

The Old University of Chicago in the New: The Library

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The University of Chicago was incorporated in 1856 on ten acres of land at 35th and Cottage Grove, donated by Senator Stephan A. Douglas.² The first classes were held on September 9, 1858. Like any “Institution of learning, of high order,” the newly formed University possessed a library. In their annual catalogue for 1859-60, the University reports their Library has 2,000 volumes and a librarian, the Hon. J.Y. Scammon.³ Early on, its library was notable for its collection of public documents, believed to have also been donated by Stephan A. Douglas.⁴ Over the next twenty-seven years, the University grew its collection to approximately 7,000 volumes.⁵ These 7,000 volumes formed the basis of the library of the University when it was

¹ This article is based on research by the authors for an exhibit at the Regenstein Library, which was later developed into a web exhibit “[“A Case for Reparations at the University of Chicago”: Sources.](#)” We would like to thank Caine Jordan, Guy Emerson Mount, and Kai Parker of the Reparations at University of Chicago Working Group ([RAUC](#)) for partnering with us to create this exhibit. And to thank Guy Mount, who gave us the idea to locate the original library of the old University of Chicago in the first place.

² For a history of the “old” University of Chicago, and its connection to profit made from slave labor, see C. Jordan, G. Mount, and K. Parker. “[“A Case for Reparations at the University of Chicago.”](#) The Reparations at UChicago Working Group paper, University of Chicago, US History Workshop, May 2017. The paper was originally distributed as part of a guest post on [Black Perspectives on May 22, 2017](#). It was later expanded and published as “‘A Disgrace to all slave-holders’: The University of Chicago’s Founding Ties to Slavery and the Path to Reparations.” *The Journal of African American History* 103, no.1-2 (2018): 163-178. For a detailed history of the connections between the old and new University of Chicago, see John Boyer, *The University of Chicago: A History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 5-65.

³ University of Chicago. [Annual catalogue](#). (Chicago: Church, Goodman & Cushing, 1860), 23, which is part of [Old University of Chicago Records](#), Box 5, Folder 1, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library. For a brief history of the founding of the University, see p.33-34. See page 6 for the mention of the librarian. Jonathan Young Scammon (1812-1890) was a lawyer and abolitionist, believed to have been active in the Underground Railroad. As well as the Old University’s first librarian, Scammon was a regent and active donor. He donated the money to build Dearborn Observatory, which relocated to Northwestern University after Old University of Chicago closed. (Edgar J. Goodspeed, “The Old University of Chicago in 1867,” *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society (1908-1984)*, Vol. 3, No. 2 [Jul., 1910], 53.) After his death, Scammon’s second wife, Maria Sheldon Scammon, bequeathed their home and property in Hyde Park to the newly reincorporated University of Chicago. That land is now part of the Laboratory School campus. Scammon Court is located in the quadrangle between Blaine Hall and Belfield Hall, including two bronze reliefs honoring the John and Maria Sheldon Scammon. (“[Great University Memorials](#),” *University of Chicago Magazine*, Vol. 17, No. 8, June 1925, 321.)

⁴ In his introduction to [Public Documents of the First Fourteen Congresses, 1789-1871](#), published in 1900, A.W. Greeley takes note of the remarkably complete collection of early scarce documents possessed by the then young University of Chicago Library, “In the City of Washington there is no complete collection [of US Public Documents] in any one library, whether that of Congress, of the Senate, of the House of Representatives, of the State Department, of the Navy Department, or of the War Department...As to other cities, in the West, the University of Chicago Library contains perhaps the fullest set in the country.” Researchers believe Stephan A. Douglas donated his large collection of government documents to the Old University of Chicago Library. The connection to the new University of Chicago may be inferred, but we have yet to uncover direct evidence linking Regenstein’s near-comprehensive holdings to a Douglas gift.

⁵ The University library was greatly expanded in 1870 when the Librarian, Hon. H. M. Thomson, donated his own library, including a complete collection of the Bohn Libraries volumes. Thompson oversaw donations from publishers in London and New York and the personal library of Rev. Elisha Tucker. (University of Chicago. [Annual Catalogue](#). [Chicago: Hazlett & Reed, 1877], 22.) For images of the book plates that acknowledge Thompson’s gift, see “[Old University Books](#)” in the web exhibit “[“A Case for Reparations at the University of Chicago”: Sources.](#)”

reestablished in Hyde Park in 1890. They represent a physical connection between the Old University of Chicago in Bronzeville and the “New” University of Chicago that exists today.

When the original University closed in 1886, trustee John A. Reichelt purchased the entire collection with the intention of gifting it back to the University once reincorporated. The “new” University of Chicago acknowledged this contribution in their University Record of 1890, “To Mr. Reichelt, who thus by faith bridged the black and yawning chasm between the Old University and the New, belongs, by virtue of a gift to an institution not yet born, the honorable title of the first ‘benefactor’ of the University of Chicago.”⁶ Calling Reichelt the “first benefactor” of the University obscures the interconnectedness of Old and New. Reichelt was a trustee of the original University of Chicago, who acted with his own interests in mind in his work to secure an asset of the University and ensure its safe return to its original owner.

In the interim between Old and New University of Chicago, the books were held by the Baptist Union Theological Seminary in Morgan Park, IL. The Seminary reports, “The library of the University of Chicago...has been purchased by J.A. Reichelt, Esq., and is, at present, in the possession of the Seminary.”⁷ Reichelt entrusted his donation to the Seminary due to the historically close relationship between the two institutions. It was, in fact, not the first time the University and the Seminary had collaborated to purchase and process a book collection.

The Baptist Union Theological Seminary received its charter in 1863. The Seminary began by providing theological education to students at the University interested in a career in ministry. In 1865, “Dr. Nethaniel Colver gave some lectures to a few students in the University...and in the fall of 1866, assisted by Rev. J.C.C. Clarke, began more regular instruction with eight or ten students.”⁸ The Old University and the Seminary operated under separate charters, but both were run by the Baptist Theological Union, who saw their missions as complementary. For the first twelve years, the Seminary and the University overlapped extensively. This included sharing their neighboring campuses. Students at each institution were allowed to take classes at either

⁶ University of Chicago. [The University Record](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1917), 166.

⁷ Baptist Union Theological Seminary, [Catalogue: 1886-7](#) (Chicago: R.R. Donnelly & Sons, 1887), 37.

⁸ Baptist Union Theological Seminary, [General Catalogue: 1867-1892](#) (Chicago, 1892), 6. [A portrait of Nethaniel Colver](#) currently hangs in the main stairwell of Swift Hall on the new University’s campus (University of Chicago Photographic Archive, apf1-01773, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library). Swift Hall houses the Divinity School, which originated as the Baptist Union Theological Seminary. The portrait in the Divinity School may have hung in the old University of Chicago. When the University of Chicago was reincorporated, it officially recognized the alumni of the old University as its own (Boyer, 59). These alums formed their own alumni association, which was responsible for multiple fund-raising campaigns. In 1904, the alumni association for the old University of Chicago began a campaign to collect artifacts from the original campus ([University Record](#), Vol 9, No. 2, June 1904, 77 [made available by The University of Chicago Library]). Since the portrait was likely painted during his lifetime and since Colver died in 1870, it is possible that the portrait displayed in the Divinity School today originally hung in a building on the Bronzeville campus. The old University alumni association is also responsible for donating two stones from Douglas Hall, the main building on the old campus. One of these stones was installed into the outer wall of the Classics building and the other in front of the C-bench outside Cobb Hall. See “[Old University on Campus](#),” in the web exhibit.

institution and Seminary students could use the University library, since there appears to have been no dedicated space for a library at the Seminary.⁹

In 1869, University trustee W.W. Everts raised \$60,000 to facilitate the purchase of the famed Hengstenberg Collection for the Seminary.¹⁰ His son negotiated the initial agreement. Because the Seminary lacked a library, the collection of 12,000 volumes was “placed in the University buildings” that same year.¹¹ Entrusting a \$60,000 collection to the University reflects the interconnectedness of the two institutions. The University was able to leverage its resources to raise the money for the Hengstenberg Collection and hold the collection until the Seminary was able to accept it. In their 1870-71 Annual Catalogue, the Seminary acknowledges this joint endeavor, “The library of the late Dr. Hengstenberg, of Berlin, though not the exclusive property of the Seminary, has recently been deposited where it is readily accessible to both the professors and students.”¹² The University likewise includes the Hengstenberg library as an asset in their annual catalogues from 1869 through 1875, after which the Seminary moves to Morgan Park, taking Hengstenberg’s collection with it.¹³

On April 7, 1886 (three months before the old University closed), Thomas Goodspeed wrote John D. Rockefeller to update him on plans to reopen the bankrupted University. “We [Drs. Northrup and Goodspeed] have proposed to Dr. Harper to assume the Presidency of our wrecked and ruined University...”¹⁴ Harper represented the connection between the old and the new, the Seminary and the University. Goodspeed explains the interconnected fates of the Seminary and the University. “We could easily excuse ourselves and say ‘we are only responsible for the Seminary and others must look after the University’. But we are not able to do this, and feel as great an anxiety about our University work as about the Seminary. Indeed the University is

⁹ In 1871, the Seminary reports the presence of a Reading Room “furnished with the best theological and literary periodicals, American and foreign,” but no library (Baptist Union Theological Seminary, [Catalogue: 1870-71](#) [Chicago, 1871], 18).

¹⁰ “Proposed Purchase of a Great Library in Germany for Chicago,” *New York Times* (1857-1922); Oct. 4, 1869. Ernest Wilhelm Hengstenberg was a German theologian, well-known for his defense of orthodox Protestantism against historical-critical interpretation. See Matthias A. Deuschle [Ernst Wilhelm Hengstenberg: Ein Beitrag Zur Erforschung Des Kirchlichen Konservatismus Im Preussen Des 19. Jahrhunderts](#) (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013). Many of his books were translated into English. His library was considered the most extensive scholarly, theological library of its time. The purchase of the library was well-publicized and helped to solidify the Baptist educational institutions in Chicago as serious players in higher education. It is not surprising that Rockefeller and the founders would want such a significant financial, educational, and cultural asset for their reincorporated University.

¹¹ University of Chicago, [Annual catalogue](#). (Chicago: Church, Goodman & Cushing, 1870), 35, which is available through the [Old University of Chicago Records](#), Box 5A, Folder 9, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

¹² Baptist Union Theological Seminary, [Catalogue: 1870-71](#) (Chicago: Lakeside Publishing and Printing, 1871), 16.

¹³ University of Chicago, [Annual Catalogue: 1875-76](#) (Chicago: Lakeside Publishing and Printing, 1876), 21. The Hengstenberg Collection officially became part of the Seminary’s collection in 1875. The unique bookplates added to the volumes of this collection are dated 1875, likely to reflect their official transfer to the Seminary from the University space. To see an image of the commemorative bookplate, see “[Library Connections](#),” in the web exhibit. In 1890, this valuable collection became part of the new University of Chicago Library, when the Seminary was incorporated into the University and renamed “The Divinity School.”

¹⁴ “[Dr. Goodspeed to Mr. Rockefeller](#),” [p.21] April 7, 1886 ([Founders' Correspondence](#), Box 1, Folder 1, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library). For more on the events surrounding the closing of the old University, see Caine, Mount, and Parker “[A Case for Reparations at the University of Chicago](#),” 9-11.

necessary to train students for us. We are getting our own work on solid ground and we cannot sit down and congratulate ourselves and see the University perish.”¹⁵

Part of John D. Rockefeller’s patronage included the condition that the Baptist seminary in Morgan Park be relocated to Hyde Park and become the Divinity School. Doing so ensured that the Seminary library of approximately 25,000 volumes, including the Hengstenberg collection, as well as the additional 7,000 volumes from the Old University of Chicago library in the Seminary’s possession, would belong to the University. The Old University Library was valued at \$8,000 and counted among the \$400,000 matching donations that Rockefeller stipulated that the founders raise.¹⁶ When the “new” University of Chicago reopened in 1890, these books formed the collection for the University of Chicago “Libraries,” now encompassing a group of general and departmental libraries. In 1890, the first librarian of the new University of Chicago, Zella Allen Dixson, began processing the books.¹⁷ The original 7,000 volumes were dispersed amongst these various libraries based on their subject, a majority going to the general collection housed in Haskell Hall. Many of these books can be found on the shelves of the Joseph Regenstein Library today, some bearing their original bookplates from the Old University of Chicago Library; a tangible link between the old and the new.

¹⁵ “[Dr. Goodspeed to Mr. Rockefeller](#),” [p.23] April 7, 1886 ([Founders' Correspondence](#), Box 1, Folder 1, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library).

¹⁶ “[Mr. Gates to Dr. Morehouse](#),” [p59] April 25, 1890. ([Founders' Correspondence](#), Box 1, Folder 9, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library).

¹⁷ Zella Allen Dixson is considered the first Director of the new University of Chicago Library, but she was never conferred with the title “University Librarian.” Thomas Wakefield Goodspeed, Secretary of the Board of Trustees, recommended Dixson for the position of University Librarian (“[Dr. Goodspeed to Dr. Harper](#),” [p.47] March 25, 1891 [[Founders' Correspondence](#), Box 2, Folder 2, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library]). She was currently serving the Librarian at the Baptist Union Theological Seminary. President Harper offered Dixson the position of “Assistant Librarian” and a \$1500 annual salary. Dixson accepted the position under the agreement that she would function as the chief librarian, even if not conferred with the corresponding title. Despite their agreement, Harper continued to look for a chief librarian. He invited Melvin Dewey, famous for his new classification system, to join the faculty at \$7000 a year to serve as Director of Libraries and to bring his Library School to Chicago. Dewey turned him down for a better offer to stay in Albany. (Haynes McMullen, [The Administration of the University of Chicago Libraries, 1892-1928](#) [Chicago: University of Chicago, 1949], 28-35.)