



The History of the Philodemic Society, 1830-2011

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Submitted for the Society's enjoyment in the spring of 2012

Philodemicians,

With great pleasure and lots of cheer, I present to you the final product of a project started long ago: the four part history of the Philodemic Society, 1830-2011. First envisioned in the fall of 2009 by Grand Librarian Daniel Rendleman, this history project has been the work of eight semesters, four librarians, and lots of help from alumni and Lauinger Library staff members. It has been featured in four installments in *Utraque Unum*, the journal of the Tocqueville Forum on the Roots of American Democracy, and even if it makes its way into no other hands, at least a copy of it will find a home in our collection in the University Archives.

For posterity, two prefatory notes have been preserved: the first, a note written by Daniel Rendleman upon presenting the first three chapters of the history in spring 2009, and the second, an introduction to the fourth chapter, which was completed three years later. You will also find a short appendix (which will hopefully grow with the years!) containing a number of funny anecdotes provided by alumni during the research process for the fourth chapter.

I hope that you all enjoy learning about the Society that we all hold so dear – maybe you will even stumble across something you recognize from your own time at Georgetown. But what is more important than the enjoyment that us wizened folk might find in these pages is that younger Philodemician readers take this story as a charge: this is not the end of our history project, it is only a good start. Take care of our history and traditions, because it is important; liberty cannot eloquently defend itself, you know.

In any case, all grumblings, questions, comments, and concerns can be directed to Joshua Donovan, the current Librarian of the Society, for this Librarianess Emerita is almost to the end of her time here. I do hope you enjoy, and I do hope that “ELD” continues to be a watchword for us all.

Sincerely,
Emma Green
College Class of 2012

Foreword: Note from Daniel Rendleman to the Society, Spring 2009

Philodemicians,

The Library Committee humbly submits to you the Librarian's Report for Spring 2009. Having little to do with the library itself, this is a general history of the Society from 1830 until 1977. This report is intended for two primary purposes. The first is to reveal some of the wealth of our archives by looking at particular aspects of three time periods. Chapter 1 focuses on tradition and oratory from 1830 until the end of the Civil War. Chapter 2 shows how the Society recovered from that conflict and carries us on to the end of the century. Chapter 3 details the rise of Philodemic intercollegiate debate and offers some explanation as to why the Society was disbanded in 1977. The second purpose of our document is to serve as a time capsule, to be contained within our archives. Future Philodemicians, looking back, will see in this paper what we thought of ourselves and of our predecessors.

I hope that each of you enjoy this quick reading. If Philodemicians, especially new members, spend the time to peruse this history one time, they will gain a general sense of the tradition they are inheriting. I hope that members might catch at least a glimpse of the Society's true purpose, the defense of Liberty.

It has been my pleasure to serve the Society in the capacity of Librarian these past two years, and I have every confidence that my successor will surpass my own efforts.

God bless,

Daniel Rendleman
| College Class of 2009

Chapter 1: Beginnings

By Emma Green

Philodemic History, 1830-1865

1. Founding and Purpose
2. Structure of the society
3. Revolt
4. Conflict at President's Chair
5. Odd traditions – toasts and topics
6. How to make a great speech, nineteenth century style

1. Founding and Purpose

On February 22, 1830, the Philodemic Society was born, appropriately on the birthday of George Washington.¹ Founded by Father James Ryder, Georgetown's Vice-President at the time, the Society was formed to cultivate eloquence in the student body through practice of debate. The name "Philodemic" was chosen for its Greek roots, meaning "a love of the people." In a personal letter, one of Philodemic's original students stated that the Society was founded for the people, paralleling the United States government.²

Our motto, *eloquentiam libertati devinctam*, or "eloquence in defense of liberty," embodies the ultimate purpose of the Philodemic. Originally, the Society was seen as a forum for developing skills needed to watch over and defend the nation. The Philodemic was not only about rhetoric, but about protection of freedom and liberty through discussion of ideas. As Benjamin Floyd Rush said in this 1836 commencement speech:

"...So many who deem it a sacred duty to unravel the mysteries of science, and instruct in the lessons of wisdom, and in the midst of so many disciples of learning.... Suffice it to say these were some of the inducements which urged us to associate ourselves as a Philodemic Society."³

Mr. Rush lauded the natural inquisitiveness of Philodemicians, who lived for learning and exploration of ideas. The early Philodemic was an elite institution, reserved for only the most intellectually curious and advanced students. In the first years of its existence, Philodemic was largely regarded as the "Society of the College."⁴

2. Structure of the Society

During the first years of the Society, special orations were given at four big events during the year: Commencement in June, Independence Day in July, Washington's Birthday in January, and eulogies for departed members or men of note, like Andrew Jackson or the Philodemic's own Father Ryder. Speakers for these special occasions were chosen by committee, and they were often the most revered, senior members of the Society. Notable members of society often attended these events, including Congressmen and esteemed military officials. Indeed, President John Quincy Adams nearly attended one debate, but the course of Philodemic history was changed forever by his driver, who failed to show up for work that day.⁵

One special tradition, the Commemoration of the Landing of the Pilgrims in Maryland, was a flagship event for the Society. Beginning in 1842, this full day of activities involved traveling to Maryland with other members of the Georgetown community and creating a festive slate of events for the community. Important officials were invited to preside over the day's activities, and a chosen Philodemician would give a speech.⁶ At this event, Philodemicians could expect to hear "The Philodemic March," composed specifically for us in 1854 by Pedro A. Duanas.⁷ This event was particularly important to the Catholic community, because it was the only commemoration ceremony for the landing of the first Catholics in the U.S. This celebration demonstrates Georgetown's essential leadership as a Catholic university at this time in history.

In its early years, the Philodemic Society was a much greater part everyday life than it is today. Meeting between two and three times per week, the Society combined business meetings and more informal debates into one session. These meetings were called to order by the President, who was usually a faculty member, or the Vice-President, who was a student representative. Attendance was required, and fines were imposed upon late or absent members. Philodemic meetings were also subject to the will of Georgetown's governing prefects. Once, this tension even resulted in a Philodemic-led revolt of the student body.

3. Revolt

One Sunday night in 1850, the Philodemic wanted to hold a special meeting after study hours. When a prefect refused the meeting privileges, they disregarded his instruction and met as planned. As a consequence for their blatant disrespect, the prefect suspended their late night studying privileges and forbade them from meeting for a month. After protesting this punishment with a petition to the rector and being rejected, the Philodemicians spurred revolt in the student body. Students began hurling stones, exploding firecrackers, and protesting loudly on campus. When the night of chaos came to a close, three Philodemicians were expelled. One, Mr. Xavier Wills from Maryland, stayed on campus and attempted to make a speech before the student body. As soon as he began to speak, and students were promptly dismissed to their quarters – and the true

revolt began. As a body, the students went to the rector's office, demanded redress, and were collectively expelled. Yelling and whooping, the students stormed into the city.

Negotiations between campus administration and the students continued for several weeks. The Washington *Republic* reported that a "foreign professor has been tyrannizing over the students...enforcing the most humiliating and demoralizing practices." Several congressmen agreed to intercede on the students' behalf. Finally, after writing several letters of petition to the administration, students were allowed back on campus once they gave a formal apology for the damage they had done.⁸

This anecdote is amusing and dramatic, but it is also an important reflection of the Philodemic's influence on student life. Philodemicians were not the only rebels – they took many sympathetic, non-debating students with them as well. After only 20 years of existence, Philodemic had become an organization with enormous influence over the student body.

4. Conflict at the President's Chair

To highlight even more drama in the Philodemic Society, our attention now turns to a fateful evening in 1859. Among many other topics concerning the mounting conflict with the South, including "ought nullification be extended to the states,"⁹ the Philodemic chose to debate "Should the South now secede?" The debate spanned several meetings and two weeks, betraying the high emotions and strong opinions surrounding the topic. At the end of two weeks, a victory for the affirmation was won – the Philodemic decided that the South should secede. When the Vice President made a disparaging comment about the South upon the announcement of the verdict, a member from Mississippi sprang at him, starting a brawl on the floor of the Philodemic. Members from North and South began attacking one another; the violence finally escalated so much that Father James Clark, the current President of the Philodemic, had to put out the lights to stop the fighting. As punishment, the President of the University, John Early, banned all further meetings of the Philodemic for that year.⁵

This incident later led to the a new line in the Appendices of the Constitution, which states in the House Rules that no one shall approach the President's chair during the debate.

5. Odd traditions – toasts and topics

Because the Society met several times every week, their topics were narrow in focus, requiring in-depth knowledge on a range of subjects. Many topics were historical and often pitted two great individuals against each other, such as the question "whether Napoleon Bonaparte or General Washington was the greater man."¹ While many original debate topics would be irrelevant today, a surprising number still pose interesting challenges, such as "that her union with England may be detrimental to Ireland"¹⁰ and "is civilization more affected by time than by a few select individuals?"¹¹ Many

contemporary Philodemicians would appreciate the Commencement topic from 1852, which asserted that “socialism is an enemy more dreadful than vandalism.” Some topics also seem slightly ridiculous now, such as an earnest discussion of whether the female mind is as “susceptible to cultivation as the male.”¹²

The Philodemic had a strong tradition of giving toasts after special debates; these often lasted for quite a while, as members were free to chime in with unlimited toasts after some traditional statements were made. Some toasts showed up consistently, such as celebrations of Washington, the Founding Fathers, the Declaration of Independence and the military; these are similar to our traditional Merrick toasts given today. Interestingly, the Irish and the Poles were often referenced; this may indicate strong patterns in the ethnic origins of Society. However, some curious toasts occasionally appeared, catering specifically to the event or the times. One particularly strange toast from July 14th, 1844 was “to Oregon – may the wretch who would refuse to fight for *his* country be flayed alive, anointed with honey, and set on the head of a hornet’s nest.”¹³

6. How to make a great speech, nineteenth century style

Speeches during the first three decades of the Philodemic Society were similar in many ways, and were actually not that different from the speeches of today’s society. While Philodemicians met several times a week for informal debates and meetings, they often gave formal orations at big events for the Society and the greater community. These speeches were always lengthy, sometimes spanning more than an hour.

To be truly eloquent and fit the 19th century norm of impassioned oratory, early Philodemic speeches had to include several components. To begin, the orator had to thank the society profusely for letting him speak, declaring himself unworthy in every possible way and apologizing in advance for the terrible speech he was about to give. This self-deprecation went on for several minutes, and afterwards the orator plunged into his topic. Many speeches celebrated specific holidays, such as Washington’s Birthday or Independence Day, so orators included the grandest patriotic imagery possible. The Founding Fathers were men who “loomed like mist through the ages,”¹⁴ Americans were “the freest, the best, the chosen people of God,”¹⁵ and Washington’s name was most likely out of all to “hold the place where angels assigned it in the Archives of Eternity.”¹⁶

Flowing, patriotic imagery was not enough, however. Without Latin quotes, appeals to ancient Romans and Greeks, and frequent references to history, speakers could never have engaged their classically-educated audiences. At this time in Georgetown’s curricular history, the College placed strong emphasis on classical studies. As a result, Philodemic speeches were often inundated with appeals to the ancients. During the 1840 commencement address by Mr. Daniel C. Digges, one paragraph alone contained two Latin quotes and references to Dionysus, Cicero, Dante, Tasso, Milton, Shakespeare, Raphael, Titian, Phidias and Praxiteles.¹⁷ Religious references were also quite common,

indicating the strong Catholic identity of the Society and Georgetown in these early years.

For all the similarities and differences in oratory habits, the Society's aim has certainly stayed consistent throughout the years. Mr. P.P. Morriss said it well during his Farewell Address of Washington speech in 1836:

...Let eloquetia libertati devincta [*s/c*] be your watch word through life, not the cold, insignificant collection of words without meaning, or thoughts without elevation, or fluency without interest.... That eloquence which comes from the heart.... let such be the eloquence you would aim at. Ponder on the relics of the orators who are past, imbibe their spirit and their zeal, their energy and their patriotism.¹⁸

Still today, we hold these same virtuous goals in the Philodemic Society. Our pursuit of eloquence in defense of liberty is just as pure as in 1836, and our words are just as powerful.

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Chapter 2: Reforming in the Wake of the Storm: A History of the Philodemic Society from 1866-1900

By Michael Desnick

It is my desire that this chapter enhance our knowledge of the Philodemic Society's past, that we might also gain a better understanding of our present, and hopefully, take the lessons our predecessors have to share with us into account as we shape our Society's future. Therefore, may I dedicate this work to all those, Philodemician or not, who passionately seek to defend liberty with eloquence, and hope heartfelt that it is enjoyed by those who read it as thoroughly as I enjoyed researching and writing it.

Following the Civil War, the country lay in a state of bewilderment and confusion. While soldiers from both sides grudgingly tumbled across the nation making their way home after several years of conflict, men and women at home began to seek a way to rebuild the lives that had been so violently disrupted during the four years of bitter strife.

By summer of 1866, the shellshock of war and the President's violent assassination began to fade, and the boys of the Philodemic turned their thoughts towards the kind of normalcy ordinary citizens too desperately sought. Reconciliation between North and South was a theme that pervaded the nation, and also made its way into the Society. In that regard, the society offered honorary membership to General Robert E. Lee in July, an honor for which he courteously thanked the Society in his return letter of July 14th. Ulysses S. Grant was also invited to be an honorary member of the Society. Although the membership tried to carry on normally, business at meetings was often set aside to announce and mourn the death of a former Philodemician.

During this time, the society's desire to maintain a consistency of procedure was reflected in a strict adherence to parliamentary order: weekly meetings involved serious discussion and consideration of the formation of committees, and appointment of members to serve therein. Even seemingly mundane tasks such as gathering questions of debate from the previous year, or examining books of the library were deferred to committee. A formal resolution and voting procedure were even required to offer condolences to the family and friends of Franklin Pierce, an honorary member of the society, upon his death.¹⁹

As men often do in times of uncertainty, these men returned to what they knew best, realizing how contemporary events could be understood gazing upon them through the lens of antiquity. It is from these somber occasions that the society drew inspiration for many of its debates, which were often punctuated with themes of war, military, or conflict in general. For its first debate in October of 1866, the society chose, "Resolved: The death of Caesar was beneficial to Rome," an astonishing topic choice, albeit a propos to the recent events that had astonished the United States.

¹⁹ Box 6, Folder 1

Accounts of the debate taken by the Recording Secretary neglected the content of the actual debate, with the exception of the following commendations, "An eloquent and elaborate discussion was naturally expected, nor were these fond hopes blighted. In fact, so well did these gentlemen perform the task assigned to them and so marked was the influence of their words upon the hearers, that a tie resulted in voting, which could only be resolved by the President casting his vote in the negative." One might be inclined, however, to take Mr. Homer's words with a grain of salt, and attribute such stern division of the chamber to lingering tensions surrounding Lincoln's death.

This same fondness for antiquity was to be found in the society's speaking. To begin the records for the year, Mr. Lyles, the Amanuensis, included at the beginning of his book, "Mentalis Philosophia," a lengthy diatribe in Latin concerning the place and mindset that ought to pertain to all lovers of wisdom. Later, he himself made the comment that the society greatly appreciates a gentleman who could hold himself to the advice of Quintilian, "Nullum nostrum usquam negligentem sermonem," which in its modern instantiation within the Philodemic goes by, "Let it be good, but by God, let it be short."

Similarly macabre topics pervaded the entire semester, including questions as to whether the execution of Sir Walter Raleigh was justifiable, which was negated, whether the execution by Napoleon of Duke Enghien was justified, which too was negated, and whether a lenient or despotic exercise of power is more efficacious in quelling rebellion or preserving tranquility, which ironically is also described as having been, "negated." After a while, the society's militaristic and Francophile tendencies flared, and for several consecutive weeks topics of Napoleon were discussed, including whether he could rightly be called a patriot, whether his invasion of Russia was a military error, and whether his banishment on Elba was justified. Such topics pervaded debate throughout the semester.

As the winter months drew near, several crucial events made their way into the annals of Philodemic history. The first of these came on November 11th, when the Society voted to form a committee to impress upon the President of the College an urging towards the proposal of securing a hall in which Philodemic could hold its weekly meetings. The second happened on the 2nd of December, where the Society convened and debated whether the mental capacities of the sexes were equal, which they indeed decided was the case, despite the vociferous objection of a few dissenters. Although seemingly an obvious fact for a contemporary audience, the measure was rather liberal for a time when other debate societies seemed to constantly negate a similar resolution.

The most important event in the post bellum era of the Philodemic undoubtedly came during the spring of 1867, when it was decided that a Grand Reunion of the Philodemic Society would take place during commencement weekend. Together with Rev. MaGuire, the president of the College, Philodemic president Rev. Clark extended an invitation to all Philodemicians to the Grand Reunion, and to bring with them an autographed photograph of themselves to be included in the Philodemic records. Invitations addressed to Philodemicians made their way across the nation, from Maine to California, but even to such diverse places

as Canada, the West India Islands, and South America. Mexico unfortunately was excluded due to what could only be described as, “want of mail facilities,” but as the only Mexican member was currently attending the college, he was easily informed. The purpose of the meeting was to rekindle ties of brotherhood among Philodemicians, both active and alumni, in order to rectify what had been perceived as a general distancing amongst the society. It was felt that alumni especially had been affected by the separating influences of the “late civil contest.”

Fathers MaGuire and Clark undertook as an effort a gathering back to Alma Mater of as many of her children as possible, to rekindle friendships, bury animosities and go forth, as in previous years, “a united band of brothers.” To accomplish such a lofty endeavor, Father MaGuire elicited the help of the alumni themselves, requesting, “Your assistance in the dissemination of intelligence of this Reunion is heartily solicited.” Furthermore, he implored:

Send copies of this invitation to such persons as you may think likely to be of the class mentioned, and also as far as you can, by means of newspapers in your neighborhood, or any other mode you may think feasible, communicate the invitation to those entitled to receive it, and direct public attention and favor to the celebration.

On July 2nd, 1867, the society held the Grand Reunion, where Mr. Richard T. Merrick of Washington City, whose father William D. Merrick had been a Philodemician, was to give an oration, as he was previously voted to do by unanimous approval of the Society, but his arguing a law trial intervened and Alexander Dmitry, esteemed Philodemician, gave a rousing speech in his stead. Following this oration, a poem was read to the attending guests and after that a tribute to Father Fenwick, whose death had left a whole not only in the hearts of Philodemicians, but the entire College, and indeed, all those who had the pleasure of knowing him. The dinner proceeding was an extravagant affair; the name of each dish was followed on the menu by a quotation from Shakespeare, “the appositeness of which evinced not a little taste and research,” as one observed put it. As a true example of the kind of salty wit persistent amongst the Society, they complimented the Soup St. Julian with, “Expect spoon-meat” from The Comedy of Errors, and beside the veal sweet bread, from Loves Labours Lost, “‘Veal’ quoth the Dutchman, ‘is not veal a calf?’” The Grand Reunion sparked amongst the university a greater interest for the Philodemic Society amongst the Georgetown community as a whole, and this expansion of interest on campus became manifest as the Society surged from the eleven members it counted in 1867 to the twenty-three that it numbered by November of 1874.

The years following the Grand Reunion were occupied by the same kind of intellectual fervor as always, and although the militant muscle of the Philodemic was still flexed during debates like, “Ought Hannibal to have marched against Rome after the Battle of Canae,” contemporary questions such as, “Is the purchase of Walrussia [Alaska] likely to prove a benefit to the United States?” also occupied the debaters’ attention. During this period, average meetings included not only debates, but also officer reports,

discussions on miscellaneous business, as well as votes on resolutions ranging from acceptance of new members to the Committee on Label's recommendation that additional labels should be ordered for the purpose of labeling books in the "smaller case" of the Library.

On the 24th of September in 1874, the Society received wonderful news in the form of a letter from Mr. Richard T. Merrick, whose words reflected a promise he had made to the Philodemic earlier at the triennial celebration of 1874, and were to impact the course of the Philodemic for more than a century henceforth:

I, Richard T. Merrick, desirous of promoting the pursuit of oratory and encouraging the practice of debate among the students of Georgetown...transfer to Patrick Healy and his successors in office 18 shares of Capitol stock in the Metropolitan Railroad Company, which are of the par value \$50 each, to have and hold in trust for the purpose of purchase of a suitable gold medal to be presented to that member of the Philodemic Society who shall be deemed to be the best and most competent speaker of the Society under the following conditions: The Society shall vote on the four best members, who shall compete in public debate monitored by the President of the University and committee and awarded at commencement.

The house then discussed a resolution to offer thanks to the Honorable R.T. Merrick, which was carried. The Society then voted in favor of establishing a committee to search for the missing copies of the Constitution and minute book, which was also carried. Aptly, the first Merrick Debate topic was a resolution as to whether the federal government ought to subsidize railroad companies. The Merrick debate quickly rose to prominence as the foremost debate of the Philodemic calendar, and gained a reputation for attracting the attention of the entire campus and entire surrounding community throughout the following years. The reformed bonds of the society were emboldened during these times of great debate.

In September of 1880, after several years of arduous labor, Father Healy completed construction on a planned five-story stone and brick structure of Flemish Renaissance style.²⁰ In the academic year of 1881-1882, rooms on the third and fourth floor of the building were thrown open to use by students. The Philodemic, after decades of steady expectation, finally saw their dream fulfilled when, on December 13th the Society took possession of the commodious room in the north wing of the building.²¹ A fine chair was set up for the President, a design furnished by Paul J. Pelz, also an architect of the edifice. After some routine business, the Vice President reviewed the half century of the Society's work. A banquet then followed, with many a toast and speech befitting the occasion.

Various attempts at cataloging the membership of the Philodemic Society had been undertaken during the latter half of the 1880's by Father

²⁰ Durkin, S.J., Joseph T. Georgetown University: The Middle Years (1840-1900). Georgetown Press, 1963.

²¹ Richards, S.J., Joseph. Memorial of the 1st Centenary of Georgetown College D.C. 1891.

Corbett and others, who, seeing that such a catalogue had not been printed since 1868, desired to make such a list for posterity. After successfully compiling such a list for the years 1870-1888, he tried to reinstate one starting 1838, but left it unfinished, however, he left a note attached admitting, "Whoever wants to continue this list will have to do it himself."

During this same period, the Philodemic set forth to promote greater understanding of the Constitution and By-Laws, and therefore codified the most recent instantiation of it. The first pocket-size version of the Constitution was also released in 1899. Appreciation of the Library was built directly into the document itself, as the first six rules pertained to the Library and the member privileges thereby. The Library at this point had grown to a substantial size, and members were permitted the right to fare books from the Library, but also to return them in a timely fashion lest they incur a fine. Further engrained were member responsibilities, the most notable of which was written thus, "The decision of the debate shall be render by yeas and nays [not my emphasis] according to the arguments actually advanced, without partiality." Member rights and responsibilities were of utmost importance to the Philodemic Society of the late 19th Century.

One of the more important events of the late 19th Century for the Philodemic was described as the "First intercollegiate meeting between Catholic debaters of the United States." On May 1st, 1895, 3 members of the Society traveled up to Boston for debate with the Fulton Society of Boston College as to whether the income tax law recently passed by Congress was equitable. Given the choice of sides, the Hilltop boys picked the negation. After stirring peroration was heard from the Fulton Society, the three Philodemicians addressed the Hall with what "The Columbian" called, "The wisdom of a statesman and sagacity and polish of a diplomat," which was enhanced by a charming sincerity of logical and thorough arguments, capped off by an "honest, frank manner that won the confidence of the audience." After lengthy deliberation by the judges, Philodemicians were awarded the victory that all agreed they deserved, with the exception of one Massachusetts columnist, who, in reporting the event the next day, referred to them as, "Those Southern Disputants" (strange since the three were from Pennsylvania, North Dakota and California). Revered Thomas Conaty, the head judge at the debate, gave a stirring address that fittingly summed up the lofty goals of both societies, "Jesuit institution turns out not only educated Christians, but Christian statesmen fit to compete against the flower of any American university or college. We challenge the competition and we invite it."

Although the nation of the United States, and in fact the Philodemic Society itself had been fractured by the divisive years of the Civil War, through mutual pursuit of common goals, and a dedication to the pursuit of eloquence in defense of liberty, the Philodemic emerged from the period a body unified. Bonds of kinship formed through those years endured to bring us an organization that to this day remains dedicated to the same lofty ideals.

May our Society continue to perpetuate and learn from these traditions that we may grow stronger and closer in the years to come.

Chapter 3: Fool's Gold, 1900-1977

By Daniel Rendleman

The next seventy-seven years of the Philodemic, taken as a whole, are a bit of a paradox. On the one hand, it was during these years that the Philodemic attained its highest levels of national game, consistently performing well at a high level of intercollegiate competition. National championships, best speaker awards, and long, unbeaten streaks were commonplace. But that success raises the obvious question, "If the Philodemic was doing so well for itself, why did it suddenly disappear and what caused the period of inactivity that was so damaging to the Society's standing on campus?" Several answers are generally given. Some believe that the Philodemic Society hearkened back to an age of old white men that was no longer popular or that was actively opposed by the University. Some believe that the student body was not interested in academic debate. The first claim may have some truth to it; the second claim does not. In fact, right up until the Philodemic's dissolution, it was very active and, by many standards, successful. The story is a confusing one, but it begins with the turn of the century, and we, too, will begin there.

The twentieth century began much as the nineteenth had ended. The Philodemic Society was the most prestigious group on campus and, by all accounts, we were successfully pursuing eloquence and defending liberty. In fact, a new version of the Constitution, approved by the society in 1901, began by defining our little group of friends, declaring, "This Society was first organized in the year of our Lord eighteen hundred and thirty, and the fifty-fourth of the Independence of the United States. It is called the PHILODEMIC SOCIETY OF GEORGETOWN COLLEGE, and has for its primary object the cultivation of Truth, Eloquence, and Liberty."²² These two sentences proclaim the same proud patriotism and the same goals that had characterized the Society for over seventy years. In fact, everything about the Society from this period suggests the idea of continuity.

For example, debate topics showed the same variety and philosophical depth that was found throughout the nineteenth century. In 1903, the Society debated, "Resolved: The character of Shylock as portrayed by Shakespeare is base and criminal, and his condemnation was just."²³ In 1910, we debated, "Resolved: John Brown deserves the title of hero," and, "Resolved: That the work of the Editor-in-Chief of a College paper should count as one course towards his degree."²⁴ This varied selection shows that the Society was interested in literature questions, historical questions, and more pragmatic, everyday concerns.

Philodemicians will, perhaps have some interest in the minor details of Society life. Meetings and debates did not exactly follow the current format of keynoters, floor speakers, keynoters. Topics were not chosen at business meetings. Instead, at each regular meeting of the Society, the debaters would be chosen for three weeks in advance. The next week, those debaters selected and announced the topic they wanted to discuss. When it came time for debate, before any speech was given, the president appointed a single member to serve as critic for that night. Each of the keynoters spoke for five to ten minutes and then gave their rebuttal for no more than three minutes. At this point, the critic gave his comments and the Society voted for the best keynoter or "regular debater" by secret ballot. This was followed by the floor debate

²² Philodemic Constitution, Philodemic Archives, Box 8, Folder 2

²³ Box 8, Folder 1

²⁴ Box 8, Folder 1

or the “volunteer debate” which would last until everyone had said their share.²⁵ Sometimes, the chancellor of the society (think: Faculty Advisor) offered his own critiques at the end, but his attendance was not expected at every meeting. This format is a little different than the modern practice but would not be a major adjustment for any Philodemian in 2009 or in 1839 for that matter.

The Society continued on like this for the next few decades while particular Philodemic traditions gained prominence. The first of these was the Merrick Debate which continued to attract crowds and star power. Judges included major generals, associate justices of the Supreme Court, senators, and many congressmen. Contrary to some reports, it was held on every single year until the Society’s dissolution.²⁶ Keynoters for the debate were chosen by majority ballot at a regular meeting of the Society, two in the Fall and two in the Spring. Alongside this debate, the premier event of the year, grew the Hamilton Debate, named in honor of George Hamilton, Richard T. Merrick’s son-in-law, who donated the funds for the award’s endowment. It was to be given to the best extemporaneous speaker in the Society, though the term extemporaneous may need some defining. It is unclear whether the speakers were told the topic early on the morning of debate or the night before, but they certainly had some amount of time to prepare. There were six of them, chosen by majority ballot at a regular meeting of the Society and the winner was decided by a panel of alumni judges.

One particular point of interest is the date of the Merrick debate. In the 1901 version of the Constitution, it is listed as February 22nd. In the 1911 version, it was February 22nd “or as near thereto as possible.”²⁷ At first, this may seem like an overture to George Washington, and it very likely was. However, the old practice of specifically celebrating Washington’s Birthday had died away within the society and, in a way, the Merrick Debate was taking its place. The focus of the Philodemic’s most anticipated event of the year was no longer the nation’s founder but the oratorical abilities of its members. Taken in isolation, this change does not seem like much and probably would not warrant much interest, but this was just one of many changes coming to the Philodemic.

Before delving into those transformations that would ultimately shake the Society, a particular entry in the *Amanuensis* (or Recording Secretary) book from May 13, 1831 struck this Librarian’s eye. It is worth recording in full:

The final meeting of another Philodemic year—another year of profit and success—was called to order by the President at seven o’clock in a private dining room of the Hotel Roosevelt. With an ill-disguised sadness he called upon the Secretary for the last roll-call and minutes, the last meeting but one. And the secretary responded and as he came to the end of his recitation he too experienced the feeling of sorrow at concluding his efforts in behalf of Philodemic. But the business of the meeting was pleasant, concerned as it was with eating and drinking, and the spirits of the old and new members were lifted to the pleasant contemplation of the matter at hand.

²⁵ 1911 Constitution

²⁶ Box 11, Folder 5, Merrick Program

²⁷ Box 8, Folder 3 Constitution

It is signed, “Sadly Submitted, William Arthur Sullivan.”²⁸ The words are nothing unexpected and the feelings expressed are no different than those felt by any Philodemian during his last days as an undergraduate. However, if you are reading this near the same time that I did, i.e. in 2009, then William Sullivan is either ninety-seven years old or passed from this world. I cannot track down anything about the man after this very entry, but I know that for a time our two lives were very similar, and yours probably is too. Many of our fondest memories are remarkably similar to his own. As Philodemians go forward in their lives and in this Society, we should remember that others were here before us and that, God willing, others will come after us. There may come a day when 2009 is seen as the midpoint in the Philodemian’s storied history. These are things worth reflecting on.

The Society itself moved on too, most notably with the arrival of Fr. John S. Toohey, SJ in 1911. He served as the Society’s moderator, coach, and mentor, until 1949, and under him, the Philodemian began to make its name known. Of course, intercollegiate debate was not unheard of before this time. Upon occasion, the Society debated the Enosian Society at the George Washington University or some other school, perhaps once or twice during a school year. Under Toohey, the Philodemian became the debate team for Georgetown University, annually crushing the likes of Harvard, Yale, Penn, Boston College, and many others. Mostly these schools came from the East Coast, but not exclusively. A Society history from 1955 records about Toohey that, “During his term as moderator, he instilled a great love of eloquence and oratorical skill in Georgetown undergraduates. It was under his guidance that Georgetown went from 1921 to 1939 without suffering a single defeat...”²⁹ The archives, for those who care to peruse them, abound with newspaper clippings detailing the Society’s exploits. One clipping will announce the debate, another will announce the results, almost always the same: victory for Blue and Grey.

Alongside this growing intercollegiate dominance was a subtle change in topic selection. Philosophical and literature questions were disappearing as early as 1911 and being replaced by pure policy resolutions, such as, “Resolved: that the United States government should appoint federal registrars to supervise registration in those places where there is evidence of the deliberate restriction of the right to vote. And be it further resolved: that the Congress include provisions for the protection of all citizens in their right to both register and vote.”³⁰ They were not all quite so specific, but the general trend was towards discussions of specific laws or treaties or policies that should or should not be undertaken by the Federal government. Literature, Philosophy, and History all passed out of Philodemian discussion.

These two movements combined to transform the Philodemian Society. Minute books from the 1950s and 60s reveal a drastically different kind of meeting. Instead of each night being devoted to a particular resolution, the Society openly conversed on a topic such as foreign relations with China or the government of Spain. This was often accompanied by a guest speaker, an expert on the area. Then, at some point during the evening, someone proposed a resolution based on the topic of discussion. If the Society was talking about the role of the United Nations, a member might suggest, “Resolved: The United States should require the Soviet Union to pay its debts to the United Nations or lose its seat.” The Society then began discussing the merits of that resolution until it was either decided or they voted to adjourn.

²⁸ Box 9, Folder 4

²⁹ Box 10, Folder 2 Debating at Georgetown

³⁰ Box 11, Folder 8, Mar 8, 1965

Meetings lasted anywhere from forty-five minutes to almost two hours.³¹ Due to the incomplete nature of our records, it is hard to tell when this new meeting format first took place. It probably was a long process, but it seems to have been completed between 1944 and the mid-1950's.

One particular meeting on October 11, 1963 revolved around whether or not Edward Kennedy should be elected to the United States Senate. Apparently, it was a pretty hot issue and several resolutions and counter resolutions were proposed. One side tried avoiding a vote on the resolution by voting for adjournment, calling for quorum, and using other tricks of parliamentary procedure. The recording secretary, who was a very understated writer, recorded that eventually, "the rival factions began to express their intellectual rivalry through physical manifestations, centered around the historic door at the entrance of the room."³² The President called for adjournment and no vote was rendered.

But the format was not the only thing that had changed. Consider this description of the Philodemic and the Edward Campion Society from the early 1960s:³³

More than mere clubs for intercollegiate debaters, these organizations are first and foremost training grounds for Georgetown men who are interested in holding public office or in performing public service. Nowhere is this dominant purpose better exemplified than in the weekly meetings of the societies. Here, every effort is made to simulate "real life" public debates and discussions. Contemporary issues are probed and argued with all of the rough and ready vehemence and earnestness of a congressional debate. In this setting, where "no holds are barred," the Georgetown man rapidly learns to prize and employ quick thinking, wit and eloquence.³⁴

The Philodemic had always had three main goals, one of which was a means to the other two, and while that one, eloquence, was still highly prized, there was now no mention of either Liberty or Truth. The primary purpose was, supposedly, self-improvement with the eventual aim of public service. That is certainly a noble goal (and one which many other literary societies at other colleges had held from their founding), but it marked a dramatic change from the first 130 years of Philodemic history.

The two men who did the most to shape the Philodemic over the next couple decades were Dr. William Reynolds and Mr. James Unger, the first serving as coach from 1960-1967, the latter from 1968-1983. Throughout the 1950s, intercollegiate debate had shifted away from the titanic struggles of school versus school premier events into tournament format. Instead of highly attended community affairs on the stage of Gaston Hall, debates became private affairs done before one to three judges. Style was less important as research and topical expertise came to the fore. The Philodemic had kept up, but was not excelling.³⁵ After Fr. Toohey, a series of temporary coaches came and went, none of them staying for longer than a couple years. In addition, the new School of Foreign Service had created their own Edward Campion Debate Society, splitting Georgetown's oratorical abilities in two. But the two groups merged in 1960 and soon afterward Dr. Reynolds arrived on campus. The Philodemic began winning

³¹ Box 10, Various Minute Books

³² Box 11, Folder 7

³³ The Edward Campion Society was the School of Foreign Service's Philodemic counterpart.

³⁴ Box 11, Folder 1

³⁵ Durkin, Joseph T., Swift Potomac's Lovely Daughter p143

tournaments and even held its own Cherry Blossom Tournament for high school students, which eventually involved over 150 schools.

While all of this was going on, regular weekly meetings continued but took on a different, secondary nature. Some Philodemicians saw these meetings as training sessions for the “real” work of intercollegiate tournaments. This divide was heightened when James Unger came to Georgetown. Mr. Unger, who passed away in 2008, is considered by the policy debating community to have been the greatest debate coach of the 1970s. He came to Georgetown after receiving his J.D. at Harvard Law and immediately turned Georgetown into a debating powerhouse. In five different years from 1973 to 1980, one of Mr. Unger’s teams was ranked first in annual coaching polls.³⁶ Georgetown excelled under Mr. Unger’s leadership and stood at the forefront of policy debate in America.

The observant reader just noticed that one of Mr. Unger’s top teams, in 1980, competed three years after the demise of the Society itself. Throughout Georgetown’s rise to intercollegiate glory, a rift grew between the two aspects of Philodemic: weekly debate and policy tournaments. The former suffered especially from an aura of stuffiness and tradition that was unpopular on campus at the time. Other similar groups like the Georgetown Sodality, the college’s oldest student organization, also died out in that environment.³⁷ When Philodemicians came back from summer break in 1977, they found that the President’s office was building cubicles in the Philodemic Room to fit the needs of its expanding staff.³⁸ The move was widely detested on campus and several faculty members, including our friend, Dr. John Glavin, protested. Eventually, the President’s office relented, but it was clear that the Philodemic Room was no longer an integral part of the school or its oldest secular student group.

The Society itself died off. Policy debate lived and thrived and sometimes continued to use the Philodemic name, but the organization as it had existed since 1830 was gone. It remained in this state for the next eleven years until an enterprising Georgetown student named Eric George had a passion to set things right.

It is hard definitively identify the cause of the Philodemic’s downfall. What follows is simply this librarian’s analysis: The Philodemic fell victim to its own success. It rose to the very heights of intercollegiate debate and grew to championship caliber in whatever format it competed in. But along the way, priorities shifted. Policy debate came to emphasize research and logical argumentation, fine things to be sure. But as generations of Philodemicians drew closer to that flame, they turned away from the issues of Philosophy, Religion, Literature, and History that had animated Philodemicians in the past. There have been at least four possible definitions of the word Philodemic over the years, but the least plausible is one given during the Philodemic’s “Golden Age” where one reporter wrote that it meant, “Love of Eloquence.” That may have accurately and fully described the Society as it existed, but not as it was created.

Nor is this to say that Philodemicians from that period deserve blame or were in any way less dedicated than their predecessors. To some extent, the Philodemic belongs to its current members in any given year, and, as the interests of generations of students shifted, so too did the purpose of the Society. Nonetheless, this is one Philodemician who is glad to see a Society that so closely resembles its earlier roots and who finds comfort in the fact that Eloquence is once again subservient to Liberty.

³⁶ Wikipedia

³⁷ Jordan Nardino, e-mail

³⁸ The Hoya, September 2, 1977

Chapter 4: The Boys (and Girls) are Back in Town, 1989-2011

By Emma Green

Preface: Words from a retiring Librarianess, spring 2012

Capturing recent memory is difficult. All Philodemicians who have joined our ranks in the last two decades have their favorite memories, stories of debauchery, and unique spin on the events and politics of the Society. Much of our memory of these two decades has been filtered through long years of scattered records, fluctuating interest, and aging memories. But that is exactly why we must capture our history now, while the Philodemic remains strong and our connections to alumni remain active. In undertaking this history of the Philodemic Society from 1989-2011, today's Philodemicians hope to capture a bit of what has made us into the Society we are today – in all of our quirky, eloquent glory. Certainly, this account will be incomplete, but hopefully it will provide future Philodemicians with some helpful background on Philodemicians of old so that they may create a better Society of their own.

I. The Years Before: The 1980s in the Philodemic Society

Our former Grand Librarian, Daniel Rendleman (COL '09), last left the story of the Philodemic in the age of the 80s. By his account, our Society had firmly shifted away from the tradition of literary debate and weekly meetings by this time – we had become a small team of competitive debaters who focused almost exclusively on policy. While the face of the Philodemic had certainly changed, we still count among our ranks the small but mighty contingent of Philodemicians who persevered through these years.

As had been the tradition since the beginning of the Philodemic, until 1983, our organization had a coach that helped us with weekly debates and intercollegiate competition. But in the fall of 1983, Philodemic Coach James Unger was suspended from the University under suspicion of misappropriating funds and made a quick exit, leaving the Philodemic in its “survival years.”³⁹ During this time, a series of part-time coaches cycled through, but debate efforts were largely sustained by dedicated students like Steve Larson (a former United States District Court judge), Mike Mazarr (a current adjunct professor at Georgetown University), Stuart Rabin, and Gary Thompson. Mr. Thompson describes these years as “rag-tag” but “lots of fun,” full of road trips in old BMWs, tie-dye T-shirts, and a surprisingly strong competitive showing.⁴⁰

But in the wake of the graduation of some of these few remaining Philodemicians, the debate program at Georgetown all but died. By 1988-1989, the program was almost non-existent. The “reconstitution” of the Society that followed during the 1989-1990 academic year rescued the Philodemic from near death and reconnected us to our roots.

³⁹ *The Georgetown Voice*, “Debate Coach Under Investigation,” 18 October 1983, 4.

⁴⁰ Gary Thompson, personal email correspondence with Emma Green, May 2011.

II. Our Reconstitution: 1989-1990

For Georgetown's Bicentennial celebration in 1989, an excellent project was undertaken: the publication of *Swift Potomac's Lovely Daughter*, a volume of student research papers on the history of the University. It is a testament to the Society's historical significance to Georgetown that not one, but three (!) chapters of this volume are dedicated to the history of the Philodemic Society.⁴¹ At a time when our organization was nearly non-existent, interest in reviving one of the University's oldest traditions was clearly growing. One of the student authors, Eric George, came together with several other dedicated Georgetown alumni – including Richard Gordon, who was the Associate and Assistant Dean of Georgetown Law School at the time – to reconstitute the Philodemic Society as a literary debating group.

At this point, an aside about Dean Gordon is in order. As a student of the Philodemic Society the 1950s, he served as President and won the Merrick Medal. Fortunately for the future of our Society, during his undergraduate years, Dean Gordon became friends with Leo O'Donovan, who later became a Jesuit and President of Georgetown University.⁴² When Fr. O'Donovan began his term in 1989, he sat down with Dean Gordon and asked him, "What's the first thing I should do as President of Georgetown?" Without hesitation, Dean Gordon replied, "Give the Philodemic its room back." Within two years, the Philodemic had gone from being a fledging idea discussed in Healy Pub to a small (but enthusiastic) group that met weekly to defend liberty with eloquence in the style of a traditional literary debating society.

III. The Early Years: Philodemic in the 1990s

In its early years, the Philodemic was small, passionate, and conservative. But our loyalty to one another was strong from the beginning. When a Philodemian, Andrew Booth, died in May of 1993, Philodemians went on a campaign to get a memorial service for him in the Philodemic Room. They passionately argued that the Philodemic Society had been one of the most important things Mr. Booth did on campus, and worked to bring the Philodemic together as a community to commemorate his death.⁴³

But, as it were, this sad part of our history marks a larger story in the Philodemic's recent past – our variable relationship with the Georgetown administration. Throughout the early 1990s, the Philodemic wandered in and out of the Philodemic Room on Thursday nights, and we were ultimately denied access to the room for Mr. Booth's memorial service. During some weeks, our debates were held in the Philosophy Department conference room. The small but resilient group of Philodemians was given a boost when the chair of the Philosophy Department wrote a "letter of recommendation" on our behalf to help us get back into the Philodemic Room, although to little avail.⁴⁴ Other debates were held in off-campus locations, like the City Tavern Club.⁴⁵

⁴¹ Joseph T. Durkin, ed., *Swift Potomac's Lovely Daughter: Two Centuries at Georgetown through Students' Eyes* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1990).

⁴² Jordon Nardino, personal email exchange with Emma Green, June 2011.

⁴³ Letter to the University from Rita Jankovich, Georgetown University Archives (GUA), Philodemic Collection, Box 010202.

⁴⁴ Letter from Philosophy Department, GUA, Philodemic Collection, Box 010202.

⁴⁵ Russell Smith, personal email exchange with Emma Green, June 2011.

Our struggle to regain our hallowed hall continued during the beginning of the 1990s. The alumna who had served as the first female President of the Society, Rita Jankovich, led an alumni letter campaign on behalf of current Philodemicians to help them secure permanent access to the Philodemic Room on Thursday evenings. A letter drafted to President O'Donovan traced the past conversations with the President's Office, noting that the only effective communication occurred when current Philodemicians were backed by an alumni threat to cut off donations.⁴⁶ While we have not regained full access to our room, this story took a happy turn in 2011 when President John DeGioia's Chief of Staff, Joseph Ferrara, promised the Society seniority over all other reservations for the Philodemic Room.

In addition to our tenuous relationship with the President's Office, the Philodemic also had an on-and-off relationship with Georgetown administration at large early on during our reconstitution, particularly with the Student Activities Commission. Admittedly, all student organizations can empathize with the challenges of creating good programming, and SAC has certainly shifted quite a bit over time for the better. But as we moved into the 1990s, the Philodemic faced several significant issues of cooperation and reputation, dubbed by one amanuensis as "The Persecution."⁴⁷ During the 1995 academic year, the Philodemic was put on probation for its exclusionary induction policies, accused of discriminating against certain students and having a closed induction ceremony. The fall-out from this was divisive, and ultimately resulted in the resignation of the standing president and vice president.⁴⁸ Our Constitution and By-Laws were edited to accommodate a more "open" induction policy while still adhering to our long-standing traditions, and many of these changes dictate our induction policies today. No interested student who consistently attends debates will ever be denied induction into the Society, and moreover, we are thrilled to welcome anyone who values eloquence in the defense of liberty into our community.

Lore also has it that during this time period, Associate Dean of Students Penny Rue accused the Philodemic of being "racist because of its dress code."⁴⁹ We certainly may have struggled with the reputation of being an "old boys' club" (to which this Librarianess strongly objects, but there you are). But this incident marks a height in tension between the Society and the University; according to alumni sources, Dean Rue's departure significantly helped strengthen the Philodemic's position within the Georgetown community.

IV. Culture

On this note of the Philodemic's reputation in the Georgetown community, a brief note on the culture of the Society is worth examining. Many of the alumni who contributed to this project commented on the make-up of the Society throughout the early years following our reconstitution, and the results were not quite what one would think. Although many early Philodemicians recalled the Society as overwhelmingly white and conservative-leaning, women

⁴⁶ Memo to alumni, GUA, Philodemic Collection, Box 010202.

⁴⁷ Amanuensis Book from spring 1994 and fall 1995, entry by Russell Smith, GUA, Box 960515

⁴⁸ Russell Smith, personal email exchange with Emma Green, June 2011.

⁴⁹ Jordon Nardino, personal email exchange with Emma Green, June 2011

played a surprisingly strong leadership role. Certainly, men outnumbered women by quite a bit, but at least three of the Philodemic presidents of the 1990s were women.⁵⁰

Another aspect of our culture during this era was the relationship between the Society and other organizations on campus. Oral tradition used to frame Philodemic as part of a “triumvirate” of sorts on campus: the International Relations Club, the Delta Phi Epsilon Foreign Service Fraternity, and the Philodemic Society had many overlapping members. Indeed, one of the strongest points of political controversy in the Society was whether or not these alliances were becoming too strong.⁵¹

The size of the Philodemic Society also fluctuated quite a bit throughout the early years of our history. During the early parts of the 1990s, we were a small (but dedicated) band of debaters. Starting around 1993, the Philodemic had about 20 members, only 10 of whom were active.⁵² Toward the end of the decade, by 1997, the Philodemic had about 65 inducted members, about 40 of whom were active. This surge in membership and attendance marked a new era of success in the Philodemic, one which was marked with innovation and the beginning of many traditions which we cherish today.

V. **Party Like It's 1999: New Philodemic traditions at the turn of the Millennium**

By the turn of the Millennium, attendance at weekly debates had shifted to an average of 40 or 50, but attendance at larger debates – like the Hamilton or Merrick debates – came to about 100. The community was growing stronger and more active, and this growth was marked by several important changes.

First, the Philodemic became more diverse. The earlier “core constituency [of the Philodemic] was white, male, Catholic, and intellectual in an old-fashioned way, enamored of Chesterton, Neuhaus, Lewis, Newman, Descartes, Aquinas, St. Paul, and Plato.”⁵³ Some of the “Diaspora” included “socialists; the committed (but non-socialist) left; partisan politicians; parliamentary and policy debaters; a strong contingent of geeks; and a few people who came by simply for the show.”⁵⁴ As membership grew, however, many new voices were heard. Significantly, much new input came from other parts of the campus community, including members from the College Democrats, the College Republicans, and the International Relations Club. These students gravitated strongly toward policy, and “Plato became a dirty word.”

But our traditions of yore were not forgotten, and in the spirit of the past, several new traditions were established. One of the Philodemic’s fondest traditions, the Dean Gordon Debate, was established in 1995 to commemorate Dean Gordon’s contributions to the reconstitution of the Philodemic Society.⁵⁵ Until his death in 2003, Dean Gordon personally attended these debates, which award the wittiest speaker of the night in honor of Gordon’s own reputed wit. As all of today’s Philodemicians could attest, however, sometimes this endeavor turns south, and one alumnus recounted a particularly delightful exchange with Dean Gordon: when asked what he thought of that year’s debate, he replied, ““It was terrible,”” speaking in his

⁵⁰ Rita Jankovich, the first female President, Kathy Homoki (now Trimble), and Tera Brown. Apologies to any others whose names may not have been included.

⁵¹ Jordon Nardino, personal email exchange with Emma Green, June 2011

⁵² Russell Smith, personal email exchange with Emma Green, June 2011.

⁵³ Jack Massey, email exchange with Emma Green, June 2011.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ Russell Smith, email exchange with Emma Green, June 2011.

“unforgettable baritone.”⁵⁶ Later, a donation in his honor was given to the Society, and this helped us create the pins that read “Dean Gordon” – oh so subtly – on the back.

Another cherished – albeit more debaucherous – tradition of the Philodemic Society was created ca. 1997 or 1998: the legendary “Senior Debate,” our yearly send-off to the senior class. And if the reader will indulge a brief moment of self-regard, the Librarianship was also re-established in 1998. Jordon Nardino, serving as the first of the new group of Librarians of the Society, undertook several historical projects; notably, he compiled some key facts about the Society’s history and lobbied the University to restore some of the original artwork to the Philodemic Room.⁵⁷

Looking a bit forward into the history of the Society, three other, newer Philodemic traditions are worth noting. One, the Orange Cactus Award, was awarded beginning in 2003 to the speaker who most consistently offered outrageous comments on the floor of the Philodemic. The story behind this award has been warped slightly by the waters of history, but seems to have been named for an inexplicable comment by a member named Amar Weisman about an orange cactus and a convenience store.⁵⁸ Allegedly, a physical orange cactus actually existed for a time, but the award was given for the last time ca. 2005 or 2006.⁵⁹

President Jonathan Deutsch (2005) and future President Patrick Connolly (2006) helped create two new traditions that still exist today: the Father Ryder Award, given to the best floor speaker during the Merrick Debate; and a softer tradition, that of no politicking before the election of our officers at the Grand Semi-Annual meeting. While both of these traditions seem well-established in our Society today, their birth was relatively recent, showing just how powerfully cultural can sway perceptions of history in our Society.

VI. Recent Memory: A healthy, happy Society

In recent years, the Philodemic has become stronger than ever. In the latter half of the ’oughts, membership began to take a “40-60” shape, with the goal of beginning the year at 40 inducted members and ending with around 60.⁶⁰ But more than that, the regularly-attending non-member community exploded – by the fall of 2008, the Philodemic Society routinely saw more than 100 members at its first few debates of the year. By the 2011-2012 academic year, the Society consistently sustained 80-100 members at most of its weekly Thursday night debates.

And, excitingly, new generations of Philodemicians have continued to bring innovation to our Society. Off and on, the Philodemic has competed with literary debate societies at other Universities, such as the Winchester Cup debate with the Jeffersonians at the University of Virginia and the Columbia Cup with the Enosinian Society at the George Washington University.⁶¹ During the spring of 2009, the Philodemic Society hosted Qatari delegates from

⁵⁶ Jordon Nardino, email exchange with Emma Green, June 2011.

⁵⁷ Jordon Nardino, email exchange with Emma Green, June 2011.

⁵⁸ Martin Skold, email exchange with Emma Green, June 2011.

⁵⁹ Jonathan Deutsch, phone conversation with Emma Green, June 2011. In this Librarianess’s humble opinion, the end of this award was perhaps for the best.

⁶⁰ Randy Drew, Membership Report 2008, GUA.

⁶¹ NB: The Enosinian Society was revived ca. 2007 by a young woman who was later inducted as an honorary member of the Philodemic Society, Ms. Jacqueline Posada. To our knowledge, however, their Society no longer exists. The Jeffersonians, on the other hand, just happen to be quite difficult to contact. We did, however, visit them in the springs of 2008, 2010, and 2012, and a *very* good time was had by all.

the Doha Debates, engaging in a smaller, more intimate debate in Riggs Library about the role of women before the nationally-televised debate was hosted at Georgetown the next day. And in the spring of 2011, the Society hosted a debate against Bruce Friedrich, Vice President of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA); this debate saw record attendance and drew several members of the faculty.

Along with this impressive growth in membership, the Society has striven to coalesce as a community. Andrew Rugg (President in 2007) began our tradition of hosting regular “President’s Dinners” as a way for members and non-members to get to know one another outside of the debate setting. Every week after debates, we walk as a group to Martin’s Tavern on Wisconsin Avenue, where fun is had by all. And during a short-lived and perhaps ill-advised bout of athleticism, the Philodemic even fielded a flag football team during the fall of 2008, resulting in only a few minor injuries.

Of course, a Society’s history stretches far beyond these few pages, and much has been missed. Hopefully, this account will cast some light on our reconstitution, the origins of some of our newer traditions, and our shifting culture over time. Whatever conclusions you may draw, fair reader, take heart that the Philodemic is on its way up, developing more and more into the forum for debate on campus.

Appendix: Debauchery, for those who are interested

1. From Jack Massey (SFS '99) and Paul Miller (COL '99)

Mr. Massey's account: Miller and I studied abroad in Oxford together. Among episodes of sapient colloquy, vulgar drunkenness, and dancing in various 'oomph-sha, oomph-sha, oomph-sha' clubs (a horrifying image, even now), we used to hang out at the Union. There, we played chess, drank subsidized beer, tried talking to British girls, and listened to Elvis and Glen Campbell on the jukebox, until the Tories voted the jukebox and the girls out of the bar in retaliation.

We were inebriado mas inebriado in the Union Bar one day when a Brit came in and said they were traducing American independence in the debating chamber. So I abandoned my closely developed French opening and sauntered on in, looking very American in cowboy boots, blue jeans, and a white shirt. I was even thin, then, which is hard to remember.

And miraculously, I got the floor immediately, as if the episode were being filmed rather than lived. Just walked in, raised my hand, was recognized as the honorable gentleman from Texas, and strode up to the platform. Where I proceeded to shout about manifest destiny, nuclear deterrence, Dwight Eisenhower, the glory of our arms, the might of our economy, and the freedom (oh, the freedom, bought so dear but appreciated so totally) that is indubitably and forever ours, never to be known the dirt-grubbing subjects of an ancient and terrible imperium.

They can ask you questions in the Union, which is where the real action is, and I took several of them from the horde of increasingly agitated PPE undergraduates, managing to insult Viscount Montgomery, Herbert Kitchener, Douglas Haig, Charles Cornwallis, and a whole host of British military men before noting that the Germans keep kicking the British off the Continent, and we keep letting them back on. More on Eisenhower. Reflections on British martial virtue. Preference for mad Hanoverians to indispensable philosopher-Presidents.

It was a really drunk, funny, obnoxious, and historically well-informed speech. Finally I was shouted and gavelled down, and escorted back to the bar. I was later informed that I had won the debate, the 'Champagne Debate,' but I never received my bottle from the storied Union cellars. Pearls before swine, champagne before Americans was, I take it, their thinking.

Later, Miller and I ran one or two Union-style debates in the Philodemic (abetted by the Parliamentary debaters, who essentially used that style anyway) and got rave reviews. The ability to interrupt the key-noters made their longer speeches more fun and bearable, and the staccato rhythm on the floor was also exhilarating. Also, it's interesting to see who's fast on his feet and who isn't--one problem with the Philodemic is the tendency of some to memorize speeches and then give them in grandiloquent fashion, which isn't (really) what debate should be. Although I suppose the best feature of the Philodemic, the one that marks it as the greatest debating institution of which I've been a part, is its tolerance of different styles. Anyone who says that you can't compare apples and oranges is, after all, the merest idiot.

Mr. Miller's Account: That is, of course, a totally fabricated story, or rather one that leaves out half the point. Kind of like a man who boasts about the fish he has caught years after memory has forgotten even what kind of fish it was.

There was a debate at the Oxford Union, "Resolved: This House Does Not Recognize the Independence of the United States." Almost every American in town showed up, but they were still drowned by the sea of Britons eager to feel vicariously Great by trashing their imperial progeny. Jack is also remembering rightly that he stood up, gave a speech, and was howled, gaveled, booed, shouted, and nearly wrestled back down. The line that really pissed them off (my memory here is better because I drank less than Jack before the debate) was "If it weren't for us, you'd all be speaking German!" said with a deliberately pronounced Texas twang. Jack didn't get very far after that.

But Jack is a little unkind to leave out my rebuttal of his ugly American routine. A few speakers later, I rose, thanked the audience, and told them that while my erstwhile American colleague was right in pointing out that the United States was politically and militarily independent, we were, alas, yet still dependent, culturally, on our true motherland: the United Kingdom. (Much applause.) I spoke movingly of the great benefit to humankind done by the British in their steadfastness, their resolve, their selfless assumption of world responsibility. I do believe I called them the light of civilization. Then I told them of my dream. (More applause). A dream that one day, the Union Jack would again fly from the skylines of Boston and Philadelphia. A dream that the Union Jack would fly from every hill and molehill of Mississippi. From every mountainside, that Union Jack would fly. (Continuous applause). And one day, I dreamed, every child of Churchill--British and Irish, Welsh and Canadian, Australian and American--would join hands and sing in the words of the new national anthem: God save the Queen! God Save the Queen! God save the Queen! (Thousands of Brits rise as one to their feet, thundering ovation, shouts, hurraahs).

It was only after that that they awarded Jack the stupid bottle of champagne and we sat drinking in the pub for the next several hours.

2. **From Martin Skold (SFS '05), a story with which we can all identify**

In Spring 2002, there was a debate over the relative merits of FDR and Ronald Reagan. Mr. Dattatreya, not impressed with either, noted in a speech favoring FDR that FDR was the founder of the American welfare state, while Reagan slept more in office than any other president, but that FDR had one saving grace Reagan lacked: he had died in office. This was too much for the illustrious Mr. Horgan, who rose in opposition. Bringing himself up to his imposing 6'2" height, he thundered in his deep basso profundo voice: "Ronald Reagan was conceived immaculately! He alone could do no wrong; he alone was sinless. When he dies [it was 2002], he will ascend to Heaven on the wings of angels and be seated at the right hand of God!"

3. **From Daniel Rendleman (COL '09), Grand Librarian of the Philodemic Society**

[Speaking to the reputation and perception of the Society]: As for the student body at large, I don't know that people thought of us very often. Not more than say the SE Asian Society or the Renaissance Club. I doubt most people had very strong opinions about us either way, though, the head librarian at Special Collections in Lauinger did once tell me, "I love it. You're so popular. It's like your basketball stars." I did not dissuade him from this notion.