

2. Secrets of the "Tomb"



The Order flourished from the very beginning in spite of occasional squalls of controversy. There was dissension from some professors, who didn't like its secrecy and exclusiveness. And there was backlash from students, showing concern about the influence "Bones" was having over Yale finances and the favoritism shown to "Bonesmen."

In October of 1873, Volume 1, Number 1, of *The Iconoclast* was published in New Haven. It was only published once and was one of very few openly published articles on the Order of Skull and Bones.

From *The Iconoclast*:

"We speak through a new publication. because the college press is closed to those who dare to openly mention 'Bones'...."

"Out of every class Skull and Bones takes its men. They have gone out into the world and have become, in many instances, leaders in society. They have obtained control of Yale. Its business is performed by them. Money paid to the college must pass into their hands, and be subject to their will. No doubt they are worthy men in themselves, but the many, whom they looked down upon while in college, cannot so far forget as to give money freely into their hands. Men in Wall Street complain that the college comes straight to them for help, instead of asking each graduate for his share. The reason is found in a remark made by one of Yale's and America's first men: 'Few will give but Bones men and they care far more for their society than they do for the college....'

"Year by year the deadly evil is growing. The society was never as obnoxious to the college as it is today, and it is just this ill-feeling that shuts the pockets of non-members. Never before has it shown such arrogance and self-fancied superiority. It grasps the College Press and endeavors to rule it all. It does not deign to show its credentials, but clutches at power with the silence of conscious guilt.

"To tell the good which Yale College has done would be well nigh impossible. To tell the good she might do would be yet more difficult. The question, then, is reduced to this -- on the one hand lies a source of incalculable good -- on the other a society guilty of serious and far-reaching crimes. It is Yale College against Skull and Bones!! We ask all men, as a question of right, which should be allowed to live?"

At first, the society held its meetings in hired halls. Then in 1856, the "tomb", a vine-covered, windowless, brown-stone hall was constructed, where to this day the "Bonesmen" hold their "strange, occultish" initiation rites and meet each Thursday and Sunday.

On September 29, 1876, a group calling itself "The Order of File and Claw" broke into the Skull and Bones' holy of holies. In the "tomb" they found lodge-room 324 "fitted up in black velvet, even the walls being covered with the material." Upstairs was lodge-room 322, "the 'sanctum sanctorium' of the temple... furnished in red velvet" with a pentagram on the wall. In the hall are "pictures of the founders of Bones at Yale, and of members of the Society in Germany, when the chapter was established here in 1832." The raiding party found another interesting scene in the parlor next to room 322.

From "The Fall Of Skull And Bones":

"On the west wall, hung among other pictures, an old engraving representing an open burial vault, in which, on a stone slab, rest four human skulls, grouped about a fools cap and bells, an open book,

several mathematical instruments, a beggar's scrip, and a royal crown. On the arched wall above the vault are the explanatory words, in Roman letters, 'We War Der Thor, Wer Weiser, Wer Bettler Oder, Kaiser?' and below the vault is engraved, in German characters, the sentence; 'Ob Arm, Ob Beich, im Tode gleich.'

The picture is accompanied by a card on which is written, 'From the German Chapter. Presented by D. C. Gilman of D. 50'."

Daniel Coit Gilman ('52), along with two other "Bonesmen," formed a troika which still influences American life today. Soon after their initiation in Skull and Bones, Daniel Gilman, Timothy Dwight ('49) and Andrew Dickinson White ('53) went to study philosophy in Europe at the University of Berlin. Gilman returned from Europe and incorporated Skull and Bones as Russell Trust, in 1856, with himself as Treasurer and William H. Russell as President. He spent the next fourteen years in New Haven consolidating the order's power.

Gilman was appointed Librarian at Yale in 1858. Through shrewd political maneuvering, he acquired funding for Yale's science departments (Sheffield Scientific School) and was able to get the Morrill Land Bill introduced in Congress, passed and finally signed by President Lincoln, after being vetoed by President Buchanan.

This bill, "donating public-lands for State College for agriculture and sciences", is now known as the Land Grant College Act. Yale was the first school in America to get the federal land scrip and quickly grabbed all of Connecticut's share at the time. Pleased by the acquisitions, Yale made Gilman a Professor of Physical Geography.

Daniel was the first President of the University of California. He also helped found, and was the first president of, John Hopkins.

Gilman was first president of the Carnegie Institution and involved in the founding of the Peabody, Slater and Russell Sage Foundations.

His buddy, Andrew D. White, was the first president of Cornell University (which received all of New York's share of the Land Grant College Act), U.S. Minister to Russia, U.S. Ambassador to Berlin and first president of the American Historical Association. White was also Chairman of the American delegation to the first Hague Conference in 1899, which established an international judiciary.

Timothy Dwight, a professor at Yale Divinity School, was installed as president of Yale in 1886. All presidents since, have been either "Bonesmen" or directly tied to the Order and its interests.

The Daniel/Gilman/White trio was also responsible for the founding of the American Economic Association, the American Chemical Society and the American Psychological Association. Through their influences on John Dewey and Horace Mann, this trio continues to have an enormous impact on education today.

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