

Drop curtain similar to that of the old Haden Opera House, as re-created by production crew students. It was used at the 50th anniversary program of the campus chapter of Delta Sigma Rho.

The night that gave us the Columns

The "Forty-Ninth Annual Open Session" of the Athenaeum Literary Society scheduled for Old Academic Hall on the night of January 9, 1892 never came off there. That was the night that fire destroyed the University's main building, leaving only the Columns. Two weeks later the program was transferred to the old Haden Opera House, at Ninth and Broadway, and presented as originally planned. Now, sixty-seven years later, the program has made its way back to the main University building, on the stage of modern Jesse Hall Auditorium, in a reconstructed version by students and faculty with a scarcity of original material to guide them.

The repeat performance served to highlight the golden anniversary of the University chapter of Delta Sigma Rho, national honorary fraternity in forensics. The Athenaeum Society, student speech forensics group, cooperated in the costumed production, which also called for the services of University band members and students in dramatic art.

To help re-create the atmosphere of the Opera House, a large drop curtain was designed and created to hang before the Jesse Auditorium stage. It was painted by Lewis W. Stoerker, assistant professor of

speech and dramatic art, and his student crew at the University scene shop. It showed a castle scene flanked by cameo-shaped sketches of Romeo and Juliet; the replica was based on newspaper accounts.

The Athenaeum and Delta Sigma Rho members taking part in the re-enactment were garbed in Prince Albert period costumes. Some wore sideburns and beards. Their oratory was accompanied by grandiose gestures in vogue at the time. Makeup, staging and costuming were done by the Missouri Workshop. Dr. Frances L. McCurdy, assistant professor of speech and dramatic art assisted with rehearsals, and Carol Henderson handled costuming and makeup.

Costumed members of a small University band, under the direction of Charles L. Emmons, assistant professor of music, performed numbers antedating 1892. Included were "March from Aida" by Verdi; "Bronze Horse Overture" and "Selections from Fra Diavolo" by Auber, and "Washington Post March" by Sousa. The stylized music of the period gave the audience some hearty chuckles.

The declamations and orations had a jocular tone, but the audience gave close attention to the debate on the topic, "Immigration Should Be Prohibited,"

as many of the pros and cons could be translated to today's arguments over integration.

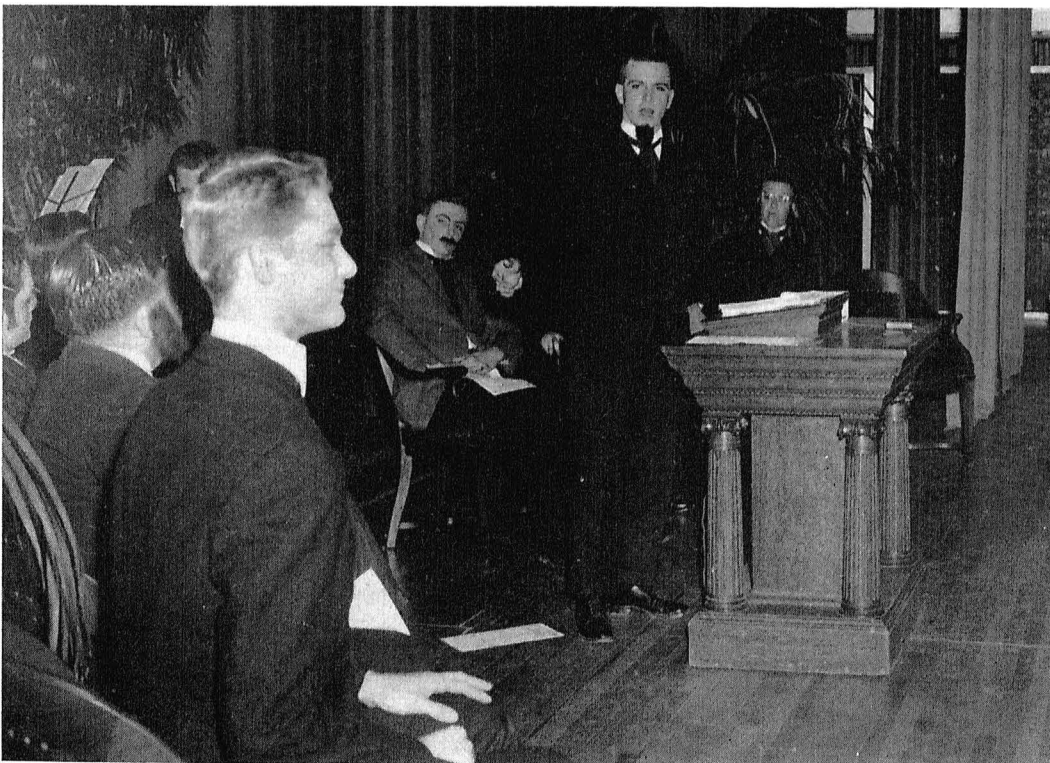
When the curtain was raised the audience saw eight Delta Sigma Rho and Athenaeon Society members in makeup and costume seated in chairs across the stage. Behind them were seated the director and ten members of the University band, also in 1892 attire. As the band played, the audience of some 300 persons stood and sang "The Star-Spangled Banner," then Jack L. Pooker gave the invocation. After Carl D. Gum, in his role as the incoming president of the society gave his inaugural address, William A. Heyde III declaimed "Curfew Bells." In the debate on ending immigration, Larry H. Heflin took the affirmative, and Graham T. Helmendach took the negative. John L. Port, Jr. gave the declamation, "Signing of the Magna Charta;" Joseph O'Rourke, instructor in speech, delivered an oration, "Ireland and the Irish;" and Charles R. Row finished the speaking with a "paper" entitled, "Athenaeon Joker." Musical numbers were interspersed through the program.

Adding a further touch of authenticity to the occasion were hand-lettered programs distributed to the audience. Old style type faces and designs were reproduced by Jan Mackie, graduate student in speech. The program bill is not a facsimile, since the original was destroyed in the Academic Hall fire. A special edition of the Columbia Herald describing the holocaust noted that the newspaper's back shop had printed the society's program and the copies had just been delivered to the Athenaeon Society by the Herald

office but they were never distributed. The paper published a copy of the program several days later in its regular weekly edition to show the people what they had missed and what they were to see on January 23, 1892, in the Opera House.

Preceding the re-enactment in Jesse Auditorium, more than sixty persons, past and present members of the two forensics groups, attended a banquet at the Student Union. Loren Reid, professor of speech and a past adviser of the Delta Sigma Rho chapter, served as toastmaster. W. Francis English, dean of the College of Arts and Science and a former Missouri high school debate coach, welcomed the guests. Robert C. Smith, Jr., a Columbia attorney and Delta Sigma Rho, '43, spoke on "Contributions of Debate Training for the Professional Man." W. F. Woodruff, a Kansas City attorney and the first member of the local DSR chapter ('09), spoke of his experience as a debater on trips to Austin, Texas in 1907 and to Boulder, Colorado in 1908. The final speaker at the banquet was Herold T. Ross, professor of speech at DePauw University and current national president of Delta Sigma Rho.

In 1892, fourteen years before Delta Sigma Rho was founded, Missouri's Athenaeon Literary Society could already reflect on a half century of successful student speech activity. And in those years Library Societies occupied a dominant role in campus life. A society's annual open session, for which students, faculty, and townspeople gathered to applaud the declamations, orations, and debates, was the big event



Sideburns, beards and Prince Alberts were prominent on the Jesse Auditorium stage when students and staff members re-enacted the 1892 Open Session program of the Athenaeon Literary Society.

THE FORTY-NINTH
ANNUAL OPEN SESSION
ATHENAEAN
LITERARY SOCIETY.

"Regina Scientia Mundi."

HADEN OPERA HOUSE JANUARY 23rd, 1892

MUSIC.
The National Anthem.

PRAYER.
Jack L. Boker, Athenaeon Society.

MUSIC.
March From Aida -- Verdi.

Inaugural Address: Carl D. Gum, Athenaeon Society,
Delta Sigma Rho.

Declamation-- Curfew Bells: William A. Heyde, III,
Athenaeon Society, Delta Sigma Rho.

MUSIC.
Bronze Horse Overture--Auber.

Debate.-- Resolved: That Immigration Should
Be Prohibited.
Affr. Larry H. Heflin, Athenaeon Society, Delta Sigma Rho.
Neg. Graham T. Helmendach, Athenaeon Society, Delta Sigma Rho.

MUSIC.
Selections From Fra Diavolo -- Auber.

Declamation-- Signing of the Magna Charta:
John L. Fort, Jr., Athenaeon Society.

Oration-- Ireland and the Irish: Joseph O'Rourke,
Athenaeon Society, Delta Sigma Rho.

Paper -- Athenaeon Joke: Charles R. Row, Athenaeon
Society.

MUSIC.
Washington Post March -- Sousa.

*This hand-lettered program is a reconstruction
of one actually performed 67 years ago. It is the work
of Jan Mackie, graduate student in speech.*

of the year. And in 1892 the interest in a society's open session was roughly equivalent to interest today in Jayhawk-Tiger football rivalry (Missouri had played its first football game with Kansas only a few months earlier in the fall of 1891). University bands were a customary adjunct to society open sessions, cheerleaders were not unusual, and the Athenaeon Society with its "Rickety Ruff! Rickety Ruff! Who's the stuff! Who's the stuff! Athenaeon!" certainly was not the only society with its own yell.

It was shortly after 7 p. m. on January 9, 1892 that members of the M. U. band filed into the chapel of Academic Hall, took their places in the orchestra pit, and began to tune their instruments in preparation for the evening's activities. Some few students were already in the hall, others were entering the building, and still others along with members of the faculty and citizens of Columbia were hurrying through

the snow toward the building. Suddenly the lights of the chapel's main chandelier flickered. Then with a great crash the lighting fixture tore itself from the ceiling and plunged into the seats below. Fire, attributed to defective wiring, could be seen in the ceiling. Academic Hall was destroyed.

In order to re-create the annual session program, University staff members spent months in research, digging into old newspaper files, old Savitars, and searching for speech material appropriate for 1892 delivery. The two declamations on the program were shaped from books of the period. Much of the writing for other features was by Dr. Robert P. Friedman, assistant professor of speech and director of forensics, and Thomas L. Fernandez, instructor in speech. Assistance in the re-creation of the debate and orations came from Dr. Lewis Atherton and Dr. Charles F. Mullett, professors of history.