, eclectic collections of donated books. There was no funding from parent institutions to systematically purchase materials to supplement the colleges' programs...They were open for only a few hours per week and were operated by a professor who was assigned to be caretaker of the library as part of his teaching responsibilities" (Weiner 2). Gieser agrees, though he attributes the development of literary society

libraries more to the lack of books in the college library. He writes, “The typical college library of the 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” (Gieser 10). This indeed proved to be an important aspect of literary society libraries—the majority of books chosen were written in English.

The development of the literary society libraries began not long after the development of the literary societies themselves. Just as students felt the need for intellectual pursuits and discussion outside the rigid classical courses taught in American colleges, they felt the need for more contemporary, accessible texts. Harding writes, “Literary societies began early to collect libraries in connection with training their members in debates. In pre-Civil War colleges there were no student lounge rooms, study halls, or even library reading rooms. The usual small college library was housed in a locked room, opened perhaps once a week for an hour for the withdrawal and return of books. In fact, the only fairly comfortable and attractive places were the rooms of the societies” (Harding “I” 2). As discussed above, few college libraries allowed students to borrow books, because they didn’t think the books in the library would be useful to undergraduate students. Those that did allow students to check books out had heavy restrictions (Harding “II” 99). The literary society libraries changed that practice too, allowing students to check books out, sometimes even allowing students who did not belong to the literary society to use the society’s library.

The literary societies funded their libraries in a variety of ways. They solicited donations from alumni and important figures of the day. Sometimes faculty would contribute funds for the purchase of books. Other societies taxed their student members (Herrick 61). Sometimes the general dues that members paid to belong to the literary societies were devoted to the library, as at Colby College (Herrick 62). Some literary society members donated their own books for the use of the society. Through a variety of means, the literary societies managed to amass books quickly, sometimes outstripping the college's library in size.

The development of the literary society libraries at Muhlenberg College, as described by Davidson in "Literary Society Libraries at Muhlenberg College," provides an example of how the process happened at many colleges. The literary society libraries at Muhlenberg College were in existence for the first forty-five years following the college's foundation (Davidson 183). Because Muhlenberg had both collegiate level courses and preparatory courses, full emphasis was not placed on collegiate level learning; Davidson argues that this may have hindered the development of a college library (Davidson 183). The students involved with the literary societies at Muhlenberg College made it a main priority to develop libraries and reading rooms, as well as to hire librarians and assistant librarians (Davidson 184). Davidson writes,

A comparison of these early libraries with the College library may serve to emphasize the importance of the former...the College library added approximately 2,500 books in about the first twenty years while the two society libraries combined added 3,851 in the first twenty-five years. In addition to trailing in quantity, the College library seems to have been even more deficient in quality—at least in those items which would appeal to or be readily useful to college students...It was approximately twenty years before the first play of Shakespeare was added to the library, and that in

Pope's edition. *Robinson Crusoe* in Arabic came long before *Robinson Crusoe* in English...Another significant difference lies in the fact that for the first eleven years no books were circulated from the College library, while the societies made their books readily available for outside use. (Davidson 185)

Davidson's example of the Muhlenberg College library having only *Robinson Crusoe* in Arabic, rather than in the English that most students spoke and would prefer to read it in, is an arresting example of the ways in which college libraries of the early nineteenth century failed to meet the needs of their students. As Davison concludes, "it was the students themselves, through their literary societies, who carried the burden of furnishing reading materials for their own use" (Davidson 187).

Function of Literary Society Libraries

As discussed above, it was the restrictions regarding the use of library books, the small selection of books, and the limited hours of operation in the college library that led college literary societies to begin collecting books for their own libraries. It appears that this did not concern the colleges: Reeves writes, "Some wonder may be expressed that the colleges have not, of their own volition, given greater attention to the improvement of their library facilities. The principal reason for this lack of interest in the library is probably attributable to the 'lesson-hearing' and textbook type of instruction which has prevailed in colleges. Under such instructional methods little use is made of the college library" (Reeves 58). It developed, however, that nineteenth century college students did indeed desire the use of a library, and access to books beyond the classical texts covered in their coursework.

The literary society libraries allowed students to experiment with what best fit their needs. Harding argues, "Not only did college libraries concentrate on

theology and older works to the exclusion of modern books but they were governed by regulations which made them storehouses rather than laboratories” (Harding “I” 5). The literary society libraries offered students that laboratory experience, both in terms of providing the access to books and study spaces that allowed them to expand their intellectual horizons, and in terms of creating the library that best fit their needs. The members of the literary society chose which books would be included in their library: “...it would appear from the library catalogs of the Dialectic, Philanthropic, and Demosthenian Societies that these collections provided the members with a good selection of contemporary publications as well as the works of older standard authors” (Harding “I” 20). The students ran the libraries themselves—often a member of the literary society acted as librarian, rather than hiring a full-time staff person (Harding “I” 6). And, the members of the literary society made and enforced their own rules and regulations regarding the library. Though the rules decided upon by the literary societies were still strict, and the literary society libraries also had limited hours, “The significance of all these regulations is that they were made by students for the use of their own libraries, without dictation from the college authorities. While they may seem stringent by twentieth-century standards, they were decidedly liberal when compared with the regulations governing the use of the college libraries” (Harding “I” 9-10).

The members of the literary societies took great pride in their society libraries. They worked hard to collect books, and to furnish the library rooms stylishly and comfortably. There even seems to have been some competition between literary societies—generally, a college or university would have two

literary societies—as to which could amass the largest library (Harding “I” 13).

While the literary societies remained the most active and influential extracurricular activity on nineteenth century college campuses, the literary society libraries played a huge part in student life.

Decline of Literary Society Libraries

As did the literary societies themselves, the literary society libraries began to decline during the second half of the nineteenth century. After 1850, the college and university libraries began to grow more quickly than the literary society libraries (Harding “II” 95). The college libraries also began to diversify their collections, adding more modern and English-language materials, as well as to loosen some of the restrictions placed on undergraduate use of the library: “At the end of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, there was a definite shift in emphasis from conservation and protection of books to making them accessible and encouraging students and faculty to use them” (Weiner 4).

The literary societies began to transfer their books to the college libraries, as funding and running their own libraries became more difficult for the literary society members to keep up. Harding writes, “As the fortunes of the literary societies declined, the maintenance of their libraries became an increasing burden on the members. Hence it is not surprising that soon after the Civil War a movement was started in northern colleges to transfer the society libraries to the college administrations” (Harding “II” 105). By the early twentieth century, almost all college literary societies throughout the United States had transferred their libraries to the care of the college:

The first decade of the twentieth century may be said to close an era which began about 1876. This era saw the transfer of the society libraries from their original ownership to that of the colleges or universities themselves. This development may be said to open a new chapter in higher education: the assumption by the colleges and universities of responsibility for developing their heretofore meager libraries into strong collections to support their programs of instruction and research. (Harding "II" 110)

Some literary societies made provisions to reclaim their libraries at a later date, if they so chose, but most left their books in care of the college libraries.

Though the literary society libraries of the early nineteenth century were not long-lived, they did leave their mark on the American university and the college academic library. Herrick writes,

The libraries of the early literary societies throughout the country are known to have played a very important part in the development of our present college and university libraries. The transfer of well-selected society collection was a stroke of fortune to the college library which often consisted for the most part of aggregate gifts of charity. We can realize the gain for the institutions that had these society libraries as their foundation collections. What was lost thereby we can less easily measure, that is, the individual student interest and active participation in the selection of books and management of the libraries. (Herrick 63)

It is true that with the transfer of the literary society libraries to the college library collections, students lost their governing role in determining how their library would function. It seems, however, that the literary society library, its management, and its choice of materials, were taken into consideration as the American college library developed into the twentieth century.

Methods

Literature Review

I began my literature review by searching various combinations of the words that I felt best described my topic of interest, such as “literary societies,” “literary society,” “college,” “university,” and “nineteenth century.” I searched within library science-specific databases like Library and Information Science Abstracts (LISA) and Library Literature and Information Science. I also searched wider-ranging databases like Academic Search Complete and Google Scholar.

The articles that I found through these search methods seemed to fall under two categories: they were either pre-1940s studies of literary societies as an academic institution, or they were case studies of the history of literary societies at specific universities. This makes some sense—since literary societies have been extinct for over a century at most universities, they have lost their appeal as a research topic except when looking at a particular university’s history. I found both types of articles to be helpful in conducting my literature review.

Primary Source Research

My interest in the history of Miami University’s literary society libraries began when I was an undergraduate working in the Miami University Special Collections. I was transcribing the minutes of Miami’s faculty senate meetings,

beginning in the 1820s, and noticed several mentions of the literary societies and their libraries. To begin my research for this paper, I first went back to those minutes, as well as Miami's Board of Trustees meeting minutes.

I continued my research in the Miami University Special Collections. In that collection, I looked at materials belonging to or relating to the several literary societies that had been in existence at Miami. These materials included an account book of the Miami Union literary society, a letter from Whitelaw Reid, representing the Erodelphian Society to the Board of Trustees, and a catalog of the Erodelphian Society library. I also looked over two unpublished theses on the Miami literary societies.

In the Miami University Archives, I looked at materials relating to student life. These included several folders of literary society material. I was able to study the Erodelphian Society librarian's book, the Miami Union library register, and pamphlets and programs from various debates and meetings held by the societies.

Finally, I looked at several published histories of Miami University. These were helpful in giving me an overarching view of the development and decline of Miami's literary societies, and helped me piece together how the various materials I had studied in Special Collections and the Archives fit together. The histories included *The History of the Miami University Libraries* by Elizabeth Baer and *The Miami Years* by Walter Havighurst.

I used the above materials to conduct a case study of the Miami University literary societies, modeled after some of the case studies I had read when conducting my literature review. I wanted to tell the story of the Miami University

literary societies, both as an institution in and of themselves, and as they fit into the wider history of literary societies at nineteenth century American colleges and universities.

Miami University Literary Societies and Their Libraries

The Societies

Miami University was chartered in 1809, with the completion of the Symmes Purchase in southwestern Ohio. It took several years, however, to choose the exact location of the proposed university, build up a campus, and attract a faculty. The first college-level classes at the new Miami University, in Oxford, Ohio, were not held until 1824 (Havighurst 36). Following the opening of the university, it was not long until the literary societies were born, with the first beginning in only the second year courses were offered.

The quick beginning of the literary societies at Miami can be attributed to several reasons. First, literary societies had already become popular at other universities throughout the eastern United States. The students who attended Miami would have likely been aware of the existence of literary societies at other universities in the area, and perhaps would have been in contact with family members or friends who were involved in the literary societies at other universities. In addition, the conditions that led to the creation of literary societies at other universities were present at Miami as well. In *The History of the Miami University Libraries*, Elizabeth Baer writes,

Students of the colonial period and later were a close-knit group, kept under strict surveillance by the president and faculty, their daily life, social as well as curricular, prescribed and set. In a tight little world, with a program and

methods of instruction which had little relation to the world outside, students gravitated to the literary society as a means for training themselves to think, write, and speak. (Baer 30)

The literary societies at Miami offered students the opportunity to expand upon their studies and to explore other areas of interest not supported by the college curriculum.

There were multiple literary societies that came and went during Miami's early years. The Erodelphian Literary Society was begun on November 9, 1825 (Havighurst 75). The Union Literary Society began just one month later, on December 14, 1825. There were other, much shorter-lived societies as well. For example, the Epanthean Society was formed in 1838 (Davis 144), but disappeared by the following spring (Davis 147). Finally, the Miami Hall Literary Society began in 1842, to protest the stance of the other two societies on fraternities—the two original societies excluded members of fraternities from joining. The Miami Hall Literary Society succeeded in drawing members away from the original societies. It joined with the Union Literary Society in 1842 to become the Miami Union Literary Society (Havighurst 91).

It was these two societies, the Erodelphian Literary Society and the Miami Union Literary Society, which shaped the extracurricular world at Miami for much of the nineteenth century. The two societies competed against each other for members and donations, as well as in debating (Davis 72). "Both societies were secret in organization and both were incorporated under the laws of Ohio. Any boy registered in the University was eligible for membership, and election to one of the societies usually took place as a matter of course. To retain membership, however,

required a good deal of diligence. The boys worked hard to meet the standards of their group in the preparation of essays, debates, and speeches” (Bainbridge 12). Members of each literary society were proud of their status, and were very serious about maintaining their status within the society.

The Erodelphian Literary Society

When the Erodelphian Literary Society was formed on November 9, 1825, fourteen students made up the original membership. They selected a Chairman and a Secretary, in addition to beginning work on an official constitution (Davis 15). By the spring of the following year, the Erodelphian Society had been given a room in which to conduct its meetings and debates, on the third floor of the main campus building (Baer 29).

The Erodelphian Society was particular about its membership, but also used its membership to boost prestige and gain donations: “Membership in the Society was to be of two classes: ordinary and Honorary. Any person desiring ordinary membership was to make application in writing and be vouched for by three members. None but those in good standing morally and in scholarship were to be admitted...The Honorary members were to be gentlemen of established reputation noted for their literary attainments” (Davis 18-19). The Erodelphian society elected its first group of honorary members, which included the entire Miami faculty, in the fall of 1826 (Baer 32). Once a member, a student was to participate in the “ordinary exercises,” which included “declamation, composition, and disputation” (Davis 19). Minutes of the Erodelphian Society suggest that they debated many topics, ranging from political and social issues of the day to seemingly sillier topics like “Does a

Bachelor lead a happier life than a married man?”—which was decided in the affirmative (“Erodelphian Minutes” December 7, 1883).

The Miami Union Literary Society

The Union Literary Society was founded on December 14, 1825, only one month after the Erodelphian Literary Society. Like the Erodelphian Literary Society, the members of the Union Literary Society wished “for the cultivation of the moral and intellectual faculties of the mind...and for...mental benefit” (Davis 33). The Miami Hall Literary Society was begun in May of 1839, several college generations after the original literary societies (Davis 33). The Union and Miami Hall literary societies merged to form the Miami Union Literary Society (Davis 151) several years later, in 1842 (Davis 166). The Miami Union Literary Society also debated political and social issues of the day; a record book of the society lists such topics as “That Poverty makes greater men than riches” and “That the immigration of Chinese should be prohibited” (“MU Record Book”).

The Decline of the Literary Societies

The decline of Miami’s literary societies—like the decline of literary societies at many nineteenth century American universities—had multiple causes. Oxford was growing, which meant that students had a wider variety of activities to take part in off campus (Davis 299). Fraternities and other on-campus activities were also growing, which meant that students often joined those groups instead of the literary societies (Davis 213). For the Erodelphian Literary Society, which would not allow its members to also belong to a fraternity, the development of the

fraternities spurred new competition at first, but eventually led to a significant decrease in members (Davis 141). In addition, the literary societies were not receiving enough funding to keep up with all of their activities, a more difficult university curriculum left students with less free time, and the University library began to expand, lessening the need for the literary society libraries (Davis 299). Finally, though other literary societies like the Epanthean and Eccritean societies were short-lived, they did draw members away from the Erodelphian and Miami Union literary societies while they lasted, weakening the literary society system as a whole (Davis 222-223).

There is some debate as to when the literary societies officially went out of existence at Miami University. When the Civil War began, enrollment at Miami dropped, and all of the literary societies lost members (Davis 247); “much of the enthusiasm and vitality of the Societies was gone” (Davis 249). One source suggests that the last meeting of the Miami Union Literary Society took place on April 2, 1872 (Davis 293). Miami closed in 1873, but it is possible that the literary societies did reconvene after the university reopened in 1885 (Davis 306). It is even possible that the literary societies carried on into the twentieth century, at a much smaller scale; in *The Miami Years*, Walter Havighurst writes that the last members of the literary societies graduated from Miami in the 1920s (Havighurst 89).

The Libraries

As at many other American universities in the nineteenth century, it was the lack of materials available to students through the university library that brought

about the idea of a literary society library. At Miami, a university library was not planned for until classes had already been in session for nearly a year: "The first appropriation for College Library purposes was in 1825. The total amount appropriated was two hundred and fifty dollars, fifty of which was to be used for subscriptions to 'literary and scientific' publications and the remainder to be used for the purchase of books at the discretion of the President" (Davis 105). The first librarian at Miami was William Sparrow, Professor of Languages; he took on the duties of overseeing the library in addition to his teaching responsibilities (Davis 106). Even after the library had gotten underway, students were still unsatisfied with the amount of material available: "The Library of the University was not only small but it was lacking in material that would appeal most to the students and was restricted during much of the period to the Faculty and upperclass men" (Davis 105).

Restrictions on student use of library materials increased and decreased several times early in Miami's history (Davis 106). At first, only the faculty was permitted to check books out of the library, but by March of 1828, members of the senior class were also able to borrow books (Davis 106). An action of the Board of Trustees, dated March 31, 1828, reads

1. No student shall receive from the library more than two volumes at once; nor keep them longer than two weeks.
2. The Library shall be opened for receiving and distributing books every Saturday in term time between the hours of 2 and 5 p.m.
3. Whoever shall keep a book from the library longer than two weeks, or shall injure a book, or permit it to be injured whilst in his possession, shall be fined 6 ¼ cents each week he detains the book from the library, and pay the amount of damage in case of injury.
4. The Senior class only shall be allowed to take books from the library.

5. The Professor of Languages shall discharge the duties of Librarian.
(McSurely 3)

By 1842, all students were allowed to borrow books, so long as they paid a fee. An account book of the Miami library includes a note that “every student paying \$0.50 a session to the Library has a right to borrow books from the same, session commencing 31st March 1842” (“Miami Library Accounts”). Only four students are listed as having taken advantage of the newly accessible library; two students paid the fee, one student had his fee waived for working in the library, and another had his fee waived for being the campus bell ringer. It is unclear why students did not react with more enthusiasm to being able to access the materials in the university library—perhaps they had gotten used to not having access to the university library, and it is likely that the literary society libraries had developed enough that students belonging to the literary societies felt that it was not worth the fee to use the university library as well. Later on, perhaps as the literary society libraries began to decline and the university library began to develop, more students are listed as having paid the fee to use the university library.

The restrictions placed on use of the college library, that brought about the literary society libraries, also made it unnecessary for the college library to develop as quickly as it might have otherwise: “it was the lack of usable books and access to them which gave rise to society libraries...The libraries belonging to the societies of the college grew considerably, and as they grew, there was little demand made on the college library by any of the students. Ironically, the development of these societal libraries gave the college libraries an excuse not to grow at a rate appropriate to the needs of the student body” (Baer 24-25). It would be a long time

before the Miami University library developed into anything resembling the academic libraries expected of universities today.

Beginnings of the Miami Literary Society Libraries

Almost as soon as the Miami literary societies began, they began to build their libraries. They focused on building collections that would both complement their studies and provide materials for further research, and include materials for leisure reading (Davis 107). By 1840, though the college library had the largest individual collection, it was outstripped by the literary society libraries, which combined held “68 percent of all volumes on campus” (Baer 33). In addition to their libraries, the literary societies also kept their own archives (Davis 82).

Mentions of the literary society libraries begin to appear in the minutes of Miami’s faculty senate in 1842. The literary societies had previously been given rooms in which to hold their meetings and debates, but now they wished to have expanded space in which to keep their libraries: “An application was made by each of the Literary Societies now existing in the College, viz, the Erodelphian and the Miami Union, for rooms for the use of their Libraries; an answer to which was postponed till the next regular meeting of the Faculty” (“Minutes II” May 31, 1842). At the following meeting of Miami’s faculty, the issue of the literary societies was discussed further, but still no decision was reached: “Committees of the two literary Societies on the subject of their application for Library rooms were heard, and the decision of the case still further postponed” (“Minutes II” June 3, 1842). Finally, both literary societies were granted space in which to maintain their libraries. The secretary of the faculty writes,

Resolved, 1. That the room formerly occupied by the Miami Hall be granted to the Miami Union Society for the use of their library, and that the Society be required, as a condition of the grant to have the door in said room removed at their expence [sic], so as to be opposite to the present position of the door in the room on the other side of the entry immediately west.

2. That said west room on the same floor be granted to the Erodelphian Society, for the use of their library; and that the Faculty pledge themselves to use their influence with the Board of Trustees to have the same amount appropriated from the College Treasury for the repairs & fitting up of said room, as was formerly expended from the funds of the Institution for the fitting up of the room of the Miami Hall, so as to place the two literary Societies now in existence, in connection with College on a footing of equality.

3. That the Secretary be directed to furnish a copy of this minute to each Society with a request that it be entered on their records. ("Minutes II" June 10, 1842).

Each of the literary societies accepted the decision of the faculty, and began to set up their libraries in their respective rooms ("Minutes II" July 8, 1842).

The Erodelphian Literary Society Library

The Erodelphian Literary Society began to consider a library as early as three months after its founding (Davis 25). "A large, pronouncing English dictionary was the first book purchased. The money for this was raised by taxing each member twenty-five cents. Before long, the Society authorized each member to accept donations and prepared a petition to be used. The petition was addressed 'to friends of literature and science,' and the general idea expressed was that they sought donations of books or money to be applied in purchasing the same" (Baer 31). The Erodelphian society set up "drives" to increase library holdings (Davis 232). In addition, Honorary members often donated books, and the Erodelphians used this to their advantage—they would invite Honorary members to attend

meetings or speak at events, in the hopes that, should the honorary member not be able to attend, they would donate a book instead (Davis 27).

The Erodelphian society was able to amass books quickly; a “Catalogue of the Erodelphian Society Library beginning 1826” shows that the society had gathered 1,241 volumes by 1828, only three years after its founding (“Erodelphian Catalogue”). The Catalogue also shows the variety of materials the Erodelphian society collected. In 1826, listings ranged from *Arabian Nights* to *Bonny Castle’s Algebra*. Listings in 1828 also included quite a range of titles, such as *Paul’s Letters*, *The Island*, *Treatise on Self Knowledge*, *Nicholl’s Recollections*, *American Man*, *Greek Grammar*, *Vicar of Wakefield*, *Thaddeus of Mantua*, *History of the United States*, *Life of Bonaparte*, *The Shipwreck*, and *History of New England*. As Elizabeth Baer writes, “That the Miami Erodelphian’s preferences did not coincide with the holdings of the Miami 1833 college library clearly shows in the Erodelphian catalogue of 1835 which lists 215 novels and romances and 30 volumes of theology, compared with the college catalogue’s 157 volumes of theology and no novels and romances. The Erodelphians had 127 volumes of poetry as compared to 10 in the university library” (Baer 31).

There were strict rules regarding the duties of the Erodelphian Literary Society librarian, as well as regarding use of the Erodelphian Literary Society library. “At first, the position of librarian of the society was an adjunct to the treasurer. However, the position of librarian was soon made a separate office ‘with the duties of keeping a record of all books and all donations.’ The librarian loaned books, assessed damages, and was required to turn over all fines to the treasurer. In

turn, the librarian was under the supervision of a committee and could be fined if found derelict in his duty" (Baer 31). A notebook labeled "Erodelphian Society Librarian's Book" shows that the librarian kept detailed charts and lists of society members and what books they checked out. In addition, the society seems to have had some sort of cataloging system, as numbers such as 3E7 are written next to each member's name, rather than the title of a book, and are then crossed out, which was presumably done when the book in question was returned ("Erodelphian Librarian"). Borrowing books was limited to literary society members (Davis 26)—so, early in Miami's history, if a student did not belong to a literary society and was not a senior, he would have had no access to any type of library on campus. If a book was lost, the member had to replace it, and even had to replace the entire set if the lost book was part of a series (Davis 26). The length of time a literary society member was allowed to borrow a book for depended on the book's size: "a quarto could be kept for three weeks; an octavo for two weeks; and a duodecimo for one week" (Davis 26). Eventually, society rules were changed so that non-members could use the collection: "if 'any citizens of Oxford or its vicinity' would deposit five dollars 'either in money or books' they were to have 'free reign access to the Library upon the same conditions as regular members'" (Davis 26-27). In this way, the Erodelphian Literary Society was able to continue increasing the size of its library.

Finances and the library room itself played a large role in the operation of the Erodelphian Literary Society library. As early as 1831, there are entries in the "Erodelphian Literary Society Treasurer's and Financial Records, 1826-1890" showing the cost of keeping up the library itself—on January 7, 1831, ninety-nine

dollars was paid for “workmen in the library” (“Erodelphian Treasurer”). After the designation of an official library room for the Erodelphian society in 1842, it seems that the Miami faculty was unsuccessful in convincing the Board of Trustees to give the society a grant to furnish their room. The faculty minutes of 1845 record the Erodelphians’ new push to furnish and fix up their library room:

A communication was received from the Erodelphian Society informing Faculty of their intention to fix up the room formerly granted to them for a library room for their purpose, & asking of the Faculty to use their influence with the Board of Trustees—according to a resolution passed of 1842—to secure an appropriation for the same. On motion Resolved That the Erodelphian Society be informed that the Faculty stand ready to redeem their pledge as then given. (“Minutes III” March 7, 1845)

However, a minute of the Board of Trustees from nearly a year and a half later shows that the Miami faculty were unsuccessful in that endeavor: “Mr Crume presented a petition for the Erodelphian Society, praying for aid in Defraying the expense occurred in fitting up their Library room,— which after being taken up and read, was- On Motion refered [sic] to the Standing Committee on Finance to Report thereon” (“BOT Minutes II” August 11, 1846). There are no following reports on the subject, so it is unclear whether the Erodelphian society was ever reimbursed for the cost of furnishing and fixing up its library room.

In the early 1850s, the literary societies, which had decreased in membership since the introduction of fraternities and other on- and off-campus activities, experienced a brief renaissance. The Erodelphian society used this opportunity to once again increase its library holdings. “In 1852, the Erodelphians had made a special effort to increase their library, even offering a prize of ten dollars to the member who would secure the greatest number of books from the standpoint of

money value or the money with which to purchase more” (Baer 60). Only one year later, however, the Erodelphian Literary Society signed its books over to the college library. Though there would be some back-and-forth as to where the books were to be kept, the Erodelphian interest in its library was much decreased.

The Miami Union Literary Society Library

Like the Erodelphian Literary Society, the Union Literary Society began its library almost immediately. At a meeting on December 23, 1825, only a week after the literary society’s founding, all members were “urged to solicit donations” (Davis 35). The Union Literary Society had the advantage of taking on the Miami Hall Literary Society’s library when the two societies joined in 1842. The Miami Hall Literary Society had been collecting its library since 1839, and had over six hundred books to add to the Union Literary Society’s library (Davis 153). In addition, the Board of Trustees had helped furnish and fix up the Miami Hall Literary Society’s meeting room, which later became the Miami Union Literary Society’s library (Davis 202). The Miami Union Literary Society thus had the benefit of an updated library room, which it appears that the Erodelphian Literary Society never gained. Though all these provisions had been made for the Miami Union Literary Society’s library, it is interesting to note that a student librarian was not listed among the society’s officers until 1886 (“MU Record Book”).

The Miami Union Literary Society members also collected a variety of books, both those related to their college studies and those that offered the opportunity for pleasure reading, though they may have focused mostly on government publications and political works (Davis 276). An undated Library Register lists such titles as

Thiers French Revolution, Tristram Shandy, an 1855 Coast Survey Report, and Count Robert of Paris ("MU Library Register"). It also appears that the Miami Union members collected many book sets instead of individual titles. In this Library Register, books are numbered, the title is listed, and there is a column where the name of a donor or other additional notes could be recorded. Many of the books have the notation "gone" listed in this column. The Library Register is not dated, but a notation at the end states, "total number of books, April 13, 1886 (marked in blue) is 351." There are 507 books listed in the Register, so it appears that the list was made before 1886, and someone went through and marked which books were still in the society's possession by 1886. In addition to its library collections, the Miami Union Literary Society introduced the idea of a "Cabinet of Curiosities" (which the Erodelphians soon adopted as well). The Cabinet of Curiosities was to "be filled with 'such natural and artificial curiosities and relics of antiquity' as would 'furnish food for research, reflection, and rational amusement'" (Davis 42). The societies' cabinets may have eventually become the basis for Miami's natural history museum.

The Miami Union library room itself, as well as the society's financial ability to support its library were very important. The Union Literary Society made a petition for a devoted library room the year before the Erodelphian Literary Society and the joined Miami Union Literary Society made their similar requests. The Board of Trustees recorded that "Mr. Macdill presented a petition from a Committee in behalf of the Union literary Society for 'a grant of the passage or hall lying between the Miami and Union Literary Societies for a library and Cabinet Room' — Said petition being taken up & Read On Motion the same was refered [sic] to a Committee

of three to consider and make report thereon.—” (“BOT Minutes II” August 10, 1841). The Union Literary Society was granted its request, only one day later:

Mr McBride from the Committee to whom was refered [sic] the petition from the Union literary society made the following report. “The committee to whom the foregoing memorial was refered [sic], Report that they have had the matter under consideration and recommend that the prayer of the memorialist [sic] be granted—Therefore Resolved, That the Union literary Society have the privilege to occupy the East part of the Hall in the third Story of the center Building between the Union Hall and Miami Hall, to be fitted up as a room for a library and Cabinet, provided the Same be fitted up at the expence [sic] of the Said Society. (“BOT Minutes II” August 11, 1841)

Later, the final location of the Miami Union Literary Society is described as “a carpeted room the same size as their Hall. At each end of the room the floor was raised approximately three feet and the bookcases rested on this raised floor. The ‘Cabinet of Curiosities’ stood in the center of the room...No chairs or settees are mentioned, but undoubtedly, they were in evidence” (Davis 202). Financial input into the library room is recorded in the Miami Union account book—for example, seventy-five cents was paid for “turning library drapery” on August 10, 1846—along with donations and book expenditures (“MU Account Book”).

Transfer of the Literary Society Libraries to the Miami College Library

As early as 1848, the Miami Union Literary Society had offered to sell books to the college library: “The Miami Union Society has offered a copy of the British Poets in fifty vols will Bound for twenty five dollars which is certainly far from a high price” (“BOT Minutes II” August 8, 1848). By the early 1850s, both societies were considering the complete transfer of their books to the college library. Each society had experienced a decrease in membership, and was having difficulty maintaining its respective library. In addition, both societies struggled with missing

books—it is unclear whether they did not have a good system for recording checked-out books, or whether perhaps they knew how many books were in their library but did not have a complete inventory of titles (Davis 275). In 1853, the complete transfer of the literary society libraries to the main college library collection took place:

In June 1853, the Board passed, after several readings, the Ordinance to change the library and society rooms. The change was to be made only if the expense did not exceed \$300, and even then the Committee on College Grounds and Buildings could not proceed without consent of the two literary societies. The purpose was to enlarge the College Library room to the size and shape of the chapel below. The library shelves and books of the two societies were to be removed from the respective libraries and placed in the new and general library. Partition walls were to be removed and the extended walls of the building strengthened. Each of the societies would have enlarged halls. Upon delivery by the societies of their books and documents, the librarian was to keep them 'in trust for the use and benefit of the Said Societies respectively' and upon a written order of the Said Societies, was to 're-deliver all Said Books and Documents to the Said Societies respectively.'" (Baer 62)

At the time of the transfer, the two literary societies had a total of about three thousand books.

The transition was not smooth, however. The Erodelphian Literary Society appraised its books, now housed in the college library, once per year (Davis 233-234). After three years, members of the Erodelphian society felt that the society's books were not being well taken care of, and Whitelaw Reid wrote to the Board of Trustees representing the Erodelphian society. Reid's letter, dated July 2, 1856, states that "The number of volumes given over into the hands of the College Librarian as the representative of the Board was 1551. The number now in the Library (Oct 12th 1855) was 1287" and "scarcely a single set of any valuable work remains complete" (Reid "Letter"). Evidently, the books which had gone missing

were some of the more valuable books from the collection, as Reid writes, “And of course it is always the case that where a man steals a book he steals one worth stealing.” In addition, the Erodelphians felt that the books which were still accounted for within the college library had not been well cared for: “The books that remain are very much abused, much more of course than if they had been used solely by members of the Society.” To atone for the “intolerable abuse” of its library, Reid and the Erodelphians requested that “the Board adopt some plan, such as is used in almost all libraries to which there is any degree of public access, as shutting up the book shelves with wire filled doors, or as by refusing any admittance to the room at all and having sub-librarians to deliver the volumes to those calling for them at the door, or any practicable plan which will attain the desired result – the prevention of books being stolen or lost.” Reid then offers the Board assistance in whatever it decides to do, with funds from the Erodelphian treasury. The request of the Erodelphian Literary Society regarding its library is of course somewhat ironic, given that the literary society libraries had begun in the first place in order to make sure students had access to the library materials they needed.

The conversation about how the Erodelphian Literary Society’s books should be handled went on for several months following the receipt of Whitelaw Reid’s letter. The following day, the Board of Trustees

Resolved, that the Librarian be required to have a volume of forms, and to make the proper entry of loaning and returning every book taken from and brought back to the Library. That the Librarian shall have the books under his sole control, and no one else shall have a key to the room; he shall also make out a catalogue of the books at once; and shall report fully to the Board at its annual session (the first day thereof) which Report shall trace the loss of the books as far as possible. And Mr. Corry was appointed a Committee to

confer with the Erodelphian Society, and communicate this action of the Board. ("BOT Minutes III" July 3, 1856)

The members of the Erodelphian Literary Society were evidently not satisfied with this action, as a note appears in the minutes of the Miami faculty several months later: "A memorial was received from the Erodelphian Society making a statement in regard to the transfer of their books &c to the University Library,—and closing as follows:—'We, the committee of the Erodelphian Society, do request the Faculty to appoint some person who in conjunction with a person appointed by us, shall make out a schedule and inventory of the Books, which we, acting for the Society, and you binding yourselves for the Board of Trustees, shall sign...'" ("Minutes III" September 12, 1856). And again, in January of 1857, the Erodelphians sent a list of books to the faculty, which the faculty then transferred to the librarian, so that it could be compared with the books currently in the college library ("Minutes III" January 23, 1857). Finally, the Erodelphians did eventually end up requesting their books back, though they were not reimbursed for those books that had been lost or stolen (Davis 234).

The Miami Union Literary Society also asked for its books back, around the same time as the Erodelphian Literary Society was making its request, though with somewhat less drama. "In 1857 Charles Elliot [university librarian] reported returning the books of the Miami Union Literary Society so that they could be sold to liquidate a debt. He explained that after the union of the society libraries with the college library he had appointed two sub-librarians, one from each society, for the express purpose of securing to each society the protection of its property" (Baer 68). However, upon the return of its library, the Miami Union Literary Society counted

1,428 books, which left 281 missing, and valued at \$776 (Davis 235). It is unclear whether the Miami Union Literary Society did in fact sell its books to pay off a debt; it is possible that the books were sold back to the Miami college library. There is a bit of a gap in the records here, and it is unclear what may have happened to the literary societies' books between about 1860 and 1910. In any case, the books of both the Erodelphian Literary Society and the Miami Union Literary Society were completely transferred to the Miami University library in 1910, when the new Alumni library building opened (Havighurst 89).

The Collection

Today, the books of the Miami Union and Erodelphian literary societies are housed in the Walter Havighurst Special Collections library at Miami University. The books of each literary society are kept in their own respective collection. Many of the books held in these literary society collections duplicate the books held in the 1841 collection, which contains the extant books listed in one of Miami's first library catalogues. Cataloging of the literary society collections is currently underway; up until now, the literary society collections had not been catalogued beyond the original cataloguing done by the literary societies themselves.

I was able to look at a sampling of books from each of the literary societies' collections, in order to see the type of markings each society used to establish ownership of its library. The books I was able to view did seem to be heavily history-based (*Burnet's History of the Reformation*, *Weber's Outlines of Universal History*), but books from other disciplines were represented as well (*The Fine Arts in*

Great Britain and Ireland, The British Poets), showing the variety of topics the literary societies would have collected books upon.

Of the books belonging to the Erodolphian Literary Society that I was able to look at, each had a bookplate inside the front cover stating that the book belonged to the Erodolphian library. Often this bookplate is layered over other, older versions of the Erodolphian bookplate. The bookplate lists cataloging or shelf location information for the book; this information had generally been crossed out and updated multiple times, as new books were accessioned and added to the collection. Sometimes, there is also handwritten information listing accessioning information for when the book was added to the Miami university library.

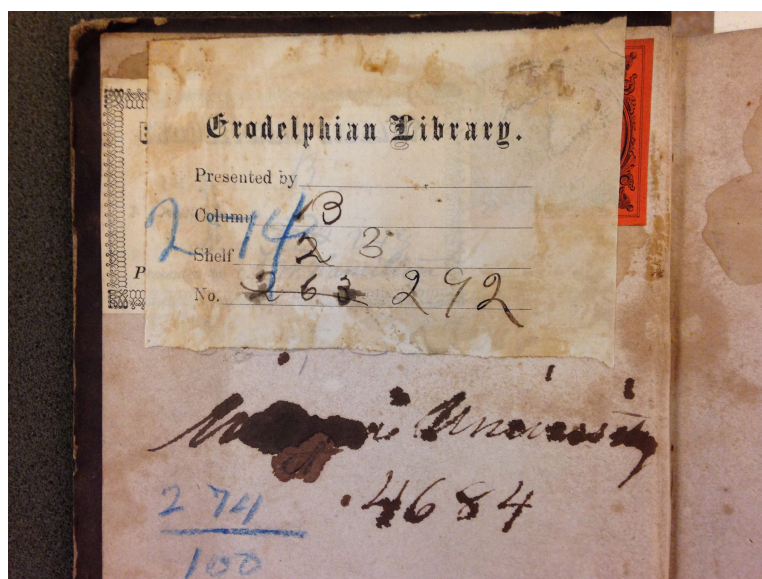


Figure 1. Erodolphian Library bookplate in *Burnet's History of the Reformation*. Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries, Oxford, Ohio.

In addition, the bookplate included a spot where the name of the donor who had provided the book to the library could be listed.

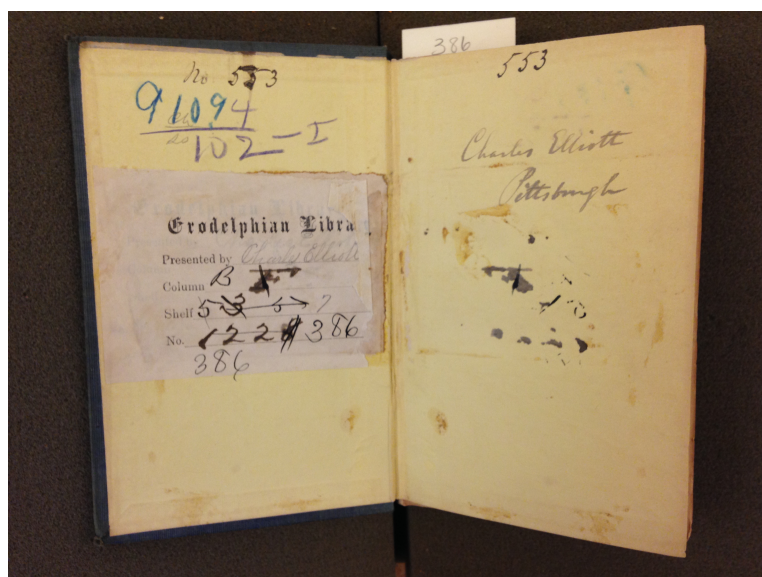


Figure 2. *Switzerland, the South of France, and the Pyrenees*, donated to the Erodelpian Literary Society by Charles Elliott. Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries, Oxford, Ohio.

Finally, several of the books have an Erodelpian Society seal, embossed upside down on the top right corner of the title page.



Figure 3. Erodelpian Literary Society seal, embossed in *Switzerland, the South of France, and the Pyrenees*. Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries, Oxford, Ohio.

Similarly to the books from the Erodelpian Literary Society library, the books from the Miami Union Literary Society library also each have a bookplate

stating that they belong to the society library. Some of the bookplates simply list an accessioning or cataloging number, with a place for the book's donor to be listed.

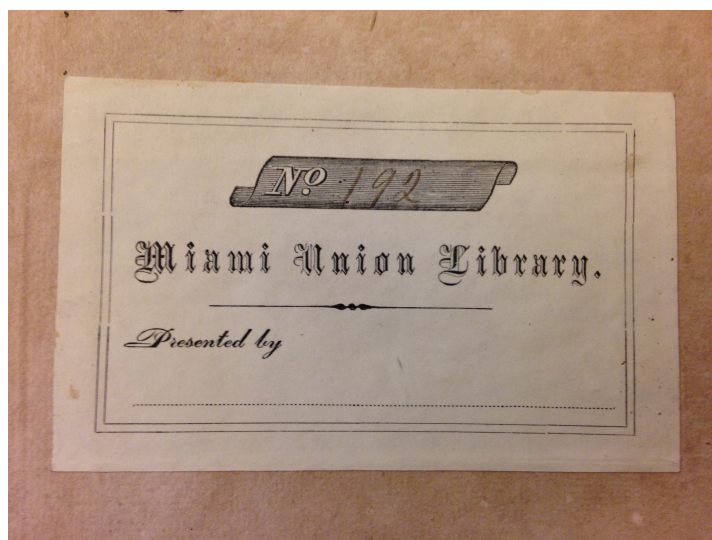


Figure 4. Miami Union library bookplate in *The History of Ancient Greece*. Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries, Oxford, Ohio.

Other bookplates list more extensive cataloging or shelf location information.

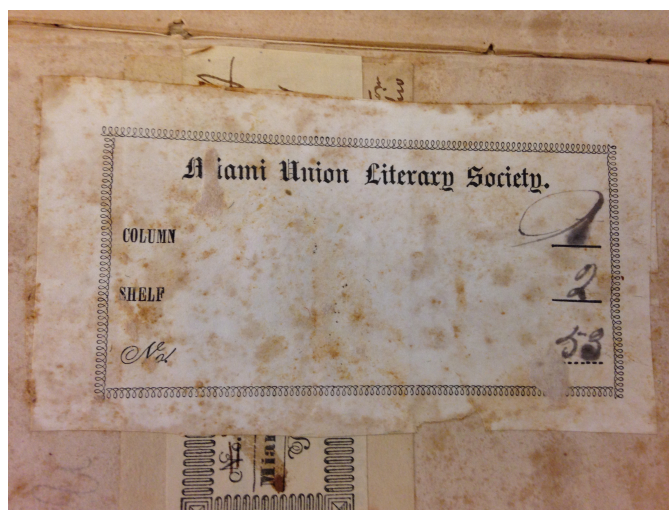


Figure 5. Miami Union library cataloging information in *The Autobiography of John Galt*. Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries, Oxford, Ohio.

This information is generally not crossed out and updated the way it is on the Erodelpian bookplates, although the Miami Union bookplates are also layered one

over another. Several of the books contain inscriptions showing support of the Miami Union Literary Society and its library.

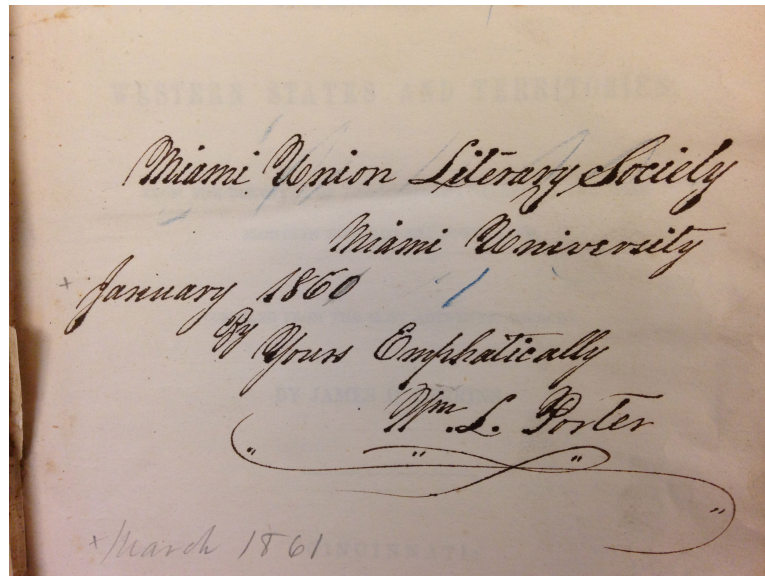


Figure 6. Inscription to the Miami Union Literary Society in *Annals of the West*. Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries, Oxford, Ohio.

Conclusion

The creation and decline of the Miami University literary societies mimics that of the literary societies in existence at most other nineteenth century American universities. Like most other American universities in the nineteenth century, Miami was a school that imposed strict moral and behavioral rules upon its students. The students' education was strictly controlled as well—learning revolved around lectures, memorization, and recitation, and left little time for the exploration of personal interests. As at other universities of the time, Miami students soon joined together to create literary societies that would meet needs that the college curriculum did not; at Miami the first literary society was formed within less than two years of the first classes held at the university. At Miami, as at its peer institutions, there were two main, rival literary societies, the Erodelpian Literary Society and the Union Literary Society (which later joined with the Miami Hall Literary Society to form the Miami Union Literary Society). Though other, short-lived literary societies would form throughout Miami's early history, it was these two which remained in existence throughout the history of Miami's literary societies. Because the literary societies were one of the only extracurricular activities available to Miami's students, they quickly became a central part of campus life.

Through their literary societies, Miami students gained experience in debating and speech making, which were skills they would not have learned through their traditional coursework. They debated political and social issues of the day, and learned about life outside of the college when they invited esteemed members of the community to speak as well. These skills were particularly useful as they joined professions like law, politics, and the ministry, which prized well-developed speaking and debating skills.

At Miami University, as at other nineteenth century colleges and universities throughout the United States, the creation and development of a university library was not a primary goal of the university administration. What college libraries did exist were small, very focused on religious and historical texts, and were only open to faculty members. Members of the administration felt that, because of the nature of their studies, students did not need access to books beyond the textbooks they memorized and recited from for class. The literary society libraries worked to combat this practice, providing students with access to books, especially more contemporary books that were published in English. Though the literary society libraries still had rather restrictive rules by today's standards, they were often the only libraries available to students. At Miami, the Erodelphian and Miami Union literary societies began collecting books for their libraries almost as soon as the societies were formed. The combined library collections of the literary societies soon outstripped the Miami university library in size. The members of the Erodelphian Literary Society and Miami Union Literary Society were very proud of their libraries, and worked hard to maintain and expand their collections. For as

long as the literary societies remained the predominant extracurricular activity available to students, the literary society libraries were very important to student life and scholarship at Miami.

As at most nineteenth century American universities, the literary societies at Miami began to decline toward the later half of the nineteenth century as other extracurricular activities like fraternities and athletics became more popular, and as the college curriculum began to be modernized. With the decline of the literary societies came the decline of the literary society libraries. The transfer of the literary society libraries to the university library seems to have been a common practice, though Miami's literary societies may have been unusual or perhaps even unique in the amount of back-and-forth that took place before the literary society libraries were finally and completely transferred to the college library. By the end of the nineteenth century, the Miami literary societies and their libraries, as well as the literary societies and literary society libraries of Miami's peer institutions, were largely a thing of the past.

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