



The Frontier Literary Society

(Article begins on page 2 below.)

This article is copyrighted by History Nebraska (formerly the Nebraska State Historical Society). You may download it for your personal use.

For permission to re-use materials, or for photo ordering information, see:

<https://history.nebraska.gov/publications/re-use-nshs-materials>

Learn more about *Nebraska History* (and search articles) here:

<https://history.nebraska.gov/publications/nebraska-history-magazine>

History Nebraska members receive four issues of *Nebraska History* annually:

<https://history.nebraska.gov/get-involved/membership>

Full Citation: Edward Everett Dale, "The Frontier Literary Society," *Nebraska History* 31 (1950): 167-182

Article Summary: Literary societies in the West appear to have evolved from Friday afternoon rural school exercises. Society meetings included recitations, dialogues, drills, debates, and musical numbers. (This article includes the constitution and by-laws of one literary society as well as a list of debate topics.)

Cataloging Information:

Place Names: Rock Creek, Nebraska; Timber Creek, Oklahoma

Photographs / Images: a pioneer community center (teacher, pupils, and community residents in front of the West Union School, Custer County, Nebraska, 1887)



A PIONEER COMMUNITY CENTER

The school served the pioneer community in many ways, including that of providing a home for the frontier literary society as described in this issue. This photograph, with teacher and pupils in the foreground, was taken at West Union, Custer County, Nebraska, in 1887.

THE FRONTIER LITERARY SOCIETY

BY EDWARD EVERETT DALE

THE pioneer settlers who poured westward in the decades following the Civil War to occupy homesteads on the prairies of Nebraska, the Dakotas, Kansas, and western Oklahoma were in their own language a "sociable" people. It had been with deep regret that they left old friends and neighbors of their former homeland. Once established in new homes on the western prairies these settlers eagerly sought to form new ties with the people about them.

The first social contacts usually took the form of visiting with the families on the adjoining or nearby homesteads. Often an entire family would rise early in the morning, scrub the children within an inch of their lives, dress them in their Sunday best, and drive three or four miles to the home of a congenial neighbor to "spend the day." Most people were so poor that they had little else to spend so could only spend the day! Such visits, together with shorter ones for an evening or afternoon were for a time almost the only social diversion of the older people of the new community.

It was not long, however, until the young unmarried people began to demand something a trifle more exciting than friendly visits. What they wanted was "something to go to." This may seem strange to many of us today who must live in the midst of the bustle and hurry of a more sophisticated society. What we prefer is "something to stay away from!" Life on a prairie homestead, however, doubtless seemed a trifle drab and monotonous to active young people, especially in a land which afforded far more leisure than the pioneer settlers of the wooded regions farther east had ever known. In that time and region entertainment and recreation were not purchasable commodities as they are today. There were no picture shows, ball games, carnivals, night clubs, or amusement parks. Entertainment, like

most of the clothing, must be homemade. In consequence these Victorian youths and bobby soxers soon began to arrange and attend numerous socials, dances, play parties, picnics, candy breakings, and similar affairs, designated by the more Puritanical adults as "frolics." The erection of a little school house and the establishment of a four or five months school afforded opportunities for additional activities. The school building eventually became something of a social center. Here were held not only church services, Sunday school, and prayer meetings, but singings, box suppers, pie suppers, and church dinners.

In virtually every community, however, there were at least a few persons of scholarly tastes and literary leanings who felt that while parties, taffy pullings, hayrides, and similar frivolous activities were harmless enough they should not be allowed to absorb the entire social activity of the neighborhood. What they felt was needed was some organization of an educational nature which would provide intellectual stimulus for the entire community. Obviously, it should be something with activities in which both young and old could participate and which would not only furnish entertainment but promote the cultural growth of all who attended its meetings. The formation of a literary society seemed the ideal way to meet this need.

The origin of the literary society in America seems lost in the mists of antiquity. Certainly it appears very early in our nation's history and in some instances may have been formed as a sort of artificial substitute for the New England town meeting. In the prairie West the organization of such a society appears, in some instances, to have been suggested by the Friday afternoon exercises of the rural school.

The country school teacher was usually keenly alive to the fact that his salary was paid by the people he served. In consequence, with grave forebodings in his heart and fingers discreetly crossed, he hospitably invited his patrons to visit the school at any time they might feel so inclined. A people starved for entertainment usually accepted his invitation in considerable numbers. Almost invariably they chose the worst possible time for such a visit, which was

Friday following the afternoon recess. At that particular hour the youngsters, eagerly looking forward to the two whole days of freedom, seemed possessed of the devil while the teacher, with nerves worn to a frazzle by a hard week's work, always appeared at his worst.¹

To get past this "grave yard shift," the period was often given over to exercises by the children. These might take the form of a spelling match or "ciphering match," but more often consisted of the "speaking of pieces." Then it was that *Mary Had a Little Lamb*, *Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star*, *The Boy Stood on the Burning Deck*, *The Widder Spriggins Daughter*, and all the other old time favorites were given. Sometimes they were presented haltingly and at others with express train speed apparently with the objective of getting it over with as soon as possible, making a bow, and getting back to the safe haven of a seat.

To the "frontier intellectuals" these Friday afternoon exercises suggested the formation of a literary society in which children and adults alike could share. Some had belonged to such an organization in the region from which they had come and so had acquired a body of experience that would prove useful in the establishment of another. Once the suggestion was made it was received with enthusiasm. In typical American fashion, a meeting was held at the schoolhouse, a constitution and by-laws framed and adopted, officers elected, and committees appointed.

The most important of these was the program committee of which the school teacher, as the educational leader of the community, was usually a member. With commendable zeal this committee set to work to canvass the neighborhood for persons willing to give a reading, sing a song, or take part in a debate. Talent, like gold, is where you find it, and the diligent committee members often found it in most unexpected places. Sometimes a near illiterate would be discovered who could play the banjo or guitar like a real artist, or who had an excellent voice and a large repertoire of

¹ E. E. Dale, "Teaching on the Prairie Plains, 1890-1900," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, XXXIII (September, 1946), 293-307.

popular songs. A shy young girl might be revealed as a surprisingly good reader, or as having great ability in playing the leading role in a dialogue or short play. Men never suspected of any knowledge of public speaking sometimes proved to be clever debaters, delivering speeches that were wise, witty, and convincing. It was the task of the program committee to seek out all this talent and put it to work and at the same time to encourage the backward and help the inexperienced to improve and gain greater confidence.²

In addition it was necessary to make a diligent search for materials that might be presented. Poems suitable for reading might be found in old school books or magazines. One or two "speech books" or collections of dialogues were likely to be unearthed, and in some instances others were ordered from publishers in the East. A small library was often assembled by securing donations of books and occasionally by purchasing a few volumes. These were kept at the school house and checked out by the librarian at the close of each meeting.

Meetings were usually held twice a month, though in some cases they might be weekly—usually on Friday night. If the school room did not have a stage one was constructed of rough lumber. Wire was stretched from wall to wall in front of this stage from which curtains of dark calico were hung by small rings so that they could be slid back and forth by two willing volunteers from the ranks of the older boys of the school. Since people often came three or four miles to attend the meetings, the school house was usually filled to overflowing by a little after dark. The program consisted of recitations, or readings, interspersed with drills, musical numbers, and dialogues. Readings included such ancient classics as *Spartacus to the Gladiators*, *Rienzi to the Romans*, *Curfew Must Not Ring Tonight*, *The Face on the Barroom Floor*, *Whistling in Heaven*, and many more of a dramatic nature. Some in a lighter vein were *How Ruby Played*, *Little Orphan Annie*, *Darius Green and His Flying Machine*, *How We Tried to Lick the Teacher*,

² *Ibid.*

and many others chosen with due regard to the age and ability of the reader.

The dialogues were as varied as the readings. Popular ones, to be given by three or four persons, were *Arabella's Poor Relations*, *Sam and the Postman*, and *The Train to Mauro*. Usually they were of a humorous nature but as was to be expected of a generation brought up in the tradition of *McGuffey's Readers* most of them sought to point a moral or teach a good lesson. Drills by school children were often held since a large number could take part. This was good psychology on the part of the officials of the society for the larger the number that participated in the program, the greater would be the interest of the community. A favorite drill was called the "Choice of Trades." Each child was given a tool or other object typical of a trade or profession. Carrying it with him he came out and gave a few lines of verse describing how he expected to carry on his life work. After each had spoken they all marched about the stage each reciting his verse. For example a lad with the medicine case of a doctor would appear and deliver the following:

When I am a man a man I'll be
I'll be a doctor if I can and I can
My pills and powders will be nice and sweet
And you can have just what you want to eat
When I am a man.

Others would express in verse their preference for the role of a farmer, carpenter, blacksmith, cowboy, lawyer, or teacher. A dozen youngsters presenting such a number was nearly certain to mean the presence at the program of a dozen fond fathers and mothers to view the whole proceeding with beaming approbation.

After the recitations, dialogues, drills, and musical numbers had been presented it was customary to have a brief recess followed by a debate. Subjects were frequently of an abstract or philosophical nature as: "Resolved, that fear of punishment has a greater influence over human conduct than does the hope of reward." Other subjects dealt with historical questions or current political issues. Sometimes, but not often, the subject chosen would be of a

humorous or frivolous type, as: "Resolved, that a clean cross woman makes a better wife than a dirty good natured woman."³ Such a subject was unusual, for the debate was in most cases a serious affair. Those participating planned their speeches with great care, practiced them diligently, and delivered them with as much fire and vigor as though the destiny of nations hung upon their words.

The organization and carrying on of a successful literary society might become a major activity for a large number of people. Children must be drilled on their speeches and songs, reluctant individuals persuaded to share in the programs, and rehearsals held by the characters in the dialogues. This was all preliminary to the actual presentation of the program. Yet the latter also had its problems. Stage properties had to be brought in and arranged. The curtain sometimes stuck at most inopportune times or youngsters forgot their speeches and had to be prompted. Characters in dialogues might easily forget their lines or garble them in fantastic fashion.

Slips of the tongue were sometimes made with tragic results. At a literary society meeting in a rural schoolhouse in central Kansas a young woman gave the favorite old reading, *Curfew Must Not Ring Tonight*. She moved along beautifully and had the audience almost in tears as she described how Bessie climbed to the belfry and clung to the clapper of the swinging bell the tolling of which was to be the signal for the execution of her lover. When she came to the final lines, however, detailing the maiden's appeal to Cromwell and his promise of pardon for the young man, disaster struck. She meant to say: "'Go, your lover lives,' cried Cromwell, 'curfew shall not ring tonight.'" Frightened and nervous, she said: "'Go, your liver loves,'" which nearly broke up the meeting and caused the girl to flee from the stage weeping bitter tears of humiliation.

Scarcity of suitable materials also sometimes caused the selection of a reading not suited to the appearance and

³ *Minutes of Mt. Gilead (Texas) Literary Society, November 20, 1891.*

personality of the one who gave it. Joe Williams, a former Oklahoma cowhand, has related that he once rode ten miles to attend a literary society at Valley View Schoolhouse. The third number was a reading given by a girl about seventeen years old. He described her as tall, lean, and crosseyed, with stringy red hair, freckled face, and projecting front teeth. But the subject of her reading and the refrain closing each stanza was this: "The Lips that Touch Liquor Can Never Touch Mine." Joe said it was a good speech but not temperance argument at all!⁴

No doubt literary societies flourished in many rural communities of Nebraska during the last quarter of the nineteenth century but most of them kept no records. The minutes of one very interesting one, however, have been preserved. These are significant, not only for what they say, but for what can be read between the lines. The organization was established in the Rock Creek community, about sixteen miles northeast of Lincoln, sometime prior to 1880. It was first known as the *Mutual Improvement Society* and as such met every Friday evening during the autumn and winter months for nearly three years. It seems to have lapsed for a time after 1882 but was reorganized in October, 1884, as the *Rock Creek Literary Society*. Under this name it was carried on, with some lapses and reorganizations, until 1895.⁵ Possibly it was continued after that date, but if so the minutes have not been found, the last entry being for March 8, 1895. The change of name made in 1884 is apparently meaningless for the membership rolls show that the same persons were officials and members, in some cases for the entire period of fifteen years.⁶ The objectives of the Rock Creek Literary Society are revealed by the following constitution and by-laws:

⁴ Joe Williams, *Statement*, March 10, 1948.

⁵ Minutes of the Mutual Improvement Society and of the Rock Creek Literary Society. Original in possession of Lloyd Jeffrey, Waverly, Nebraska. (Hereafter referred to as *Minutes*.)

⁶ *Minutes*, Lists of members for 1880, 1881, 1882, 1884, 1886, 1887, 1888, 1894.

CONSTITUTION AND BY-LAWS OF THE ROCK CREEK
LITERARY SOCIETY

I

This society shall be known as the Rock Creek Literary Society.

II

The object of this society is to promote the intellectual and social interests of its members; to encourage the study of subjects literary, scientific, philosophical, amusing, musical.

III

This society shall be governed by Cushing's Manual and the following by-laws, which may be amended as the occasion demands.

I

A membership fee of five cents for each person over fifteen years of age shall be charged to defray incidental expenses.

II

The officers of this society shall consist of a President, Vice-president, Secretary, Treasurer and Sergeant-at-Arms.

III

The duties of the officers shall be as follows:

The President shall preside at all meetings of the society, call extra meetings, decide points of order, appoint committees, levy all fines, and with the assistance of the sergeant-at-arms, preserve order.

The Vice-President shall preside in the absence of the president and perform all the duties of that office upon such occasions.

The Secretary shall keep an accurate record of all meetings of this society, call the roll, read the program.

The Treasurer shall collect all fines and dues, keep an exact account of all moneys received and paid out, and report each month to the society.

The Sergeant-at-arms shall clean the lamps, build the fires, sweep the floor, cut a dog-wood club and preserve order in the hindermost parts of the house and such other parts as may require his services; he shall also perform all other duties not herein mentioned that may arise from time to time.

IV

The members of this society shall be cheerfully governed by the officers, and respond promptly to duties assigned them, and work first, last, and all the time for the best interests of this society.

V

All members failing to respond or to furnish an acceptable substitute shall be fined five cents (cases of sickness only excused) for every failure.

VI

The regular meetings of this society shall be held on Friday evening of each week.

VII

The officers of this society shall be elected every fourth meeting.

VIII

Nine members shall constitute a quorum for the transaction of business.

IX

The order of business shall be as follows:

1. Call to order.
2. Reading of the minutes of the last meeting.
3. Roll call.
4. Reports of committees.
5. Unfinished business.
6. New business.
7. Exercises of the evening.
8. Reading of program for next meeting.
9. Adjournment.⁷

The society could hardly be called a wealthy one. The minutes of the meeting for November 12, 1880, show the following entry: "The question of making the sergeant-at-arms a saleried [sic] office was brought before the house and it was voted to pay the holder of that office 40 cts. a month." On March 10, 1882, it was voted "to pay the Sergeant 20 cts for building fires and 10 cts. for lamp chimney." On November 5, 1884, the treasurer rendered a report showing "total on hand \$1.94. Expended as follows. Lamp .60, paper .25, lamp wick .05, coal oil .25. Total \$1.15. Remainder on hand \$0.79." Clearly the duties of the treasurer were not too onerous and it is plain that there was no reason for bonding that official.

The unusual provisions for electing officers every fourth meeting was probably designed to stimulate interest in the society by giving a large number of members an opportunity to serve as officials. Also it gave many persons experience in presiding over meetings and conducting the work of the organization. In view of the duties outlined for him it is

⁷ Minutes.

not surprising that the office of sergeant-at-arms should have been made a "saleried" office or that one member should have protested that he had not been legally elected since the individual nominating him "had failed to rise and address the chair before making the nomination."⁸

Early presidents of the society were Obadiah Hull, P. S. Galley, Warren Clark, Charles Post, William Armstrong, James Bixby, I. F. Dale, C. A. Rogers, J. R. Speck, James Parks, William Folger, J. M. Armstrong, L. A. Price, and Paul E. Clark.⁹ Some of these including Obadiah Hull, William Clark, and I. F. Dale served repeatedly over a long period of years. Secretaries included Emily Birdsall, H. P. Dale, James Bixby, I. F. Dale, I. E. Ormsby, Ida Bixby, Emma Core, Lulu Burnett, John Armstrong, Jessie Galley, M. H. Jeffery, Mattie Hall, Ella Jeffery, Minnie Armstrong, and Ethel Birdsall. Emily Birdsall served repeatedly for several years.

The society had a library of nearly forty volumes. These were probably largely donated and were constantly checked out by the members of the organization, probably to be used in many cases in assembling information for the debates.¹⁰ Such debates were a regular feature of nearly every program, the first part of which consisted of readings, songs and dialogues. A short recess was then held and the debate, with two speakers on each side, was the concluding feature of the evening. Occasionally there were three speakers for each side and in some instances only one. Since the decision of most judges is unconsciously influenced by their own views the results of the discussion of current questions may give some index as to the political opinions of the people of this part of Nebraska during these years.

⁸ *Minutes*, Feb. 18, 1881.

⁹ Obadiah Hull was a member of the Nebraska legislature, sessions of 1895 and 1897.

¹⁰ Some of the volumes most used were *Dictionary of American Politics*, Macaulay's *History of England*, 5 vols., *Our Republican Monarchy*, *Seven Financial Conspiracies*, *Rise and Progress of Human Slavery*, *Thirty Years of Labor*, *A Short History of the French Revolution*, *The Money Monopoly*, *Protection or Free Trade*, and various others.

Space does not permit giving all subjects debated by the society but the following list gives the questions discussed during the period from 1880 to 1882, together with the decision of the judges.

1880

1. February 6, 1880: Resolved that the use of intoxicating liquor has destroyed more lives than war. Dec. for aff.
2. February 13, 1880: Resolved that U. S. Grant should be our next President. Dec. for aff.
3. March 5, 1880: Resolved that corporal punishment should be abolished in our schools. Two judges for aff., one neg.
4. March 5, 1880: Resolved that Chinese Immigration should be prohibited by law. Dec. for aff.
5. November 12, 1880: Resolved that railway rates should be regulated by law. Dec. for aff.
6. November 19, 1880: Resolved that the reading of works of fiction is beneficial. Dec. for aff.
7. November 23, 1880: Resolved that the Irish agitators should be prosecuted. Dec. for neg.
8. December 3, 1880: Resolved that commerce has done more to civilize the world than all other agencies combined. Dec. for neg.

1881

9. January 14: Resolved that Nebraska should have a prohibitory liquor law. Dec. for neg.
10. January 28: Resolved that women should be allowed to vote. Dec. for neg.
11. February 11: Resolved that U. S. Grant should be placed upon the retired list of the army with the rank and pay of general. Dec. for neg.
12. February 18: Resolved that science contradicts the Bible. Dec. for aff.
13. February 25: Resolved that the United States should have control of all of North America. Dec. for neg.
14. March 8: Resolved that married men are more useful to the community than bachelors. Dec. for aff.
15. October 28: Resolved that it would be to the interest of the U. S. and also the Negroes that the colored people of the U. S. be colonized. Dec. for neg.
16. November 4: Resolved that the Indian Territory be opened for settlement. Dec. for neg.
17. November 25: Resolved that the treatment of her Irish citizens by the British government has been disgraceful. Dec. for aff.
18. December 2: Resolved that greater honor is due Washington for defending America than Columbus for discovering it. Dec. for neg.

19. December 9: Resolved that Guiteau should be hanged for shooting President James A. Garfield. Dec. for aff.

20. December 16: Resolved that the right of suffrage should be extended to women. Dec. for aff. (reversed earlier decision on same topic).

21. December 30: Resolved that the cultivation of a talent for poetry is detrimental to success in life. Dec. for aff. Society voted to meet Pleasant Ridge society at Waverly in debate on January 13. Wm. Clark, Obadiah Hull, I. F. Dale and H. P. Dale to be speakers.

1882

22. January 5: Resolved that it would have been better for the Negroes and for the states of the South had the enfranchisement of the colored men been gradual instead of immediate. Dec. for neg.

23. January 20: Resolved that conscience is an innate faculty of the soul. Dec. for aff.

24. January 27: Resolved that lawyers are a public nuisance. Dec. two for neg. one aff.

25. February 3: Resolved that no man who cannot read and write should be allowed the elective franchise. Dec. for neg.

26. []: Resolved that ignorance has caused more suffering than ambition. Dec. two for aff. one for neg.

27. November 3: Resolved that the use of tobacco should be prohibited by law. Dec. for neg.

28. November 24: Resolved that the United States should adopt the policy of a tariff for revenue only. Dec. for aff.

The above list includes all subjects debated during the period indicated. While the debate was sometimes postponed, due to the length of the program, or the failure of one or more of the scheduled speakers to appear, it was apparently designed to be a regular feature of most meetings.

The rolls of the society during this period show 41 members in 1880, 51 in 1881, and 45 in 1882. Of these, however, only twelve men and one woman, Miss Ida Bixby, participated in any of the debates. Miss Bixby appeared in but one—the question as to the relative honors due Washington and Columbus. On the other hand Obadiah Hull was one of the speakers in 24 out of the total of 27 debates while I. F. Dale spoke in 20 and his brother H. P. Dale in 19 of them. The remaining nine participants shared in from two or three to nine or ten of the discussions. When it is considered that the membership of the society included

many women and at least some children it seems that the number who took part in the debates was as large as could be expected. With meetings held weekly a few of the debaters must have devoted a fair share of their waking hours to studying the questions and preparing their speeches.

Apparently nearly all of the other members of the organization shared in the earlier part of the programs which consisted of recitations, musical numbers, and dialogues. A special dialogue committee was appointed and seems to have been very active. At the close of each meeting the critic rendered a report freely dispensing praise and blame wherever they were felt to be due.

After the reorganization of the society in 1884 the debate does not seem to have formed so prominent a part of the programs as formerly. Yet it was by no means abandoned and various new questions were discussed and some of the older ones brought up again. In the case of the latter, however, the decision of the judges seldom varied from the one given before. On November 12, 1884, the society voted to have a "paper" prepared and read at the meeting on November 26 instead of holding a debate. An editor and assistant were appointed and until the organization closed its year's work the following March the "paper," called *The Rock Creek Astonisher*, seems to have been a regular feature of nearly every meetings.

It is unfortunate that no copy of *The Rock Creek Astonisher* seems to have been preserved. Probably it was not unlike most other literary society papers, which have come down to us, or that can be largely restored from the memories of a few older people who in their youth edited them. These "community organs" usually gave news items of the neighborhood but this was only preliminary to the main feature which was the good natured "ribbing" of the local belles and beaux. Special attention was always given to budding romances of the young people. Typical gibes and quips might be as follows:

"No, that is not the rising sun you see in the east. It is Hank Smith's new red-wheeled buggy headed in the direction of Mary Johnson's house." "Mrs. Simson says that

Ed Adams and Sam Williams come so often that she 'can't throw out a pan of water without throwing it on one of them boys.'" "When Bill Jones told Bessie Jenkins that he was going to hang himself if she wouldn't marry him Bessie said: 'Well my dad says you'll sure have to do it at home because he's not going to have you hanging around here!'" "Bonnie Phillips says that Earl Wilson's new mustache reminds her of a base ball game—nine on a side."

"Seven wonders of our own little world.

1. "Wonder who's going to keep that new house Joe Thompson is building.

2. "Wonder if Amy Bixby means to take her a boy to raise.

3. "Wonder why Bob Carter always has to go by Ethel Holt's house when he goes any place.

4. "Wonder why Mr. and Mrs. Hilton's dogs bark at everybody except Jack Hall.

5. "Wonder why Della Walton has to go to the post office every day.

6. "Wonder if Johnnie Burton's sprucing up so here lately means anything.

7. "Wonder if Buck Rainey got those two hound pups to help him catch a Fox."¹¹

Such joking always brought a laugh and resulted in the persons whose names were mentioned receiving a good deal of chaffing from their friends in the community.

The Rock Creek Literary Society was a type. Similar organizations existed not only all over Nebraska in the pioneer era but in virtually every other western state, and their influence upon the cultural development of the communities in which they were held must have been very great. Members read widely in seeking materials for the programs or in preparing speeches for the debates. Poems and dialogues were memorized and current questions to be discussed studied. The historical or philosophical subjects debated also required wide reading and diligent study by the speakers. The information which they had thus acquired

¹¹ Dale, *loc. cit.*

was then passed on to an eager audience. Confidence as well as skill in public speaking was gained by all who participated in the programs. No doubt many lawyers, legislators, members of Congress, and other public officials received their first training in public speaking in the frontier literaries and debating societies.

The educational influence of such an organization also must have been very important for the children of a community. Youngsters not old enough to participate in the activities of the Rock Creek Literary Society when it was first formed grew to young manhood and womanhood during the fifteen years of its existence. From observing the work of their elders in the organization they were stimulated to participate in its programs themselves as soon as they were old enough. In consequence they literally grew up with the institution having an important influence upon their lives. The literary society created and sustained an interest in history, literature, and public speaking. It affected the cultural growth of children in the same fashion that the church and Sunday school influenced spiritual development.¹²

In a newly settled region the literary society was also a powerful factor in bringing people more closely together, in the creation of friendships, and the establishment of a community consciousness. In 1897 the people of the Timber Creek community in western Oklahoma established a literary society. The settlers had come from many states of the Union and most of them had occupied their homesteads in the past twelve months. At the conclusion of the first meeting of the society the newly elected president who was from a northeastern state made a brief speech. In closing he said:

¹² The Literary Society also must have been an important factor in promoting romances. I. F. Dale was elected president and Emma Core secretary of the Rock Creek Society in October, 1882. They were later married and reared a family of seven sons and two daughters. Of the sons three still live (1950) in Nebraska, where one is a county farm agent. Of the other four one is a physician, one a college professor, one a chemist for the federal government and the fourth a farmer in Virginia.

“I am very proud of the honor you have bestowed upon me by electing me President of the Timber Creek Literary Society. We have all come here within the past year to settle and make our homes in this new country. We have come from many regions. I happen to be from the Northeast while many of you are from the South or the West. But we must not let this influence our feeling toward one another. In the future we want no North, South, East, or West in our thoughts, but only Timber Creek. Let us forget everything except that we are all friends and neighbors working together in this society to advance the cultural and educational development of the Timber Creek Community.”