A Brief History of the Library of Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary

Introduction

The library of Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary has quite a history. What began as a very small collection has grown to include approximately 400,000 items. Despite several relocations, mergers, and some trying times, the library has remained strong, largely due to tremendous faculty support, dedicated librarians, and solid leadership. As you will see, the outstanding library of today was made possible through the support and guidance of many. A brief history of the library collection, its locations, and its leadership is necessary to fully appreciate who/what we have become.

The Collection

The library of Garrett Biblical Institute (GBI) began in 1855, along with the institution itself. In the beginning, the library had approximately $800 worth of books, which were augmented with the temporary access to the professors’ personal libraries, until the collection could be expanded and improved. With the addition of these books, the first collective library of the institution was worth approximately $3,000 and consisted of a small collection of “carefully selected books.” From the beginning, the library accepted donations to enhance the existing collection, and folks were directed to send their items to William M. Doughty in Chicago. As was said in the beginning, “The library [was] in its infancy. By degrees it [was] expected to increase…until it [should] be all that the most zealous student of Bible lore might desire.”

The collection has always been expanding and improving throughout its history. From its meager beginning, the collection steadily increased in size and quality. Very quickly, the institution’s library consisted of thousands of books, all before its tenth year. At the behest of the faculty, the library grew more quickly in the latter part of the nineteenth century. By 1870, the library had collected almost three thousand volumes.

In 1897, the collection was greatly enhanced by the addition of the Deering-Jackson Collection of Wesleyana and Methodistica which had been diligently collected by Mr. Francis M. Jackson in England. This collection of approximately 3,500 items was purchased for the seminary by William Deering, a devoted, generous trustee. This special collection continued to grow with the addition of related materials, including original letters by the Wesleys and early Methodist pioneers.

At the turn of the century, the library had amassed a collection of 13,000 books, but this was quickly enhanced. By 1912, the institution had a collection of about 23,000 volumes. In 1921, the collection had grown to 78,500 items, making the library the supposed sixth largest theological library in world, and the collection had been expanded to include materials from many other denominations and religions. A product of previous years of collecting, a specific religious education section was also added to the library which included current and past curricula. The collection dramatically increased to approximately 130,000 by 1926. By 1928, the library had purportedly become the second largest theological library in the country, containing approximately 165,000 volumes, which included a large selection of missionary materials,
religious education curricula, and denominational items! By the 1930s, the growth was thwarted by financial realities which drastically slowed the expansion of the collection. In fact, faculty were relied upon to donate review copies of books during this time. In 1934, Garrett Biblical Institute merged with the Chicago Training School, and the Gustavus F. Swift Library from CTS became a part of the Garrett library, which increased the collection in numbers and added new subject areas, particularly mission and diaconal studies. By 1939, the library was actively loaning books to those who lived at a distance, including alumni and Methodist ministers. Thankfully, the 1940s and 1950s were a time of recovery, and although the collection suffered during the previous ten years, the next twenty years built upon the collection’s strengths. The newly created Library Guild helped to make this continued expansion possible. In the 1960s, the library continued to expand, both in volumes and periodicals, and included almost 180,000 volumes. When GTS and S-WTS began sharing materials in the late 60s, the collection grew to approximately 215,000. With the merger of GTS and ETS to become Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary in 1974, the library expanded to include even more volumes which were hand-selected by librarians from the ETS/North Central College-Seminary Library and included many materials from the Evangelical United Brethren tradition, bringing the collection to approximately 249,000 volumes. With this merger, the Keen Bible Room with its extensive collection of rare Bibles was added to the collection. In 1977, the library began to collect microfilm, which greatly enhanced the collection, while preserving space. In 1981, a formal agreement between Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary and Seabury-Western Theological Seminary formed The United Library which created a shared, enhanced, and expanded collection. By the end of the 1990s, the collection had grown to almost 300,000 volumes, including a strong curriculum library and growing archives. By 2007, the collection had surpassed 300,000 volumes and continued to strengthen its existing subject areas. In the early 2010s, the collection was bought from Seabury-Western which was moving to another location. This brought a large influx of materials and new subject areas to the current building, including the Hibbard Egyptian collection and many other special, rare materials, specifically a mummy. On May 11, 2017, The United Library was renamed to The Styberg Library in honor of Ernest and Bernice Styberg who have been long-time supporters of the seminary.

The collection has been strengthened by many partnerships and sharing agreements throughout the years. From at 1870, students had access to the Northwestern library which steadily grew and far surpassed the collection of the seminary. By 1890, students had access to the collections of the Chicago Public Library and the Newberry Library. One year later, students access to materials was expanded even further to include the new public library in Evanston. By 1894, this had expanded to include the John Crerar Library in Chicago. By 1921, students were given access to the libraries of six other theological institutions in the Chicago area, giving students access to at least three million volumes! One theological institution is worthy of mention. Western Seminary, which had recently opened across the road, extended its collection to Garrett students. This cooperation continued after its merger in 1933 to become Seabury-Western. Later in the century, the agreements between the Chicago-area theological libraries expanded access even further. This sort of cooperation has only been enhanced through the Association of Chicago Theological Schools and the American Theological Library Association Reciprocal Borrowing Program.
The Buildings

The library has been housed in four different buildings. As the institution moved and expanded, so did the library. Originally housed in Dempster Hall, the library was moved to Heck Hall around 1867. This move provided a designated space for the library, with much room for growth. While the collection had slowly expanded to approximately 2,000 books in its early days, space was at a premium. This new space in Heck Hall for up to 30,000 volumes provided the much-needed breathing room for the collection to continue to grow, while also providing an additional reading room. When Memorial Hall was completed in 1887, the library was moved again. This time, the space was even more commodious and grand, allowing for additional growth as well as the storage of rarer materials in a new fireproof vault. In 1910, this space was further improved with the addition of a fireproof annex. With the completion of the current building in 1924, the library was moved once more to its current location and continued to grow. The addition to the chapel in 1952 created additional space for a reading room and more stacks. In 1961, the Reference Room was named in honor of Dr. Frederick Carl Eiselen who served the seminary from 1902 to 1932, first as professor and later president; likewise, the Reading Room was named in honor of Dr. Charles Macauley Stuart who also served first as professor and later president from 1896-1924. In the early 1970s, a temporary metal building, affectionately called “Volleyhall” because it replaced the volleyball court between Old Dorm and Pfeiffer Hall, was constructed to house the expanding collection. When the United Library was established in 1981, the collections of Seabury-Western and Garrett-Evangelical were shared, with approximately half of the collection at each seminary library. In 1982, significant funding and grants were amassed which allowed for the renovation of the library space. In 1984, the library annex was added to accommodate the ever-growing collection, including locked shelving for archival materials. When Seabury-Western moved from Evanston in the early 2010s, Garrett-Evangelical purchased the Seabury-Western half of the collection and installed moveable shelving to accommodate the large influx of books. Since then, new furniture and upgrades to group study spaces and technology have been made. As always, the collection continues to expand, and The Styberg Library remains one of the largest and premier theological libraries in the country.

The Librarians

For the first seventy-five years of the library, professors served as the librarians, with the occasional appointment of an assistant librarian. The first official faculty appointment occurred in 1880 with Francis Dana Hemenway, a professor of Biblical literature, was given responsibility for the ever-growing collection. Prior to this appointment, no one was officially designated as the librarian; however, faculty likely shared responsibility for the collection and lent their books for use. By 1884, Charles F. Bradley, a professor of New Testament exegesis, had taken over the responsibility for the library. A year later, Charles W. Bennett, a professor of historical theology, was appointed, and he also only served in the position for a year. Thankfully, in 1886, Milton Spenser Terry, a professor of Old Testament exegesis, was appointed as the librarian, and he continued in the position until 1903, providing some stability to the library. During his tenure, assistant librarians who also served as instructors were regularly appointed. In 1904, Doremus Almy Hayes, a professor of New Testament exegesis, was appointed. In 1911, he was assisted by
the experienced Samuel Gardiner Ayers who served faithfully in the library until 1931. By 1929, Ayers was the librarian, and he was assisted by Mabel Frances Gardiner who began around 1924. In 1931, Ayers retired, becoming librarian emeritus, and GBI appointed its first official librarian who was not a faculty member, an alumnus from New York City named Raymond Philip Morris (B.D. 1929). Sadly, Morris only lasted a year. For the next fourteen years, the library was without an official director; instead, Mabel Frances Gardiner served faithfully as assistant and later associate librarian until 1957, for a total of thirty-years. In 1946, Robert F. Beach was appointed as librarian, and he served for the next five years. In 1951, Arthur W. Swann became the librarian, and he served for the next five years. In 1957, Edward Lee Sheppard was hired as the next librarian, but he only stayed for one year. In 1958, Ray R. Suput, a Serbian Orthodox, took over as the librarian, and he stayed for six years. In 1965, John D. Batsel assumed the position of librarian, and he remained in this position until 1977. In 1977, Alva R. Caldwell became the librarian after previously serving as a reference librarian for the seminary for eight years. Caldwell continued as the librarian until 2007. With the creation of the United Library in 1981, Newland Smith became the co-library director with Caldwell. In 2007, Beth Marie Sheppard became the new library director, and she served until 2012. The library has been directed by Jaeyeon Lucy Chung since 2012.

In addition to these librarians, the library has been supported by many others throughout the years, both staff and students. They are too numerous to mention, but they are the unnamed faithful who have labored to make the library the excellent place and resource that it is today. Without their efforts, much would not have been possible.

**Concluding Gratitude**

And so, we give thanks for our rich history and all who have tirelessly striven to make it possible. We look to our history with deep reverence which gives hope for the days and years ahead!

*This brief history was constructed through extensive research in the seminary’s catalogs and bulletins, which date from 1855.

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