Through a century, the beautifully carved gift of the Class of 1913 has symbolized the University's role as a democratic forum, a place where society's challenges are debated and struggled over.
For nearly 100 years, Hill Auditorium has been Michigan’s most prestigious venue for rhetoric and debate. And for that same century, speaker after speaker has gripped, pounded, caressed and leaned upon an oak lectern given to the University by students.

Could the Class of 1913 have known the voices of influence, controversy and power that would one day stand at this very lectern?

Looking back, it seems only fitting that a piece of furniture that would support some of the society’s most provocative speakers was itself a point of contention.

When leaders of the 1913 literary class began brainstorming about a class gift, the men suggested something for the Michigan Union. This raised the ire of senior women, who were not about to contribute money to buy a gift bound for a building that was reserved for men.

The women prevailed—Ann Arbor and Detroit newspapers reported on the “fine scrap”—and the seniors voted to give a reading desk for the University’s soon-to-open auditorium.

Created by Detroit architect Albert Kahn to complement the great hall he designed, the Hill Auditorium lectern cost $250.

As silent witness to the ideas and arguments that are the stuff of a university, however, the lectern has been priceless.

– Kim Clarke

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