Guide to the Butler-Gunsaulus Collection 1527-1915
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Descriptive Summary

Identifier ICU.SPCL.BUTLERGUNSAULUS

Title Butler-Gunsaulus. Collection

Date 1527-1915

Size 3.25 linear feet (7 boxes)

Repository Special Collections Research Center
University of Chicago Library
1100 East 57th Street
Chicago, Illinois 60637 U.S.A.

Information on Use

Access
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Citation
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Historical Note

During the first decades of the twentieth century, American rare book and manuscript collecting became a fashionable pursuit that offered intellectual and cultural satisfactions as well as the camaraderie of fellow devotees. Chicago's Caxton Club, founded in 1895, along with informal social gatherings, provided an opportunity for bibliophiles to share their love of books. A group of collectors who regularly haunted the rare book section of Alexander C. McClurg's bookstore were dubbed "Saints and Sinners" by humorist Eugene Field, one of the regulars. Among the clerical members of the group was Frank Wakeley Gunsaulus (1856-1921), who was perhaps the most notable Chicago collector to contribute rare books, manuscripts, and autographs to the early University of Chicago.

Born in Chesterville, Ohio, Gunsaulus came to prominence as the minister of the socially prestigious Plymouth Congregational Church of Chicago. Gunsaulus extended his reputation as a powerful preacher and earned extra money to support his book and manuscript collecting by conducting summer lecture tours across the country. Influenced by deep religious principles, Gunsaulus, like other culturally conservative reformers in America and in Europe, hoped that a robust program of philanthropy could alleviate, if not eliminate, the worst aspects of modern life. One outlet for Gunsaulus's cultural and social revisionism was his own personal crusade to create new, more egalitarian educational institutions. In an address to his Plymouth Church parishioners, he proposed founding an institute of technology that would be open to all qualified students seeking technical training. Inspired by Gunsaulus's idea, meatpacking magnate Philip D. Armour put up the needed money to launch the Armour Institute of Technology in 1893, an institution Gunsaulus served for the rest of his life as president (and which later became the Illinois Institute of Technology). Gunsaulus assumed a second academic position in 1912, when he was appointed Professorial Lecturer on Practical Theology in the University of Chicago Divinity School.

For Gunsaulus, collecting and reading antiquarian books and manuscripts was another way to escape the materialism and immorality of modernity. Eugene Field's story, "The Temptation of Friar Gonsol," written in 1889, recounts how Friar Gonsol (Gunsaulus) and Friar Francis (Frank W. Bristol) were tempted by a rare book. Gunsaulus believed that, confronted with the power and aesthetic appeal of texts from the past, readers would naturally be encouraged to renew themselves intellectually and spiritually. The aged pages of a manuscript had an almost magical power to recall a world where values such as chivalric honor were still meaningful. Nor was this journey back in time to be the privilege of a wealthy few. Gunsaulus saw it as his personal mission to provide manuscripts and rare books to the University of Chicago, so it could become a present-day repository of the creative achievements of past centuries. Visitors to the University Library, "weary of vulgar and soul-destroying success" and pining for a return to "knightly devotion to what often seem lost causes in politics, society, church, and state," would gain enlightenment from viewing his gifts.

Despite his loyalty to the Armour Institute, Gunsaulus reserved his most valuable gifts for the University of Chicago, prompting library administrator J.C.M. Hanson to dub him "the patron saint of the University Libraries." In 1910 Gunsaulus gave the Library a large number of early American manuscripts, letters, and autographs (eventually known as the Butler-Gunsaulus
Collection). Two years later, he began to donate medieval and Renaissance manuscripts and early printed books, his most significant donations coming between 1915 and 1917. In these two years, Gunsaulus presented a manuscript of Boccaccio’s Genealogia deorum gentilium (1385-87), and early printed editions of Augustine’s De civitate dei (1470) and Cicero’s De officiis (1470). Gunsaulus also donated a copy of the St. Albans Chronicle (1481), still regarded as one of the finest specimens of early English typography in the United States. Gunsaulus concluded his gifts to the University in 1917 and 1919 with additional fifteenth-century books and the proof sheets for Felix Mendelssohn’s oratorio Elijah, annotated by the composer. (Building for a Long Future: The University of Chicago and Its Donors, 1889-1930, 2001)

**Scope Note**

Series I of the Butler-Gunsaulus Collection contains 340 American and European manuscripts, letters and autographs from the sixteenth through the twentieth centuries. Most are American and date to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Among the authors are John Adams, William Cullen Bryant, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Desiderius Erasmus, Horace Greeley, Washington Irving, Andrew Jackson, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, William Henry Seward, Frederick Douglass, George Washington and the Marquis de Lafayette. The documents are arranged alphabetically.

Series II contains engravings from many unidentified sources of historic persons and events.

**Related Resources**

The following related resources are located in the Department of Special Collections:

http://www.lib.uchicago.edu/e/spcl/select.html

**Subject Headings**

- Adams, John, 1735-1826
- Bryant, William Cullen, 1794-1878
- Clinton, DeWitt, 1769-1828
- Emerson, Ralph Waldo, 1803-1882
- Erasmus, Desiderius, d.1536
- Greeley, Horace, 1811-1872
- Irving, Washington, 1783-1859
- Jackson, Andrew, 1767-1845
- Jefferson, Thomas, 1743-1826
- Madison, James, 1751-1836
- Seward, William Henry, 1801-1872
- Washington, George, 1732-1799
- Lafayette, Marie Joseph Paul Yves Roch Gilbert Du Motier, marquis de, 1757-1834
- Douglas, Stephen Arnold, 1813-1861
- Douglass, Frederick, 1818-1895

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Armstrong, John, to John Nicolson - August 11, 1788
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Armstrong, John, to Simon Snyder – August 6, 1914
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