

UNIVERSITY of PENNSYLVANIA



The University Archives
and Records Center

A Guide to the
Scientific Society of the
University of Pennsylvania
Records, 1882 - 1891

0.25 Cubic ft.

UPS 500

Prepared by J.M. Duffin

November 2005

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PROVENANCE

The collection was transferred from the University Library to the University Archives and Records Center in 1956 as part of the records of the Zelosophic Society of the University of Pennsylvania.

ARRANGEMENT

The Scientific Society records are organized in four series: Constitution and by-laws, c. 1882; Minutes, 1882 – 1891; Meetings, 1883 – 1891; Reports, 1883 - 1886. All the series are arranged alphabetically except for the minutes which are arranged chronologically.

HISTORICAL NOTE

The Scientific Society of the University of Pennsylvania was formed by students of the University of Pennsylvania in October 1882 to promote interest in “scientific and literary subjects [which] would be a benefit to ourselves and other students in this University.” Shortly after its creation, the Scientific Society negotiated with the remaining officers of the then defunct Franklin Scientific Society to assume the latter’s debts in exchange for the latter’s library, collection of specimens, and room in College Hall. Interest in the new organization grew and it managed to sustain an active program of student debates, exercises and public lecture series during the 1880s. The public lectures frequently brought guest speakers, mostly scientists, from other Universities. One notable lecturer was Eadweard Muybridge who spoke before the group twice (in 1884 and again in 1885) on the photographic studies of human and animal motion that he was conducting at the University.

Like all student organizations that are dependant upon training a fresh group of students to continue its existence, the Scientific Society eventually succumbed to a lack of interest to keep the organization going. In the spring term of 1892 the Society was beginning to experience real difficulties in attracting a steady membership. In spite of a last minute attempt to broaden its appeal by eliminating the debates and alternating their evening exercises between topics of a scientific and literary character, the Scientific Society was unable to form itself again in the fall of 1892. The void created by the Society’s demise, however, was quickly filled by the reconstituted Zelosophic Society of the University of Pennsylvania in October 1892.

SCOPE AND CONTENT

The records of the Scientific Society of the University of Pennsylvania chronicle the numerous meetings or exercises of the Society and document the organizational structure of a late nineteenth century student organization. The records are primarily in the form of minute books, programs, and registers (or “Report Book”) of exercises, which include a list of the topics discussed and debated and the names of the participants. There is one stray report that reviews one of the Eadweard Muybridge’s lectures in February 1884.

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INVENTORY

Constitution and by-laws

Box 1 FF 1 c. 1882

Minutes

FF 3 1882-March 1891

FF 4 March 1891-April 1891

Meetings

FF 9 Programs and tickets, 1883-1885

Report book of the president of exercises

FF 6 February 1883-February 1886

FF 7 September 1883-November 1887

FF 8 December 1887-April 1892

Reports

FF 10 Committee reports, 1883-1886

FF 11 Review of Eadweard Muybridge lecture, February 1884

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