

The Ciceronians One Hundred Thirty-Four Years

By Reid Banks

For one hundred thirty-four years the Ciceronian Literary Society has functioned at Mercer. At times its vigorous and omnipotent presence has easily belied its age; at other times it has seemed to possess all the senility and frailty expected of its aged condition. But somehow it keeps coming back. The plans are laid, the schedules go up, and the Ciceronian Society meets, if not in the enthusiastic response to the discussions of the present, then in reverent respect for the royal heritage of over a century and a quarter of past societies.

Began in 1833 at Penfield, the Franklin Society split to form the Ciceronian and Phi Delta debating societies. The two rivaled each other for more than a century, each amassing sizeable treasuries, building great meeting halls, and possessing huge libraries, the books of which have been on loan to Mercer's library since 1903.

Having moved to the campus in Macon, the Ciceronian Society took up residence in the Administration building where now the Dean's office is located. The Society's motto, *Veritas et Eloquentia* (Truth and Eloquence), seemed to thrive on new Mercer soil, for the Society was soon challenging the Phi Deltas to rigorous debates in what is now the Economics building.

Until the 1930's and the death of the Phi Delta Society, the two organizations debated literary and political topics of every conceivable magnitude or sometimes triviality. A brief glimpse at the old Ciceronian Society minutes now filed away in the Stetson Library reveals a number of interesting subjects debated. "Which has the more influence, money or women?"

Surprisingly enough the latter was preferred. "Ought drunkenness to be an excuse for crime?" The decision (unfortunate for some, of course) went negatively. However, when it came to deciding whether man sprang from an original pair, there was a hung jury. For some reason they did not want to commit themselves on this issue.

There were of course more realistic topics then these. In Penfield days, for instance, to the question, "Ought Beauregard to advance on Washington?" the response interestingly enough was negative. A similar answer came to the question, "Would reopening the slave trade be beneficial to the South?"

Just last year the Society tackled the question, "Can it be proved from Shakespeare's works that Hamlet was a Christian?" As Mercer's oldest organization, then, the Ciceronian Society possesses a tremendous freedom of discussion. In fact, former faculty member Dr. Wilson C. Snipes of the English department once commented, "The Ciceronian Society has the potential for being the nucleus of an intellectual revolution at Mercer." It is no wonder, then, that the Society still thrives. Somehow those schedules continue to go up, and the Ciceronian Society continues to meet; perhaps it will always thrive.

Topics discussed by the society this year have ranged from "Lesser known aspects of Sidney Lanier" to Samuel Beckett's *Waiting For Godot*. The next meeting will be Thursday evening at 7:00, in room 314 of the Student Center. The program will center around a talk by Tom Cauthorn on the works of Ernest Hemingway.

The Legend of The Charter

Legend often accompanies antiquity. And so it is with the charter of the Alpha Beta Chapter of the Kappa Sigma Fraternity. The charter of the Alpha Beta Chapter was the second charter granted by the present Zeta Chapter of the University of Virginia in the first drive to expand the fraternity into a national organization. The charter is dated December 10th, 1874, Kappa Sigma history, which is somewhat limited in its account of the Alpha Beta Chapter, shows that the chapter established in 1874, was the second one established by the original University of Virginia organization — but this chapter went out of existence a year or so later. The only reason on record to explain this collapse of old "Beta" is "undue conservatism".

The chapter was reorganized by a more liberal group of men in 1891, renamed "Alpha Beta", and has flourished since then. But the fact remains that for a little over fifteen years there was no Kappa Sigma Chapter at Mercer University. Despite the inactivity of the chapter for those fifteen years, the original charter of 1874 still remained in the proud possession of Mercer's Kappa Sigma group. How the charter survived those years is somewhat of a mystery.

Legend has it — and legends are often true — that the "Beta" charter, after being lost for several years, was found behind the fireplace among the ashes of the old Kappa Sigma room, when a remodeling job was being done on the administration building — then Mercer's only building. It is said that the janitor, upon finding the charter, turned to a student standing by and asked: "Can you tell me what this is?" Fortunately the student recognized the charter and explained what it was to the janitor. He complimented the janitor on his alertness, and said that he had done the fraternity an invaluable service. The janitor replied: "Do you really think so?" "Most assuredly", answered the student: "You will be hearing about the Kappa Sigma Fraternity again on this campus." And that student proved to be right.

Another very interesting story about the obtaining of the "Beta" charter, and the establishing of the Kappa Sigma Fraternity at Mercer is preserved in the history of the fraternity. The founder of the chapter was William Anderson Thomas of Davisboro, Georgia. Thomas had attended Trinity College before coming to Mercer, and it was there he had been initiated into the Eta Chapter of Kappa Sigma. Apparently Thomas had heard about the establishing of the new university in Macon from his parents; and the desire to go to school closer to home, plus the missionary zeal to spread Kappa Sigma abroad, led him to transfer to Mercer in the fall of 1874. The story goes on to recount that when Thomas arrived at Mercer he was immediately set upon by the fraternity men of the campus. He, of course, told them that he was already a Kappa Sigma. The "rushers", after assuring him that his fraternity would surely die out in a year or so, magnanimously gave him until after chapel of the following day to agree to join their fraternity. But William Anderson Thomas was a Kappa Sigma. That night he set to work. The next day after chapel he met the other fraternity men in accordance with his agreement. To their surprise he declined their invitation with the announcement that he had secured five friends and promised brothers during the night and that he intended to organize a Kappa Sigma chapter on Mercer's campus. And that he did!

The two signatures of the "Beta" charter present another interesting fact. The signatures are those of Lyon G. Tyler and James Blakey. Lyon G. Tyler, the Grand Scribe of the Zeta Chapter, was the son of the President of the United States, John Tyler.



Dear Dr. Harris:

I wish to commend you and the Trustees of Mercer University for your refusal to discipline Dr. F. R. Otto in his use of controversial language in a recent chapel sermon. I learned of the controversy through an article in the New York Times last Friday.

When I attended Mercer, there was no professor on the faculty whom I held in higher esteem than Dr. Otto. His lectures challenged the intellect, while his charity warmed the heart. His sermons brought meaning back into a theology that had grown sterile through the monotonous repetition of moral platitudes. This man helped me not only to hear the Gospel, but to understand it, both with my head and my heart.

His dismissal would have been a great loss to the University and especially to the student body, whose welfare he has always kept uppermost in his mind, as well as in his conduct.

I hope that Dr. Otto will continue to lead students to put away childish things.

Very truly yours,
W. Franklin Maxwell
AB, 1960

cc: The Mercer Cluster
The Macon Telegraph & News

Michigan State's Summer Program Is Still Open

Students from 30 states have already enrolled in Michigan State University's summer overseas study program, but there are still openings for qualified students, according to MSU officials.

Credit programs are available in

French at Paris, France; Spanish at Madrid, Spain, and German at Cologne, Germany.

Parents of students participating in the AMLEC summer program can also take advantage of the economical transportation rates to Europe.

For additional information on the summer AMLEC program, contact the Office of International Extension, 58-A Kellogg Center, MSU, East Lansing, Mich. 48823.

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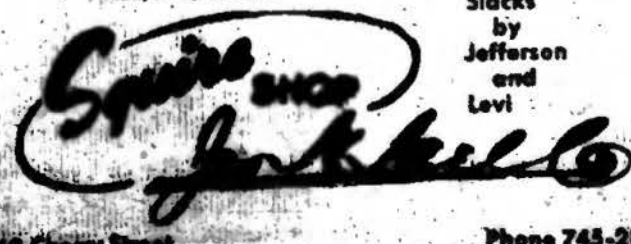
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