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**BUILDING  
FOR A LONG  
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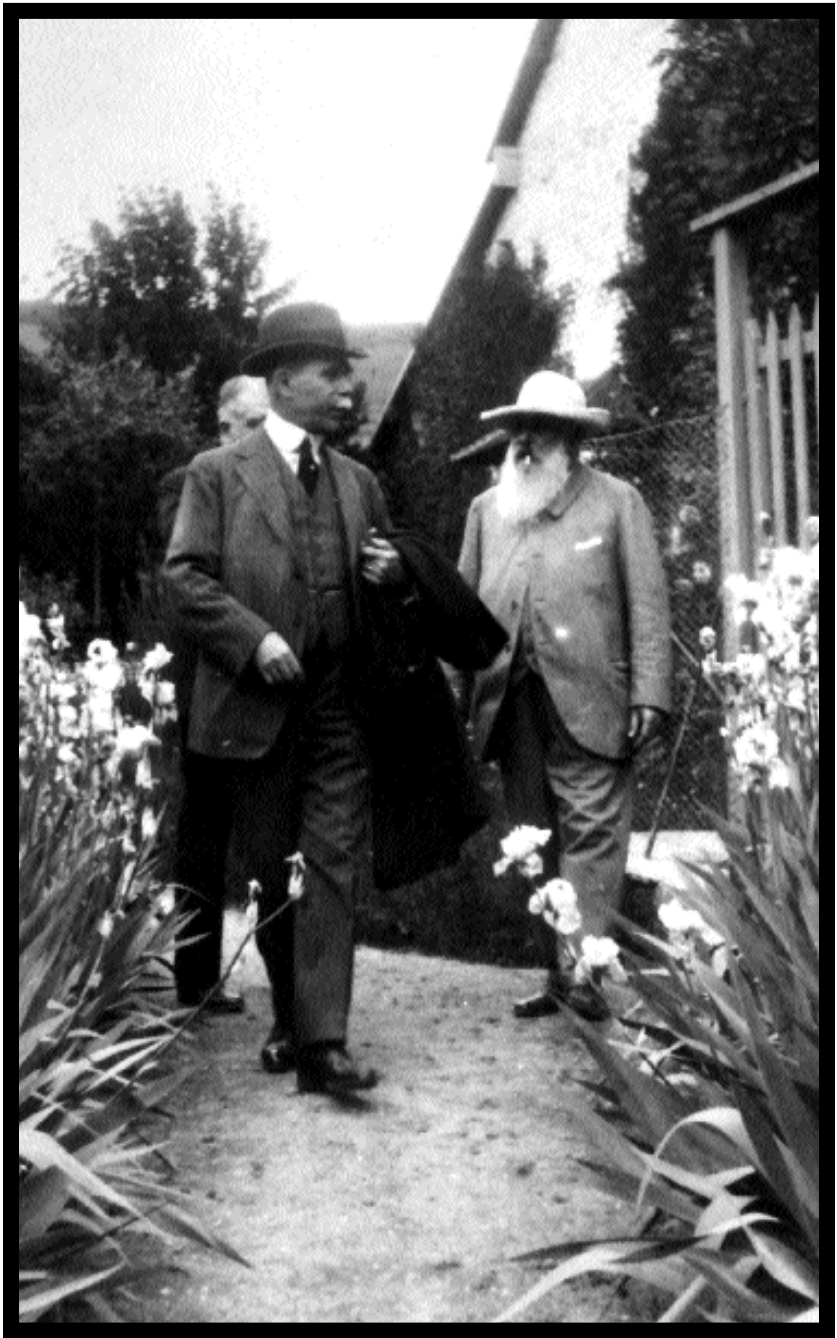
**THE ROLE OF THE  
TRUSTEES IN THE  
EARLY UNIVERSITY**

**JOHN W. BOYER**

**VI**

**OCCASIONAL PAPERS  
ON HIGHER  
EDUCATION VI**

**THE COLLEGE  
OF THE  
UNIVERSITY OF  
CHICAGO**



*Martin A. Ryerson with Claude Monet at Giverny, 1920.*

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B U I L D I N G   F O R  
A   L O N G   F U T U R E :

*The Role of the Trustees in the Early University*

I N T R O D U C T I O N



warm welcome to the new academic year. In remembering the year just past, let me begin with some of the most important members of our College community, our students. Over the past several years many colleagues have remarked to me about the continuing and outstanding quality of our students, their energy, their intelligence, their intellectual fearlessness, and their social engagement. Such students are worthy of the great traditions of this College, and we must be worthy of them. We have many ways to measure the achievements of our students. An important way, and one which is always a matter of great pride for us, our students, and their families, is the number and the quality of the national scholarships they win. We had an especially strong cohort in 1999–2000, including three Marshall Scholarships, a Rhodes Scholarship, four Goldwater Scholarships, four Mellon Fellowships in the Humanities, four Medical Scientist Training Program Fellowships (MSTP), two Fulbright Grants, and a U.S. Department of Defense Graduate Fellowship. I could extend this list of famous and not-so-famous prizes, but my larger point is that we continue to have a student body of extraordinary intelligence and ambition.

And that will continue to be true in the future, for the Class of 2004, which began its College career last month, is truly remarkable.

*This essay was originally presented as the Annual Report to the Faculty of the College on October 17, 2000. John W. Boyer is the Martin A. Ryerson Distinguished Service Professor in the Department of History and the College, and Dean of the College.*

Applications for the Class of 2004 increased over the previous year, from 6,849 to 7,396. Our admissions rate for the entering class, which was 61 percent in 1998 and as high as 71 percent a few years before, declined again from 48 percent in 1999 to 44 percent this year. This increase in selectivity is also reflected in the fact that 63 percent of the new students ranked in the top 5 percent of their high school classes, up from 55 percent in 1999 and 43 percent in 1998. The average combined SAT Verbal Plus Math has increased from 1349 in 1998 to 1384 in 2000. The class also includes a record number of students of color, ninety-one Hispanic students and fifty-six African-American students. Both numbers are about 50 percent higher than those of the most recent past.

It is worth remembering that the original goal of our commitment of substantial additional resources for Admissions was to assure that an increase in the size of the entering classes would not lead to a lowering of standards. Happily, just the opposite has happened, for the increase in applications and in selectivity has been so substantial that we have both increased the size of our entering classes *and* raised the standards for admission to the College. I am extremely grateful to Michael Behnke, Ted O'Neill, and their staff for the hard and creative work that has made this extraordinary achievement possible.

I am pleased to report that we have seen improvement in graduation rates as well. The graduating Class of 1994 constituted only 71 percent of its incoming cohort; the same figure for the Class of 2000 is a much more favorable 81 percent. Similar improvements can be seen in retention rates. For example, 91 percent of the students entering as first-years in 1990 returned for their second year; the same figure for students entering in 1998 was 95 percent. We should continue to devote serious efforts to improving these numbers still further. Indeed, much of the work we have done recently and plan to do in the future is designed to

sustain and improve these results, that is, to bring better students to the College, to retain them, and to graduate them within four years.

Last year was the first year of the implementation of the new curriculum. In general, some bumps along the way notwithstanding, the implementation went smoothly and effectively. This was owing to the hard work of a host of colleagues, above all the five Collegiate Masters—Bill Brown, John Lucy, Dennis Hutchinson, Sid Nagel, and Jose Quintans—and the Chairs of the various Core staffs, as well as the members of the Curriculum Committee, the Committee of the College Council, and the College Council itself. I thank all of these colleagues for their strong and creative leadership in the College.

This past year a new Core sequence was created in Biology and another new sequence, on integrative biology, will be added this year, developed with the support of the Howard Hughes Medical Institute. These courses are designed to present a more complex and integrated view of biological science for students who do not plan to major in a life science. Last year also saw the creation of a new Natural Science sequence, Environmental Sciences, which is designed for prospective humanities and social science majors and incorporates mathematics, biology, and physical science into a single, integrated six-quarter program. A new Civilization sequence, Music in Western Civilization, began this year, and other Civilization courses, notably The Ancient Mediterranean World, have been revised. Several colleagues in the humanities will introduce a new three-quarter general education sequence this year, entitled Media Aesthetics: Image, Sound, Text.

To sustain, but also to continually renew, our venerable tradition of general education in the College will require ongoing professional and personal commitments by the regular faculty. Historically, this has been a community in which specialists are willing to interact with each other

in planning and teaching general-education courses that integrate disciplinary knowledge in inter- and cross-disciplinary frameworks, and to understand what others are doing. Such leadership by the regular faculty in teaching first- and second-year general-education courses, rather than pushing such responsibilities off on graduate students, is a precious heritage of our past and present, and it sets us apart from the conditions under which many other private universities operate. I strongly urge that we make every effort to protect and enrich that heritage. Indeed, the College is eager to support in a substantial and material way colleagues who wish to plan new or re-newed general-education courses or sequences in all areas of the curriculum.

In the wake of our recent efforts on behalf of the general-education curriculum, I asked the College's Curriculum Committee, working with the directors of our various concentrations and with other concerned colleagues, to begin a study of the College's concentrations during the 1999–2000 academic year. This project will conclude during the current academic year, but we have already learned from students that a sense of community with their fellow concentrators is very important to them; it is valued greatly by those who have it and wished for by those who do not. This review has also led us to confront the fact, known informally to many of us for years, that too many of our College students still feel like orphans in the graduate-student-dominated culture of many of the departments, and these include some of our best students. As a historian, I must confess that this finding puts the great constitutional and curricular struggles of the 1950s in a slightly ironic perspective. Having confronted (and, in the long run, undermined) the Hutchins College to gain space for their specializations, have our departmental faculties—you and me with our other hats on—utilized the curricular space that we gained in the most optimal way? Certainly our students would benefit

from greater efforts within our departments to create and nurture an academic community that actively encourages undergraduate participation, systematic efforts to increase interaction between students and faculty, and an increase in the number of course offerings for juniors and seniors designed for the intellectual and pedagogical needs of our more advanced students. The Masters and I look forward to working with our colleagues in the departments in achieving those ends.

Last year the College faculty approved a new concentration in Religious Studies which will begin this fall. This is the first concentration in thirty years to be sponsored and staffed by a professional school, and the College is grateful to the faculty of the Divinity School for its willingness to bring its considerable teaching skills and scholarly excellence to the College. The Religious Studies concentration will be a part of the New Collegiate Division.

The Big Problems program is now entering its third year. This program began as a result of the curriculum review of 1995–98, which saw the suggestion emerge that the College develop general-education courses for fourth-year students that would cut across disciplines and bring students and faculty from different disciplinary backgrounds together around single large themes. The Big Problems program, chaired again by J. Paul Hunter and Bill Wimsatt, is offering five team-taught courses this year, including Science and Religion, The Organization of Knowledge, and Is Development Sustainable?

The College's offerings in writing also continue to grow. Along with the continued success of the Little Red Schoolhouse program, I am pleased to report that several advanced writing courses were offered in 1999–2000: Writing Criticism (offered twice), Writing Biography, Writing Argument, Play Writing, Fiction Writing, and Poetry Writing. Similar plans are in place for 2000–01. But these courses are oversubscribed and

we ought to do more, both in traditional creative writing courses and the less conventional courses like the first three listed above. This year we will add a course in the writing of nonfiction, taught by Simon Winchester, the distinguished author of *The Professor and the Madman*. This nonfiction writing course will be possible thanks to the generous support of an alumnus of the College, Robert Vare, who is now an editor of the *Atlantic Monthly*. Robert has established the Robert Vare Visiting Professorship in Nonfiction Writing which will allow us to bring a distinguished practitioner to campus each year for at least the next five years.

International and second-language education are also flourishing. For example, enrollments in Spanish and French 202 and 203, well beyond the language requirement, have seen dramatic growth over the last five years. Our new Foreign Language Proficiency Certificate program, created in 1998, is also growing. In 2000–01, Proficiency Certificate examinations will be available to students in French, German, Spanish, Arabic, Chinese, Hindi, Japanese, Korean, Polish, and Russian. The steady growth shown in the number of Foreign Language Acquisition Grants (FLAGs)—sixty-five this past summer, up from forty-four in 1999—makes it clear that we are on the way to our long-term goal of offering two hundred such grants each summer. These grants are designed to make advanced language study on a total immersion basis more attractive to our students. Students from nearly every modern language offered at the College applied for FLAGs in 2000.

There has also been healthy growth in the program of Civilization Studies abroad. Another new program that will begin in Winter Quarter 2001 is an African Civilization course based in Cape Town, South Africa, and sponsored by our Committee on African Studies. The Department of East Asian Languages & Civilizations will also launch an intensive program of intermediate Chinese language study in Beijing during the



Autumn Quarter of 2001. I should also emphasize that these initiatives enjoy the support of and direct participation by the senior faculty of these programs, support which I consider essential to maintaining rigorous academic standards in all such programs.

Thanks to more than a year of intensive effort led by Associate Dean of Students in the College Ann Harvilla and Marti Packer of NSIT, the College (along with several of the graduate divisions and professional schools) has launched a new registration system. The new system, currently known as Exeter (the name of the firm which designed and installed the software in collaboration with the Chicago team), was first used for College pre-registration in the spring of 2000, and then for all College registration this fall. There have been rough spots in these early stages, but these will be resolved in an expeditious manner. I am confident that with Exeter we have installed a much more useful and efficient system for both faculty and students than we have ever had available to us in the past.

Finally, there is much continued good news on the fund-raising front. During the administrations of Presidents Hanna H. Gray and Hugo F. Sonnenschein, the College became a major partner in the fund-raising programs of the University. We look forward to continuing this partnership under the administration of President Don M. Randel. Our experience over the past eight years indicates that the alumni of the College are eager to support educational and co-curricular initiatives which directly benefit students and faculty and which help to sustain Chicago's historic reputation as an innovative leader in liberal-arts education. Accordingly, College fund-raising priorities focus specifically on strengthening faculty teaching in the College and on enriching student life, and we very much hope that these will become signature goals for the upcoming capital campaign as it relates to the College and undergraduate education. In the same way, I am pleased to report that during the past

academic year the College received several notable gifts from younger and mid-career alumni, including \$1 million from Andy Alper, Class of 1980; \$1.5 million from Gary Hoover, Class of 1973; and \$2.5 million from Peter May, Class of 1964. Their gifts will go to support Houses in the new residential commons, to create need-based and merit-based scholarships, and to help to create the new University of Chicago Paris Center.

Over the past twenty years a large number of colleagues have worked very hard to make the College a richer, more sympathetic, and supportive place for our students, and it has been my personal experience over the past eight years that our alumni deeply appreciate and support such efforts. We not only want our students to be able to undertake their academic work in ways that encourage the highest levels of personal intellectual discovery, but we want our students to be able to explore more fully opportunities for a creative engagement with and service to the world, including the world beyond the boundaries of Hyde Park. After all, the kind of learning we foster is the best guarantee of creativity, and the century looming ahead of us is likely to prize individual creativity above all else.

The College thus remains a place dedicated to nurturing extraordinary creativity in young and old alike and to fostering among our students a life-long love of learning. Those are its fundamental, core values, and they are values that bring great honor to the wider University enterprise. It is a very special College, with great, if often highly contested, traditions. I think we can all take great pride in the consistency of educational purpose and in the continuity of intellectual identity that has marked the College's history since the 1930s. True, some parts of the work of the College have changed over the decades, and (in my judgment) generally for the better, but I believe that more than ever it remains a unique place in American higher education, one that our alumni admire and cherish.

**BUILDING FOR A LONG FUTURE:  
GOVERNANCE AND PHILANTHROPY  
IN THE EARLY UNIVERSITY<sup>1</sup>**



At the conclusion of last academic year, the University of Chicago received one of the largest single gifts in its history, a gift of \$20 million from Max Palevsky to create the Max Palevsky Residential Commons. This magnificent gift—certainly the largest the College has ever received since its formal constitution as a faculty in 1930—was given not only by a College alumnus, but also by a former member of the Board of Trustees. Of course, Max Palevsky has been extremely generous in the past—the Palevsky Cinema in Ida Noyes Hall and the Palevsky Professorship in the College, now held by our colleague William Sewell of the Department of Political Science and the College—were past, powerful signs of his devotion to Chicago. But the extraordinary size and the propitious timing of this new gift affords us an occasion to recall once again the importance of our Trustees—present and past—in defending, enriching, and sustaining our great University. The recent selection of a new President, Don M. Randel, under the leadership of the Trustees, also reminds us that the Trustees have important roles in our governance structure beyond providing for the material support of the University, roles that are complex, subtle, and in many respects decisive for our ongoing success.

1. My thanks to John Deak, Daniel Meyer, and Carol Radovich for generous assistance in preparing this essay. Unless otherwise noted, all archival materials cited are located in the Department of Special Collections, The University of Chicago Library.

As I considered the theme of this year's report, I thought that it might be useful to recall the origins of those dual relationships, that is, the extraordinary generosity provided by individual past members of the Board to help constitute and create the University, and also the role that the Board has played in the larger governance structure of the University.

I shall try to demonstrate below that it was during the first two decades of the Board's history when we not only gained significant and substantial traction as a great university, with great buildings, libraries, faculties, and students, but when the Board also developed modes of dealing with and supporting the faculty, the students, and the University community at large, folkways and precedents that in many respects have continued to survive and, so I will suggest at the end of my report, serve us well in the present and the future.

Little systematic scholarly work has been done on the early Trustees and especially on those men who were prominent both as donors and policy leaders. Indeed, perhaps the single most notable commentary on our Board was an early but also harshly negative evaluation, generated in a semi-concealed way by Thorstein Veblen, the controversial social scientist who taught at the University of Chicago from 1892 to 1906. Veblen's book, *The Higher Learning in America. A Memorandum on the Conduct of Universities by Business Men*, was and still is one of the most strident critiques of the governance structure and policy directions of the early American research universities ever undertaken. The book owed a great debt to the University of Chicago, since its basic agenda and many of its most notable arguments were conceived here in Hyde Park before Veblen was forced to resign from the faculty over a matter of personal indiscretion in 1906. Although it was published only in 1918, the genesis of this work is thus keyed to and reflecting of Veblen's

unhappy experiences and professional and intellectual discontent at Harper's University.<sup>2</sup>

In *The Higher Learning*, Veblen was concerned with a double dilemma. On the one hand the new universities were allowing themselves to become all things to all men, dabbling in community service, social work, and extension education that dispensed erudition "by mailorder" (a clear dig at Harper), whereas they ought to be devoted solely to idle curiosity and "the disinterested pursuit of knowledge." On the other hand, this involvement in the world had come with great costs, since it encouraged universities to emulate the values of modern business. Not only had the faculty been tempted in imprudent, if socially "useful" directions, but the governing boards of the universities had been taken over by businessmen. Veblen minced no words in his views of the uselessness and possible danger of boards filled with businessmen:

So far as regards its pecuniary affairs and their due administration, the typical modern university is in a position, without loss or detriment, to dispense with the services of any board of trustees, regents, curators, or what not. Except for the insuperable difficulty for getting a hearing for such an extraordinary proposal, it should be no difficult matter to show that these governing boards of businessmen commonly are quite useless to the university for any businesslike purpose. Indeed . . . the fact should be readily seen that the boards are of no material use in any connection; their sole effec-

2. See Charles T. Rasmussen and Rick Tilman, "Mechanistic Physiology and Institutional Economics: Jacques Loeb and Thorstein Veblen," *International Journal of Social Economics*, 19 (1992): 238–40; and Benjamin McArthur, "Revisiting Hutchins and *The Higher Learning in America*," *History of Higher Education Annual*, 7 (1987): 19.

tual function being to interfere with the academic management in matters that are not of the nature of business, and that lie outside their competence and outside the range of their habitual interest.<sup>3</sup>

For Veblen, such boards were inevitably potential sites of nefarious meddling by conservative businessmen who might be tempted to undercut the intellectual autonomy and pure academic virtue of the new secular research universities.<sup>4</sup> They were a source of “quietism, caution, compromise, collusion, and chicane,” and thus it was particularly unfortunate that “[t]he final discretion in the affairs of the seats of learning is entrusted to men who have proved their capacity for work that has nothing in common with the higher learning.”<sup>5</sup> Veblen’s critique was thus double-centered—against businessmen as guardians of the new universities and their propensity to meddle in the autonomy of universities, and against the larger direction of social utilitarianism and cultural conservatism that their influence was bound to engender among the faculty.

3. Thorstein Veblen, *The Higher Learning in America. A Memorandum on the Conduct of Universities by Business Men*. Reprinted with an introduction by Louis M. Hacker (New York, 1957), p. 48. See also Joseph Dorfman, *Thorstein Veblen and His America* (New York, 1934), pp. 396–408.

4. Some commentators would argue that things have not changed much in the last eighty years. Richard Chait has surveyed trustee-faculty relations in our time and finds them marked by discord, suspicion, and mutual disaffection. Writing in a recent issue of the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, Chait described what he characterized as the “prolonged and bitter confrontation between faculties and boards” that, so he believes, marks the landscape of modern American higher education. “Trustees and Professors: So Often at Odds, So Much Alike,” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, August 24, 2000, pp. B4–5.

5. *Higher Learning*, pp. 50–51.

Not surprisingly, the initial response of University leaders to Veblen's characterizations was profoundly unsympathetic. Immediately after the book's publication in 1918, then-President Harry Pratt Judson would observe acidly to Abraham Flexner that Veblen's departure from Chicago in 1906 had been a case of good riddance.<sup>6</sup>

Still, not everyone subsequently connected with the University of Chicago was unsympathetic with Veblen's arguments about higher education. For example, Veblen's book seems likely to have played some role in inspiring the next book by a Chicago faculty member published with the same title, to wit, Robert Hutchins's *The Higher Learning in America*, published in 1936, seven years after Veblen's death. Hutchins's exact views about Veblen are difficult to ascertain, although it seems clear that Hutchins had some familiarity with Veblen's work. One of Hutchins's best aphorisms—"football has the same relation to education that bull fighting has to agriculture"—seems to have been a direct appropriation from Veblen. Benjamin McArthur has gone so far as to assert, probably with justification, that Hutchins saw his tract "as a companion to Veblen's revolutionary manifesto."<sup>7</sup> To be sure, there were substantial differences—whereas Hutchins sought to recuperate and defend an older ideal of liberal culture on the collegiate level as one of the proper missions of the university, Veblen envisioned the true university having a pure research function, criticizing the effect of the incorporation of collegiate work in the universities on the

6. "Mr. Veblen was once a member of our faculty, and we were quite willing to accept his resignation when he tendered it." Judson to Flexner, April 1, 1919, *Presidents' Papers* [hereafter cited as *PP*], Box 67, file 9.

7. McArthur, "Revisiting Hutchins and *The Higher Learning in America*," p. 19. See also Mary Ann Dzuback, *Robert M. Hutchins. Portrait of an Educator* (Chicago, 1991), pp. 125–26.

grounds that the goals and objectives of the former were incompatible with the intrinsic mission and professional abilities of the faculty of the latter.<sup>8</sup>

Yet, there were also parallels, for while Hutchins refused to eliminate the College—as William Dodd urged him to do in the early 1930s—he did separate its functions and, eventually, its faculty from the rest of the University, actions which would have been consonant with Veblen’s larger image of what the research university was about. Moreover, both men sought to imagine a university that was profoundly non-utilitarian and even anti-utilitarian, and thus both were writing against those features of the socially engaged university with strong occupational and quasi-vocational functions that Harper and his erstwhile pragmatist allies in the first generation of faculty had articulated. Most important, both Hutchins and Veblen decried the notion of undergraduate education as an education for social gentility, privileged with non-educational cultural interventions, such as vocational training, student activities, and mass athletics.<sup>9</sup> As a University president, Hutchins had to avoid the anti-business cast and tone that Veblen easily adopted, but in the end both imagined the University as a self-sufficient, ideal type that existed primarily unto itself and for itself, devoted to the advancement of pure learning for its own sake.<sup>10</sup>

8. *Higher Learning*, pp. 16–20, 73ff., 88. For the tradition of “liberal culture,” see Laurence R. Veysey, *The Emergence of the American Research University* (Chicago, 1965), pp. 180–251, esp. 210–11. That Hutchins was at least superficially linked to this tradition via men like Mortimer Adler and Richard McKeon who had, in turn, been influenced by John Erskine at Columbia University seems obvious.

9. Compare Veblen, *The Higher Learning*, pp. 73–76, 89–90, 121, and Robert M. Hutchins, *The Higher Learning in America* (New Haven, 1936), pp. 29, 36–43.

10. Barry Karl has shrewdly noted that Hutchins’s rhetoric had traces of a “gentlemanly Veblenism.” Concerning Hutchins’s famous faculty-trustee dinner speech



Such an image not only challenged a key component of the social utilitarian logic behind Harper's rationale for the University of Chicago, but it also called into question the range of vocationalist teaching programs and the remarkable student cultural practices that Harper himself was willing to associate with an undergraduate education.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, Veblen's arguments also challenged the legitimacy of the responsibilities

in early 1944, where Hutchins called for a revolution in higher education that would, among other things, (in Karl's words) "release higher education from the grip of professionalism and its control of training and evaluation," Karl observes: "Hutchins had titled one of his first major commentaries on American university life *The Higher Learning in America*. That was in 1934. Ten years later in his address to the faculty and Trustees he was fulfilling whatever promise to Veblen the title was intended to imply; and if the cackle of Veblen's ghost could be heard around the dining room of Chicago's swank South Shore Country Club, it was surely accompanied by the raging shade of William Rainey Harper." Barry D. Karl, *Charles E. Merriam and the Study of Politics* (Chicago, 1974), pp. 166–67.

11. The relationship of Hutchins to Harper is a fascinating subject and one that, surprisingly, has received little attention. Both men came out of the small college, small town atmosphere of east central Ohio, both were steeped in Protestant values, both were moralists, and both ended up at Yale. Yet Harper sanctioned big-time football, fraternities, a college of commerce for undergraduates, and a general view of liberal education that was (a) functionally preparatory toward graduate education and (b) profoundly related to preparing students for the vocational world. Hutchins, in contrast, denied any necessary connection between general education and training for graduate school and was profoundly hostile to any form of vocationalism within the world of the liberal arts. When Hutchins, as the guest speaker at a conference in memory of William Rainey Harper in 1937, forcefully articulated such views, it was not surprising that he encountered mild bafflement on the part of his audience. See his lecture "The Philosophy of Education" and his roundtable discussion on "The Relation of the Liberal Arts College to the University," in Robert N. Montgomery, ed., *The William Rainey Harper Memorial Conference. Held in Conjunction with the Centennial of Muskingum College, New Concord, Ohio, October 21–22, 1937* (Chicago, 1938), pp. 35–50, 112–20.

that our Trustees had already secured for themselves by the first decade of this century. Against Veblen's critique of the boards of American universities in general, and, by implication, of our university in particular, perhaps the most eloquent respondent was William Rainey Harper himself. Writing in the long, detailed report that he prepared on the occasion of the Decennial celebration of the University in 1901–02, Harper devoted considerable space to the activities of the Board. He asserted that

[t]he history of the growth of the University is in itself the best testimony of the largeness of view taken by the Board of Trustees. With a body of Trustees less intelligent or less able, such progress would have been impossible. It is fair to say that in the breadth of view which has characterized the work of the Trustees there is to be seen an expression of the spirit of the city of Chicago—a spirit to which the University is indebted for many of the important elements that have entered into its constitution.<sup>12</sup>

Harper's rhetoric could easily be seen as self-serving and accommodating, but there is considerable evidence that most senior faculty members before 1914 shared Harper's high estimation of the work of the Board. Why was this the case? Harper's conception of the University was original not only in its vision and boldness, but also in its capaciousness. It is customary in our institutional memory about Harper to dwell on his interest in creating a research university, but we often

12. William Rainey Harper, "The President's Report," *The Decennial Publications*, Volume I (Chicago, 1903), p. xv. For views of Harold H. Swift, who succeeded Martin Ryerson in 1922 as Chair of the Board, about the Board of Trustees, see Dorothy V. Jones, *Harold Swift and The Higher Learning* (Chicago 1985), pp. 17–18 and *passim*.

forget that this notion of research was bound up with an equally powerful, late-nineteenth-century conception of science as a solvent or even solution to many current social and cultural problems. Universities, for Harper, existed not only to generate new knowledge, but ultimately to undergird the very edifice of American democracy. Moreover, as recent scholars like Barry Karl and Steven Diner have argued, many senior faculty members at Chicago shared Harper's (and as we shall see, the Trustees') views about the service role of the University in society, and thus it was not surprising that they would also have views rather different from those of Veblen about the relations between the larger civic community and the educational enterprise on our campus.<sup>13</sup>

Thus, a "fit" between the motivations of key business and civic leaders eager to see a prestigious and pragmatically influential University and a faculty of distinguished scholars eager to showcase their scholarly research was fully plausible at the new University, especially in view of the fact that the President himself articulated and defended so forcefully an ideology of scientific engagement with the world. Indeed, Diner and others have demonstrated that a powerful commitment to using science to improve society characterized the activities as well as the publications of an unusually large number of Chicago scholars in the first two decades of our history. For scholars like Albion W. Small, James H. Tufts, Charles R. Henderson, Ernst Freund, Edwin O. Jordan, John M. Coulter, Charles E. Merriam, and many others, Veblen's concern for "idle

13. See Karl, *Charles E. Merriam*, pp. 44–46, 51–54, and Steven J. Diner, *A City and Its Universities. Public Policy in Chicago, 1892–1919* (Chapel Hill, 1980), pp. 27–51. See also Darnell Rucker, *The Chicago Pragmatists* (Minneapolis, 1969), pp. 12ff., and Conrad Cherry, *Hurrying toward Zion: Universities, Divinity Schools, and American Protestantism* (Bloomington, Ind., 1995), pp. 4–13.

curiosity” was largely irrelevant in the face of their own multifaceted beliefs in the power of a great research university not only to generate new knowledge and to engender new levels of expertise, but also to make that knowledge and that expertise available to the world, including the world of modern business.<sup>14</sup>

This relationship was perhaps made easier because the early Trustees did not seek to meddle in the academic work of the faculty as such. Harper proudly asserted in his Decennial report of 1903 that “it is a firmly established policy of the Trustees that the responsibility for the settlement of educational questions rests with the Faculties, and although in some instances the request of a Faculty has not been granted for lack of funds required, in no instance has the action of a Faculty on educational questions been disapproved.”<sup>15</sup> This pattern of deference is confirmed by James H. Tufts, a professor of philosophy who served as Dean and eventually as Vice-President at the University, who insisted in his (unpublished) memoirs that the Board had no interest in trying to control educational issues.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, the documentary record of Board activities seems to support these assertions. The Board’s primary concerns were with financial, logistical, and planning issues, some large

14. “What Merriam and other academics shared with their industrial benefactors and what the generation of Harper and Low had sought to embed in the structure of the university was the responsibility of guiding that power [of modern business] in socially responsible directions. For most of them the endeavor did not imply a denigration of that power, let alone the necessity of destroying it.” Karl, *Charles E. Merriam*, p. 54.

15. Harper, “The President’s Report,” p. xiv.

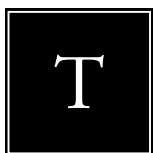
16. James H. Tufts, unpublished Memoirs, section on “Trustees,” p. 1, *James H. Tufts Papers*, Box 3, folder 18.

and capacious but many small and petty, the latter necessary because of the lack of a formal central bureaucracy at the University. For the most part, relations between the Board and the senior faculty were occasional, individualist, and ad hoc in nature. The few senior faculty who did have personal contacts with Board members were not shy about approaching them, occasionally as lobbyists for a particular cause. And individual Trustees were sometimes prevailed upon to support faculty research projects, although this was often through the mediation of the President's office.<sup>17</sup> Nor were the connections between prominent Trustees and senior faculty only programmatic. The autobiographies of Elizabeth Wallace and Robert Lovett make clear that some social and cultural interactions did occur between and among faculty and Trustees. Senior faculty and Trustees certainly did not live in the same social worlds, but theirs were not wholly distant worlds either.<sup>18</sup>

17. Some senior faculty were clearly aware of the value that might come from Trustee patronage of their specific disciplines. William G. Hale expressed a more personal side of these relationships when he wrote to trustee Charles Hutchinson in 1893 that "both for the sake of the association of the name (for your presence on the Board of Trustees was one of the reasons for my coming here) and for the sake of example to others to go and do likewise, I desire very much that the fellowship which you have given to my department should be called the Charles L. Hutchinson Fellowship in Latin." Quoted in Thomas J. Schlereth, "Big Money and High Culture. Hutchinson and the Commercial Club," *The Great Lakes Review*, 3 (1976): 20.

18. See Elizabeth Wallace, *The Unending Journey* (Minneapolis, 1952); Robert Morss Lovett, *All Our Years* (New York, 1948). See also Dorothy Michelson Livingston, *The Master of Light. A Biography of Albert A. Michelson* (New York, 1973), p. 295, the latter a charming biography written by the daughter of Michelson.

THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES AND  
EARLY PHILANTHROPY AT CHICAGO



he early history of the University and the history of its Board are in fact inextricably intertwined. Upon the collapse of the old University of Chicago in June, 1886, a committee of Baptist leaders constituted themselves under the leadership of Thomas Goodspeed, then the Secretary of the Baptist Union Theological Seminary, to try to recreate a new University of Chicago. The collapse of the old college was critical to the success of the new, since the death of the modest institution founded by the Baptists of Chicago with a gift of land from Stephen A. Douglas in 1856 allowed its successor to escape from the former's mid-nineteenth-century educational ethos. Through the mediation of Frederick Taylor Gates, the Secretary of the American Baptist Education Society, the Chicago group was able to gain the initial, tentative support of a prominent East Coast Baptist, John D. Rockefeller, who in 1889 was already one of the wealthiest individuals in the United States. Upon Rockefeller's agreeing in May 1889 to provide an initial \$600,000 if the Baptist community, soon supplemented by local Chicago business leaders, could match this sum with another \$400,000, the possibility of a new University of Chicago was at least plausible. In the summer of 1890 the necessary legal instruments of incorporation were completed and approved, and a new Board of Trustees constituted to undertake the all important tasks of selecting a first President (accomplished in September 1890), planning the new campus and its first buildings, and launching fund drives to secure ongoing support from wealthy individuals in Chicago. Although Rockefeller's generosity proved ongoing, there was from the outset a profound sense that the new University would not

succeed unless it merited substantial support from prominent Chicago leaders, especially on the front of building construction, since most of Rockefeller's early benefactions were explicitly designated for programmatic and endowment support and not for buildings.

The decision regarding the new President was perhaps the Board's easiest task, since William Rainey Harper was in fact the first and only plausible choice from the earliest days of the work of Goodspeed's group. When Harper finally accepted the new Board's offer in February 1891, after six months of deliberation, a profound step forward had been taken. Harper's vision of a comprehensive university, rather than a mere liberal-arts college, was to prove a powerful device that immediately defined future fund-raising and budgetary priorities.

By occupation, the first Board was diverse, and probably not untypical of other university boards of the era, consisting mainly of businessmen, journalists, lawyers, and judges, with one clergyman (Alonzo K. Parker) on the margins. A subsequent analysis in 1931 of the occupational background of the Trustees appointed between 1890 and 1930 by J. Spencer Dickerson found four bankers, two leaders of insurance companies, eight lawyers, six judges, twelve manufacturers, four ministers, three real estate brokers, five publishers, three engineers, four university presidents, one medical doctor, and four whom he categorized only as "capitalists."<sup>19</sup> For Dickerson they were a "cross section of the better element of the life of Middle West." Chicagoans dominated the Board, but other cities—Detroit, Milwaukee, Minneapolis, Sioux City, Iowa, as well as New York and Washington, D.C.—were also represented.

19. J. Spencer Dickerson, "Address to the Faculty and Trustees," in *The University Record*, April, 1931, pp. 107–8. For similar findings, see Diner, *A City and Its Universities*, p. 202.

At the time, the role that boards of trustees would play in the governance of the new research universities was still open to question. After all, the private research universities were hybrid creatures—emulating German and other continental educational institutions that were closely regulated by, but also generously funded by the state and thus by taxpayer revenues. In the American context, there was no “state” and hence no taxpayers, but rather a formal, but clearly private deputation of civil society—the “board of trustees”—administering budgets comprised of student fee revenues and philanthropic contributions from wealthy private individuals. What had begun as (typically confessional) advisory bodies for the small, private liberal-arts colleges of our earlier tradition now evolved into money-generating but also policy-supervising modalities for direction and control. How were these boards to relate to the new research-oriented professoriate, with their code of independent scholarly values and their expectations of freedom to write and speak as they would? How much power would these boards assemble? What was to be their role vis-à-vis the powerful conception of the university as an autonomous but also private community dedicated to independent-minded research and teaching? In 1890 or even 1900, much remained to be thought through and worked out, and the great public European universities had little to offer their American emulators in the way of instruction about how governance could take place.

In our own case, these structural uncertainties were compounded by two additional factors. First, the riskiness of the enterprise itself. It is all too easy, from the vantage point of a hundred-plus years of success, to see the University of Chicago as destined to succeed. Yet the founders must have lived in great uncertainty, and the desperate financial negotiations that occurred in 1890–91 were merely the beginning of years of doubt and occasional dismay. Thomas Goodspeed would later recall in his unpublished memoirs that



I have never changed my mind as to the fearful risk we ran of failure. If we had entered on that great adventure with the light-hearted confidence all others felt we should certainly have failed. Fortunately, I succeeded in impressing my associates with a sense of the almost impossible greatness of our task and we won out. But we only succeeded after incredible difficulty and many months in which we faced almost certain defeat.<sup>20</sup>

The first University of Chicago had gone bankrupt in 1886, after years of almost pitiful underfunding and sectarian squabbling. Who could promise that the second iteration would be any more successful? That the University would be built from scratch in a vacant field in the recently annexed suburb of Hyde Park symbolized the ad hoc quality of the new enterprise. Harper might advocate his plans for the University in the fall of 1890 as being of revolutionary quality, but that made them no less chimerical.<sup>21</sup> The unpredictability surrounding the decision to refound the University in 1890, and on terms so astoundingly ambitious, makes the courage of Harper, Goodspeed, and their closest allies on the Board of Trustees all the more impressive.

Second, the Board of Trustees was in a most peculiar position, since real financial power lay in New York, not in Chicago, while real intellectual power, as well as a considerable share of budgetary cunning, lay

20. "Reminiscences of Thomas Wakefield Goodspeed," p. 319, *Thomas W. Goodspeed Papers*.

21. "I have a plan for the organization of the University which will revolutionize College and University work in this country. It is 'brand splinter new,' and yet as solid as the ancient hills." Harper to H. L. Morehouse, September 22, 1890, *Correspondence of Frederick Gates, 1888–1906*, Box 1, folder 7. Hereafter cited as *Correspondence*.

in the mind and soul of William Rainey Harper. Initially, Rockefeller was adamant about not wanting a formal role on the Board of Trustees, preferring local officers to accept and maintain responsibility. Frederick Gates, Rockefeller's *de facto* agent during the early years of the University, but also a man with a strong sense of purpose and himself basically sympathetic to Harper's vision, reported to Harper that Rockefeller had no intention of controlling the Board directly:

[he] would prefer in general not to take active part in the counsels of the management. He prefers to rest the whole weight of the management on the shoulders of the proper officers. Donors can be certain that their gifts will be preserved and made continuously and largely useful, after their own voices can no longer be heard, only in so far as they see wisdom and skill in the management, quite independently of themselves, now. No management can gain skill except as it exercises its functions independently, with the privilege of making errors and the authority to correct them. The only way to assure a wise management during the whole future of the institution is to continue the method employed hitherto, in the selection of members of the board, which is to make the most careful, the nicest possible choice of new men to fill necessary vacancies, as they shall from time to time occur, and so to keep the board at all times up to the highest point of skill and efficiency.<sup>22</sup>

Of course, no amount of rhetoric could mask the fact that Rockefeller retained enormous power over the future of the fledgling University,

22. Gates to Harper, May 13, 1892, *William Rainey Harper Papers*, Box 8, folder 20.

simply because Chicago remained until after 1910 deeply dependent on Rockefeller's largesse. And after 1896 this power was formalized by the fact that Frederick Gates and John D. Rockefeller, Jr. joined the Board as agents of John D. Rockefeller, Sr., thus creating a geographically dualistic governance structure, partly determined in Chicago and partly in New York City. Moreover, John D. Rockefeller, Sr.'s personal influence was felt in numerous ways, largely expressed by his ongoing frustration over Harper's propensity to engage in huge levels of deficit spending. Between 1894 and 1903 for example, annual deficits in the operating budget of the University averaged \$215,000 a year.<sup>23</sup> This meant that between 26 and 31 percent of each annual budget between 1894 and 1903 was *de facto* covered by John D. Rockefeller, but covered only by after-the-fact petitioning and occasional scheming on the part of Harper and Goodspeed that was clearly tolerated, if not sanctioned, by the Board. Only Rockefeller was in a realistic position to cover such deficits, even though he resented having to do so.

This ambivalent—but (as I will argue) in the long run advantageous—situation put the members of the Board of Trustees in a strange intermediary relationship, creating a “hinge position” for the Board, which found itself constantly mediating between an overenthusiastic Harper and a nervous and skeptical Rockefeller. This relationship both authorized and enhanced the mediatory roles of those key Chicago leaders, like Martin A. Ryerson and Charles L. Hutchinson, who had the professional and personal respect of Rockefeller. But this hinge position also produced tensions. These tensions were perhaps most graphically analyzed in two fascinating reports by Starr J. Murphy, a lawyer who

23. See the appendix to the letter of Gates to Harper, June 25, 1904, *Harper Papers*, Box 9, folder 3.

worked for Rockefeller and who was sent to Chicago in late 1903 on a investigative mission to undertake an “exhaustive inquiry” into the University’s operations and especially its finances. As Frederick Gates discreetly informed Harper, Murphy was “to spend some time at the University, looking into all its various affairs with such eyes as Mr. Rockefeller and myself would hope to use were the time available.”<sup>24</sup>

Murphy’s first attempt to assay the structure of the University resulted in a long, detailed, and insightful report in early 1904 that was generally complimentary, but which also commented on the strange, neither-nor governance situation in which the Board of Trustees found itself:

The President [Harper] is a man of the widest optimism. This is a quality of first importance provided, only, [that] it can be restrained by a cool and deliberate judgment. . . . The President is a man of great persuasiveness, and it is easy for him to present to his Trustees, in a very convincing way, the importance and necessity of the things which he desires to see accomplished. Being subjected as they are to this pressure, and realizing the value and the need of the various things recommended, it is not surprising that the Trustees should be disposed to acquiesce in his plans, so far as the resources of the institution will permit; and to be optimistic with regard to the possibility of increasing those resources. The situation is unusual. The founder is well known to be a man of great resources and of great liberality, and the Trustees are justified in believing that he has a profound interest in the institution. Year after year he has added princely sums to its endowment, and

24. Gates to Harper, November 25, 1903, *Harper Papers*, Box 9, folder 2.

year after year as the annual budgets have been presented to him and his immediate representatives, the annual deficit has been provided for. . . .

But this situation, Murphy continued, must not be allowed to continue, and he left no doubt who was responsible:

The existing financial situation, and the course of financial administration for the past few years is intolerable and must be altered. While it is desirable and necessary that the Trustees should be men of broad intellectual sympathy and of keen appreciation of educational needs and possibilities, it is also necessary that they should be men of iron resolution, capable, notwithstanding their full appreciation of these things, of appreciating, with equal force, the limitations imposed by financial considerations. This is where they have proved themselves lacking, and it is in this direction that a change must be sought.<sup>25</sup>

As the deficit continued to trouble Rockefeller and his advisers, Starr Murphy submitted a second, more negative report in February 1905, laying the blame on the officers of the University, by whom he most certainly meant the local Chicago trustees as well as Harper and Goodspeed, for the “constant and alarming increase in the budget deficits.” For Murphy, the University’s budget estimates were characterized by “utter worthlessness,” which offered Rockefeller “no protection whatever.” Indeed, they were “purely a matter of form, as the University

25. Report of Starr J. Murphy, February, 1904, quoted in Richard J. Storr, *Harper’s University. The Beginnings* (Chicago, 1966), pp 345–46.

authorities do not consider themselves in any way bound by them.”<sup>26</sup> The outraged reactions of Goodspeed and several Trustees protesting against Murphy’s “offensive expressions” (Goodspeed) could not mask the fact that Murphy had not only called a fiscal spade a spade, but had also dared to express openly what others had only been willing to ponder silently.<sup>27</sup> Still, we are left with a puzzle, for the early Trustees in their own business careers were well known as men of steadfast resolution. How are we to explain this seeming disjunction between their tough-minded worldliness in the affairs of their own businesses and their apparent toleration or at least sufferance of the free-spending ways of their designated educational leader, William Rainey Harper? Was their support for Harper an example of conflict avoidance, or was it perhaps more a case of deft and deliberate Machiavellianism, a charge that Murphy out of politeness consciously dismissed in his first report, but which he came very close to imputing in his second report.<sup>28</sup>

26. Report to the Trustees,” February 9, 1905, pp. 1, 5. The Rockefeller Archive Center, Pocantico, Sleepy Hollow, New York. I am grateful to Carol Radovich of the Rockefeller Archive Center for sending me a copy of this report.

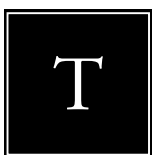
27. For local reactions to Murphy’s 1905 report by Goodspeed and others, see the letters and memoranda in *PP*, Box 47, folder 14.

28. In 1904, Murphy insisted that “I should . . . be extremely loath to attribute such motives to the Trustees. It must be remembered that they are busy men of the highest standing, and they are devoting a great deal of most valuable time gratuitously to this work.” Quoted in Storr, *Harper’s University*, p. 344. But in 1905 he insisted that “[t]here is a tendency to expend money of the University without authority” and demanded that Rockefeller have now a local agent ‘on the ground’ [in Chicago], without whose approval no obligations could be incurred or expenditures made.” Report of 1905, pp. 28, 31. The latter comments were a clear rebuke to the Board of Trustees.

Perhaps we can begin to answer these questions—or at least provide a more suitable interpretive context for posing them—if we first look at the kinds of activities and cultural values represented by key leaders of the first Board of Trustees. As we shall see, not only did these men give generously of their time, but they also gave generously of their money to the new University. They did so with caution and deliberation, but also with great pride and confidence. Why did they support the University with their own money, and, equally important, what kind of an institution did they want the University to become?

**TWO KEY LEADERS  
ON THE EARLY BOARD:**

**MARTIN A. RYERSON  
AND CHARLES L. HUTCHINSON**



Thomas Goodspeed had hoped that the new Board, which he proudly described to Harper in June 1890 as constituting a “noble list,” would provide strong advisory leadership and also serve as a source of considerable wealth.<sup>29</sup> Several of the early Trustees were unable or unwilling to play either role and soon disappeared from the

29. Goodspeed to Harper, June 1, 1890, *Harper Papers*, Box 9, folder 7. Most of the Trustees honored their original obligations, and several, including Ryerson, Hutchinson, and Walker, gave buildings to the University. But there were some notable exceptions. Francis Hinckley, who originally committed to \$50,000, paid nothing whatsoever. Henry Rust promised \$10,000, but only paid \$4,000. See the payment records for the 1889–90 subscription in *Subscriptions for Contributions to the University of Chicago*, Records, Box, 1, folders 1 and 2.

membership of the Board.<sup>30</sup> But the majority of the early Trustees did devote a substantial amount of their personal time to the work of the Board, and several emerged as major benefactors in their own right. The two most active and influential Trustees in the first two decades of the University's history were without doubt Martin Ryerson and Charles Hutchinson. Close personal friends, part of the same circle of social and business interests, they dominated many of the key deliberations of the Board during both Harper's and Judson's presidencies. Indeed, it is little exaggeration to suggest that few if any important policy decisions were taken without their consultation, and in many cases their opinions shaped the outcome of debates. Hutchinson once referred to Ryerson and himself as the "two bugbears of the Board"—and their interconnected lives demonstrated the qualities they valued in the University and in the city.<sup>31</sup>

In the context of the history of the city of Chicago, Martin Ryerson and Charles Hutchinson are usually seen as part of a small group of progressive businessmen who sought to impose a genteel, cultured veneer onto the huge metropolis that Chicago constituted by 1890, the second largest city in America, the sixth largest in Europe and America combined. James Gilbert has argued that these men "aimed to impose a moral order that would, like a map, guide the resident to the proper places and into the

30. Unable to attend meetings of the Board on a regular basis, Ferdinand Peck was removed in 1900 and replaced with A. C. Bartlett. See Harper to Peck, June 28, 1900, *PP*, Box 65, folder 19. Several months earlier Andrew McLeish, a Trustee since 1890 and Vice-President of the Board, had urged Harper to get rid of the "weaklings and unfaithful ones" on the Board and replace them with "capable men with consciences." McLeish to Harper, March 15, 1900, *ibid.*, folder 15.

31. Hutchinson to Harper, January 26, 1896, *PP*, Box 65, folder 11.



proper attitudes.”<sup>32</sup> Other scholars have seen these men as advocating an “urban imperialism” in Chicago to show to the outside world and particularly to critics in New York that Chicago was capable of generating cultural institutions on par with those of great European cities or the American East Coast.<sup>33</sup> In this sense, their willingness to help Harper and his Baptist compatriots might be seen as a convergent and timely meeting of virtue and necessity—they would help create a great university, and it would be a distinguished university, but it would be their university and not that of a modest Baptist community. Harper’s large-scale visions thus ran parallel with the ambitions of these representatives of the urban elite.

Yet, neither Ryerson nor Hutchinson were typical, cardboard copies of a late-nineteenth-century arriviste bourgeoisie. That Ryerson spent so much of his early life in Europe—he had lived in Paris and in Geneva for several years to attend private secondary schools—made his knowledge of European culture rich and textured. Like the professors whom Harper recruited who had lived and studied in Germany and Austria, Ryerson thus had a first-hand understanding of the high culture of major European cities. Hutchinson too gradually gained a first-hand, if more self-taught appreciation of the major institutional emblems of European art and architecture, prowling museums like the South Kensington in London, the Prado in Madrid, and the Louvre in Paris.<sup>34</sup>

32. James Gilbert, *Perfect Cities. Chicago's Utopias of 1893* (Chicago, 1991), p. 36.

33. Schlereth, “Big Money and High Culture,” pp. 25–26. See also Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, *Culture and the City. Cultural Philanthropy in Chicago from the 1880s to 1917* (Chicago, 1976).

34. His private diary is revealing of his many trips to Europe and his eagerness to learn from his experiences there. The diary is a partial transcript, covering the period 1881 to 1911, but with several large gaps. *Charles L. Hutchinson Papers*, Newberry Library.

They were close and connected members of a common civic elite: each represented considerable second-generation wealth, each took great pride in their home town, and each defined the future prosperity of the University as being essential to the future greatness of the city of Chicago. It was also critical that they were relatively young men: in 1890 Hutchinson was 36 and Ryerson 34, working with a young president, William Rainey Harper, who was himself only 34. They were not part of that famous generation of Chicago business leaders who obtained and exercised great wealth and who had been born in the 1830s—men like George Pullman, Marshall Field, Richard Crane, Potter Palmer, and Philip Armour—whom James Gilbert and other scholars have represented as constituting the founding generation of Chicago capitalists.<sup>35</sup> Instead, their youthfulness as heirs of wealthy men (Ryerson's father had been born in 1818, Hutchinson's in 1829) put them in the unique position to devote as much time as they might wish to cultivating civic projects and supporting worthy cultural and educational causes. Equally important, they both had extensive networks of friends and business partners, some of whom they "inherited" from their fathers. These elements of useful leisure, business acumen, large wealth, and a close personal understanding of the elite social networks of the burgeoning metropolis were critical in the work that both of them accomplished, at the University and for other major civic institutions like the Art Institute of Chicago.

Both became involved with the University in 1890, during the early stages of the appeal by the American Baptist Educational Society to obtain \$400,000 to match the initial offer by John D. Rockefeller of

35. For Gilbert these men were "a second generation of institution builders and city boosters, but a first generation of enormous fortunes." See Gilbert, *Perfect Cities*, p. 38; as well as Kathleen D. McCarthy, *Noblesse Oblige. Charity and Cultural Philanthropy in Chicago, 1849–1929* (Chicago, 1982), pp. 53–72.

\$600,000. When the solicitation seemed to founder for want of support, Goodspeed and Gates made a critical decision to go beyond the Baptist churches to the civic and business community of Chicago at large.<sup>36</sup> As Gates put it to Harper in November 1890, the canvass of Baptists and of former alumni of the old University notwithstanding,

our largest hope is from the rich, outside men. . . . We have been promised by Mr. Charles Hutchinson, the President of the Commercial Club, a hearing before that venerable body on the last evening of this month. Mr. Blake has been chosen to deliver the speech, and he is now preparing it. . . . Immediately thereafter we shall seek to get the positive pledges of our chief friends among the outside nobility, and from that moment we expect fine weather and clear sailing.<sup>37</sup>

This was a critical turning point in the history of the University, perhaps even on par with Harper's appointment as President, for the wealth that these members of the Chicago "outside nobility" represented was not only valuable in and of itself, but it was critical to persuading a nervous and uncer-

36. The extent to which the new University was dependent on Rockefeller and the Chicago business community is apparent in the lists of individual subscribers for the \$400,000. According to the "List of Original Subscribers to the \$400,000 Fund," Goodspeed and his colleagues were able to obtain commitments from approximately 1,080 individuals for a total of \$422,293. Yet \$324,826 of this money was contributed by the 101 individuals who agreed to give at least \$1,000 or more, with the remaining funds coming from hundreds of extremely small contributions, many of the \$5 and \$10 variety. See *Subscriptions for Contributions to the University of Chicago*, Records, Box 1, folder 3.

37. Gates to Harper, November 12, 1889, *Correspondence*, Box 1, folder 5.

tain John D. Rockefeller that the citizens of Chicago would indeed take up the cause and not leave him with the sole responsibility for the new college.<sup>38</sup>

Charles Hutchinson was the first non-Baptist civic leader approached by Thomas Goodspeed on behalf of the committee soliciting support from the Chicago business elite to match Rockefeller's offer of \$600,000. Hutchinson agreed to support the cause with a modest subscription of \$1,000 and, more importantly, with the offer of his time and social connections. Thereafter, Gates and Goodspeed used Hutchinson's good offices in their interview with Marshall Field, which led to Field's donation of ten acres of land between 56th and 57th Streets worth \$125,000 to launch the new University.<sup>39</sup> Field, in turn, urged that Hutchinson be named a Trustee. Hutchinson assented, but argued that his friend Martin Ryerson also be appointed to the Board, perhaps with a sense of Ryerson's greater financial capacity.<sup>40</sup> Ryerson then agreed to serve.

38. Frederick Gates informed Harper that he had used the contributions of men like Ryerson and Walker to reassure Rockefeller: "I had a great talk with Mr. Rockefeller. I found him troubled and depressed. He has begun to fear that Chicago is lying down on him. . . . I tried to cheer him and I think I did relieve his mind to a very great extent. I told him (1) of Ryerson's gift and of his hope of raising \$100,000; (2) of Walker's memorial building; (3) of Rust's promise of \$15,000 towards campus and his general promise as a benefactor; (4) of 3 lawyers getting [the] name of [the] University for wills; (5) of Board's resolution to raise \$500,000 as speedily as possible for buildings. . . ." Gates to Harper, April 27, 1891, *Harper Papers*, Box 8, folder 19.

39. Field to Gates, January 22, 1890, *Correspondence*, Box 1, folder 6; Field to Gates, May 26, 1890, *PP*, Box 33, folder 7.

40. This narrative is described by Thomas W. Goodspeed in his "Charles Lawrence Hutchinson," published in *The University of Chicago Biographical Sketches* (2 vols., Chicago, 1922–25), 2:41–42; as well as Goodspeed, *A History of the University of Chicago. The First Quarter-Century* (Chicago, 1916), pp. 83–88.

The new Board held its first meeting in July 1890. Initially, the Board selected a Baptist businessman and community leader, E. Nelson Blake, as its President. An active participant in the affairs of the first University of Chicago and a local merchant of some reputation (he committed \$25,000 to the 1889–90 subscription), Blake had recently moved to Massachusetts and both he and his wife were in ill health. At the same meeting Ryerson was named as Vice-President of the Board, with Hutchinson elected as Treasurer of the University. There is good reason to think that Ryerson's appointment as Vice-President was a deliberate, symbolic move to place a non-Baptist within the University's leadership. So effective was Ryerson's leadership—his fellow Board members even passed a special resolution in June 1891 thanking him for his effectiveness—that Blake himself offered in October 1890 to step aside to permit Ryerson to take charge.<sup>41</sup> Blake's suggestion was strongly seconded by Thomas Goodspeed, the Secretary of the Board and close adviser to Harper. Goodspeed realized both the substantive advantages and symbolic significance of replacing Blake with Ryerson. He wrote to Harper in early October 1890 that

Mr. Ryerson charmed me. He is a quiet, but genial liberal, level headed and in every way fine man. He is without business practically, and worth \$3,000,000 or \$4,000,000. He is very near all the ablest men in the city. He seems much interested. Mr. Kohlsaar and the others [the other Trustees] feel that we cannot do so well

41. "I deem this matter of electing Mr. Ryerson of great importance, for altho' not a Baptist, he is a worthy man and once enlisted heartily in University matters, he would be a tower of strength." Blake to Harper, October 16, 1890, *PP*, Box 65, folder 1. To Gates a few days later Blake wrote of Ryerson that "he is young, smart, deeply interested, well educated, liberal and wealthy, also of ability." Blake to Gates, October 20, 1890, *Correspondence*, Box 1, folder 7.

as to make him President of the Board. They think it will do more than anything else we could do to help us in our coming appeal for the building fund. There is no doubt but that our funds for that purpose must come from the businessmen of Chicago. Our own people [the Baptists] will not furnish one dollar in five of it. Mr. Ryerson being the Vice President would naturally succeed Mr. Blake. To pass him over would be perhaps discourteous. To name him as President will give us a President universally respected, with plenty of leisure, with great wealth, liberal, very close to the wealthiest and most liberal citizens. The union with the Sem[inary] has emphasized the Baptist character of the institution. Would it not now be good policy, the best thing we could do to emphasize the liberal spirit in which our own work is to be carried on. I can see no reason why we should not do this and I think it may in the great campaign we must make for money during the next five years lead us to a victory we cannot otherwise win.<sup>42</sup>

A week later Goodspeed reiterated his urgings to Harper—after insisting that Blake should not stay on, he continued that “Ryerson it seems to me is the man. He is worth \$4,000,000. He is himself liberal and very near to all the wealthiest men here. His standing is A 1. He is a level-headed and capable man. He has abundant leisure. I do not see why he should not be worth half a million to us during the next five years.”<sup>43</sup>

42. Goodspeed to Harper, October 1, 1890, *Harper Papers*, Box 9, folder 7.

43. Goodspeed to Harper, October 5, 1890. A personal fortune of \$4 million in 1892 would be the equivalent in 1999 dollars of approximately \$72 million, not Rockefeller-level wealth but sufficiently substantial to be able to make major philanthropic interventions nonetheless.

Perhaps most notable about Blake's and Goodspeed's suggestions was that they were offered in the first place. Reflecting the new University's old denominational groundings, the first charter of the Board specified that two-thirds of its members must be Baptists, but the charter said nothing about the confessional standing of the leadership of the Board. Still, Ryerson was not a Baptist—his religious views seem to have been vaguely liberal Protestant, bordering on the agnostic—and making him the leader of the new Board of Trustees would be a politically significant decision.

For reasons which are unclear based on the surviving correspondence, Ryerson did not formally succeed to the Presidency until June 1892. The delay very likely had to do with tensions among the Baptists over the denominational identity of the new University, forcing Harper to move slowly in consolidating the leadership of the Board.<sup>44</sup> Blake's own gracious letter after his resignation suggests this fact when he observed to Harper that "[i]t was only due to Mr. Ryerson from every point of view that he should be selected for the place, and I trust that the denominational friends will fully understand the case."<sup>45</sup> During these crucial months Harper himself pondered his own confessional standing within the Baptist community, having been accused of heresy for his modernist textual analysis of the Bible, and the delay concerning Ryerson may well have been a rather rare case of Harper proceeding

44. Alonzo Parker reported to Harper in late October 1890 that he had been assailed by angry Baptist ministers worried about the fact that Ryerson was not a Baptist. He went on to observe, "Personally I do not feel the force of these objections, and I am pleased with what I have seen of Mr. Ryerson. But I should be sorry to arouse criticism at this stage, or what is far harder to meet, a party clamor." Parker to Harper, October 21, 1890, *Correspondence of John D. Rockefeller and His Associates, 1886–1892*, Box 1, folder 12.

45. Blake to Harper, July 4, 1892, *PP*, Box 65, folder 1.

with undue deliberation.<sup>46</sup> Still, Chicago businessmen like Hutchinson and Ryerson had offered their initial support to re-found the University of Chicago in 1890 with the clear understanding that the new institution was not to be a re-run of the first University of Chicago, which meant that it would assume a non-sectarian identity in regard to its educational policies and research programs.<sup>47</sup> That Ryerson was confirmed as President in June 1892 should be viewed as a quiet but notable step in confirming the secular identity of the new University.<sup>48</sup>

46. Gates wrote to H. L. Morehouse early in 1891, referring to Harper's "morbid brooding on his heresies real or supposed." Gates to Morehouse, February 6, 1891, *Correspondence*, Box 1, folder 8. For Harper's problems with orthodoxy, see James P. Wind, *The Bible and the University. The Messianic Vision of William Rainey Harper* (Atlanta, 1987), pp. 107–8; and Daniel L. Meyer, "The Chicago Faculty and the University Ideal, 1891–1929." Dissertation, University of Chicago, 1994, pp. 54–55.

47. Hutchinson made this an explicit consideration in agreeing to offer his patronage to the new institution. Gates reported to Harper in October 1889 that "[w]e have been obliged frequently to disconnect this movement bag and baggage from the old in order to get a respectful hearing. Only today Drs. Goodspeed and Lorimer [were] in conversation with C. L. Hutchinson [,] president of the commercial club (who promises us a hearing before the club next month). [Hutchinson] inquired anxiously if this had anything to do with the old institution in any way. Their assurance that it had *not* unlocked him and the commercial club." Letter of October 23, 1889, *Correspondence of John D. Rockefeller and His Associates, 1886–1892*, Box 1, folder 8.

48. Harper himself realized the ambivalent situation of the Baptists in regard to fund raising. At the end of the canvass of 1892 for the \$1-million building fund, almost all of which came from non-Baptists except for a last-minute contribution from Henry Rust, Harper commented to Gates, "Do you realize the significance of Mr. Rust's gift—a million with almost not a Baptist cent, yet saved by a Baptist gift." Letter of July 10, 1892, *Correspondence*, Box 1, folder 11. Unfortunately, Rust was unable to make good on his pledge, so the \$1-million building fund remained largely non-Baptist in nature, thus confirming the importance of the decision to broaden the confessional audience for the new University.



Personally, Ryerson was a calm, deliberate, and thoughtful person, whom later commentators would remember for his discernment, aesthetic taste, and shrewd business sense. The son of a first-generation capitalist of the same name who made a fortune in timber and real estate, Ryerson was educated in Paris and Geneva and then attended Harvard Law School.<sup>49</sup> Upon his father's death in 1887, he became one of the wealthiest men in the city, but chose to use his wealth to pursue cultural and artistic interests. His knowledge of art was on the level of a connoisseur. His collection of art grew slowly and carefully, and upon his death in 1932 the Art Institute, which he served for many years as vice-president, received a breathtaking collection. It is thus no exaggeration to say that the Institute is enormously indebted to Ryerson and his wife, not only for a spectacular collection of French Impressionists—including five paintings by Renoir and sixteen paintings by Monet—but also for an extraordinary group of Old Master paintings as well, all of which originally hung in his mansion at 4851 South Drexel Boulevard (this is still extant, now owned

49. Ryerson's father was born in 1818 on a farm near Paterson, New Jersey. He eventually made his way west to Grand Rapids and Muskegon, Michigan, where he worked for firms trading with local Indians. He then became a saw mill owner and opened a yard in Chicago in 1851. He soon made a fortune in the lumber trade, supplemented by shrewd real estate investments in central Chicago, as well as in local banks and in the Elgin Watch Company. Although his business interests were in and around Chicago, Ryerson lived in Europe in the early 1870s for several years with his second wife, née Mary A. Campau, who was the younger Ryerson's mother. Mary Campau Ryerson was of French descent, her family having come to Grand Rapids from Detroit in the early 1800s. She seems to have been fluent in French and may have been an influence in the decision to send the younger Ryerson to Europe for secondary schooling.

by the Franciscan Fathers Monastery).<sup>50</sup>

Ryerson immediately made his influence felt at the University in several important policy issues, including the choice of an architect to plan the new campus, and the size and domain of the territory on which the campus would be located. It was Ryerson who guided the deliberations of the Committee on Buildings and Grounds in its choice of Henry Ives Cobb and the design of the first campus master plan, and perhaps equally importantly, it was Ryerson, working in tandem with Hutchinson, who urged that the original conception of the spatial grid of the campus be expanded by acquiring additional territory owned by Marshall Field.<sup>51</sup> Ryerson even put up \$25,000 in cash in 1891 as the major component of the down payment needed to acquire this additional property. At the time other Trustees felt that this expansion was too ambitious and risky, but Ryerson and Hutchinson believed that a larger and more cohesive site would better serve the long-term interests of the University. Similarly, Ryerson was also the key figure in Harper's successful campaign to acquire the Berlin Collection, providing almost half of the money that was pledged and paid for the collection owned by

50. Detailed records of the bequests may be found in the *Martin A. Ryerson Papers*, Box 11, Collection Records, Archive of the Art Institute of Chicago. I am grateful to Mr. Bart Ryckbosch, Archivist at the Art Institute, for permission to review these materials.

51. See Goodspeed, *A History*, pp. 169–73; and, in general, Jean F. Block, *The Uses of Gothic. Planning and Building the Campus of the University of Chicago, 1892–1932* (Chicago, 1983). The original tract donated by Marshall Field was located between 56th and 57th Streets east of Ellis Avenue, which was then immediately supplemented by the purchase of an additional parcel from 57th to 59th Street, also along Ellis. Ryerson's and Hutchinson's intervention extended the University's boundary along the Midway to the full extent from Ellis to University Avenues.

S. Calvary and Company in Berlin in 1891. Overnight this collection transformed our fledgling library into a major research collection, with the University of Chicago coming to have the second largest university library collection in the United States by 1896.

But Ryerson's most significant donations lay ahead. As Harper and Goodspeed urgently sought major gifts from local Chicagoans in the spring of 1892 to actually build the first set of buildings, in a cable from Paris in June 1892 Ryerson notified Harper that he would pledge \$150,000 towards the construction of a building in memory of his father, as part of a million-dollar building drive. Several months later Ryerson decided that his gift would be used to create a physics laboratory.<sup>52</sup> A year later he intervened at an even more critical juncture, offering to provide \$100,000 in cash if other Chicagoans would come up with another \$400,000, a matching fund that, in turn, merited an additional half-million dollars from John D. Rockefeller.<sup>53</sup> Ryerson's intervention was successful—the million was eventually raised. In July 1910, he then contributed an additional \$200,000 to expand and refit the physics building to meet the

52. Ryerson to Harper, June 15, 1892; Ryerson to Harper, November 7, 1892, *PP*, Box 65, folder 22. The process by which individual donors came to be associated with specific buildings was slightly chaotic and only took final shape over the course of 1892. Originally, Marshall Field's gift of \$100,000 was assigned to name the biology building, but it was soon discovered that this would not be sufficient to cover the necessary costs. According to Gates, it was Martin Ryerson and Charles Hutchinson who apparently insisted that the patron of a building had to cover the actual costs of a building. See Gates to Goodspeed, October 31, 1892, *Correspondence*, Box 1, folder 11.

53. *Minutes of the Board of Trustees*, 1890–95, pp. 99, 228–9; Goodspeed, *A History*, pp. 271–2, 276. A major purpose of this initiative was to retire \$400,000 in debt that the University faced in the aftermath of its explosive beginnings. See Harper to Gates, October 23, 1893, *Correspondence*, folder 12.

changing needs of the faculty and graduate students of the department.

Having funded the Ryerson Physical Laboratory, Ryerson also became familiar with the work of its leading scientist and eventual Nobel Prize winner, Albert Michelson. In 1898, Ryerson even invited Michelson to provide him with a list of the sums needed for Michelson's research, and then informed the Board that he would personally cover these costs.<sup>54</sup> He later provided additional gifts to support Michelson's work in 1904, 1907, and 1924. Not surprisingly, Michelson's daughter later recalled that Ryerson took a personal pride in her father's research achievements.<sup>55</sup> Albert Einstein observed in 1952 of Albert Michelson that "I always think of Michelson as the artist in Science. His greatest joy seemed to come from the beauty of the experiment itself and the elegance of the method employed." Does Einstein's appraisal of Michelson help to illuminate why Ryerson, who had the eye of a connoisseur in evaluating artistic achievement, was impressed with the work of this great scientist? Reciprocally, one of Michelson's most powerful avocations was as a painter, so much so that his daughter would later argue that "Michelson's technique of painting a watercolor was illustrative of his method of attacking a scientific problem." Art and physics—two fields of human creativity that have the capacity to pay special recognition to the powerful pleasures of color and light.<sup>56</sup>

54. Ryerson to the Board of Trustees, September 6, 1898, *PP*, Box 65, folder 22.

55. Livingston, *The Master of Light*, p. 295.

56. See *The Master of Light*, p. 321, as well as pp. 186–87, 250. I owe this reference to my colleague and friend, Peter Vandervoort. Michelson regularly painted watercolors, and later in his life he took formal classes in painting at the Chicago Academy of the Fine Arts. Michelson also enjoyed a longstanding friendship with Ogden N. Rood, another American physicist whose book, *Modern Chromatics*, was influential with the late nineteenth-century French pointillist painter Georges Seurat.

Ryerson's subsequent investments after the start of the First World War were equally critical: a gift of \$250,000 in 1917–18 to help launch the Medical School; and, finally, an additional \$200,000 to create the first endowed chair in the history of the University, which, predictably, was awarded to Albert A. Michelson. That Ryerson's last gifts went to long-term endowment, as opposed to buildings, reflected the all-important fact that by the 1920s the University was finally moving out from under the shadow of Rockefeller's beneficence and seeking independent sources for its long-term operational capital.

Nor was Martin Ryerson's cultural philanthropy on our campus restricted only to the physical sciences, for he also worked to strengthen our library collections and to support the research work of distinguished scholars in the humanities. Beyond his initial support for the acquisition of the Berlin Collection, Ryerson's interest in rare books and manuscripts found continued expression in his acquisition of the famous Sir Nicholas Bacon Collection of early English manuscripts in 1924 and in his purchase of a mid-fifteenth-century codex (the "McCormick Manuscript") of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* in 1930, both acquired on the basis of personal interventions with Ryerson by Professor John Matthews Manly of the Department of English.<sup>57</sup>

Perhaps as important as Ryerson's financial largesse—his total gifts to the University amounted to well over \$2 million, far surpassing

57. See Manly to Ryerson, July 28, 1924, Acquisitions File, Bacon Mss.; and Manly to Ryerson, July 1, 1930, Acquisitions File, Ms. 564. The Bacon Collection is described in *Calendar of the Martin A. Ryerson Collection of Court and Manorial Documents from the Estate of Sir Nicholas Bacon in the University of Chicago Library* (Chicago, 1974). In reference to the Bacon Collection, Manly argued to Ryerson that "[t]he collection would be of enormous value to me personally in my researches in the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries, but aside from and beyond this personal interest is the extraordinary wealth of material and the continuity of the social and economic picture it contains."

Goodspeed's hoped-for \$500,000—was his acute understanding of Harper's educational vision and of the special needs of a university that would devote much of its individual and collective resources to sponsoring original research. This is clear from several speeches that Ryerson gave on various public occasions in the 1890s. On the occasion of the dedication by the University of the Yerkes Astronomical Observatory in October 1897, he argued that the astronomical observatory would demonstrate a "continuing and increasing usefulness." How so? Not only would the new facility serve powerful instrumental purposes, but it would also enhance the analytic ideals of science as well: "In an age when so much of the ability and energy of the community is devoted to the advancement and the improvement of material conditions each new agency for upholding the ideals of life through the cultivation of science for its own sake has a usefulness of the highest order." Ryerson thought this reconciliation of the two forces—practical and ideal—possible and necessary: "Let us by all means be practical if we can, at the same time [let us] broaden our conception of the meaning of the word, so that it may include that development of the intellectual side of life, without which any improvement of material conditions is absolutely vain."<sup>58</sup> Similarly, on the occasion of the Decennial celebration in June 1901, he insisted that the progress of the University in moral and intellectual domains was part of a larger sweep of progress that characterized modern life itself, and he took pleasure in the fact that "the world is as ready to respond to earnest and devoted work in moral and intellectual fields as it is to efforts put forth for material gain."<sup>59</sup>

58. *University Record*, October 22, 1897, p. 247

59. *Ibid.*, June 28, 1901, p. 104.

At the same time, in defending the intrinsic value of research, Ryerson was opposed to a conception of the University as isolated from society. On the occasion of the dinner meeting of the University congregation in February 1897, Ryerson spoke on behalf of the Trustees. The audience included alumni of the University, and the occasion called for what might nowadays be called outreach. Ryerson argued that the new kind of education that was now called “higher” must penetrate every stratum of society, where it should shape and prepare mankind for the “duties, the trials, and the pleasures of life.” Having posited a link between the intrinsic power of higher education and the improvement of human life, he then argued that the University community would do well to continually engage the world:

It follows from this measuring of methods by results that while the problems of education must be solved by educators, those problems must be stated and the solutions verified by life itself, not alone the life of the scholar, nor that of any class of a community, but human life in its broadest sense.<sup>60</sup>

He then argued that this dialogic process made it imperative for the University to stay in touch with the world around it:

the experiences and educational needs of all should be brought to the knowledge of educators, the practical as well as the intellectual and spiritual requirements of mankind should be made known by contact with the world which will test theories by practice and direct educational energies in useful channels. . . .

60. *Ibid.*, February 26, 1897, pp. 579–80.

The value and influence of a university are therefore dependent upon a reaction upon it of the life of the community.

Speaking explicitly on behalf of the Trustees, Ryerson placed special importance on the University remaining open to outside criticism and information:

A close succession of business and academic control will promote the continuous and systematic progress of an institution, but that control can only retain its vitality and usefulness by keeping in contact not only with the progress of modern thought, but also with the changes in modern life, and that very continuity and that concentration of management make it the more necessary that such management should be kept open to outside advice and criticism. We shall welcome through this body, which we hope will contain a constantly increasing circle of men and women who have gone forth from The University into the different walks of life, such advice and criticism.

If Martin Ryerson was the quiet, deliberate man with great leisure and with the financial resources to dedicate himself to his passions, Ryerson's regular dinner companion, close friend, and ally Charles Hutchinson was a perpetual motion machine of civic leadership activities. Like Ryerson, Hutchinson was the son of an early Chicago capitalist, Benjamin Hutchinson, who made a fortune in the stockyards and grain trade. The friendship of the two men, which was further strengthened by the parallel friendship of their wives, took on remarkable forms of social and philanthropic tourism. Hutchinson's private diary, which is on deposit at the Newberry Library, provides a charming if cursory record of



some of the world excursions the two couples took together. Just as they traveled together, they collected art together as well.

Yet, if Hutchinson's life shared parallels with Ryerson's, there were differences. He was a joiner, an enthusiast, and an advocate, involved in a hundred different causes, although he was no closer to the tycoon mentality that Veblen thought was characteristic of the typical Board member than was Ryerson. He was also self-educated—a recent biographer has described him in his youth as a “sensitive, intelligent, bookish, deeply religious boy who wanted to go to college but acceded to his father's wishes and went into the family business instead.”<sup>61</sup> Hutchinson's social causes were as varied and numerous as his contacts and causes in Chicago society: the Commercial Club, the World's Columbian Exposition, the Relief and Aid Society, Hull House, the Chicago Orphan Asylum, and the Chicago Public Library. He also found time to support Harriet Monroe's efforts to found *Poetry* magazine. His greatest civic role was to serve as the President of the Art Institute, to which Ryerson became a principal patron. Named President of the Art Institute in April 1882, Hutchinson's credentials as a civic booster of the arts were well established when the appeal for the new University started later in the decade. Hutchinson played a foundational role toward the Art Institute not unlike that he subsequently provided to the University. From a small, orphan-like establishment in 1882, upon Hutchinson's death in 1924 the institute had already joined the front ranks of American art museums.

Hutchinson's theories about the importance of art in society paralleled Ryerson's views on the social utility of science. An ardent social progressive, Hutchinson believed that the Art Institute had a responsibility to elevate the taste and sensibilities of the masses. In an early

61. Schlereth, “Big Money and High Culture,” p. 19.

lecture, “Art. Its Influence and Excellence in Modern Times,” Hutchinson appealed to the socially therapeutic power of art by suggesting that

[a]rt awakens the imagination, quickens the conscience. . . . Art has to do directly with morality. The beautiful refines. Perfect art suggests perfect conduct. We need not destroy our passions and desires, but to master and refine them. . . . But above all let us urge the claim of art to a place among us, if for no other reason than this: That in the midst of this busy material life of our day, she may call upon us to halt, and turn our thoughts away from so much that is of the earth earthy, and lead us to contemplate those eternal truths which after all most concern the children of God.<sup>62</sup>

Eager to spread this gospel of aesthetic revival, Hutchinson pushed the board of the Art Institute to open its doors with free admissions on Sundays and supported the idea that the museum building be located in the middle of the city, not in an isolated park. As Kathleen McCarthy has pointed out, it was also owing to Hutchinson that the Art Institute developed a socially inclusive, outward-looking notion of who should be its proper audience. She writes that

[a]rtisans, blue- and white-collar workers, visitors from the country, and wealthy art patrons all appeared in the museum’s halls, a fact which delighted Hutchinson, who made daily visits and constantly kept tabs on attendance records. With his

62. “Art. Its Influence and Excellence in Modern Times,” *Saturday Evening Herald*, March 31, 1888, p. 3.

usual ebullience, he declared that the Art Institute was over-active, overhospitable, overcrowded with passing exhibitions and students, but at least it was alive.<sup>63</sup>

Hutchinson's personal philosophy was happily untypical of most business leaders of the late Progressive Era. Hutchinson once quipped that "[t]he state has a right to demand from a man not only part of his money, but also a tithe of his thought, his time, and his life. Everybody should put into the city in which he lives as much as he gets out of it."<sup>64</sup>

Commuting between the Art Institute and the University, Martin Ryerson and Charles Hutchinson exchanged roles, or, perhaps more accurately, adopted roles most appropriate to their personalities and the needs of the time. At the Art Institute, Hutchinson was president and Ryerson nominally the vice-president but, in fact, one of its chief artistic patrons. At the University, Ryerson was the President, with Hutchinson serving as Treasurer and as Chairman of the Committee on Buildings and Grounds, a standing committee of the Board. In this latter capacity he exerted strong, vigilant guidance over the quality of the architectural proposals for new buildings. Hutchinson's enthusiastic jottings to Harper in April 1900, as he toured Oxford University looking for "great ideas" for the cluster of buildings that would be built at the corner of 57th and University (including the new commons, which he financed and which is heavily indebted to the great hall at Christ Church, Oxford), confirmed his early conviction that

63. McCarthy, *Noblesse Oblige*, pp. 88–89.

64. Quoted in Henry Justin Smith, *Chicago. A Portrait* (New York, 1931), p. 304.

[t]his city of ours would be richer, filled with a higher intellectual life, had we more beautiful surroundings, monuments of art, buildings stored with books and paintings and sculpture. So that on every hand something should suggest high and noble thoughts.<sup>65</sup>

As President Ernest Burton later remembered,

[a]s each of the forty buildings of the University was planned, and finally built, Mr. Hutchinson gave prolonged and intelligent attention to the plans, considering carefully not only the larger matters of style and general structure, but even the minutest of details of arrangement, ornamentation, and furniture. Through personal association with him in this work, I learned how accurate was his judgment, how inexhaustible his patience. He had a keen sense of the influence of architecture on the formation of taste, and a strong desire, happily shared by many of his associates, that what the University built should be so built that it would stand and be worthy to last. He built for a long future.<sup>66</sup>

65. "Art. Its Influence and Excellence in Modern Times," as well as Hutchinson to Harper, April 4, 1900, *PP*, Box 65, folder 12.

66. Ernest D. Burton, "Charles L. Hutchinson and the University of Chicago," in *Charles Lawrence Hutchinson, 1854–1924* (Chicago, 1925), p. 24. Ryerson too was deeply involved in architectural oversight. As late as 1920, Harry Pratt Judson would use Ryerson's close involvement with the plans for Rockefeller Chapel as a way of reassuring John D. Rockefeller, Jr.: "I may add that Mr. Ryerson has spent a great deal of time with the architect in working on these plans and the artistic and practical adjustments are, we think, very complete." See Judson to Rockefeller, December 3, 1920, *PP*, Box 10, folder 22.

Ultimately, the greatest service that Ryerson and Hutchinson provided to the new University was as intellectual and cultural leaders of the Board. As the President of the fledgling Board of Trustees, Ryerson especially exercised two great virtues. First, Ryerson's own substantial philanthropy, combined with his personal prestige and civic legitimacy, set a powerful example for other influential and wealthy Chicagoans to do likewise. But he also exercised a second role as well, one that was intimately related to what I have described as the hinge function of the Board. Ryerson's steady hand as President of the Board was manifested locally in his governance style—low key, conciliatory, deeply respectful of Harper and the senior professoriate. By necessity Ryerson also became a kind of personal ambassador for Harper and thus one of the latter's agents to Rockefeller in New York. That Rockefeller both trusted and had great respect for Ryerson's steadiness and prudent judgment may be one of the modest yet vital elements in our early history that has not been sufficiently acknowledged.

As President of the Board, Ryerson's role was thus crucial in steering a cautious path though Harper's endless craving for money and Rockefeller's endless worries about that craving. Officially, and for the record, Ryerson never failed to emphasize to Harper that the University had to live within its means. In February 1894, Ryerson cautioned Harper that "I hope there will be no delay in the effort to raise money for the University, it is the most pressing matter which the Trustees have to consider at the present. I think we shall all experience considerable relief when the institution is out of debt."<sup>67</sup> When Gates wrote a frustrated, angry letter to Goodspeed about the recurring deficits in early 1897, Ryerson carefully associated himself with the former's position,

67. Ryerson to Harper, February 28, 1894, *PP*, Box 65, folder 22.

chiding Harper that “I am very glad that Mr. Rockefeller is to keep so clearly in touch with the work of the University and shall welcome any restraint that our financial condition renders wise. . . . In my opinion we have progressed so far towards the beginning of the new year that we must avail ourselves of Mr. Rockefeller’s offer to loan money to meet the deficit but I think that we should not contemplate a continuance of a policy of borrowing for that purpose and should at an early date trim our sails to meet the situation, unless we have very good assurances that Mr. Rockefeller intends to place us in a position to continue on the present scale.”<sup>68</sup> He also urged Harper to maintain simplicity in university organization—Ryerson was suspicious of too many specialized ruling bodies and administrative layers that might encourage political strife in the University.<sup>69</sup> Moreover, the general policy of the Board under Ryerson’s leadership after the first several years of radical expansion was to exercise more careful supervision over new expenditures, especially after 1898.

At the same time, the Board under Ryerson was loath to undertake fundamental retrenchment strategies, and as Frederick Gates himself was forced to point out in a confidential memo to Rockefeller in 1897, there was in fact a sound rationale for *not* engaging in capricious amputations. Gates ruminated that

Most universities are the result of growth begun with a central germ or nucleus, they have developed year by year, gradually taking on new features as means have commanded and the times demanded. The history of the University of Chicago is

68. Ryerson to Harper, March 7, 1897, *ibid.*

69. Ryerson to Harper, February 23, 1896, *ibid.* For the context of this observation, see Meyer, “The Chicago Faculty and the University Ideal,” pp. 208–9.

altogether different. It is more like the erection of a building. Ground plans were laid on a scale scarcely less than the ideals of the architect of what the perfected building should be, and that perhaps, without being deterred by a close question of economies and expenses. The building has gone up from the foundations to the roof on this general scale. What we have now may be fairly estimated to be the cost of a fairly complete University—excluding the applied sciences, law, medicine, and technology. When you come to the question, therefore, of retrenchment, you are confronted with the idea of tearing down your building, with reference to saving heat, light, and service, and after all comparatively minor expenditures. You may take the budget and scrutinize it from beginning to end, and the moment you attempt to retrench you will find that you cannot do it at all, or at least do it to any appreciable extent, without simply dismembering the institution. . . . In other words, the expenses of the institution as to-day organized are not only imperative, but it is also, and likewise, utterly impossible without practically destroying the institution to make any such material increase as will save this deficit. However unpalatable this fact may be, it is nevertheless the cold truth. The institution simply cannot retrench. It can close, it can go out of business but to retrench within the limits of this enormous deficit is simply to shut up shop. The fact is that the University is one whole. Every part is dependent on the other parts. It is like a living organism and any attempt at change of its present basis, involves all of the frightful wastes of amputation and disease.<sup>70</sup>

70. "General Observations," pp. 9–11, *PP*, Box 10, folder 14.

If the University's financial structure was overextended, it was thus because of the massive initial growth of the institution, especially in the years 1892 to 1898. Frederick Gates acknowledged as much in 1897 when he observed that the deficit had arisen "in part on ground of inadvertence and in part on the ground that policy of erecting beautiful and costly buildings and of securing numerous and expensive corps of instructors."<sup>71</sup>

Nor were the members of the Board of Trustees unaware of what they had done and how and why they had done it. During a crucial conference on the annual budget with Gates in February 1897, Goodspeed sought to defuse the Trustees' and Harper's responsibility by arguing that the whole problem was one of good, indeed great intentions coupled with faulty planning: "I am speaking of the original plans upon which the University was organized, these plans having involved all that the University now costs for its current expenditures. I mean, for example, that when the President [Harper] conceived the idea of the Biological Department and added it to the original plan of the University, he, himself, had no conception of what it would cost, nor did the Trustees have any conception of it as they were in charge of a wholly new enterprise, whose origination and history is entirely without a parallel."<sup>72</sup>

Yet in his private, unpublished memoirs Goodspeed offered a more nuanced and far less generous interpretation, confessing that he too had felt ambivalent about his friend's budgetary tactics, but had gone along out of loyalty to Harper:

71. "Report of [a] Conference between Messrs. F. T. Gates, T. W. Goodspeed, and H. A. Rust, with reference to The University of Chicago, February 10, 1897," p. 2, *PP*, Box 33, folder 10. Gates was repeating an explanation which Ryerson and Harper had provided Rockefeller and himself in 1893.

72. *Ibid.*, pp. 15–16.



It sometimes seemed as though Dr. Harper was deliberately forcing the Founder's hand and had adapted this as a thoroughly considered and permanent policy. It led to very unhappy consequences for Dr. Harper, as will appear later in this narrative, but I do not think the question can ever be decided. The matter made something of a breach between Dr. Harper and me. But I would not like to say that he consciously adopted the policy of rapid expansion with the deliberate purpose of forcing the Founder's hand and extorting from him ever increasing millions, although this was in fact the result of the policy pursued. . . . Did Dr. Harper pursue the really wise course? Was the method of extorting gifts from the Founder by what seemed like compulsion the best method? Was this the only way in which the great immediate success and growth of the University could have been attained?<sup>73</sup>

We also know from Ryerson's and Hutchinson's own correspondence with Harper that they were keenly aware of their leader's spending habits: In January 1896, Hutchinson cautioned Harper, "Don't let all this good fortune lead you astray. Go slow."<sup>74</sup> Similarly, in March 1900 Ryerson warned Harper against the temptation to construct new buildings on the basis of "inadequate gifts," urging instead patience and the construction of temporary facilities "outside of the Quadrangles" that might later be used for other purposes.<sup>75</sup>

73. "Reminiscences," pp. 300–301.

74. Hutchinson to Harper, January 26, 1896, *PP*, Box 65, folder 11.

75. Ryerson to Harper, March 18, 1900, *PP*, Box 65, folder 22.

Ryerson was also aware of Rockefeller's and Gates's expectations that new gifts go toward eliminating the deficits rather than continued expansion. At a budget conference in New York in December 1898, Ryerson made a firm commitment to use new, locally generated funds to try to eliminate deficits, and not to expand programs: "So far as there is any opportunity of directing the application of the gifts to the University, the policy of the Board now is to provide for work already being done by the University rather than for any expansion of the work." But he went on to assert that this journey to the promised land of budgetary equilibrium was not likely to occur in the near future: "I think the Board has in mind the importance of that fact and any delay in making efforts has been caused by the hopelessness of doing anything [on the fund-raising front] rather than through [the] forgetfulness of the Board. It is now planned to renew the efforts at an early date."<sup>76</sup> Ambition, not deception, was ultimately at work here.

Still, in spite of these forthright and well-meaning commitments, there is no evidence—*pace* Starr Murphy's suspicions—that Ryerson and his colleagues seriously sought to curb Harper's proclivity to envisage new programs and to seek new opportunities. It was not until the summit meeting of late December 1903, where a decision was taken in Rockefeller's personal offices in New York that the deficit must be curbed, that Harper was finally called up short.<sup>77</sup> Even then Ryerson defended Harper to Gates, suggesting that "[i]t is difficult . . . to keep Dr. Harper from

76. "Conversation between President W. R. Harper, Mr. Martin Ryerson, Maj. H. A. Rust, Mr. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. and Mr. F. T. Gates on the Budget of the University of Chicago for 1899–1900 and Collateral Questions, December 5, 1898," pp. 31–32, *PP*, Box 10, folder 14.

77. Frederick Taylor Gates, *Chapters in My Life* (New York, 1977), p. 196; Storr, *Harper's University*, pp. 346–48.

interesting himself in all the details of affairs at the University and in cases where he thinks an emergency exists, from exceeding his authority in connection with them.” Ryerson then added, in a cautionary observation to Gates, “[it] may not be expedient to run the risk of discrediting his proper authority by making it possible and even necessary for employees to question its extent.”<sup>78</sup>

Perhaps Ryerson’s willingness to play a kind of middleman between Harper’s buoyant ambition and Rockefeller’s and Gates’s ongoing worries about money reflected the fact that he appreciated and took pride in Harper’s compelling, if all-too-expensive educational vision. His and Hutchinson’s extensive correspondence with Harper reveals a profound interest in the intrinsic and unique quality of the University—in one of his earliest letters to Harper, Ryerson urged that “we cannot set our aims too high nor plan too broadly the future of the University.”<sup>79</sup> Similarly, Hutchinson would write proudly to Harper in January 1892, congratulating him on having recruited both J. Laurence Laughlin and William G. Hale from Cornell: “Do not see how we could have done better. Indeed, we are to be congratulated in securing two such men as Hale and Laughlin. I have no fears of the future of the University. Listen to my ‘fatherly’ advice and go right on in the lines already adopted and success will attend your efforts.”<sup>80</sup> Ryerson also understood that Rockefeller and Gates had allowed themselves to become profoundly implicated in the

78. Ryerson to Gates, November 10, 1903, The Rockefeller Archive Center, New York. I am again grateful to Carol Radovich of the Rockefeller Archive Center for sending me a copy of this letter.

79. Ryerson to Harper, July 18, 1892, *PP*, Box 65, folder 22.

80. Hutchinson to Harper, January 3, 1892, *PP*, Box 65, folder 11. See also Meyer, “The Chicago Faculty and the University Ideal,” pp. 87–88.

success of that vision, all protests at annual budget meetings notwithstanding. For a patrician like Ryerson, the protestations of a legal hired gun like Starr Murphy were ultimately irrelevant unless they reflected a profound and lasting alienation on the part of Rockefeller, which was not likely to take place. Indeed, if anyone played the role of a Veblen-like “businessman” in these transactions, it was Starr Murphy, not Harper and his business friends on the Board of Trustees.<sup>81</sup> Given the fact that their own natural and professional instincts were to follow the straight and narrow path of budgetary probity, it was all the more remarkable that Ryerson and Hutchinson were willing to accord to Harper an unusually broad range of flexibility and trust.

Indeed, Ryerson, Hutchinson, and their fellow Trustees served the University well by being discreetly and stubbornly caught in the middle. These were able, tough-minded businessmen and civic leaders, but either from personal commitment to Harper’s vision of the wonder of a new, major university in the West or from a deep civic pride that wanted to get Chicago as much university as Rockefeller could be lobbied into paying for, they served the University by not doing what Starr Murphy argued they should have done, namely, clamp down on their enthusiastic, fast-talking President. According to Goodspeed, Gates insisted that

81. One of Murphy’s prescriptions for budgetary economies in the area of faculty salaries should be mentioned in this regard. Rather than reward deserving faculty members with regular salary raises and promotions, thus increasing the University’s deficit, he suggested that the University organize its faculty like the Army did its officer corps—so many generals, colonels, captains, all at fixed salary levels and in a predetermined number of slots. Neither time in grade nor distinguished service *per se* would merit one either a promotion or a salary increase unless a slot opened up, and since the number of higher slots would be controlled, the need for substantial salary increases would be avoided. Report of February 9, 1905, pp. 26–27.

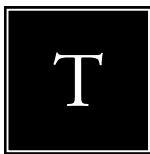
Rockefeller would have given as much, if not more, money and would have done so “not only more happily, but more freely, more rapidly, and more largely” if Harper (and the Trustees) had only been forthright by consulting him beforehand about their expansionist plans.<sup>82</sup> Harper clearly felt otherwise, and acted accordingly. In the end, it was Rockefeller who had to solve the deficit problem with several massive additional gifts to the endowment between 1906 and 1910, concluding with Rockefeller’s final donation of \$10 million in December 1910. These gifts essentially capitalized the structural deficit and allowed the University to bring order to its financial affairs without compromise to its scholarly reputation or educational quality.<sup>83</sup> I would argue that Rockefeller’s final gift was a logical, although certainly not inevitable, outcome of the Board’s neither-nor strategy. Having started the University with Rockefeller’s money, having then contributed sizable sums of their own, and having further prevailed on Rockefeller for still more massive annual contributions to cover the structural deficit along the way, the Trustees

82. “Reminiscences,” pp. 301–2.

83. Between 1906 and 1907, Rockefeller contributed \$3.7 million in additional endowment support: \$1 million in January 1906 for the 1906/7 fiscal year and another \$2.7 million in January 1907 for the 1907/8 fiscal year. This was followed by another \$1.54 million gift in January 1908 and an additional gift of \$928,000 in January 1909. See *Minutes of the Board of Trustees*, 1904–07, pp. 350, 478; *Minutes of the Board of Trustees*, 1907–09, pp. 149–50, pp. 309–13. Judson noted in his annual report for 1908–09 that “[t]he gift by the founder in January of one million dollars for endowment, to take effect July 1, 1909, will, it is expected, in the next fiscal year wipe out the last of the recurring annual deficits.” *The President’s Report. July 1908–July 1909* (Chicago, 1910), p. 5. In mid-December 1910, Rockefeller then announced a \$10-million concluding gift that would be paid in \$1-million installments over the next ten years, beginning January 1, 1911.

viewed the Founder's final gift both as a sign of the need for fiscal penitence and of the good grace of a friendly providence. Rather like the great Dominican preacher Johann Tetzel, who awarded the famous plenary indulgence of 1517 and thus merited Luther's wrath, the great man at 26 Broadway now pronounced to the Trustees: having solemnly repented, your sins are forgiven; go forth now and live in budgetary probity and sanctity.<sup>84</sup>

### C O N C L U S I O N



The preceding narrative suggests that Thorstein Veblen was, in fact, wrong. Whereas Veblen expected businessmen to interfere with the autonomy of the university and to impose commercial values to the detriment of pure learning, in fact Ryerson and Hutchinson tried to do just the opposite, by breaking down the forces that might lay behind these oppositions. Still, lest my final set of comments be seen as an invitation to us to resume the pattern of deficit financing that was a chronically happy feature of the first fifteen years of

84. Harry Pratt Judson is usually portrayed as the stern budgetary disciplinarian who gave confidence to Rockefeller that the deficits would end. Notwithstanding Judson's strictness in these matters, this view has to be qualified by the fact that most of the budget balancing between 1906 and 1910, as it related to the structural deficit *per se* and not to incidental expenses, was owing to Rockefeller's continued largesse. Hence, plausible budgetary security only came in the aftermath of the final, magnificent gift of 1910. Moreover, by the early 1920s Judson's conservative fiscal propensities may have harmed the University's capacity to sustain a first-rate research enterprise. See Meyer, "The Chicago Faculty and the University Ideal," pp. 392–93, 396, and Jones, *Harold Swift*, p. 24.

the University's history, let me say that this is not a tale for the future, since John D. Rockefellers are rather rare birds, perhaps the kind who come once in a millennium. Nor, in fact, do we really need a second John D. Rockefeller. Because of the resilient institutional and scholarly base that the early Trustees had helped to put in place by 1906–07, and by virtue of their cooperation and mediation, the University not only merited Rockefeller's final gift of \$10 million, but that gift in turn launched an astonishing subsequent growth in the endowment over the next twenty years, from \$15 million in 1910 to almost \$60 million by 1930. The "final" in Rockefeller's 1910 gift signified Rockefeller's intention that he was concluding his support, but the word also expressed his profound hope (and expectation) that "this great institution, being the property of the people, should be controlled, conducted, and supported by the people, in whose generous efforts for its upbuilding I have been permitted simply to cooperate."<sup>85</sup>

The late-nineteenth-century Chicago civic elite represented on the Trustees—the University's "outside nobility," in the apt phrase of Frederick Gates—thus played a critical, constitutive role in the foundation and formation of the University, so much so that it is difficult to imagine the success of Harper's daring venture without their patient leadership and careful mediation. If that leadership appeared to outsiders like Starr Murphy as rather too subdued and too deferential toward

85. So too did the Trustees, both as a matter of general policy and as a bow to the conditions for future successful fund raising. The University's business manager, Wallace Heckman, observed in 1924 that "[a]s to incurring a deficit, it would be contrary to the fixed policy of the Board, and would it not also be unfortunate, in view of the proposed campaign, to have to admit that our request [for new money] is in part for money already spent?" Heckman to Thomas Donnelley, April 9, 1924, *PP*, Box 10, folder 16.

Harper, perhaps that made it all the more effective, combining as it did an ardent civic boosterism, a belief in the pragmatic values of scientific research, great generosity with their own fortunes, and an unusual capacity to accept risk and, at the same time, exercise political common sense.

Moreover, if Harper in 1902 could praise his first Board of Trustees, led by Martin Ryerson, for having had the wisdom to leave the academic affairs of the University to the sole and exclusive control of the faculty, later generations of Trustees have continued to affirm that wise and necessary tradition. Temptations to the contrary have clearly been evident, and not always at the instigation of the Trustees. For example, internecine feuding between the College and Divisional Faculties over the abolition of the Ph.B. in 1946 resulted in the highly problematic decision of the Council of the Senate to lodge a formal appeal to the Board of Trustees in March of that year. Luckily, cooler heads soon prevailed and a compromise was crafted among the faculty itself. In the end, most Trustees have adhered to the position taken by former Chairman of the Board Laird Bell, who suggested in 1956 that

Trustees had best bear in mind that they could not be a college faculty, and that they should keep their hands off education. This is a sound doctrine but it must be asserted with discretion. Every man thinks he is an educator. By hypothesis your trustee joined the Board because he thought he was interested in education. He will resent being told to keep his hands off the most interesting part of the activity. . . . Trustees cannot abdicate *all* concern with educational matters. Logically the Trustees as the controlling body have the right—in fact the duty—to determine what kind of education shall be offered. As custodians of the property and the funds, they are bound to



see that these are devoted to the purposes for which they were given. . . . But once overall policy is determined it ought to be true that the educational experts should determine how the policy is to be implemented.<sup>86</sup>

Such a view, which suggests that Trustees can share fully in the purposes and values of the University, but also respect a crucial “division of labor” that serves those larger purposes well, was amply demonstrated and valorized by the work of Ryerson and Hutchinson.

Burton’s wonderful line about Charles Hutchinson is worth repeating—“he built for a long future.” Such might be said of all the leaders of the founding generation, and the University they created—dedicated to collegiate liberal education, distinguished scientific research, and service toward society—was so well built that it brilliantly exploited the many challenges that we encountered in our exciting, but also stormy, twentieth century. I cannot help but think that Ryerson and Hutchinson, McLeish and Walker, and all their colleagues would think very well of the generosity of alumni like Max Palevsky, Andrew Alper, Gary Hoover, and Peter May. For they too are building for a long future.

May we enter our third century with equal boldness, with the same vibrant conviction of the value of new knowledge, and with the same unbending dedication to our venerable mission of educating young and old alike in the many virtues and pleasures of liberal learning.

I wish you an exciting and auspicious academic year, and, as always, I thank you for your wonderful work on behalf of the College.

86. Laird Bell, “Excerpts from the Trustees’ Corner,” *Association of American Colleges Bulletin*, October, 1956, quoted in Donald R. Belcher, *The Board of Trustees of the University of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia, 1960), p. 26.





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