

What's a University?: The Perspectives of UNC's Antebellum Students

by

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Thank you, Janice, for your generous introduction and thank you Bob for the honor of inviting me to give this year's Coates lecture. The title of my talk is deliberately meant to echo Jim Leloudis's inaugural lecture last year – What's a University For? His work on the history of UNC, especially his book, *Schooling the New South* (1996), has been invaluable to my research on the early period of the University's history, and I want to build on his remarks by focusing on the lives and writing of UNC's antebellum students.

In their own words

Institutional histories usually chart the careers of university presidents, illustrious faculty members, and famous alumni. They rarely give space to ordinary students. This evening, though, I want to introduce you to some of these remarkable people, to let them tell you in their own words what the University meant to them. In describing what it was like to be a student here 150 to 200 years ago, I plan to show you materials drawn from over 1800 documents in Wilson Library's rich collections of antebellum student writing.

These documents include letters, compositions, speeches, diaries, letter books, notebooks, account books, grade books, grade reports, diplomas, and debating society records housed in the Southern Historical Collection, the North Carolina Collection, and the University Archives.ⁱ Their authors were young men who attended UNC between 1795, the year that the University opened its doors, and 1869, when the social and economic upheaval following the Civil War closed them again. As a composition teacher, I have learned much about "my antebellum students" from editing and annotating some 120 of these documents for a website titled *True and Candid Compositions: The Lives and Writings of Antebellum Students at the University of North Carolina*.

This site will be part of the impressive *Documenting the American South* project, and I am grateful to the many talented librarians and technical staff who are working to make these materials available to a wider audience. Snooping among these students' papers has been a remarkable and rewarding experience for me, and the website will enable many others to discover who some of these students were and what they

have to tell us about themselves, their schoolwork, their shenanigans, and their hopes for the future. Because our time is limited this evening, I am unable to give a comprehensive answer to the question in my title – What Is a University? – but given the perspective of most antebellum students, I'd like to focus on two contexts that preoccupied them most – the classroom and the debating society.ⁱⁱ

Student life: The early days

When the University of North Carolina opened on a cold, dreary January 15th in 1795, not a single student was present. Gov. Richard Dobbs Spaight,ⁱⁱⁱ other distinguished guests, and a single faculty member, Rev. David Ker, inspected the finished building and went home.^{iv} The two-story brick College, now known as Old East, and the unpainted wooden house of the "presiding professor" as Ker was called, were the only buildings defining the campus. A pile of yellowish red clay had been dug out for the foundation of the chapel (the east wing of Person Hall) and a wooden structure known as Steward's Hall would soon be built to serve students their meals. But the first student would not arrive for almost a month.

By February 23, John Pettigrew^v was able to write to his father, "There are now 73 or 4 students at the University. They come very fast, and there is not room for more than nine or ten more." On May 4, John wrote to his father again, this time explaining how he spent his days:

We have only saturday evening and sunday to refresh ourselves; before sunrse in the morning we have to attend prayers and study untill eight, & then eat brakefast and go in again at eight nine, study untill twelve, we dine and go in at two, we study untill five, then we have nothing appointed for us to do untill next morning: On sunday we have prayrs in the morning as usual at twelve we have a Sermon red, and at four we are questioned uppon religius questions.

Establishing a university was not simply a matter of constructing a building, hiring a teacher, and advertising for students. It also involved creating supportive relationships among faculty, students, parents, and North Carolina citizens. That work continues today, of course, as we promote bond referendums and seek effective ways to urge support for our work with students.

In 1795, however, in a new nation, born of revolution against a colonial power, the new university seemed perpetually caught up in sectional controversies and contests over who remained in charge. Presiding professor Ker, "a furious Republican" in a predominantly Federalist state, lasted only eighteen months, and subsequent faculty members often seemed to spend less time educating students than civilizing them. Many students, in turn, were as bent on resisting the authority of the faculty as their fathers had been in resisting the British Crown.

Though periods of rioting and tormenting the faculty eventually subsided, individual students continued to get into trouble much more frequently than they do today. Leander Hughes,^{vi} a student from Virginia, reported to his father on October 2, 1824, the expulsion of several students for violence against professors:

I have just heard the sentence of expulsion pronounced against two of the students. viz Augustus Alston and Leonidas King,^{vii} for having on last thursday night, committed violence upon upon the persons, of some of the faculty viz. Mr Betner, Mr Sanders,^{viii} – and it is said that Mr Mitchel, the now president^{ix} received several blows, both from Alston and King, though he has [no] appearance of it now. These acts of violence were committed in a time of intoxication. I did not see any of the engagements that took place though one was ensued in thirty steps of my room between, Alston & M r Sanders after which, Alston ran into my room and requested that I should give him a knife (which I refused) as Mr Mitchel & Sanders had both been upon him. Betner is confined to his room; though not from the blows he received but from spraining his ankle by some means in the contest. A. & King were expelled at a meeting of the trustees to day, and the sentence pronounced by judge Ruffin.^{x1}

Students who refused to submit to the authority of the faculty were dismissed, but they might be reinstated if they wrote a letter of contrite apology and pledged to uphold University regulations. Jonathan Ambrose Ramsey,^{xi} for example, petitioned the Board of Trustees on June 28, 1810, to be allowed to return to school midway through a six-months' suspension. His offenses had included firing a pistol, blocking the door of the chapel, and "conveying away" President Joseph Caldwell's carriage.

Having been debarred for some time past from the privileges resulting from your institution, I take this method of informing you my sentiments and lay open the cause that leads to this address. Probably some of the members of your honorable board have not heard my situation, or the relative circumstances of my unfortunate punishment. It was during the agitations and commotions which happened at College in the month of March last that I was seduced to take a part in those disturbances; a part which I long have sorely repented that I ever bore, as it gave reason to the faculty to imagine that I wished greatly to add to the confusion which universally spread itself.

The reason upon which was founded my suspension appeared to have been the act of firing one pistol and if it is any palliation of the crime, it did not take place within the hours prescribed by law for study, nor at night when ~~amid the silence of darkness~~ the cracking of a pistol might have caused greater tumult.

Although the presence of gunpowder, knives, and illegal alcohol made for a potentially deadly combination, fortunately no student or faculty member that we know of was killed. Mischief making, however, remained a significant pastime of students throughout the antebellum period. What else was there to do in Chapel Hill except get drunk and try to outwit the tutors who kept watch over the dorms? One of the more creative accounts of student mischief is the tale of Gooly, whose trip to a local whorehouse was thwarted when the tutors chased him back to campus. The story is recorded in an 1841 diary kept by Gooly's best friend James Lawrence Dusenbery, a native of Lexington, NC.^{xii}

First Chronicles

Chap. 1 st

Now it came to pass in the eighth month, even the month August & in the thirteenth day of the month, that Gooly^{xiii} surnamed the drummer arose & went forth into the wilderness of Sin. And there were with him in the wilderness, certain mighty men of valour of the tribe of Freshmen, worshippers of Baal who had not the fear of God before their eyes. Now there were harlots in those parts, who enticed the men of the land & were stumbling-blocks before Gooly & the men who were with him. For they were moved in their hearts to go in unto them; so they arose & went forth by night, bearing in their hands, gifts of raiment & precious metal. But the intents of their hearts were evil before the Lord continually & it was forbidden that this great wickedness should come to pass. For behold as they went the very trees cried out at their approach & put forth their arms to forbid their passage. But Gooly & the men of might who were with him, were hardened in their hearts & pressed forward to give battle to the giants of the forest. And lo! one of the giants pressed sore upon Gooly & smote him between the eyes & he fell upon his face to the earth. Then Gooly arose & fled to his own house & the men, when they saw what was done, turned & fled after him. Thus was Gooly & the worshippers of of Baal discomfited before the giants of the wilderness of Sin.

Done on Saturday the 14 th of August 1841.

Although the University grew to become the fourth largest college in America in the decade before the Civil War,^{xiv} for most of its antebellum history, it was a modest regional school enrolling between 100 and 200 students annually. A concise description of the University appeared in the December 15, 1833, issue of Chapel Hill's first short-lived newspaper *The Harbinger*:

University of North Carolina. – Seniors 16, Juniors 23, Sophomores 35, Freshmen 28, irregular students 7; total 109 – from N. Carolina 87, Virginia 13, Tennessee 4, S. Carolina 2, Alabama 2, Maryland 1. Number

of Professors 5, one vacancy. – Expenses per session: tuition \$15, room-rent 1, servant hire 2, board 6 to 8 per month; washing, mending and bed, 8; deposit, most of which is returned, \$3 – The annual Commencement is on the fourth Thursday in June. – First vacation, six weeks from the fourth Thursday in June; second vacation, four weeks from the 15th of Dec. (p. 3, NCC)

The school year in the antebellum period was slightly longer than it is today, each semester lasting nineteen to twenty-two weeks. The school day remained much as John Pettigrew described it in 1795. Other students provide interesting details however. Writing to his sister on February 28, 1838, Kenelm Harrison Lewis^{xv} constructed a sequence of scenes, from dawn until noon, punctuated by the college bell, which hung in a wooden tower in the middle of campus near the Old Well:

Very early in the morning the observer may see lights at a few of the windows of the buildings inhabited by the students. They mark the rooms occupied by the more industrious or more resolute, who rise and devote an hour or two to their books by candle light on the winter mornings. About day the bell awakens the multitude of sleepers in all the rooms, and in a short time they are to be seen issuing from the various doors with sleepy looks and a few with books under their arms to attempt to make up as well as the faint but increasing light will enable them, for the time wasted in idleness or dissipation ~~on the~~ on the evening before. the first who come down go slowly, others with quicker and quicker step as the tolling of the bell proceeds; and the last few stragglers run with all speed to answer to their respective names. One of the Professors reads a portion of Scripture by the mingled light of the reddening beams which comes in from the eastern sky. He then offers the morning prayer. The hundreds of young men before him exhibit the appearance of respectful attention. when prayers are over, the several classes repair immediately to the rooms assigned to them, and recite the first lesson of the day. During the short period which elapses between the recitation and the breakfast bell College is a busy scene. parties are running up and down the stairs two steps at a time with the ardour and activity of youth. And now and then a fresh crowd is seen issuing from the door of some one of the buildings where a class has finished its recitation and comes forth to disperse to their rooms; – The breakfast bell brings out the whole throng again and gathers them around the long tables in the Steward, s Hall or else scatters them among the private families of the Village. – An hour after breakfast the bell rings to mark the commencement of study hours; when the students are required by College laws to repair to their respective rooms, which answer the 3fold purpose of parlour bedroom and stud[y to] prepare for their recitation at 11. o'clock they [however] who choose to evade this law can do it without any detection. The great majority comply, but some go into their neighbour, s rooms to receive assistance in their

studies, some lay by the dull book and read a tale: and others farther gone in the road of idleness and dissipation steal secretly away from College and ramble in the woods or skate upon the ice, evading their task like truant boys. they of course are marked absent but pretended sickness will answer for an excuse. they go, on blind to the certainty of disgrace which must soon come. –

Inside the classroom

Studies of antebellum college life offer few glimpses into the classroom. We know that the method of instruction was primarily recitation, students answering the professor's questions, usually by reciting or quoting memorized portions of the textbook. Students rarely comment on their recitations, except to note when they were "taken up" or called on and whether or not they came off well or poorly. Students often recited in alphabetical order, so they could predict when it would be necessary to prepare for class. Having been called on, a student could then skip studying for a few days, until the alphabetical rotation came his way again.

Thomas Miles Garrett^{xvi} wrote in his 1849 diary, "This morning our lesson was in Philosophy, and as I expected to be called upon to recite, I committed verry thoroughly. I was called upon as I expected and made a pretty good recitation. I am now free for three or four lessons." That students admit to such sporadic preparation should make us cautious about inferring what they might have learned from textbooks. Though students were responsible for studying their textbooks – and a number I'm sure did so diligently – plenty of students took shortcuts, working from books that previous students had helpfully annotated with answers to math problems or translations of Latin and Greek texts.

Though we would like to know more about what took place in the antebellum college classroom, Thomas Williams Mason's^{xvii} 1856 composition gives us a glimpse through the door. Titled "The Journal of a Day," the essay was written for Professor John Thomas Wheat's^{xviii} sophomore composition class. Wheat, professor of rhetoric and logic from 1849 to 1859, wrote "excellent" at the bottom of the last page. Let me read an excerpt describing a recitation conducted by Henri Herrisse,^{xix} instructor in French:

The curtain being again drawn, discloses a scene in Prof H_s [Instructor of French Henri Herrisse's] recitation room. The Prof. is seated on a high rostrum, assuming all the dignity of his lofty station. His class consists of between thirty and forty young men of all sorts of characters and dispositions. one is grave and sober, another all fume and fuss, another delighting in his wit, another trifling beyond all tolerance. After calling the roll Prof. commences the recitation. He calls upon Mr. G_. to translate some English sentences into French; which Mr. G_. does admirably well no less to his own satisfaction than to that of Prof. Mr.

H_ is next called upon. He could probably write the exercise very well, but makes some awful mistakes in pronunciation, much to the amusement of Prof. and his own discomforture. The recitation thus proceeds until at last the celebrated wit of the class is called upon, Mr. J_. Prof asks him to translate the sentence, Have you the bad butter, into French. Mr. J_. replies - Avez-vous le vieux beurre. Prof. informs the gentleman that vieux means old. Mr. J_. startles him with the brilliancy of his wit by informing him in return that, old butter is generally bad. Prof. is forced to acknowledge the wit of his remark, and J_. takes his seat amid the applause of his class-mates, feeling highly gratified with his performance. Prof. has hardly suppressed their loud congratulations, when the bell rings and all leave the room, seeming highly honoured at having so brilliant an intellect among them.

Although the course of study in the antebellum University was heavily oriented toward classical languages, mathematics, and sciences, composition was part of the curriculum from the beginning. Students in Ker's day submitted a composition every fortnight to the presiding professor. Seniors were required to write and deliver orations of their own composing twice a year – they called it "senior speaking" – and most students, especially those graduating with honors, participated in their own graduation ceremonies by offering commencement speeches that had been vetted by the professor of rhetoric and then memorized. Juniors took a year-long formal course in rhetoric, logic, and history, and by the mid-1840s, a sophomore course in composition appears to have been established, students hearing occasional lectures and preparing an essay every three weeks.

For a time, it seems, juniors had to satisfy a college-wide essay requirement. Beginning in Fall 1839 and continuing through Spring 1846, one and sometimes two compositions were collected from each junior. They were filed in what one student refers to as "the archives of the University" (H. Octavius Hooker, June 1844) and are now housed – all 701 of them – in the North Carolina Collection. Customarily, students all wrote on the same topic, so what survives are complete class sets of papers addressing such questions as "Is it likely that poetry will ever attain a high degree of excellence in the United States?" "Has climate an influence in the formation of character?" and "Should capital punishment be stricken from our penal code?"

That students could fail these compositions is illustrated by the work of John Herritage Bryan,^{xx} who submitted to adjunct professor of rhetoric Charles Force Deems^{xxi} an essay on capital punishment in Spring 1843. Bryan evidently had failed the assignment twice before and titled his essay in the belief that he had written a "Failure Third on Capital Punishment":

"This is your second failure in Composition"

Mr. Deems' criticism on my

Second Composition.

Failure Third

on Capital Punishment.

The subject of this essay is one which demands the attentive consideration of every enlightened citizen of our free and happy country, for many and various reasons. First: because it involves the destruction of human life, the greatest blessing bestowed on us by our all-wise Creator. Secondly: It deprives many a human creature, already sufficiently destitute, of her only support in this world, or involves numerous young children, too young to work to support themselves, in vile and intolerable disgrace, or casts them to wander through the wild world alone and by paths thick-set with snares and tending downwards to destruction. These weighty arguments, though they be but few, in number, are sufficient to show that the subject is one of deep and abiding interest and that it behooves every man, who has the well-being of humanity at heart, to labor strenuously to overthrow the system, if false and pernicious in its effects and to uphold it if, on due consideration, it shall be found to be conducive to their welfare. With these few desultory remarks I must close for the present my essay on the subject of Capital Punishment

Jno. H. Bryan

Wednesday May 17 th 1843. Raleigh

N o Ca.

In taking no clear position on whether or not he supports capital punishment, Bryan certainly would also fail the assignment in an English 11 class today.

Student assessment

No antebellum compositions show any grades. End-of-term grades were used, at least by the late 1830s, but they were based on a seven-point scale – VG, G, VR, R, T, B, VB (Very Good, Good, Very Respectable, Respectable, Tolerable, Bad, and Very Bad). Each student received two grades every semester - one for scholarship and one for deportment. These grades were recorded for members of the senior class in the faculty minutes for 1847; they are a copy of an annual report sent to the trustees. Matt Ransom's claim to fame was that, during his four years at UNC, he never missed any "duty" – attending all payers, recitations, and Sunday church services.^{xxii}

Grade reports sent to parents looked a bit different.

This 1854 report for Hugh Thomas Brown^{xxiii} is typical. What matters is how often he attended prayers, recitations, and divine worship. President David L. Swain^{xxiv} consulted Hugh's professors, tallied his attendance, and wrote on page two of the form "His relative grade of scholarship in his class is considered promising and his deportment very good."

If compositions were not graded – oh, happy thought for students and composition teachers everywhere! – how, then, were they evaluated? According to the 1846 University catalogue, "[the students'] compositions are carefully examined, and returned with written corrections and oral criticisms" (1846-47 *UNC Catalogue* 23, NCC). Students, however, give us almost no information about how faculty members judged their writing. I've found only a brief reference to the feedback students received in William B. Whitfield's^{xxv} diary. On April 3, 1860, he was taking composition with Andrew Hepburn,^{xxvi} who was professor of metaphysics, rhetoric, and logic from 1860 through 1867.

Found all the benches in the Chapel tarred and just over the place where "Old Hub" [Fordyce Hubbard] sits was written in letters of tar the word "Fordyce". The students stood in all parts of the Chapel regardless of Classes.^{xxvii} Prof. [Andrew] Hepburn gave out that the 3rd Section would have him on Compositions immediately after prayers. Nearly all the Section had heard of it before but he had not given out the notice publicly and I did not carry my composition. He read out the compositions of W. Smith, Staton, Skinner^{xxviii} and two others, the authors of whom I do not know. He doesn't read out the authors' names but only the Compositions.

Presumably, then, the professor of rhetoric collected his students' compositions, commented on them orally when he "read them out," and then returned them with a few written corrections. We would hope that he singled out meritorious work to read to the class, but I have found no evidence of what was said. What is clear, however, is that faculty members made minimal corrections on students' papers. The marks almost always addressed only word choice and spelling.

The birth of the debating societies

In addition to writing letters, keeping diaries, and writing for teachers, UNC's antebellum young men had another forum for their written work – the debating societies. Students freely admit that these societies drew them away from their studies and received more energetic attention than class compositions and recitations. William Carey Dowd,^{xxix} who became president of the Dialectic Society in 1858, wrote in his inaugural address: "So have I sometimes been delighted at a meeting of the Society: so convinced of the utility of debate, that in retirement I

would almost abandon long, dull lessons and apply myself exclusively to the pleasing tasks assigned by my fellows." Let us now turn our attention to these societies, which seemed to promote an interest in learning that academic coursework did not.

The earliest debating society at UNC – called simply The Debating Society – met for the first time on June 3, 1795. The price of entrance was 25 cents for the year. Charles Wilson Harris,^{xxx} a graduate of the College of New Jersey (now Princeton) and a tutor of mathematics, had helped the students organize the society. Three weeks later, the members divided themselves into two societies – The Debating Club and the Concord Society – and a year later both societies adopted classical names: The Dialectic Society and the Philanthropic Society.

Society membership was determined for most students by where they lived. Students from eastern North Carolina joined the Phis, whose color was white; primarily, they were federalists, Episcopalian, and members of the plantation aristocracy. Dialectic Society members tended to be Westerners, republican, and Presbyterian; their color was Carolina blue. Students from other states joined whichever society suited their politics, religion, or economic background. The societies replicated the east-west sectionalism dominating North Carolina politics, and students appear only rarely to have engaged students from a rival society socially. These sectional differences also were reflected in the geography of the Carolina campus, Dis living in Old and New West and Phis occupying Old and New East.

Virtually all colleges of the period had two debating societies. As Albert and Gladys Hall Coates have argued,^{xxxii} these societies represented the earliest forms of student government on college campuses. They provided students with opportunities to read contemporary literature and to discuss current events. From the students' perspective, they offered a significant social outlet on campuses that lacked cultural resources, constructive diversions, and women. At UNC, the societies competed with each other to amass libraries and substantial portrait collections, to build dormitories, and to host elaborate commencement balls. They buried their own as well, in plots surrounded by ornate fences in the Old Chapel Hill Cemetery.

Every student was expected to join one or the other society, and faculty members were explicitly excluded. The societies certainly legitimated a uniformity of thought and conformity of behavior, but to the students' credit, they rewarded exemplary academic achievement. Each society competed with its rival for excellent students, scholastic honors, and prominent honorary members, and graduating seniors received a diploma from their society as well as from the University.

Students in both societies engaged in similar activities: writing compositions, debating, and declaiming or reading aloud extracts from works by other writers. The students organized themselves into groups, as Richard Henry Lewis,^{xxxiii} class of 1852, explains:

The members [of the Dialectic Society] were divided into four sections. The first and third always debated against each other, and the second and fourth. The alternate sections performed duty on Saturday morning following the Friday night's debate by the other two [groups]. The Seniors were required, once in each term, to deliver orations.^{xxxiii}

Students who missed a "duty" or misbehaved during society meetings paid fines, collected by an elected student officer known as the supervisor among the Phis and the *ensor morum* among the Dis. Society members also elected "correctors," whose job it was to correct the weekly compositions written by fellow students.

Topics of debate

Among the earliest Dialectic Society compositions is an essay on whether treaties made contrary to the laws of nations can be binding by William Edwards Webb,^{xxxiv} who joined the Dis in 1797. The manuscript is inscribed by the corrector "No mistakes/Wm. Houston/Sept. 2nd 1797." Houston,^{xxxv} a senior in 1797, was a charter member of the Dis; William Webb, a first-year student, belonged to the second class or section when it came to determining what duties he would perform each week.

Abner Wentworth Clopton,^{xxxvi} a Virginian, joined the Dis in 1808 and graduated a year later, becoming a tutor at UNC for a year, then a physician and Baptist minister. His first composition, on the pursuit of happiness, was corrected "and ordered to be filed" by Thomas Gilchrist Polk,^{xxxvii} a senior.

Students chose their own topics for these compositions, and because they were writing for one another, not the professor of rhetoric, they approached those topics differently. Occasionally students wrote poems, character sketches, descriptions of places, and stories. One piece that I especially like describes the campus as students rush around preparing to leave for the Christmas vacation. Written probably in 1845 or 1846 by James Johnston Pettigrew,^{xxxviii} a Phi, it includes a rare glimpse of a college servant, a slave known to students as Lord Chesterfield. Pettigrew's composition is a draft, but here's a portion of it:

In another room are three or four standing round a table, hats on and pantaloons inside boots, ready to start, but before the go, taking a farewell glass. The passage is full of trunks and negroes, willing to seize anything unappropriated. Put your head out in the Campus again; see a poor fellow while making his way to his conveyance, stopped at every step by some darkey with Mister B, "I come for that little you owe me". "Well how much?" "forty-five cents, sir." – " Mr B. – I believe you owe me a quarter." "For you old senior" "for a chicken supper sir." And so on, till at last, when he does reach the carriag, it is with a diminished purse.

Yonder is one man with his head out the East Building window, roaring out for Chester,^{xxxix} "Chester-r-r-r,! oh! Chester; Chesterfield! # how long before my concern will be ready," "The boy says, sir, the salubrity of the atmosphere is very congressional to the consolidated feelings of his concomitancy and that he will be there presently."

In addition to such creative works, students wrote essays on federalism, on liberty, and on military leaders they admired; they argued that Americans should develop their own national literature, that reading poetry has value, that critics and reviewers are responsible to society. When these students composed essays on ethical topics such as friendship, ambition, mental improvement, and the beneficial effects of adversity, they typically supported their arguments by referring to the obligations and privileges they enjoyed as members of their debating society. They placed enormous value on their association with other students, a bond of brotherhood that lasted for the rest of their lives.

Students also set their own topics for weekly debates. Assigned a week or two in advance, these debates involved four students, two taking the affirmative and two the negative. The following questions are just a sampling of the sorts of issues students addressed: Is duelling justifiable (1804; no, 1816; no, 1824)? Ought the U.S. to remove the Indians. . . West of the Mississippi (1825)? Has the influence of the Theatre upon the morals of Society been beneficial or not (not; 1830)? Should Texas be admitted to the Union (no; 1837)? Should congress receive petitions for the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia (1838)? Was Queen Elizabeth justified in executing Mary (yes; mid-1840)? Was the Mexican war justifiable? (no; 1851) Is southern slavery justifiable? (yes; 1855) Would disunion be profitable to the South? (no; 1859).

The debating societies were important not only for building lasting friendships but also for providing significant training in writing and speaking. Antebellum students lived in a community steeped in public address. They listened to faculty lectures, Sunday sermons, and visiting political figures. They read published speeches printed under the auspices of the debating societies or appearing in newspapers. As seniors they were required to deliver publicly senior speeches and commencement addresses. The debating societies offered weekly opportunities to prepare for such work. They promoted a practical literacy that focused on the skills of composing, argumentation, delivery, and parliamentary procedure that would serve well a university graduate seeking a career as a lawyer, minister, and teacher.

Leonidas Fidelis Siler

Let me illustrate the point by singling out Leonidas Fidelis Siler,^{xl} class of 1852. Leonidas began his college career at Emory and Henry but came to UNC in 1848, joining the Dialectic Society. In a letter to his cousin Sarah "Sallie" Jarrett, he

complained, "[I am] hurrying to finish up my letter, so that I can prepare a recitation in Rhetoric. This is not pleasant I assure you."

In other letters to Cousin Sallie, he expressed pleasure in "listening to an excellent sermon on the truth of the Christian religion" (May 25 1850), and he applauded a temperance lecturer who "advanced [his argument] with his profound reasoning, cutting irony and exhilarating anecdotes" (October 13, 1850). When he invited Sallie's parents to his family's Christmas celebration, he promised, "I'll make a speech and they will hear others that will be interesting & good" (December 17, 1850).

For Leonidas – church-goer, worker for the Sons of Temperance, and would-be lawyer and Methodist minister – Dialectic Society meetings had a relevance to his life outside the academy that recitations and compositions written for professors did not. He participated actively in society meetings. In March 1851 he opened a debate on the question "Were the wars of Napoleon Buonaparte beneficial to Europe?" arguing that they were.

When he became society president in August 1851, his inaugural address, like those of most society presidents, urged his fellow-students to take their society responsibilities seriously. Two of the compositions he wrote for society meetings were ordered filed, one titled "Life's but a Span; I'll every Inch Enjoy," the other an essay on "slander, that worst of poisons." In 1852, the year he graduated, he established, together with five other students, *The North Carolina University Magazine*, the institution's first literary magazine.

The importance Leonidas attached to speaking and writing well was echoed by other debating society members. Forty years after graduating, Richard Henry Battle, Jr.,^{xli} Class of 1854, could still remember many of the classmates with whom he debated, declaimed, and wrote compositions. He clearly regarded his responsibilities as a Di "sacred":

To those of us who made any effort at elocution the sympathetic and indulgent attention of our fellows was an inspiration to do our best, and we acquitted ourselves in declamation much better than in the chapel before the Faculty, or in the classroom of the Professor of Rhetoric, where we had the fear of unsympathetic criticism.^{xlii}

Making meaning

These students renew my appreciation for the ways in which students give their college experience meaning. What is a University? For most, it provides an education and a means of growing from adolescence to adulthood. Then as now, students come to Carolina to get good grades, compete for honors, and make their parents proud. Others mean to have fun and to enjoy being away from home for the

first time. A few learn that failing to accept adult responsibilities carries disastrous consequences. For all, the University experience creates friendships that advance careers and last a lifetime.

In fact, our ties to one another and to this place prompt the invaluable support Carolina needs to insure that each generation of students continues its significant contributions to the economy and culture of this state and beyond. Now as then, students believe that higher education has a power to improve the self and the world. Though few of them will become famous – in the ways our culture assigns such prominence – they will use their years in Chapel Hill to grow toward productive and rewarding lives. It's been my pleasure to introduce you to these students of long ago, and I appreciate all that you do to support this institution in its work with the students of today.

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ⁱ The materials on which I base this talk are all located in Wilson Library on the UNC-Chapel Hill campus. To date, my search has yielded over 1800 documents housed in three major collections:

- a.) Housed in the University Archives (UA), the Dialectic Society Records include an unbroken series of thirteen volumes of minutes, five volumes of circulation records for the Society's library, and 934 student compositions, 678 of them written between 1796 and 1868.
- b.) The North Carolina Collection (NCC) houses eight bound volumes of student papers written primarily in the 1840s and 1850s. A total of 571 students wrote the 701 autograph manuscripts; several students are represented by more than one composition, and whole sets of compositions on the same topic await further study.
- c.) The Southern Historical Collection (SHC) houses student writing in 98 separate collections of individual and family papers. Here we find over 300 letters from faculty members, students, their parents, relatives, and friends; over 100 additional documents shed light on the life and work of antebellum students.

ⁱⁱ Studies of nineteenth-century American education abound – though few of them focus on Southern institutions – and my work has been immeasurably aided by recent studies of the history of composition, including Anne Ruggles Gere's *Writing Groups* (1987), Sharon Crowley's *Composition in the University* (1998), Robert Connor's *Composition-Rhetoric* (1997), John Brereton's *The Origins of Composition Studies in the American Colleges, 1875-1925* (1995); and Nan Johnson's *Nineteenth-Century Rhetoric in North America* (1991). These books together with standard histories of several southern universities and old, still

useful, often multi-volume histories of higher education offer important contexts for the work I present here.

iii Richard Dobbs Spaight (1758 - 1802) was born in New Bern, NC, and educated in England, Ireland, and the University of Glasgow in Scotland. Returning to the United States, he served as an aide to Major General Richard Caswell during the Revolutionary War. A member of the NC General Assembly from 1781 to 1783, Spaight served in the Continental Congress from 1783 to 1785 and was a delegate to the constitutional convention. He was elected governor of North Carolina in 1792 and served three terms, until November 1795. Representing North Carolina in the US Congress from 1798 to 1801, Spaight was wounded in a duel with political rival John Stanly on September 5, 1802, and died the following day (DCNB 5:403 - 04).

iv David Ker (1758 - 1805) was born in Ireland and educated at Trinity College, Dublin. He had emigrated to the United States by 1789 and by 1791 was a Presbyterian minister and school teacher in Fayetteville, NC. On becoming the University's first presiding professor, he moved to Chapel Hill in 1794 and lived in a house provided for him on the site of present-day Swain Hall. Controversy over Ker's political and religious views as well as unrest among the students prompted the Board of Trustees to replace Ker as chief administrative officer. Though the board was willing to allow him to remain as professor of languages, Ker demanded that his salary be increased to include the value of his house. The board refused and called for his resignation in July 1796. Ker moved to Lumberton, NC, then in 1800 went to Natchez, MS, possibly as a tutor to the children of Gen. John Willis. With his wife Mary he opened the first public school for young women in Mississippi Territory. Ker retired from the ministry, studied law, and became clerk of superior court, sheriff, and eventually a territorial judge, appointed by President Jefferson. Mary Ker continued to operate the school and lived until 1847. The Kers were the parents of three daughters and two sons (DNCB 1:353 - 54; Connor 1:347 - 38; Battle 1:104 - 07).

v John Pettigrew (1779 - 99), known as Jackey in the family, was the son of Charles Pettigrew (1744 - 1807) and his first wife Mary "Polly" Blount. John attended the University from 1795 to 1797 and was a member of the Philanthropic Society. Charles Pettigrew hoped that John would become a physician, and by 1798 he was studying "under the direction of doctor Knox at Nixonton" (Connor 2:355). John died in an epidemic in 1799. The letter is housed in the Pettigrew Family Papers, SHC; Pettigrew's sketch of Old East (ca. 1797) is housed in the NCC.

vi Leander Hughes, son of John Hughes of Patrick County, VA, was a student at the University for only the 1823 - 24 academic year. The letter is housed in the Leander Hughes Papers, SHC.

vii Augustus A. Alston (1805 - 38) from Sparta, GA, entered the University in 1821. Leonidas King from Anson County, NC, entered in 1822. Both students were members of the Philanthropic Society, but neither received a degree from the University.

viii Joseph Hubbard Saunders (1800 - 39) of Chowan County, NC, graduated from the University in 1821 and was a tutor from 1821 to 1825, receiving the MA in 1824. He became a minister in the Protestant Episcopal church and rector of Christ Church in Pensacola, FL.

George Shonnard Bettner (1801 - 60) from New Bern, NC, graduated in 1823 and served as a tutor from 1823 to 1826. He later became a physician.

^{ix} Elisha Mitchell assumed the president's duties during the 1824 - 25 academic year, while Joseph Caldwell was in England purchasing books and scientific equipment.

^x Kemp Plummer Battle's *History of the University of North Carolina* (Spartanburg, SC: The Reprint Company, 1974) contains the following account of the "flagrant outrage":

A. A. and L. K. loaded themselves with whiskey in the village grog-shop, and arming themselves, one with a club and the other with a pistol, "sallied forth for the purpose of attacking the persons of different members of the Faculty." They committed "violent outrages" on two of the persons hunted. (1:298; see also Faculty Minutes 3:49 - 50, UA)

After investigating the matter the faculty met on October 2, 1824, with the trustees living in Orange County: Thomas D. Bennehan, Duncan Cameron, Francis L. Hawks, Thomas Ruffin, James S. Smith, and James Webb.

The young criminals expressed their regret for their misconduct, but it appeared to the authorities assembled impossible that the peace and good order of the institution could be maintained, if such outrages were permitted to pass without exemplary punishment. The said A. A. and L. K. were therefore expelled. As we now say, "the line was drawn" at cudgelling the Faculty with sticks, while looking into the muzzle of loaded pistols. (Battle 1:299)

Judge Thomas Ruffin evidently pronounced the sentence in front of the full student body assembled in Person Hall.

^{xi} John Ambrose Ramsey of Moore County, NC, entered the University in 1806 and was a member of the Philanthropic Society. In March 1810 he was suspended for six months for firing a pistol, blocking the door of the chapel, and "conveying away" President Caldwell's carriage. Midway through his suspension, in June 1810, he wrote to the Board of Trustees requesting reinstatement and permission to graduate. Minutes of trustees' meetings make no mention of Ramsey's letter, and he may not have been reinstated. According to Battle, Ramsey, "a former student of high rank," received an "honorary" BA at the 1811 Commencement, there being no other graduates that year (1:186). In 1816 Ramsey received an MA from the University. From 1814 to 1820 and again in 1823 he represented Moore County in the NC House of Commons. The letter appears in the Faculty Minutes 1:1, pp. 193-96, UA.

^{xii} James Lawrence Dusenbery (b. 1821) from Lexington, NC, entered the University in 1839, joined the Dialectic Society, and graduated in 1842. He studied medicine at the University of Pennsylvania and hung out his shingle in Lexington in 1845. He moved to Statesville, NC, in January 1846. During the Civil War Dusenbery served as a surgeon in the Confederate Army. Though he survived the war, it is not known when or how he died. He was a member of the Board of Trustees from 1874 to 1877. The diary is housed in the James Lawrence Dusenbery Papers, SHC.

^{xiii} John Lea Williamson (d. 1904) of Caswell County, NC, entered the University in 1841, became a member of the Dialectic Society, and graduated in 1843. He received the MA degree in 1847 and became a physician and cotton manufacturer. Williamson was a good friend of James Lawrence Dusenbery, whose diary refers to him as "Gooly."

^{xiv} Harvard had close to 900 students; the University of Virginia, nearly 650; Yale, approximately 500; the University of North Carolina, 456 students [Edgar W. Knight, *A Documentary History of Education in the South Before 1860* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1949-53), 3:425, 5:279].

^{xv} Kenelm Harrison Lewis (1816 - 66) was the son of Exum and Ann Harrison Lewis of Edgecombe County, NC. Known in the family as Kelly, he entered the University in 1834, became a member of the Philanthropic Society, and graduated with a BA in 1838. He received his MA in 1845. A lawyer, he settled in Rocky Mount, NC, with his wife Elizabeth H. Bryan and two children, John Bryan Lewis and Anna Lewis. The letter is housed in the John Francis Speight Papers, SHC.

^{xvi} Thomas Miles Garrett (1830 - 64) of Hertford County, NC, entered the University in 1848, was a member of the Philanthropic Society, and graduated in 1851. He became a lawyer. Enlisting in the Confederate Army in 1861, Garrett was twice wounded in battle. Promoted to colonel in 1863, he died at Spotsylvania. The diary is housed in the Thomas Miles Garrett Papers, SHC.

^{xvii} Thomas Williams Mason (1839 - 1921) was the son of Temperance Arrington and Nathaniel Mason of Brunswick County, VA. He attended boarding school in Warren County, NC, and entered the University in 1854, joining the Philanthropic Society and becoming a charter member of Delta Kappa Epsilon. During his sophomore year he won an award for the best English composition (Battle 1:669). Mason graduated with first honors in 1858, delivering the Latin salutatory. From 1858 to 1860 he attended law school at the University of Virginia. In 1860 he married Elizabeth (Bettie) Gray (1839 - 97); the couple had three daughters and one son. Mason served on Gen. Robert Ransom's staff during the Civil War, then returned to his wife's parents' plantation Longview in Northampton County, NC. He also managed farming operations in Virginia and Louisiana. Mason was a judge (1877 - 85), a member of the NC Senate (1885, 1895, and 1915) and a University trustee (1885 - 1909) (DNCB 4:234 - 35). "The Journal of a Day" is housed in the Sally Long Jarman Papers, SHC.

^{xviii} John Thomas Wheat (1801 - 88) was born in Washington, DC, the son of Mary Chatham and Thomas Wheate. John, who dropped the final e from his last name, was educated at the Virginia Theological Seminary in Alexandria. In 1825 he married Selina Blair Patten, who became well known for nursing sick University students. The couple had eight children; three died young and two sons were killed in the Civil War. Wheat was ordained an Episcopal priest in 1826 and had charge successively of parishes in Baltimore, MD; Wheeling, WV; Marietta, OH; New Orleans, LA; and Nashville, TN. In 1849 he accepted the principalship of the new Ravenscroft Theological Seminary in Tennessee, but when the school failed after a year, Bishop James H. Otey recommended Wheat for the professorship of rhetoric and logic at the University. During Wheat's years in Chapel Hill (1849 - 59), he was rector of the Chapel of the Cross as well as a member of the faculty. Wheat resigned his professorship to become rector of Christ Church in Little Rock, AR. After the Civil War he moved to Memphis, TN. He received the DD from the University of Nashville. Toward the

end of his life Wheat established congregations in California, West Virginia, and North Carolina. He died in Salisbury, NC (DNCB 6:164 - 65).

^{xix} M. Henri Herrisse (1829 - 1910) was born in France and emigrated to the United States in the 1840s. He taught at a school in South Carolina before becoming instructor of French at the University, where he taught from 1853 to 1856 while simultaneously studying law. He practiced law in Chicago (1857 - 59) and New York (1859 - 70) before returning to France. His avid interest in early American history led him to publish some ninety books, pamphlets, and articles, for which work the French government made him a member of the Legion of Honor.

^{xx} John Herritage Bryan (1825 - 91) was one of fourteen children born to Mary Williams Shepard and John Herritage Bryan, a prominent lawyer and US congressman from New Bern and Raleigh, NC. Young Bryan entered the University in 1840, joined the Philanthropic Society, and graduated with third honors in 1844. He became a teacher, receiving an MA degree from the University in 1847. Later in his life he was a lawyer and bank teller. The composition is housed in Junior and Senior Orations, 1842-46, NCC.

^{xxi} Charles Force Deems (1820 - 93), born in Baltimore, MD, came to North Carolina in 1840 as an agent for the American Bible Society. Gov. Swain persuaded him to teach at the University "in order to get a Methodist on the faculty" (DNCB 2:49). He left Chapel Hill in 1848 to teach natural sciences at Randolph-Macon College. He is best known for establishing the religious newspaper *The Watchman* (in 1866) and the Church of the Stangers in New York. The Deems fund, established at UNC with the help of William H. Vanderbilt, honored Deems son Theodore, who died in the Battle of Gettysburg. For many years the fund provided loans to needy students.

^{xxii} The grades for the senior class of 1847 appear in the Faculty Minutes, 1:6, p. 366-67, UA. The son of Robert and Priscilla Ransom, Matthew Whitaker Ransom (1826 - 1904) was born in Warren County, NC, where he attended Warrenton Academy before enrolling in the University in 1842. A member of the Philanthropic Society, he graduated in 1847. He practiced law in Warrenton, NC, and in 1852 was elected the state's attorney general. The following year he married Martha Anne Exum; they were the parents of eight children. Ransom served in the NC General Assembly from 1858 to 1861, when he entered the Confederate Army as a private. Wounded three times, he rose to the rank of brigadier general. After the war Ransom resumed his law practice. From 1872 to 1895 he served in the US Senate. Then President Grover Cleveland appointed him minister to Mexico for two years. Ransom retired to his wife's plantation on the Roanoke River and died on his seventy-eighth birthday (DNCB 5:175).

^{xxiii} Hugh Thomas Brown (1835 - 61) from Wilkesboro, NC, entered the University in 1854, became a member of the Dialectic Society, and graduated in 1858. He became a lawyer. A captain in the Confederate Army, Brown was killed in battle near Springfield, MO. The grade report is housed in the Hamilton Brown Papers, SHC.

^{xxiv} The youngest son of Caroline and George Swain, a farmer, David Lowry Swain (1801 - 68) was born in Buncombe County, NC, and educated at Newton Academy in Asheville, NC. He was admitted to the junior class at the University in 1821 but remained only one week. Reluctant to spend his parents' scarce resources, he went to Raleigh to read law under Chief

Justice John Louis Taylor, then returned to Asheville in 1823 to begin his law practice. He married Eleanor White in 1826; they became the parents of two daughters and three sons, two of whom died in infancy. Buncombe County voters sent Swain to the NC House of Commons four times between 1824 and 1829, when the legislature appointed him judge of the superior court. In 1832 Swain became governor, a role that allowed him to represent western North Carolina interests; promote internal improvements such as roads, railroads, and schools; and reform the state's constitution by bringing together in 1835 a coalition of the state's Whigs and Democrats. Despite his political success, the predominantly Democratic General Assembly of 1835, the last to elect North Carolina's governor, denied Swain a fourth one-year term. He became president of the University in 1835, a position he held until his death in 1868 (DNCEB 5:483 - 86). Students referred to Swain as "the Governor" or as "Old Bunk."

^{xxv} William Blackledge Whitfield (1842 - 62) of Jefferson County, FL, entered the University in 1859, became a member of the Dialectic Society, and joined the Confederate Army in 1861. He was killed in May 1862 at the Battle of Seven Pines. His BA degree was awarded posthumously in 1911. A photocopy of Whitfield's diary is housed in the William Blackledge Whitfield Papers, SHC.

^{xxvi} Andrew Dousa Hepburn (1830 - 1921) was the son of Rebecca Williamson and Samuel Hepburn, a lawyer and judge. Andrew grew up in Pennsylvania, attended Jefferson College and the University of Virginia before graduating in 1857 from Princeton Theological Seminary. In the same year he married Henriette McGuffey; the couple had one son, Charles McGuffey. Hepburn was ordained in the Presbyterian church in 1858. Assuming a professorship at the University in Fall 1860, Hepburn sided with the Confederacy during the Civil War and remained in Chapel Hill until 1864, when he took a leave of absence to serve as a supply pastor for the First Presbyterian Church in Wilmington, NC. In the summer of 1865 he studied at the University of Berlin. After the war financial necessity prompted him to accept a professorship at Miami University in Ohio; he served as the institution's president from 1871 until it closed temporarily in 1873. Hepburn then took a position on the faculty at Davidson College, publishing in 1875 a *Manual of English Rhetoric* and becoming president of Davidson in 1877. When Miami University reopened in 1885, he was reappointed as professor of English literature, a post he held until his retirement in 1908. He received a DD degree from Hampden-Sydney in 1876 and an LL.D degree from the University of North Carolina in 1881 (DNCEB 3:117 - 18).

^{xxvii} Students sat with their classes during services in Gerrard Hall, with the faculty and tutors seated among the students "To ensure proper inspection of the attitudes of the worshippers" (Battle 1:716).

Fordyce Mitchell Hubbard (1809 - 88), son of Sarah Mitchell and Roswell Hubbard, was born in Connecticut and graduated from Williams College in 1829, where he remained several years as a tutor. He also taught Latin at a school in Boston, where he met and married Martha Henshaw Bates. The couple had one daughter. In 1836 Hubbard published an edition of *Poems of Catullus*. Though he studied law, in 1842 he was ordained an Episcopal priest and became rector of Christ Church in New Bern, NC. After serving as principal of Trinity High School in Wake County, NC, Hubbard accepted the professorship of Latin at the University in 1848. The same year he published

a life of William R. Davie in Jared Spark's Library of American Biography. He received a DD from Williams College in 1860. Hubbard resigned his professorship in 1868 and for many years taught at St. John's School in Manlius, NY, where he also was rector of Christ Church. In retirement he returned to Raleigh, NC, to live with his son-in-law Col. Thomas M. Argo (DNCB 3:221).

^{xxviii} Hubbard evidently read the compositions roughly in alphabetical order. "W. Smith" is probably William James Smith (b. 1837) of Bigbyville, TN, who was a student from 1859 to 1861, when he joined the Confederate Army; he became a teacher and vice president of a bank. Thomas Gregory Skinner (1842 - 1907) of Hertford, NC, was a student from 1858 to 1861, when he joined the Confederate Army; after the war he became a lawyer, serving in the NC House of Commons in 1899 and in the US Congress (1883 - 87, 1889 - 91). Archibald Trenton Staton (1844 - 64) of Hamilton, NC, was a student from 1858 to 1860 and was killed at the Battle of Cold Harbor. All three students were members of the Philanthropic Society. Skinner and Smith received BA degrees in 1911 "as of 1862."

^{xxix} William Carey Dowd (1835 - 60) was born in Tarboro, NC. The second son of Patrick Dowd, a prominent Baptist minister, William attended Eastalia high school and enrolled in the University in 1854. He became a member of the Dialectic Society and graduated as class valedictorian in 1858. Appointed as a tutor of Latin in 1858, tuberculosis forced him to resign after one semester. He traveled to Florida and Red Sulphur Springs, VA, to recover his health but died on June 30, 1860, in Christiansburg, VA, on his way home to Tarboro. A biographical sketch of Dowd appears in *The North Carolina University Magazine* 10 (September 1860): 110 - 12, NCC. Dowd's inaugural address is housed in the Dialectic Society Records, UA.

^{xxx} Charles Wilson Harris (1771 - 1804), born near Concord, NC, was the son of Mary Wilson and Robert Harris, a farmer. After graduating from the College of New Jersey (Princeton) in 1792, Harris taught at schools in Mecklenburg County, NC, and Prince Edward County, VA. He studied experimental philosophy at William and Mary College, then medicine with his half-uncle, physician Charles Harris of Carbarrus County, NC. Joining the University faculty as tutor of mathematics in 1795, Harris became presiding professor from July to December 1796 after David Ker resigned. After studying law with William Richardson Davie in Halifax, NC, Harris was admitted to the bar in 1797 and took over Davie's practice when Davie became governor. Harris received an MA from the University in 1799 and served as a trustee from 1800 until 1803. He died, evidently of tuberculosis, in 1804 while visiting his brother Robert (DNCB 3:50 - 51; Hamilton, Harris Letters).

^{xxxi} Albert Coates and Gladys Hall Coates, *The Story of Student Government in the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill* (1985).

^{xxxii} Richard Henry Lewis (1832 - 1917) was born in Edgecombe County, NC, to Catherine Battle and John Wesley Lewis, a physician. After receiving his preparatory education at Edgecombe Academy and Lovejoy Academy, he entered the University in 1848, joined the Dialectic Society, and received his BA in 1852. He taught classical languages for two years in Person County and Fayetteville, NC, and earned an MA in 1855. The following year, he received an MD from the University of Pennsylvania and began a medical practice in Halifax

County, VA, later moving to Edgcombe County and Tarboro, NC. In 1857 he married Virginia A. Cull, with whom he had two sons. Lewis served as a captain in the Confederate Army. In 1863, after the death of his first wife and his sons, he married Eleanor Betts; they were the parents of four children. Troubled by poor eyesight, Lewis turned to teaching after the war. He helped establish the Kinston Collegiate Institute and Kinston College; from 1889 to 1892, he served as president of Judson College. He and his wife also conducted a private coeducational school out of their home until 1902 (DN CB 4:62 - 63).

xxxiii "A Brief Sketch of the Dialectic Society, 1848-'52," Catalogue of the Members of the Dialectic Society (Baltimore: Isaac Friedenwald, 1890), 13.

xxxiv William Edwards Webb (ca. 1777 - 1829) of Granville County, NC, was the son of John and Rebecca Edwards Webb. He was admitted to the Dialectic Society on June 2, 1796. Though he did not receive a degree with his class, by 1797 he was teaching in the University's preparatory school. He was "waylaid and stoned" during the week of student unrest preceding the 1799 Commencement. Shortly thereafter, when Samuel A. Holmes resigned from the faculty, Webb became professor of ancient languages. He left the University in 1800 to teach school in Halifax, NC, and he represented Halifax County in the House of Commons from 1809 to 1812. A trustee from 1809 to 1818, Webb eventually returned to the University and received the BA degree in 1812 and an MA in 1815. He married Sarah Williamson and after her death wed Ann Lindsey Zollicoffer, with whom he had three sons and three daughters (DN CB 6:150 - 51). The essay is housed in the Dialectic Society Records, UA.

xxxv William Houston of Iredell County, NC, was a charter member of the Debating Society and became a member of the Dialectic Society when the Debating Society divided. One of seven students in the University's first graduating class of 1798, Houston became a physician.

xxxvi Abner Wentworth Clopton, a Virginian, joined the Dialectic Society in 1808 and received his BA 1809. He served as a tutor at the University for one year, complaining on his resignation, "I find it utterly inconvenient to receive no more than \$250 a year. I am willing to serve for \$500 a year, and am richly worth it" (Battle 1:185). The trustees agreed to pay him \$400 but assigned him to head the grammar school, where he taught until 1819. In 1812 he earned an MA. A Baptist minister and physician, he eventually returned to Virginia, near Roanoke. One source states that he lived for a while in China, perhaps as a missionary (Grant 116). The essay is housed in the Dialectic Society Records, UA.

xxxvii Thomas Gilchrist Polk (1791 - 1869) was born in Mecklenburg County, NC, the son of Col. William and Griselda Gilchrist Polk. He entered the University in 1805, joined the Dialectic Society, and graduated in 1809. He received the MA degree in 1816. A lawyer and prominent politician, Polk served in the NC House of Commons (1823 - 25, 1829 - 32) and NC Senate (1835, 1836). He served on the Board of Trustees from 1831 to 1839, when he moved to La Grange, TN, eventually settling in Holly Spring, MS. In 1826 he married Mary Eloise Trotter; they were the parents of three daughters and three sons (DN CB 5:113).

xxxviii James Johnston Pettigrew (1828 - 63) was born in Tyrell County, NC, the eighth of nine children of Ebenezer and Ann Blount Shepard Pettigrew. Educated at Bingham's Hillsborough Academy, Pettigrew entered the University at fourteen. He joined the Philanthropic Society and graduated first in his class of thirty-six students in 1847, the year

President Polk attended the commencement exercises. A talented mathematician, Pettigrew became a professor at the National Observatory, but he left after six months to travel in Europe and study law there. Upon his return in 1852 he joined the Charleston, SC, law firm of James Louis Pettigru, his father's cousin. In 1856 he was elected to the SC House of Representatives. A Union man, Pettigrew nevertheless became convinced that a long civil war was inevitable, and he remained active in the militia throughout the 1850s, becoming a self-taught military engineer and returning to Europe to fight with the Italians in their war against Austria. When the Civil War broke out, Pettigrew enlisted as a private in Virginia's Hampton Legion, declining several commissions and promotions on the grounds that no one should command men who had not previously led them in battle. By the beginning of the Peninsula campaign, however, he accepted a commission as brigadier general. Shot several times, captured, and exchanged for other prisoners, Pettigrew was wounded during Pickett's Charge at Gettysburg, then was shot again in the stomach during the retreat from Pennsylvania. He died three days later (DNCEB 5:77 - 79). The composition is housed in the Pettigrew Family Papers, SHC.

^{xxxix} Chesterfield was a college servant whom some students called "Lord Chesterfield."

^{xi} Leonidas Fidelis Siler (1830 - 70) was the son of Jesse and Harriet Patton Siler of Franklin, NC. A nephew of Gov. David L. Swain, Leonidas entered the University in 1848 and joined the Dialectic Society. He graduated in 1852 as the class valedictorian. After studying law with Judge Pearson of Surry County, NC, Leonidas began a law practice in Franklin, NC. Also a teacher, journalist, and Methodist minister, he evidently was twice married and the father of three sons and three daughters. His letters to Cousin Sallie are housed in the Sarah A. Jarrett Papers, SHC; his debate speech, inaugural address, and compositions are housed in the Dialectic Society Records, UA.

^{xli} Richard Henry Battle, Jr., (1835 - 1912) was born in Louisburg, NC, to Lucy Martin Plummer and William Horn Battle, a justice of the NC Supreme Court. He entered the University in 1850, joined the Dialectic Society, and graduated with first honors in 1854. He became a tutor of Greek and mathematics from 1854 to 1858, when he received an LLB. Having studied law with his father, Richard began his practice in Wadesboro, NC. In 1860 he married Annie Ruffin Ashe; they were the parents of ten children. Battle served in the Confederate Army, becoming quartermaster of his regiment, with the rank of captain, but he resigned in September 1862 to become a private secretary to Governor-elect Zebulon Vance. After the war he resumed his law practice and was active in political and civic life, including service in the state legislature in 1911 and on the Board of Trustees from 1879 to 1912. In 1895 the University conferred on him an LLD (DNCEB 1:116 - 17).

^{xlii} "The Dialectic Society of the University of North Carolina from 1850 to 1854," *Catalogue of the Members of the Dialectic Society* (Baltimore: Isaac Friedenwald, 1890), 19.

Erika Lindemann delivered this talk on March 29, 2005 in UNC's Wilson Library for the Gladys Hall Coates University History Lecture series.

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*Books she has authored or edited include *English Essays, Literary and Linguistic* (Scholars Guild, 1975); *A Rhetoric for Writing Teachers* (Oxford, 1982, 1987, 1995, 2001); *The Longman Bibliography of Composition and Rhetoric* (1987, 1988); *An Introduction to Composition Studies* (Oxford, 1991); and *Profiles for Writing Programs in the Alliance for Undergraduate Education* (Pennsylvania State University, 1993). She has also published extensively in journals and scholarly proceedings and lectured at numerous conferences and workshops.*

She has received the Outstanding Faculty Award from the UNC Women's Issues Network and Executive Branch of Student Government (1996); University Distinguished Teaching Award for Post-Baccalaureate Instructions (2001); Association of English Graduate Students Award for Mentoring Students (2004); and Exemplar Award, Conference on College Composition and Communication (2005).