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Descriptive Summary

Identifier  ICU.SPCL.OLDUOFC
Title  Old University of Chicago. Records
Date  1856-1890
Size  15.75 linear feet (17 boxes)
Repository  Special Collections Research Center
University of Chicago Library
1100 East 57th Street
Chicago, Illinois 60637 U.S.A.

Abstract  The first University of Chicago, a Baptist school, was incorporated in 1857 on land donated by Senator Stephen A. Douglas. The University closed in 1886 due to financial difficulties. The records contain records of the Board of Trustees, and faculty, matriculation records, catalogs, student publications, and other historical materials, including two scrapbooks.

Information on Use

Access
The collection is open for research.

Digital Images

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Historical Note

The institution known as the Old University of Chicago was originally established as the University of Chicago in 1856 on a ten-acre tract of land donated by Senator Stephen A. Douglas. A Baptist school, the University was constantly plagued by financial difficulties and was forced to close in 1886. At its final meeting in 1890, the Board of Trustees changed the name of the institution to the Old University of Chicago so that the new Baptist school being organized as a completely separate legal entity might be called the University of Chicago.

Douglas had first offered the property at Cottage Grove Avenue and Thirty-Fifth Street to the Presbyterian Church for a university, but when they failed to raise the $100,000 he had stipulated, he conveyed the site to a group of Baptists. While the charter required that a majority of the members of the Board of Trustees be Baptists, the school was nondenominational in character, applying no religious test to either faculty or students. Its name notwithstanding, the university was primarily collegiate and vocational in nature with two hundred to five hundred students enrolled annually in preparatory, collegiate, law, and medical schools.

The new institution began almost immediately to encounter financial difficulties. Douglas’ connection with the Kansas-Nebraska Act, regarded as a betrayal of the anti-slavery cause, proved a liability in fundraising, and the financial panic of 1857 rendered most of the initial subscriptions worthless. Nonetheless, the trustees proceeded with construction projects beyond the school’s means, and debt mounted rapidly. The president, J. C. Burroughs, and the trustees succeeded in securing new subscriptions, but just as it seemed that the institution might reach solid financial ground, the Chicago fire of 1871, followed by the panic of 1873 and the fire of 1874 plunged it into financial peril once more.

Administratively, the university’s situation was equally chaotic and disagreements over fundraising, financial management, and faculty appointments escalated into open strife among the trustees. President Burroughs and his most vocal opponent, trustee W. W. Everts, were persuaded to resign, but the trustees created for Burroughs the post of chancellor and made him responsible for the school’s financial affairs. Conflicts among the trustees, the president, and the chancellor continued, with administrators arriving and departing in rapid succession.

Union Mutual Life Insurance Company, the university’s chief creditor, brought suit in 1881 to foreclose the mortgage on the university’s property that it held. In January 1885, the court found in favor of the company. The trustee’s hope of redeeming the property proved illusory: the university closed in the autumn of 1886 and the main building was razed in 1890.
Scope Note

The records of the Old University of Chicago have been divided into five series, corresponding in general to the parts of the institution that generated them:

Series I: Board of Trustees. The Board of Trustees, governing body of the university, was a self-perpetuating corporation of approximately forty members. Most of the trustees were Chicagoans, and the charter required that at least one-half be Baptists. The Board’s authority was financial and administrative. Responsibility for most decisions was delegated to the eight- to twelve-member executive committee that met with greater frequency than the Board. A standing committee on finance and ad hoc committees (on resolutions and on eulogy, for example) met as necessary.

The extant records of the trustees include the minutes of their meetings (1856-90), which often incorporate detailed financial statements and copies of significant correspondence. Some of the trustees’ resolutions and reports to the Board from subcommittees are extant in their original form. The Board’s financial records include subscription lists, correspondence relating to payment or default of pledged contributions, and correspondence and legal documents pertaining to donated properties, as well as letters of quitclaim from some of the Old University’s creditors at the time the new school was being organized. Materials regarding the buildings and grounds include some of the architect’s specifications for the construction of Douglas Hall (1863). Minutes of the executive committee comprise a separate volume.

Series II: Faculty. The faculty of ten to fifteen professors and tutors met regularly under the chairmanship of the president to make decisions regarding instructional policy and student discipline. Minutes of these meetings exist for the years 1872-86. The lack of presidential papers, as such, in the collection is probably due to the fact that the president tended to act collegially with the executive committee of the Board of Trustees in financial and administrative decisions and with the faculty in academic affairs.

Series III. Registrar. One of the faculty members generally served as registrar. Matriculation records kept by the registrar (1866-86), as well as university catalogues (1859-84, 1886), are among the records.

Series IV. Student Affairs. Records of student affairs include incomplete runs of the student publication, Index Universitatis, and its successor, The Volante, invitations and programs for commencement and class day exercises, and programs and records of the student literary societies, especially the Athenaeum Literary Society. Alumni directories and alumni reunion programs are also included in this series.
Series V. Historical Materials. Among the miscellaneous materials in the records are: a history of the university (ca. 1889) by W. W. Everts, trustee; two scrapbooks (1856-66, 1876-90) compiled by Edward Goodman, Chicago newspaper publisher and trustee of the second university, consisting primarily of newspaper clippings concerning the university, along with some memorabilia; a checklist of pre-fire publications of the university, compiled by Douglas McMurtrie; and a file of newspaper clippings concerning the university, 1875.

The Records of the Old University of Chicago remaining in the custody of the institution’s last secretary, O. W. Barrett, at the time of his death (1893) were deposited with Thomas W. Goodspeed, secretary of the new university. These records form the core of the present collection in the University Archives. They have been supplemented over the years by donations of material from alumni, as well as from former faculty members and trustees.

Other resources on the Old University of Chicago in the University Archives include: The Papers of the Baptist Theological Union (1865-1924) and of the Baptist Union Theological Seminary (1867-1892); photographs (faculty, students, buildings) in the archival photographic files; a student term paper, "The Architecture of the First University of Chicago," (1948), by Peter H. Selz, typescript, 13 pp.; a student term paper, "The Old University of Chicago," (1941), by Arthur A. Azlein, typescript, 71 pp.; and "History of the First University of Chicago, 1856-1886," written by an alumnus, C. H. Koenitzer, ca. 1927-28, typescript with sketches and photographs, 85 pp.

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
• University of Chicago (1857-1886)
• University of Chicago -- History
• Baptist universities and colleges
• Baptists -- Education

INVENTORY
Series I: Board of Trustees

Box 1
Minutes, 1856-90 (1 vol.)

Box 2
Folder 1
Minutes, April 7 & 8, 1874, October 12 & 19, 1885
View digitized documents. http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/scrc/md/olduofc-0002-001

Box 2
Folder 2
Founding documents, 1857

Box 2
Folder 3
Resolutions, 1874, 1886
View digitized documents. http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/scrc/md/olduofc-0002-003

Box 2
Folder 4
Reports to the Board, 1859-1885

Box 2
Folder 5
Miscellaneous internal correspondence
View digitized documents. http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/scrc/md/olduofc-0002-005

Box 2
Folder 6
Executive Committee minutes, 1856-65, 1874-82 (1 vol.)

Box 2
Folder 7
Construction and maintenance
View digitized documents. http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/scrc/md/olduofc-0002-007

Box 2
Folder 8
Stewards’ and matrons’ contracts

Box 2
Folder 9
Financial reports to the Board, 1869, 1874, 1875, 1885
View digitized documents, part 1. http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/scrc/md/olduofc-0002-009a

Box 2
Folder 10
Fundraising appeals
View digitized documents. http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/scrc/md/olduofc-0002-010

Box 2
Folder 11
Subscription lists and pledges, 1857-1885
Box 2
Folder 12
Colgate bequest to University & Baptist Theological Seminary, 1869-1872

Box 2
Folder 13
Payment/default on subscriptions: correspondence

Box 2
Folder 14
Uncollectible subscription coupons
View digitized documents. http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/scrc/md/olduofc-0002-014

Box 3
Folder 1
Titles to donated property

Box 3
Folder 2
Correspondence re: donated property

Box 3
Folder 3
Transcript of Record, Mary Hill v. University of Chicago, 1867

Box 3
Folder 4
Bills

Box 3
Folder 5
Letters of quitclaim from creditors, 1889-90

Box 3
Folder 6
Addresses and Appeals in Behalf of the University of Chicago, 1867
Box 3
Folder 7
Miscellaneous manuscript material: speech notes, correspondence, and schedule

Box 3
Folder 8
In the United States Circuit Court, Northern District of Illinois: The Union Mutual Life Insurance Co. vs. the University of Chicago; bill to foreclose, Pleadings and Abstract of Testimony, 1884

Box 3
Folder 9
In the United States Circuit Court, Northern District of Illinois: The Union Mutual Life Insurance Co. vs. the University of Chicago; bill to foreclose, Argument for Complainant, 1884

Series II: Faculty

Box 3
Folder 10
Minutes, 1872-1886

Series III: Registrar

Box 4
Matriculation records, 1866-1886
Volume also includes executive committee minutes, October, 1860, through June, 1865

Box 5
Folder 1
University catalogue, 1859-1860

Box 5
Folder 2
University catalogue, 1860-1861

Box 5
Folder 3
University catalogue, 1861-1862
View digitized documents. http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/scrc/md/olduofc-0005-003

Box 5
Folder 3A
University catalogue, 1862-1863

Box 5
Folder 3B
University catalogue, 1863-1864

Box 5
Folder 4
University catalogue, 1864-1865
Box 5B
Folder 13A
University catalogue, including Rush Medical College and Union College of Law, 1874-1875

Box 5B
Folder 14
University catalogue, 1875-1876
View digitized documents. http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/scrc/md/olduofc-0005-014

Box 5B
Folder 15
University catalogue, 1876-1877

Box 5B
Folder 16
University catalogue, 1877-1878

Box 5B
Folder 17
University catalogue, 1878-1879
View digitized documents. http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/scrc/md/olduofc-0005-017

Box 5B
Folder 18
University catalogue, 1879-1880

Box 5B
Folder 19
University catalogue, 1880-1881

Box 5B
Folder 19A
University catalogue, 1881-1882

Box 5B
Folder 20
University catalogue, 1882-1883

Box 5C
Folder 21
University catalogue, 1883-1884

Box 5C
Folder 22
University catalogue, 1885-1886

Box 5D
Register of students, with courses, 1 v., 1859-1866

Box 5E
Degrees conferred before 1893 by the former University of Chicago and the Baptist Union Theological Seminary, 1 v., undated

**Series IV: Student Affairs**

**Box 6**

**Folder 1**
- Circulars

**Box 6**

**Folder 2**
- Index Universitatis, vol. 1 [sic] (1869) (1 vol.)

**Box 6**

**Folder 3**
- INDEX UNIVERSITATIS, April, 1868; vol.1, no.6 (June 1869); vol. 2, no. 1 (January, 1870)

**Box 6**

**Folder 4**
- Commencement invitations, 1869-1885

**Box 6**

**Folder 5**
- Commencement programs, 1861-1869, 1875-1886
  - View digitized documents, part 1. http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/src/md/olduofc-0006-005a

**Box 6**

**Folder 6**
- Class day exercises: invitations and programs, 1862-1884

**Box 6**

**Folder 7**
- Miscellaneous Invitations and programs

**Box 7**

**Folder 1**
- Index Universitatis, I:1, March 1862

**Box 7**

**Folder 2**
- Index Universitatis, I:2, April 1863
Box 7
Folder 3
Index Universitatis, I:3, April 1866

Box 7
Folder 4
Index Universitatis, I:4, June 1867

Box 7
Folder 5
The Zeta Psi, I:1, June 1866

Box 7
Folder 6
The Volante, V-VI, 1875-1877
• V:1, October 1875
• V:2, November 1875
• V:3, December 1875
• V:4, January 1876
• V:6, March 1876
• V:7, April 1876
• V:8, May 1876
• VI:1, October 1876
• VI:2, November 1876
• VI:3, December 1876
• VI:4, January 1877
• VI:5, February 1877
• VI:6, March 1877
• VI:7, April 1877
• VI:8, May 1877
• VI:9, June 1877

Box 7
Folder 7
The Volante, VII, 1877-1888
• VII:1, October 1877
• VII:2, November 1877
• VII:3, December 1877
• VII:4, January 1878
• VII:5, February 1878
• VII:6, March 1878
• VII:7, April 1878
• VII:8, May 1878
• VII:9, June 1878

Box 7
Folder 8
The Volante, XIV, 1884-1885
• XIV:1, September 1884
• XIV:3, November 1884
• XIV:6, February 1885
• XIV:7, March 1885
• XIV:8, April 1885

Box 8
Folder 1
   The Volante, I:1, January 1872

Box 8
Folder 2
   The Volante, I:2, February 1872

Box 8
Folder 3
   The Volante, I:3, March 1872

Box 8
Folder 4
   The Volante, I:4, April 1872

Box 8
Folder 5
   The Volante, I:5, May 1872

Box 8
Folder 6
   The Volante, I:6, June 1872

Box 8
Folder 7
   The Volante, II:1, October 1872

Box 8
Folder 8
   The Volante, II:1, October 1872

Box 8
Folder 9
   The Volante, II:2, November 1872

Box 8
Folder 10
   The Volante, II:3, December 1872

Box 8
Folder 11
   The Volante, II:4, January 1873

Box 8
Folder 12
   The Volante, II:5, February 1873

Box 8
Folder 13
   The Volante, II:6, March 1873

Box 8
Folder 14
   The Volante, II:6, March 1873

Box 8
Folder 15
The Volante, II:7, May 1873
Box 8
Folder 16
The Volante, II:8, June 1873
Box 8
Folder 17
The Volante, III: 1, October 1873
Box 8
Folder 18
The Volante, III: 2, November 1873
Box 8
Folder 19
The Volante, III:3, December 1873
Box 8
Folder 20
The Volante, III:4, January 1874
Box 8
Folder 21
The Volante, III:4, January 1874
Box 8
Folder 22
The Volante, III:5, February 1874
Box 8
Folder 23
The Volante, III:6, March 1874
Box 8
Folder 24
The Volante, III:6, March 1874
Box 8
Folder 25
The Volante, III:7, April 1874
Box 8
Folder 26
The Volante, III:8, May 1874
Box 8
Folder 27
The Volante, III:9, July 1874
Box 8
Folder 28
The Volante, IV:1, October 1874
Box 8
Folder 29
The Volante, IV:2, November 1874
Box 8
Folder 30
The Volante, IV:3, December 1874
Box 8
Folder 31
The Volante, IV:4, January 1875
Box 8
Folder 32
The Volante, IV:4, January 1875
Box 8
Folder 33
The Volante, IV:5, February 1875
Box 8
Folder 34
The Volante, IV:5, February 1875
Box 8
Folder 35
The Volante, IV:6, March 1875
Box 8
Folder 36
The Volante, IV:7, April 1875
Box 8
Folder 37
The Volante, IV:8, May 1875
Box 8
Folder 38
The Volante, IV:9, June 1875
Box 8A
Folder 1
The Volante, VIII:4, December 1878
Box 8A
Folder 2
The Volante, VIII:5, January 1879
Box 8A
Folder 3
The Volante, VIII:9, May 1879
Box 8A
Folder 4
The Volante, X:2, October 1880
Box 8A
Folder 5
The Volante, X:8, April 1881
Box 8A
Folder 6
The Volante, XI:2, October 1881
Box 8A
Folder 7
The Volante, XI:3, November 1881
Box 8A
Folder 8
  The Volante, XI:4, December 1881
Box 8A
Folder 9
  The Volante, XI:5, January 1882
Box 8A
Folder 10
  The Volante, XI:6, February 1882
Box 8A
Folder 11
  The Volante, XI:7, March 1882
Box 8A
Folder 12
  The Volante, XI:8, April 1882
Box 8A
Folder 13
  The Volante, XII:1, September 1882
Box 8A
Folder 14
  The Volante, XII:2, October 1882
Box 8A
Folder 15
  The Volante, XII:7, April 1883
Box 8A
Folder 16
  The Volante, XII:9, June 1883
Box 8A
Folder 17
  The Volante, XII:10, Commencement 1883
Box 8A
Folder 18
  The Volante, XIII:1, September 1883
Box 8A
Folder 19
  The Volante, XIII:3, November 1883
Box 8A
Folder 20
  The Volante, XIII:9, May 1884
Box 8A
Folder 21
  The Volante, XIII:9, May 1884
Box 8A
Folder 22
  The Volante, XIV:2, October 1884
Box 8A
Folder 23
The Volante, XIV:3, November 1884

Box 8A
Folder 24
The Volante, XIV:4, December 1884

Box 9
Folder 1
Athenaeum Literary Society records, 1882-1886: constitution and by-laws, membership lists, minutes
View digitized documents, part 1. http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/srcrmd/olduofc-0009-001a

Box 9
Folder 2
Literary societies, programs

Box 9
Folder 3
Directories, reunion programs, alumni materials
View digitized documents. http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/srcrmd/olduofc-0009-003

Series V. Miscellaneous Historical Material

Box 9
Folder 4
W. W. Everts, "History of the University of Chicago," (ca. 1889), typescript, 22 pages

Box 9
Folder 5
Historical notes by J. O. Brayman re: donation of the site
View digitized documents. http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/srcrmd/olduofc-0009-005

Box 9
Folder 6
"Advance Checklist of Publications of the University of Chicago, 1859-1871," compiled by Douglas McMurtrie, (1938), 7 pages

Box 9
Folder 7
Scrapbook of Edward Goodman, 1856-1866
View digitized documents, part 1. http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/srcrmd/olduofc-0009-007a

Box 9
Folder 8
Scrapbook of Edward Goodman, 1876-1890

Box 9
Folder 9
Newspaper clippings, 1875

Box 9
Folder 10
Newspaper clippings, twentieth century

Box 10
Folder 1
"The Sleeper," sheet music, 1836

Box 11
Old University of Chicago Ledger, 1862-1863