Old College Days

The carpenters had scarcely swept up the last of the woodshavings when the students moved into the new College in September of 1825. In contrast to the cramped quarters on Main Street, the building was both spacious and palatial. With fifty students to occupy a building designed to accommodate one hundred, there was little trouble involved in assigning rooms. Indeed, it was soon found that the rooms were not to be assigned—they were merely to be appropriated on a sort of first-come, first-served basis, with the upperclassmen claiming the upper floors and the Freshmen taking what were left on the ground floor.¹

Student rooms were 12 x 20 feet. Heat was provided by a small Franklin stove which rested on a hearth of bricks around which lay a pair of tongs, a fire shovel, and broom, poker, and bellows. Furniture, provided by the students themselves, consisted of a bed, several chairs, a bureau, a boot-jack, a table, and a bookshelf. Walls were hung with pictures according to the taste of the occupant, and one early student’s room boasted busts of both Washington and Franklin. The broad window seat was a sort of catch-all for the student’s collection of mineral specimens and his books, papers, dirty laundry, and umbrellas.²

With their fresh paint and papered walls, the rooms in the new College had great potential for comfort. But half a hundred and more boys in their late teens could quickly make even the grandest of quarters look shabby, and so before two full generations of undergraduates had completed their four years at Washington College, the buildings were already showing signs of wear. Plaster had become stained and cracked, paint was chipped, and window-jams were badly splintered from students’ indulging in the forbidden sport of throwing logs in the rooms, hallways, and entries.⁵ As students had to provide their own furniture, most of them chose to purchase their necessary equipment at the lowest possible price. One either purchased what had been used by the previous occupant of the room (in this case much dilapidated) or else procured “reconditioned” furniture in town, which, except for several coats of varnish, was little better than that which passed from class to class without leaving the College.⁴

Now it was hardly expected that the abodes of the Washington College undergraduates could have been models of order and cleanliness. Faculty supervision was lax, and janitorial service was practically non-existent. The Statutes of the College required that the Faculty live in the College and that they inspect the rooms regularly,⁶ but the regulation was one honored more in the breach than in the observance. In his farewell address, Bishop Brownell, virtually admitting that during his own administration he had been unable to enforce the letter of this law, announced that henceforth all officers of instruction would live either within the college walls or in the immediate vicinity.⁷ The College Catalogue of 1835 carried a similar statement, but escapades soon to be described suggest that the Faculty were never forced to implement the College Statutes.

What we would now call the “Buildings and Grounds Staff” consisted of three persons: an Irish gardener and two Negro janitors. None of
them was really efficient, and the janitors performed their duties in a most perfunctory manner. "Professor Jim," the "assistant janitor," or as he styled himself, "Professor of Dust and Ashes," had been a family servant in Bishop Brownell's household. James Williams, for that was his real name, entered the College's employ at the opening of the College and at first his duties were merely to ring the morning bell. Then, for a while, he divided his time between Bishop Brownell's house and the College, where it was his duty to sweep the rooms and each day make up some sixty beds. Professor Jim was a garrulous fellow and easily distracted. Professor Jim seldom got very far on his appointed rounds and the students themselves were obliged to sweep, carry water, and empty slop jars. For the Yankee students, this was a hardship; for the southern students, it was worse, for, used to having such services performed for them at home, they refused to accommodate themselves to the inadequacies of Professor Jim, and their rooms were notoriously dirty and smelly.

Almost from the beginning, the undergraduates divided themselves into cliques. At the top of the scale stood the young men from well-to-do (and usually Episcopalian) families, and it was they who "set a certain tone" to the College. A young New Yorker, who in the early 1830's identified himself with this group, described them as having some superficial polish, little interest in religion, and generally given to practical jokes, hazing of Freshmen, making life miserable for the Faculty, and "sustaining the traditional reputation of the roistering student." And, if we may believe the same self-styled "roisterer," it was these blades who were wont to steal out at night to drink in taverns or to hold bacchic sessions in their rooms where they mixed punch in washbasins and drank from soap-boats. It was doubtless the antics of this group which prompted the Connecticut Legislature to pass an act forbidding any person to give credit to any minor student at the College without the consent in writing of the student's parent or guardian or the officers of the College. Although violation carried a fine of $20.00 to $300.00, various tradesmen of the town succumbed to the persuasions of the "roisterers," and the "dead-beat" student had the advantage in that the tradesman and not the student had violated the law and it was impossible to collect.

At the bottom of the social scale of Washington undergraduates were the pre-theological students who were attending college on scholarships provided by the Church Scholarship Society. These fellows, contemptuously called the religiosi, were older than most of their classmates. Many of them had worked at trades before entering college, and it was believed by the other students that they had met with little success in their former callings and that they had decided to study for the priesthood merely to enjoy the bounty of the Scholarship Society. By their more worldly contemporaries, they were regarded as being boorish in their manners and slovenly in their appearance. They associated very little with the other students and kept much to their rooms.
In contrast to the fashionable dress of their juniors, the religiosi invariably wore long, loose gowns of printed calico to class, to chapel, and to their meals.\textsuperscript{12}

In between these two extremes fell two other groups: the self-supporting pre-theological student who usually absented himself during the winter term to teach in a district school and the "solid citizen" of little social pretension and much scholarly ambition who at least set the \textit{academic} "tone" if not the social.

But it probably was the "roisterer" rather than the "solid citizen" who set the \textit{tone} of the College. Not that the pranks and practical jokes were essentially different from those perpetrated in Washington's sister colleges, there probably was something just a bit different about the atmosphere of the campus on Hartford's college hill. First, an Anglican college in Puritan Connecticut was something of an anachronism. Secondly, other than Harvard, Yale, and Brown, the other New England colleges were rural, and the students who attended Amherst and Williams were, themselves, mostly farm or village boys. The students at the country colleges shared something of the "reform spirit" which characterized the decades of the 1820's and 1830's, to say nothing of having been subjected to the supposedly restraining influence of the "revivals of religion" which occasionally swept over the college towns to the north.\textsuperscript{13} Of the young men at Washington College nothing of this sort was expected, and the occupants of Jarvis Hall did little to disappoint those who may have thought them well on the way to perdition.

Probably none of her rivals had so cosmopolitan a student body as had Washington College. In 1830, for example, of the eighty-six students, thirty-three were from Connecticut, six were from Massachusetts, five from Rhode Island, three from New Hampshire, two from Vermont, and one from Maine. Almost a third of the student body was from outside New England; nine were from New York, eight from North Carolina, four from Maryland, three each from Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Virginia, two each from South Carolina and Louisiana, one from Florida, and one from Greece.\textsuperscript{14} The twenty students from south of the Mason and Dixon Line exercised an influence altogether out of proportion to their number, and it has sometimes been assumed that it was the presence of the southern students at Washington College that, to a degree at least, set Washington College apart from Middlebury, Williams, or Amherst.\textsuperscript{15} Like Princeton, Washington College was considered "safe" by the southerners who feared an Abolitionist influence at the New England Congregationalist colleges. At Washington College slavery was not a topic of polite conversation, and the single Negro student who was enrolled during the early decades never associated with his fellows, receiving instruction in the evening at the professors' homes and never appearing either at chapel or on any public occasion.\textsuperscript{16} In such an atmosphere, the young southerner could feel pretty much at home, and could even tolerate the inefficiency of "Professor Jim" and the persistence of the Puritan Sabbath to which the College was obliged to accommodate itself even to the extent of inscribing "No Admittance on Sundays" upon the college gates.\textsuperscript{17}

Although the college rules were severe, discipline was laxly enforced.\textsuperscript{18} Students were, to be sure, admonished,\textsuperscript{19} rusticated,\textsuperscript{20} and dismissed,\textsuperscript{21} but offenders were usually given the benefit of every doubt. Both Bishop Brownell and his successor, Dr. Wheaton, have been described as firm yet patient.\textsuperscript{22} Remembered episodes will suggest, however, that both were probably \textit{more} patient than firm.

The college calendar was one which invited trouble. The academic year was divided into three terms. The fall term began in late September and had a recess of two weeks from the Thursday preceding Christmas. In the spring term there was a three-week recess from the Thursday preceding the twelfth of April. Summer term ended with Commencement the first Wednesday in August.\textsuperscript{23} It was during the summer term that most of the trouble occurred, and it was usually on Saturday afternoon before sundown when the Puritan Sabbath settled down on Hartford that groups of students ran afoul of
the law both on Main Street and on the campus.

The summer of 1828 was one of particular disturbance. Students had committed what the authorities described as "great depredations" in Hartford, and the magistrates had subpoenaed every student to purge himself by oath. The magistrates received the full cooperation of the Faculty, and all of the undergraduates except Hugh Peters, the son of Judge Peters, the College Trustee, complied. The students who had obeyed the summons may have perjured themselves during their appearance at court, and by the time they returned to campus student feelings were at a very high pitch, and much resentment was felt that the Faculty had supported the law rather than the students. Immediately the undergraduates barricaded the two college buildings. The Faculty rose to the occasion and attempted to dislodge the defenders. Bishop Brownell succeeded in breaking down a door with a fence post, but when Professor Doane was showered with unmentionable refuse thrown from an upper-story window, the Faculty withdrew. At the usual time the bell rang for Evening Prayer, the students filed into the Chapel, and that was the end of the whole affair. 24 This was at least one occasion on which the good Bishop was patient.

Perhaps the want of any organized program of what would now be called Physical Education may have contributed to the riotous activity on College Hill. There were, of course, no organized sports, but occasionally the students themselves provided entertainment less destructive than the episode just described. Among the oldest of the college traditions was "Burning Conic Sections," a "secret" ritual performed by the Sophomores at midnight after the end of the first term. 25 The course in Conic Sections was the "Jonah" of the Junior or Mathematical year, and the course was the one with the greatest mortality rate in the College. At first the ceremonial may have consisted merely of consigning a copy of the textbook to a funeral pyre, but with each year the ritual became more elaborate. Additions were made to the ceremony and each "Burning" became more splendid. A song was always composed for the occasion, and two stanzas of the

five for the song for 1846 will illustrate the spirit in which "Conic" was removed from the lives of the Sophomores.

I
Old Conic’s dead. That chessy boy
He neir can bore us more.
He used to wear hyperpolas
With tangents stuck before.

II
His face was open as the day.
Two foci were his eyes.
His axis reached from pole to pole
His apex touched the skies. 26

And as the "Burning" became more and more a college "occasion," it came to be participated in by the entire student body. By the 1850’s public announcements were posted and printed programs were provided. Freshmen were then required to attend (in nightgowns). Time failed to
soften the feelings against Conic Sections, and the song for 1855 (rendered in both Latin and English to the tune of “Happy Are We Tonight”) was even more deprecatory:

Come, stand up in a circle,  
Ye gay and happy Sophs!  
Old Conics now is burning,  
The darling of the Profss;  
He loved to call us classmates from  
Our beds at early morn;  
But now, he, dead and smoking hot,  
To Hades will be Borne.

**CHORUS**

Happy are we to-night, Sophs,  
Happy, happy are we,  
Conics has taken his flight, Sophs,  
And we shall jovial be.\(^\text{27}\)

Actually, the young men on College Hill had a definite aversion to formal games. Croquet was regarded as beneath the dignity of college students,\(^\text{28}\) and baseball, basketball, football, and soccer were not yet invented. In summer the students bathed in the “Hog,” as they named the Little River which flowed by the foot of the hill, and several of the more venturesome sailed on the “Hog” in small boats.\(^\text{29}\) In the fall, and despite the proscription of firearms, an occasional student went hunting in the nearby hills. In winter there was some skating on the “Hog” and on the Connecticut into which it flowed, and on really cold winters skaters sometimes ventured as far as Middletown. One student, Park Benjamin 1829, owned a horse and rode daily.\(^\text{30}\)

Perhaps the Washington students exercised no less than those of other American colleges of the time. In comparison with the students at the English universities, however, moralists thought that the Washington men (and, for that matter, all

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*Boating on The Hog*
American collegians) came off badly. In 1829, Nathaniel Wheaton noted in the *Episcopal Watchman* that while he was in England he had been impressed by the importance which was attached to such outdoor sports as rowing. It was his further observation that the Oxford or Cambridge undergraduate was much more healthy than his American counterpart and was much less fraught with the ills, mental and physical, which result from too sedentary a life. The editor of the *Watchman* suggested that had Wheaton turned from the river banks of Oxford and Cambridge to the “silent chambers of the more diligent students” he might have found there, too, some who could have profited by his advice.\(^{31}\) It is seriously to be doubted, however, that the editor intended to imply that the Washington undergraduates were more interested in work than in play. At any rate, the sedentary life seemed to agree with the students, for the College *Catalogue* for 1835 boasted that “in evidence of the salubrity of the climate [of Hartford], . . . during the ten years the [College] premises have been occupied, no death has occurred among the inmates.”\(^ {32}\)

The inattention of the students’ physical exercise, it must now be pointed out, was rather by default than by design. The original plan for the College called for considerable outdoor activity, for it was hoped that students would work actively in farm and garden and would learn Surveying and Mineralogy through direct outdoor experience. And not only that—Bishop Brownell had hoped that military exercises and drill would find an important place in the curriculum. In his early planning, the Bishop had sought to engage a Professor of Mathematics and Engineering who had been trained at West Point “with a view of his employing the students in military exercises, during a portion of their leisure hours; as conducive to their health, and as subservient to their better government.”\(^ {33}\) Now the Bishop did not have in mind just any officer who had been trained at West Point. Specifically he meant to engage, if possible, Captain Alden Partridge, who was not only a graduate of the United States Military Academy but who had been professor and superintendent (1815–1817) at West Point before he opened his own military school, the American Literary, Scientific, and Military Academy, at Norwich, Vermont. And Brownell had more in mind than the mere securing of a Professor of Mathematics and Engineering; he hoped to engage Captain Partridge for Washington College and at the same time acquire the Captain’s already-assembled student body. Early in 1824 Brownell visited Captain Partridge in Vermont and made the Captain an offer of appointment,\(^ {34}\) but the Captain had other plans. Partridge moved to Connecticut and he brought his students with him—not to Hartford, but to nearby Middletown where on August 22, 1825, the Literary, Scientific, and Military Institute reopened with nineteen faculty and two hundred cadets.\(^ {35}\)

The independent opening of Captain Partridge’s school so close to Washington College did not necessarily preclude the merging of the two institutions or of Partridge’s ultimately joining the Washington Faculty, and the College kept the Professorship of Mathematics open until 1828 when the Reverend Horatio Potter was appointed Professor of Mathematics and Natural Philosophy.\(^ {36}\) In the meantime, Captain Partridge had attempted to secure a college charter for his school. Failing in this, he returned in 1829 to Vermont, where the Institute was subsequently chartered as Norwich University.\(^ {37}\)

Bishop Brownell certainly had no intention of making Washington College a mere military academy or even something approximating Captain Partridge’s Institute, and it was probably the Bishop’s respect for Partridge as an individual which led him to plan for military drill at the College. If Captain Partridge would not come to Washington College, Washington College would not have military drill. And yet, if military drill were to have value under the Captain, it must have some merit without him. Bishop Brownell could not quite dispel the idea. The first *Prospectus* announced that military exercises would “be embraced in the system, as a healthful occupation for some of the hours usually devoted to recreation,” and that “as a further preventative
to extravagance, and to promote a proper esprit de corps and responsibility of character, an uniform dress will be prescribed; and after the first of May next, no other dress will be permitted to be worn in the College."

As was true of so many of Bishop Brownell's not-too-carefully-laid plans, the uniform dress was not adopted. The fops wore their brocaded waistcoats and the religiosi their calico gowns. For a while it seemed that the idea of military exercise, too, would be abandoned. During the College's first year on Main Street there were no facilities for drill, and by the time of the removal to College Hill, the character of the College as "non-military" had become fixed. In 1826, the Connecticut Legislature passed a bill exempting from military service the President, the Professors, the undergraduates, and all graduates residing in Hartford until taking their second (Master's) degrees. But this exception in no way reflected a pacifist spirit, for Bishop Brownell, despite the loss of Captain Partridge's services, had gone ahead with a more restricted plan for military drill and had organized the "Washington College Phalanx" shortly after instruction had begun on the new campus. The Phalanx was a sort of military company, or what would now be called a "drill team," the members of which carried pikes and wore uniforms consisting of at least plumed caps. The Phalanx's first appearance in Hartford was in the Fourth of July parade in 1826. In June of 1833, President Andrew Jackson visited Hartford, and his tour of the city included a brief glimpse of the College. The Phalanx was not among the score or more of military companies which marched in the parade which was the high point in Hartford's elaborate welcome, but the College's military company had the honor of escorting the President of the United States from the State House to the Presidential boat at the time of his departure from the city.

From the Phalanx emerged a more formal company, the "Washington College Archers." This group came into being about 1834 and comprised a considerable portion of the student body. The "Archers" wore striking uniforms, modeled," as contemporary description had it, "somewhat after the Swiss." Green turbans with black plumes and green frocks and white trousers represented the first use of the old Washington College colors — green and white. The officers, who were elected by the members, wore swords at their belts. The "cadets" carried long bows of lance-wood and black quivers filled with arrows. Dashing fellows were these! Each summer the Archers marched in parades in Hartford and in nearby towns, and everywhere they appeared they caught the eyes of the local belles. The Archers so impressed Thomas H. Seymour, then a resident of Hartford and later to become Governor of Connecticut, that he assumed responsibility for instructing the company in "fancy movements."

The uniform of the Phalanx and the "Archers" was worn only on parade and it never threatened to become the uniform of the College. Only once was there anything approaching an attempt at uniform dress — and that by the students themselves and with rather ludicrous results. In the late 1830's, at the suggestion of Richard Henry Killip, an English student briefly in residence at the College, the Oxford cap was introduced to the campus. Suddenly becoming sensitive to the niceties of academic attire, the students adopted the cap as the ordinary wear for the campus. Soon it was worn both on campus and in town, where it incensed the youth of the city. To deflate the aristocratic pretensions of the young academics, several young men of Hartford hired a "burly Negro topped with a monster Oxford cap," to follow the sauntering students, whenever they appeared in academic cap. With that, the short-lived fad came to an end.

No American college in the first half of the nineteenth century would have thought itself worthy of the name of college without its having at least one literary society, and Washington College was, if anything, "collegiate." While an undergraduate at Brown, Bishop Brownell had been a member of the Philermenian Society, a secret society with a membership limited to forty-five. This group was primarily a literary and debating society, and Brownell had always been proud.
of his membership in the Philermenian. While on the faculty of Union College, Brownell had also been elected to Phi Beta Kappa as an alumni member. Professor Doane, too, had had pleasant association with literary groups, for before his coming to Washington College he had belonged to two debating societies in New York City: the Greenwich Club and the New York Literary and Philological Society. Late in 1824, Bishop Brownell formed a committee consisting of Professor Doane and three undergraduates to plan a society which might offer the students something of the opportunity for debate which both he and the Professor of Belles Lettres and Oratory had enjoyed. The committee drew up plans for a literary and debating society which formally came into being on June 4, 1825, as the Athenaeum Society. At its first meeting, a seal, motto, and constitution were adopted, and sixteen undergraduates, Bishop Brownell, Professor Doane, Professor Humphreys, and Dr. Sumner were constituted the society's membership. The constitution declared the purpose of the society to be "the literary improvement of its members, especially in Declamation, Composition, and Extemporaneous Debate" and, in a college in which the opportunities for diversion were so limited, the appeal to the students was immediate. In 1826, the society received official recognition by College Statute, when the Faculty declared that "the literary society, styled 'the Washington College Athenaeum,' is hereby recognized; and no new society shall be established in the College, without permission of the Faculty."

But faculty recognition did not confer exclusive rights to the direction of the undergraduate literary and forensic activity of the College. In 1827, nineteen men withdrew from Athenaeum to form a friendly rival, the Parthenon Society. This was done, of course, with full faculty approval, for on American college campuses during this period two societies usually existed side-by-side, and it was in this friendly rivalry that the societies were stimulated to strive for excellence.

Membership in the societies was virtually open to all comers, and most of the undergraduates found their way into one or the other. Faculty were admitted as honorary members, each society receiving the new appointees in turn. Both societies elected honorary members from beyond the Washington College community. Athenaeum was partial to Bishops, and her Honorarii included Bishops De Lancey, Philander Chase, McIlvaine, Whittingham, B. T. Onderdonk, Eastburn, McCorsky, Carlton Chase, Henshaw, and Freeman. The rolls of Parthenon were graced by the names of political leaders including James Madison, Henry Clay, Harrison G. Otis, Daniel Webster, and Isaac Toucey.

The literary societies maintained club rooms (or halls) in Jarvis. Here were housed the libraries which the societies gathered. By 1844, Athenaeum had accumulated well over one thousand volumes, among which were the usual religious, historical, and philosophical works and a considerable collection of poetry, dramatic works, novels, tales, and romances, areas in which the College Library was rather weak. Although the use of the society library was theoretically limited to the society membership, the College regarded the society collections as an integral part of the College Library and, until at least the Civil War, the combined society collections exceeded that of the regular College Library in size.

Saturday morning was "Society Morning," for on that day the schedule of classes included only the recitation following the Morning Prayer and preceding breakfast. The long Saturday morning (9:00 to noon), on other days taken up with study and classes, was set aside for the weekly meetings of Athenaeum and Parthenon at which papers were read and at which the members engaged in debate on literary, social, and political topics of the day. Only religion was not regarded as a proper subject for debate or discussion. On Saturday afternoon there were debates between the societies, and in alternate years the societies held "Exhibitions"—Parthenon two days before Commencement in August, and Athenaeum in early April—consisting of Latin orations, English declamations, poetry, and satire.

In these "old college days," other societies
than the Athenaeum and Parthenon flourished with faculty sponsorship and encouragement. In 1826, under the direction of Professor Doane, a "large proportion"—as Doane put it—"of the undergraduates formed themselves into a society styled 'the Washington College Association Auxiliary to the General Theological Seminary of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America.'" Dues were $1.00 per year, and the members were expected to solicit donations for the Seminary. Although the financial situation at the College at that time would have suggested soliciting funds for Washington College rather than General Seminary, the object of the "Auxiliary" was not entirely disinterested, for it was expected that the money contributed from Washington College would be used for a scholarship to be enjoyed by an alumnus of the College.60

The "Auxiliary" lasted but a short while, and its place was soon taken by the Missionary Society which was founded in 1831. This society was to have an influence far beyond the Washington College campus, for from the Washington College Missionary Society, through the efforts of Augustus Foster Lyde of the Class of 1830, came the establishment of the Foreign and Domestic Missionary Society of the Protestant Episcopal Church, the first president of which was George Benton of the Class of 1833. The Missionary Society met weekly "for religious exercises, serious reading, and the discussion of theological subjects." Each year "a considerable fund" was "raised and applied to missionary objects."61

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**HABITS OF LITERARY MEN.**

The habits of men, in the different ages and varied circumstances of life, constitute a distinguished feature in their history. In whatever employment we are engaged, habits of one kind or other are sure to be formed. They steal upon us unnoticed, and like the lapse of time, unmarked, save by the changes they effect. In the

*The Hermethenean*

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The Missionary Society had a history of "ups and downs," but it at least existed until 1920, no mean record for any student organization. Of much shorter duration was the Temperance Society, which in 1835 made its appearance on the Washington Campus and which, for a while, included, according to an official report, "most of the students." 62

In these "old college days," Washington College had her "Golden Age" of student journalism in the regrettably short-lived *Hermetheanean,* 63 publication of which was announced on July 22, 1833. In a *Prospectus* of that date it was announced that the *Hermetheanean* would be published monthly by a number of undergraduates of the College, and that the journal of thirty-two pages per number would be devoted to the encouragement of youthful talent, the cultivation of refined taste, and the promotion of polite literature. Seldom have editors more faithfully kept their promises to the public. The first issue (October, 1833) contained several pieces of fiction, verse, and "Literary Notices." The second issue (November, 1833) included several argumentative essays ("English Poets of the Fifteenth Century" and "Thoughts on Education"), in addition to stories and poems. The fifth and final issue (February, 1834) was honored by the contribution of a poem by Mrs. Lydia Huntley Sigourney, "the Sweet Singer of Hartford," and wife of Trustee Charles Sigourney.

Whatever its literary merits, the *Hermetheanean* was not a financial success. The price was one dollar per volume of six issues, payable upon delivery of the third number, and perhaps too few dollars were received. It is hoped that the earnest young men did not suffer too great a loss in settling their account with the printer.

From the beginning, the Faculty of the College had encouraged academic excellence, albeit in ways which may seem strange to us now. To a considerable degree this was the purpose, so far as the Faculty was concerned, of the literary societies, and so it was, too, of the *Hermetheanean.* Much of what would now be called "academic ceremonial" revolved about literary and oral expression. Bishop Brownell was deeply attached to the discipline of Belles Lettres, the object of which he conceived to be the cultivation of the art of expressing one's "thoughts with clearness, strength, and elegance." 64 Most of the College's public occasions consisted chiefly of putting the students "through their paces" in oral literary expression. In 1826, the Faculty ordered that "premiums will be offered for excellence in the particular branches of scholarship, and in the performance of such literary exercises as may from time to time be appointed." 65

An early manifestation of this competitive academic exercise was the "Junior Exhibition," the first of which was held in the College Chapel on August 3, 1826. Juniors who had debated in Athenæum were now to be put to the test before an audience, and the crowd which came to witness the performance was large. Professor Doane had taught his students well, but the fine points of elocution were perhaps lost on some of the observers and hearers. A reporter for the *Connecticut Mirror* gave what was perhaps the first critical review of a literary performance at the College. "We were somewhat surprised," he wrote, "that the speakers should so soon have got the peculiar tone and gesture of Collegians - the falling inflection at the end of every period - that sameness of tone and monotony of gesture that shew how much the fear of an audience injures the interest which the speaker takes in his own theme. . . . The exhibit certainly did great credit to the instructors as teachers, and to the performers as scholars, but not to the scholars as performers." 66

This epigrammatic "damning with faint praise" may not have pleased the orators, but it could hardly have discouraged them. Junior Exhibition had taken the place of a College Commencement for that year, and the college custom came to include Junior Exhibition as part of the Commencement festivities, being held the day preceding graduation on the first Wednesday in August. Academic ceremonial has a way of becoming increasingly elaborate, and the Junior Exhibition at Washington College was no exception. Not content to recite in their "Sunday best," the Juniors rented black silk gowns from Mr. Stockbridge,
Hartford’s modish tailor. The gowns were of the design worn by doctors and had full “pudding sleeves.” The custom of wearing gowns was pleasing to all of the undergraduates except John Bernard Gilpin of the Class of 1831, an English student who asserted his superiority over his fellow students by parading his sensitivity to the academic incongruity.⁶⁷

Junior Exhibition was also another occasion for sophomore pranks. In addition to the regular printed program for the Exhibition, the Sophomores distributed “mock programs,” some of which represented the ultimate in sophomoric crudity.⁶⁸ Perhaps it was to offset this rude sport of the Sophomores that public competition for prizes in declamation was instituted for the Freshman and Sophomore Classes in 1827.⁶⁹

Until 1845, when the College received a chapter of Phi Beta Kappa, the declamation prizes, plus the senior salutatory and valedictory honors, were the only means of academic recognition. Phi Beta Kappa was, of course, a coveted honor,
and for some while after the chapter’s organization the upper third of the rising Senior Class was admitted to the society. Again, incidentally, even sacred Phi Beta Kappa became the object of parody, for the lowest third of the class formed its own “dishonor” society, Kappa Beta Phi, the motto of which was “Probability the Guide of Life.”

But the formal student groups of the “old college days” – the Athenaeum, the Parthenon, the Missionary Society, and the Temperance Society – were just a bit too tame to fully satisfy the Washington collegians, and soon secret societies found their way to the campus. Perhaps the earliest of these archetypical fraternities was that known as Theta Beta Phi, which was begun at least as early as 1828. The membership in Theta Beta Phi was largely, if not entirely, made up of students from the southern states and, at a Society “Exhibition” held on December 18, 1828, the eleven “performers” were all from the South: six from North Carolina, two from Maryland, and one each from Virginia, South Carolina, and Louisiana. In 1829, I.K.A. was organized, and this group ultimately became Delta Phi, which at Washington College (and later Trinity) made the claim of being the oldest local fraternity in the country. In 1832, a rival society, Phi Kappa, was organized. Phi Kappa, too, had a large number of southern students, particularly from North Carolina and was sometimes called the “Great Southern Society.” It has even been suggested that Phi Kappa was a re-organization of Theta Beta Phi. In 1877, Phi Kappa became a local chapter of Alpha Delta Phi. The fourth secret society of the “old college days” was the Black Book, founded in 1842 with the stated purpose of the “promotion of scholarship and friendly relations.” This group, as was probably true of other societies, was literary as well as social in purpose, and at least a portion of each society meeting was devoted to delivering orations on classical and literary subjects and to discussion of theological and philosophical prob-
lems. Black Book, also known as Beta Beta, became a chapter of Psi Upsilon in 1892.74

Membership in the Washington College fraternities was small. Between 1835 and 1859, Phi Kappa admitted an average of six students per year, as few as one, and as many as eleven.75 The societies began as upper-class groups, but eventually Freshmen were permitted to join. As may have been expected, the fraternity men were the more prominent of the campus leaders.76

With the fraternities, the literary societies, the rude pranks of the Sophomores, the "Archers," and the do-it-yourself brand of sports, life on College Hill could hardly have been dull. Although Robert Tomes, one of the College's most ungrateful sons, wrote in later years that he "would gladly have dropped a veil of oblivion over those important but wasted years,"77 his account of the "old college days" more than suggests that they were far from unpleasant.

The four years on College Hill culminated (if the years were well spent) in graduation at the Commencement held the first Thursday in August. Although lacking in the almost carnival atmosphere of a Yale or Harvard "Graduation Day," Commencement at Washington College was a gala affair. The College had no auditorium large enough to accommodate any sizeable group. Seabury Hall was technically the College Chapel, and during the first years on the Hill that building was called by the more informal name. Only one room, however, (and that but 35 by 50 feet) was used as the Chapel, and the rest of the building was taken up with classrooms, the library, and the cabinet (or museum). Christ Church would have been the logical place to hold graduation exercises, but by the time of the first Commencement on August 1, 1827, the original building of Christ Church was in a bad state of repair, and ground had scarcely been broken for the new structure.78 In a gracious gesture of inter-church comity, Central Congregational Church offered the use of their spacious building.

August 1, 1827, was a beautiful summer day. At about 9:00 A.M., the academic procession formed at the State House, and shortly thereafter a concourse consisting of the students,79 the candidates for degrees, Trustees, Faculty, the governor and lieutenant-governor of the state of Connecticut, and "an extended retinue of Clergy, Citizens, and Strangers" made its way to the brick Central Church. The large crowd which had already gathered was treated to a voluntary on the organ, prayer by Bishop Brownell, a Latin salutatory address, an English oration, a selection of music, a disputation on Roman Catholicism in Ireland, several more musical selections, more orations and another voluntary on the organ. But that was not all; an afternoon session followed, and again there were organ voluntaries and other musical selections, an English salutatory address, disputations, orations, a dialogue, the conferring of academic degrees (ten bachelor's degrees in course, one A.B. out of course, two A.M. degrees, and an honorary LL.D. on Governor Gideon Tomlinson), an address by the Right Reverend President, a valedictory oration, an Episcopal Benediction, and a final organ voluntary.80

The fourteen recipients of degrees on August 1, 1827, were the first Alumni of Washington College but one, for already the College had an honorary alumnus, the Right Reverend Alexander Jolly, Bishop of Moray, Ross, and Caithness, who was voted a Doctorate in Divinity by the Trustees on April 26, 1826.81 On August 7, 1828, the Washington College Commencement was again held in Central Congregational Church. Again there was the imposing procession from the State House and morning and afternoon exercises of orations, music, and prayers.82 Commencement for 1829, held on August 6 in Central Church, was marked by the large number of out-of-state visitors who included the Bishop of Ohio, the Reverend Provost of the University of Pennsylvania, and the Reverend Professor of Biblical Literature in the General Theological Seminary.83

By the fall of 1830, the new Christ Church had been completed84 and for many years thereafter Commencement was held there, and despite the considerable inconvenience, the parishioners of
Trinity College:
Commencement.
M.DCCCLIV.

Order of Exercises.

VOLUNTARY.

Prayers by the President.

Latin Salutatory: and
English Oration,— "Genius."
J. H. Williams, New York.

"Light of the Dark Ages."
John Scarborough, New York.

The Barbarism of the 19th Century,
Rufus Emery, Massachusetts.

MUSIC.

Festival Song, by Stuhr.

Christianity and Civilization,

The Spasmodic School in Poetry,
C. S. Leffingwell, Ohio.

Relics of our Heroic Age,
G. A. Easton, California.

MUSIC.

Quartette, . . . Young Musicians, by Kutner.

The Passionless and the Impassioned Man,
John Milton Peck, Massachusetts.

*                     ,
J. E. Williams, Connecticut.

The Profession of Medicine,
J. Moore Dick, Pennsylvania.

MUSIC.

The Plains of the Lord, by Beethoven.

The Philosophy of Rituals,
Townsend Scudder, New York.

"Nothing New."
James M. Nick, Vermont

The Coming Age,

MUSIC.

The Song, by Kutner.

The Jesuits in the Early History of North America,
J. H. Hodges, Vermont.

*                     ,
David Grego, New York.

* Excused from speaking.

Loyalty,
Samuel Hall, Connecticut.

MUSIC.

Quartette, . . . Spring Questions, by Lachm.

Symbolism of Nature,
Cornelius S. Smith, New York.

The Aims of Life: and Valedictory,
George D. Johnson, Connecticut.

MASTERS' ORATION.

The Laws of the XII. Tables,
Mr. Charles J. Handly, Connecticut.

MUSIC.

My Country, by Kutner.

DEGREES CONFERRED.

MUSIC, OLD HUNDREDTH.

Prayers by the President.

BENEDICTION BY THE CHANCELLOR.

Concluding Voluntary.

Early Commencement Program
Christ Church were always proud hosts. The new Christ Church was a stone Gothic structure with stained glass windows and beautiful appointments. Each year, however, the churchly appearance was altered by the erection of a large platform which covered both altar and pulpit, and upon this platform sat the Trustees, the Faculty, and the student speakers. 85

The Washington College Commencement was the social high point of the summer for proper Hartford and, as such, it became the occasion for the display of the latest in feminine fashions. In announcing the graduation to be held at Christ Church on August 4, 1831, the Connecticut Courant suggested that “it would be very desir-
colleges who were in town for the occasion were invited to march in the procession with the Washington Faculty. 88

On August 3, 1831, an Association of the Alumni was formed, and one of the first A.B.'s of the College, Isaac Edwin Crary '27, was elected president. 89 To the "Commencement Week" activities, the Association of the Alumni added a business meeting, held in the College Chapel at 11:00 A.M. the day before Commencement, and an afternoon session in Christ Church at which an Anniversary Sermon was preached and an Anniversary Poem was read. 90 Both readers were distinguished graduates of the College, and more often than not they were clergy. The Commencement festivities, from 1831, were brought to a grand conclusion with a Commencement Ball held on the evening of Commencement in one of the public halls in Hartford. 91