

THE PHILOMATHEAN SOCIETY

MIXING WIT WITH WISDOM SINCE 1813

For information on the Faculty Lecture Series and other Philo news and programs go to <http://philomathean.org>

Philomaths, by definition, love learning. Penn's Philomatheans carry that love out of the classroom and up to their private domain — the sprawling fourth floor of College Hall, where books, furniture, and artifacts from other times and places provide eclectic inspiration for their collective thoughts and occasional hilarity.

Back in 1813 when all thirteen members of the senior class of the College came together to found what has become the country's oldest continuously existing literary society, it was "to promote the learning of its members and to increase the academic prestige of the University." They began by giving their presiding officers the titles that are still used today — including Moderator and Censor.

Today's Moderator, Daniel J. Singer, C'08, feels lucky to have happened on the student group early in his college career. "I was hanging out with a friend and heard about a tea," Daniel recalls. "There was Philo, and I was enlightened." But seeing the light and being invited into the inner sanctum are two different things. The three-pronged admission process consists of an interview, a presentation on any topic, and a creative submission. It is a combination calculated to reveal if the candidate is both serious enough and frivolous enough to have fun with ideas, or, as some have put it, "raise hell with the mind."

As a philosophy and logic major, Daniel gave his talk on philosophy of time and made a clock on which he replaced each number with a riddle and set the time 23 minutes behind Standard Time to allow for how long it takes to get meetings under way. Perhaps the large leather-bound volume entitled *Minutes of the Society's Meetings*, in use since the very first meeting of

Philo, would reveal whether or not Daniel's talk on time was *on* time. In any case, it had the proper blend of wit and wisdom to get him admitted.

The history of Philo is redolent with stories of original performances, wacky events, and rigorous and often irreverent debates, these days with the Philolexian Society of Columbia University and in the past with Penn's now defunct Zelosophic Society. Just prior to the Civil War, Philo and Zelo faced off in an impassioned debate on slavery, symbolically placing two pistols on the lectern between the debaters.

The lectern, although not the pistols, remains today, along with an ornately carved judge's bench, church pews, glass bookcases, and, significantly, the plaster replica of the Rosetta Stone that was translated into English by three Philomathean undergraduates and published in 1856.

True to its goal of serving the University, Philo is credited with creating *The Daily Pennsylvanian*, *The Debate Council*, and *The Penn Players* and even with founding entire academic departments. It continues to sponsor a Faculty Lecture Series, teas with professors, and an Annual Orator address. From its faculty panels on AIDS and terrorism to its current production of *Edward II*, the always evolving Philo brings its own spin to its venerable history of excellence.

While part of the fun of Philo comes from its appreciation of history and love of tradition, today's Philo is very representative of today's Penn. With students from each of the four undergraduate schools, including members from four continents, Philomatheans are proud of their diverse membership and broad range of artistic and academic pursuits.



SIC ITUR AD ASTRA is their motto. Thus we proceed to the stars. Philo students begin by proceeding to the stairs — or the elevator — of College Hall and ascending to the topmost floor — from where, on even the murkiest of days, you can see the University of Pennsylvania — past, present, and forever.

left: Philo officers Barbara Coons, C'09, Past Recorder; Daniel Singer, C'08, Moderator; and Andre Gregori, C'09, First Censor, preside at the historic Lectern and Judge's Bench.