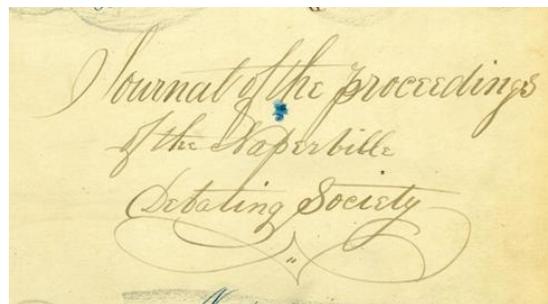


Naperville Lyceum

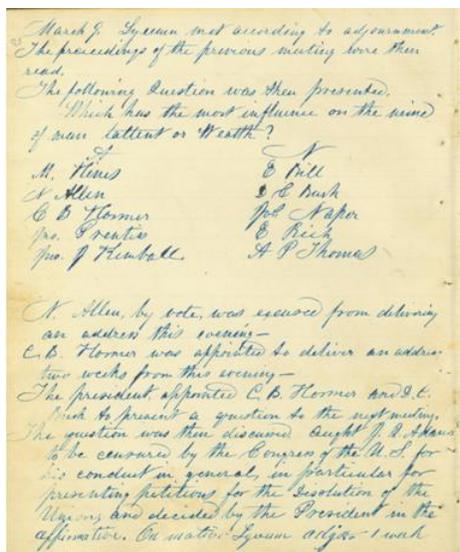
Naperville Heritage Society History Stories



In ancient Greece, gymnasiums were centers for not only the strengthening the body, but also the mind. Men and boys would discuss politics, science, religion and philosophy between athletic activities. Aristotle, one of the most famous philosophers of ancient Greece, discussed philosophy and rhetoric at one of Athens' most famous gymnasiums, the *Apollo Lyceus*. It is from the latter of the two names that debate or rhetoric societies of the mid-19th Century took their name, *lyceum*.

As the ideals of the new democracy were taking shape in the young American republic, groups of men gathered to discuss and debate the problems of the day in order to form a better society for their families, their community, and their country. Popularized by the Yale-educated Josiah Holbrook around 1832, the lyceum movement spread with town builders moving west across America.

In 1836, just five short years after Joseph Naper and nearly 60 hardy New Englanders set about building a town on the banks of the DuPage River, 15 men organized a debating society for the



Page from the *Proceedings of the Naperville Lyceum record book*

“mutual improvement in science, learning and public speaking.” This organization met once a week, year-round for seven years excluding the summer months. Bankers, lawyers, doctors, schoolteachers and businessmen met in homes (most often the home of the treasurer), schoolhouses, and even the DuPage County Courthouse, which at the time was located in Naperville’s present-day Central Park.

The types of questions and topics debated varied. Science, religion and government were often subjects. One question debated was whether the Sandhill Crane was as worthy a culinary treat as the wild turkey. Slavery, women’s place in society and education also were debated vigorously. Women and students were asked to

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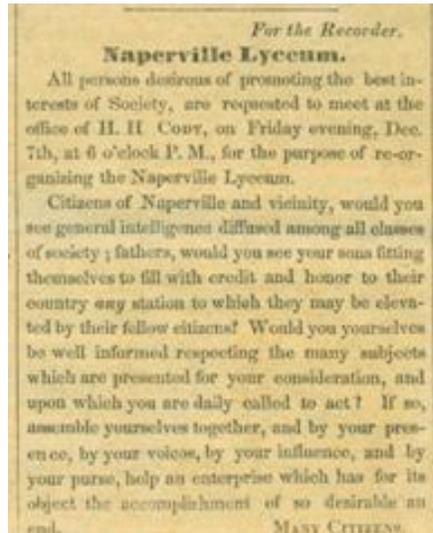
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write essays that would be read during the debates, but women and children were not allowed to participate – despite a rule that expected the hostess to have the candles lit and the fires warm when the meeting was scheduled to commence.

Strict rules were kept and dues were collected with fines paid for failure to abide by the rules. The president would select debate teams and the secretary would record the questions, topics and outcome of the debate. The treasurer was responsible for collecting dues and fines and would purchase writing supplies, candles and ink. The officers were elected every four weeks.

No reason was given as to why the society disbanded. An article in an issue of the *DuPage County Recorder* in 1849 made mention of the revival of the lyceum in Naperville, but in subsequent issues nothing was mentioned as to whether the lyceum resumed activity. Twenty years later in 1870, North- Western College (now North Central College) announced the creation of the “Second English Lyceum,” which did include female students. This lyceum met every Friday at 3 p.m. on the fourth floor of Old Main.



Article from the *DuPage County Reader*, 1849

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