

## **EDUCATING *THE LORD'S REDEEMED AND ANOINTED*: THE UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS CHAPEL EXPERIENCE 1868–1894**

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*Institution-sponsored religious activities within American state universities in the nineteenth-century have gone largely unnoticed by higher education historians, although such activities were an integral part of such institutions from their founding. One such case was the compulsory chapel at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign from its origin in 1868 to the demise of chapel in 1894. The first Regent of the University, John Milton Gregory, instituted chapel exercises from the beginning of the institution. Emphasis on chapel began to decline under the leadership of Selim Hobart Peabody, the second Regent. Compulsory chapel attendance ended during the tenure of Thomas Jonathan Burrill, the interim Regent who followed Peabody. Historical lessons to be learned from the University of Illinois experience include the effect of changing student populations on chapel attendance, the limitation placed on faculty schedules by academic work loads, and the effect of leadership's view of the importance of chapel attendance.*

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### **INTRODUCTION**

*RESOLVED. . . that sensible of our dependance on the Divine blessing in the great work in which we are engaged, it should be a standing order of this board to commence each day's proceedings*

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<sup>1</sup>The title of this article, "Educating the Lord's Redeemed and Anointed," is drawn from the speech by Dr. Newton Bateman, Superintendent of Public Instruction for the State of Illinois, given at the University's opening on 11 March 1868. He stated, "Thank God, monopolies of learning by privileged classes, are among the discredited shadows of the past. A new element is henceforth to bear sway in the destinies of these States and of the nation. To the dust must go, and will go, whatever schemes devices or systems refuse to affiliate with or set themselves in opposition to, *the Lord's redeemed and anointed—the People*" (Dr. Newton Bateman, "The Address of Dr. Newton Bateman at the Inauguration of the University," *Some Founding Papers of the University of Illinois*, David Hatch, ed. [Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1967]: 30-31).

by reading of the Word of God and prayer.<sup>1</sup>

On Tuesday, the 12th of March 1867, the Board of Trustees of the Illinois Industrial University met to begin the process of creating a new college on the Illinois prairie. Appointed by the Governor, the Board took their oath of office and sat down to transact the first business of the day. J. C. Burroughs, a trustee from the Chicago area, offered the above motion on behalf of the great work to be undertaken by the board.

That afternoon, the first official decision of the Board of Trustees was enacted. According to the board minutes, the motion was seconded and adopted unanimously. Isaac Mahan, a Baptist minister from Marion, Illinois, was called to the platform and led the Trustees in prayer to Almighty God, in the name of His Son, Jesus Christ, invoking His blessing upon the members individually and upon the enterprise they met to organize. Today, the small institution that began on a March afternoon with the invoking of Christ's eternal blessing is known as the University of Illinois.<sup>2</sup>

The University of Illinois today bears scant religious resemblance to that envisioned and invoked by its pious founders. The rise of secularization as an historical theme of American higher education has obscured investigations of spiritual life and culture that occurred on campuses during the period following the Civil War. Higher education historians Hofstadter and Hardy observe, "There are several major themes that command the attention of the historian of American higher education, but among these the oldest and longest sustained is the drift toward secularism."<sup>3</sup>

Attention to secularization as a theme has distracted many scholars from

<sup>1</sup>*The First Annual Report of the Board of Trustees of the Illinois Industrial University*, (Springfield, Ill.: Baker, Bailhache & Co., 1868) 16. The author wishes to express his sincere gratitude to the following for their assistance in this project: (1) the University Archive staff, especially Bob Chapel for his professionalism in supplying archival information and anecdotes on historical materials; (2) the library staff of The Master's College in procuring necessary interlibrary resources, especially Peg Westphalen and Janet Tillman in this research phase; (3) Kelly Behle for patiently editing and offering constructive criticism.

<sup>2</sup>Winton Solberg, University of Illinois Historian and former President of the American Society of Church History (1986), in his centennial history of the institution, points out the Protestant influence evidenced by the Board of Trustees' first decision. See Winton U. Solberg, *The University of Illinois, 1867-1894: An Intellectual and Cultural History* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1968) 96.

<sup>3</sup>Richard Hofstadter, "Part I—The Development of Higher Education in America." in Richard Hofstadter and C. DeWitt Hardy, *The Development and Scope of Higher Education in the United States* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1952) 3. Space precludes a full discussion of secularization within the American academy. The movement toward secularization in the nineteenth-century is treated in several important works including George M. Marsden, *The Soul of the American University: From Protestant Establishment to Established Nonbelief* (New York: Oxford University, 1994), and George M. Marsden and Bradley J. Longfield, eds., *The Secularization of the Academy* (New York: Oxford University, 1992).

noticing what was occurring in terms of religious life on college campuses during a period of educational upheaval. To muddy the scholarly waters further, the land-grant college movement that emerged from the Morrill Act of 1862, gave birth to a new educational era and institutional-type in American higher education. The institutions created by the Morrill Act, many of which are now the premier campuses of state university systems, have remained largely untouched by historians. Scholarly occupation with the decline of the traditional liberal arts college, rooted in classical learning, and the emergence of the new research university as a paradigm of scientific advancement frequently overshadow histories of the land-grant colleges.

The absence of full investigations has created a distorted historical view that institutions of higher learning were either avowedly secular or decidedly evangelical, depending upon the historian's perspective. This following essay examines historically one aspect of campus religious life, the compulsory chapel, at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in its formative years. The value of such an analysis is that it can provide both a clearer picture of what was happening on American campuses and fill the skeletal structure of student religious life on a state university campus in a period of both religious and educational ferment.

## **THE ROLE OF RELIGION IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY AMERICAN COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES**

### *Early Religious Influences on American Higher Education*

Beginning with the Puritan founding of Harvard in 1636, the relationship between the church and college in American higher education is replete within the corpus of general historical surveys. Historians comment, "Religion is connected indissolubly with the beginnings of American higher education."<sup>4</sup> "The whole number of colleges in the United States not founded by religion can be counted on one hand."<sup>5</sup> Brubacher and Rudy, in their standard treatment of American college and university history, summarize that colonial colleges were founded with the vision of an educated clergy, with Christian thought as the foundation of intellectual activity.<sup>6</sup> Harvard's oft-cited admissions requirement from the "The Laws, Liberties, and Orders of Harvard in 1642" summarizes it well: "Every one shall consider the main end of his life and studies to know God and Jesus Christ, which is eternal life; John xvii.3." Such religious visions of colleges and universities harken back to an

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<sup>4</sup>Clarence Prouty Shedd, *The Church Follows Its Students* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1938) 1.

<sup>5</sup>Donald G. Tewksbury, *The Founding of American Colleges and Universities Before the Civil War, with Particular Reference to the Religious Influences Bearing Upon the College Movement* (Hamden, Conn.: Archon, 1965) 56.

<sup>6</sup>John S. Brubacher and Willis Rudy, *Higher Education in Transition: A History of American Colleges and Universities*. 4th ed. (New Brunswick, Conn.: Transaction, 1997) 6.

era of Christian influence within the academy.<sup>7</sup>

### ***The Place of Religion and the Emergence of the Land-Grant Colleges***

The University of Illinois emerged in the wake of the Morrill Act of 1862. Referred to as the “Land-Grant College Act,” this legislation is frequently seen as the decisive point in the emergence of the state universities.<sup>8</sup> The Morrill Act is the centerpiece of legislation that brought the land-grant college movement into existence by proposing the setting aside of federal land for the financial support of colleges that taught the agricultural sciences and the mechanical arts. Such a proposal was revolutionary: the thrust of higher education had favored the liberal arts and aimed at society’s elites.<sup>9</sup> In spite of its importance, a lack of literature exists on this important educational movement. For the most part, focused historiography of the land-grant college movement appears in only four general treatments.<sup>10</sup>

It is more than a historical curiosity that the author of the legislation, Justin Morrill, did not envision the new “agricultural and mechanical colleges,” or A & Ms as they are commonly known, as heralding in secularization within the state universities and divesting educational power and prestige from the denominations. Arguing on behalf of his legislation, Morrill contended that the church would *benefit* by the expenditures of federal land-grants for the financing of this new type of college. He argued, “Pass this measure and we shall have done . . . something for .

<sup>7</sup>Josiah Quincy, *The History of Harvard University*, I (New York: Arno, 1977) 515.

<sup>8</sup>In a tongue-in-cheek obituary, the Morrill Act of 1862 is cited as the “cause” of the death of the liberal-arts college. See James Axtell, “The Death of the Liberal Arts College,” *History of Education Quarterly* 11 (Winter 1971):339. For a fuller treatment of the origin of the American state universities, see Elmer Ellsworth Brown, “The Origins of American State Universities,” *University of California Publications in Education* 3 (1903):1-45.

<sup>9</sup>The Morrill Act read in part that “. . . by each state which may take and claim the benefit of this act, to the endowment, support, and maintenance of at least one college where the leading object shall be, without excluding other scientific and classical studies, and including military tactics, to teach such branches of learning as are related to agriculture and the mechanic arts, in such a manner as the legislatures of the States may respectively prescribe, in order to promote the liberal and practical education of the industrial classes in the several pursuits and professions in life. . . .” (“The Land Grant Act of 1862,” *Some Founding Papers of the University of Illinois* 54, see Article 4).

<sup>10</sup>These works include Joseph B. Edmond, *The Magnificent Charter: The Origin and Role of the Morrill Land-Grant Colleges and Universities* (Hicksville, N.Y.: Exposition, 1978); Edward D. Eddy, *Colleges for Our Land and Time: The Land-Grant Idea in American Education* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1957); Allan Nevins, *The State Universities and Democracy* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1962); and Earle D. Ross, *Democracy's College: The Land-Grant College in the Formative Stage* (Ames, Iowa: Iowa State University Press, 1942). Bibliographic information is cited in Roger Williams, *The Origins of Federal Support for Higher Education* (Pennsylvania State University: University Park Press, 1991) 2-3. When religious influences are considered, the literature evaporates dramatically.

. . . the better support of Christian Churches. . . .”<sup>11</sup>

Despite the intent of the legislative framer, secularization is often laid at the feet of the Morrill Act:

The larger significance of the Morrill Act lay in the fact that the new practical instruction was placed on par with the liberal arts. In the new state institutions Greek and Agriculture entered the curriculum on the same plane; religious activities were free of sectarian control; there was now a living union between university and public school system. The rise of the new university was marked by a loosening of denominational control over the colonial colleges as well as by the growth just mentioned, with a consequent tightening of the orthodox grip upon the smaller and newer colleges.<sup>12</sup>

Nevins notes that others sought to define the new land-grant colleges by “. . . the exclusion of church or chapel, for state institutions had to avoid the entanglements of dogma. . . .”<sup>13</sup> Reflecting this reality, one committee, debating the merits of a single vs. multiple institutions benefiting from the federal funding produced by the sale of land scrip, concluded,

Such single college must either exclude Christianity entirely, and so be either atheist or pagan, or if it admits Christianity at all it must support that form of Christianity which it admits, with our state fund, and so be a cause of jealousy and wrangling among sects. . . .<sup>14</sup>

Yet in spite of such debates and tensions, religious life did exist on these campuses in the early years of the land-grant movement. Edmond notes that compulsory chapel in some form existed at nearly all land-grant institutions.<sup>15</sup> The chapel exercise in one such college prior to the period of secularization furnishes the substance of the remainder of this investigation.

## THE CHAPEL EXPERIENCE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS

### *Background and Founding of the University of Illinois*

The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign was chartered in February, 1867. Birthed in the aftermath of the Morrill Act, the Illinois Industrial University,

<sup>11</sup>Justin S. Morrill. *Speech of Hon. Justin S. Morrill of Vermont on the Bill Granting Lands for Agricultural Colleges; Delivered in the House of Representatives, April 20, 1858* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Globe Office, 1858) 14.

<sup>12</sup>Shedd, *The Church Follows Its Students* 6.

<sup>13</sup>Nevins, *The State Universities and Democracy* 82.

<sup>14</sup>Mary Turner Carriel, *The Life of Jonathan Baldwin Turner* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1961) 177.

<sup>15</sup>Edmond, *The Magnificent Charter* 164.

as it was originally called, was to be the land-grant agricultural and mechanical college for the people of Illinois. These people shared a common heritage of Protestantism, Republican roots, and a New England cultural heritage.<sup>16</sup> The denominational composition of the student body was slightly mixed. However, social, political, cultural, and intellectual homogeneity often absorbed denominational differences. Naturally the new institution assumed such a flavor. The history of the University of Illinois has been well-chronicled and numerous general surveys are available to interested readers.<sup>17</sup>

### ***The Period of Formation: John Milton Gregory, 1868–1880***

The leader chosen to guide and direct the new Illinois Industrial University was John Milton Gregory.<sup>18</sup> Recognized by many for his classic educational work, *The Seven Laws of Teaching*, Gregory blended the qualities of a Baptist minister, a seasoned educator, a gifted communicator, and a recognized author.<sup>19</sup> He had previously served as the Superintendent of Public Instruction for the State of Michigan and as president of Kalamazoo College before accepting the responsibility of building the new industrial college. Gregory's evangelical background influenced much of the early character of the institution in its formative years. It would be impossible to consider religious life at the University apart from Gregory's imprimatur. His influence as Regent spanned the years of 1867 to 1880.

Gregory's influence as a religious leader was felt in both his authorship of numerous teaching aids and his advocacy for religious education, particularly the Sunday School movement. In addition to *The Seven Laws of Teaching*, Gregory published *How to Teach the Bible* as a teacher training manual.<sup>20</sup> He was a strong advocate for the Sunday School movement, largely due to a personal sensitivity to encroaching secularization in the common school. Such advocacy by Gregory is evident in early promotional literature for the University of Illinois that featured national publications connected with the Sunday School movement on the front page

<sup>16</sup>See Daniel Thomas Johnson, "Puritan Power in Illinois Higher Education Prior to 1870" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1974). For a detailed analysis of student origins and backgrounds, see J. Gregory Behle and William E. Maxwell. "The Social Origins of Students at the Illinois Industrial University, 1868-1894," *History of Higher Education Annual* 18 (1998):93-109.

<sup>17</sup>These include Winton U. Solberg's excellent treatment in his centennial history; *The University of Illinois, 1867-1894: An Intellectual and Cultural Heritage* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1968). Other titles include Alan Nevins, *Illinois* (New York: Oxford University, 1917); Burt E. Powell, *Semi-Centennial History of the University of Illinois*, vol. 1 (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1918); and Roger Ebert, ed., *An Illini Century* (Urbana, Ill: University of Illinois Press, 1967).

<sup>18</sup>For a full biographical treatment of John Milton Gregory's life, see Harry A. Kersey, Jr., *John Milton Gregory and the University of Illinois* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1968).

<sup>19</sup>John Milton Gregory, *The Seven Laws of Teaching*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995).

<sup>20</sup>John Milton Gregory, "How to Teach the Bible," in Alvah Hovey, *The Bible* (Philadelphia: Griffith and Rowland, 1900).

of the University bulletin and promotional materials.<sup>21</sup> An unpublished manuscript entitled "The Sunday School"<sup>22</sup> articulates Gregory's own view of the Sunday School and the intended content of it. In it, Gregory recognized that the Sunday School was to fulfill the Great Commission, was birthed in Reformation ideals, and should maintain commitment to the authority of the Bible. He argued that the Sunday School should comprise seven key teaching components centered on the Word of God.<sup>23</sup> The emphasis of these seven components was content rather than methodology, in sharp contrast to contemporary trends. He placed great emphasis on biblical literacy.

Sermon manuscripts from Gregory's files provide some insight into the Regent's own spiritual thought and, possibly, to chapel content. The brief length of many of the messages suggest they would have fit the time and subject parameters of a University chapel devotional. Sample topics include "Lessons from the Spring Time," dated 14 April 1872, which treats the spring season as a metaphor for life, and "The Christian Elements of Character," a chapel lecture dated 15 September 1872, where Gregory explores character development from a generically Protestant perspective.<sup>24</sup>

Reflections of Gregory's chapel talks invoked a sense of fond memories from his former students. Writing in the historical sketch of the University at the time of the semi-centennial in 1918, Scott observed,

Dr. Gregory had a gift for speaking that enabled him to supplement the influence of class work with a series of chapel talks which impressed the youth of that day to an extent hard, if not impossible, now to realize. "Every University of Illinois student of the '70s will tell you" wrote Ockerson, "of Dr. Gregory's morning chapel talks, those earnest,

<sup>21</sup>"The Illinois Industrial University" I (June 1871), printed by Flynn & Scroggs, Printers and Book Binders, Urbana, Ill., in the Willard C. Flag Papers, 1863-1878 (1/20/7), University Archives, Main Library, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, Ill. These publications include the works of Rev. Edward Eggleston, notably advertisements for the *National Sunday School Teacher* and the *National Series of Lessons for 1871 on the Words of Jesus Christ*; *The Sunday School Record*; the *Sunday School Manual*; and an edited work entitled *The Infant Class; Hints on Primary Religious Instruction*. Additional advertisements were provided for weekly readers entitled *The Sunday Scholar* (for young people) and *The Little Folks* (for children).

<sup>22</sup>"The Sunday School" (ca. 1860), John Milton Gregory Papers, (2/1/1), University Archives, Main Library, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, Ill.

<sup>23</sup>These include a discussion of biblical history from the "Hills of Eden"; a study of the great biographies of Scripture; a study of biblical geography; an examination of biblical antiquities centered primarily on manners and customs; a study of biblical "criticism" or interpretation; a study of theology as the "science of God"; and finally, the plan of salvation.

<sup>24</sup>"The Lessons of Spring Time," Chapel Lecture, 14 April 1872; "The Christian Elements of Character," Chapel Lecture, 15 September 1872, John M. Gregory Papers (2/1/1), University Archives, Main Library, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, Ill. A fuller treatment of the impact and nature of Gregory's chapel messages and homiletic style are found in Kersey, Jr., *John Milton Gregory and the University of Illinois*, 162-65.

kindly appeals with their almost personal challenge to each one of us.”<sup>25</sup>

Numerous undated sermon manuscripts of a briefer nature suggest possible thematic messages provided by the Regent. These include devotional treatments of Luke 12:32 (“Fear not little flock . . .”)<sup>26</sup>; 2 Cor 2:16 (“And who is sufficient for these things”); Isa 40:30-31 (“Even the youths shall faint and be weary . . .”); Matt 13:45-46 (“Again the kingdom of heaven is like a merchantman . . .”); 1 Pet 4:18 (“If the Righteous scarcely [i.e., with difficulty] be saved, where shall the *ungodly & sinner* appear?”); 1 John 4:8 (“God is Love”); Phil 2:9-10 (“Wherefore God also has highly exalted him . . .”); Rom 8:38-39 (“For I am persuaded that neither death nor life . . .”); Matthew 22 (“What think ye of Christ?”); Matt 11:16-19 (“To what shall I liken this generation . . .?”); and Zech 4:6 (“—Not by *might* nor by *power* . . .”).<sup>27</sup> The content and homiletic style suggest that he handled most of the messages in a devotional or expositional manner of a generally thematic nature. Brief exposition was provided without detailed Greek or Hebrew textual analysis, often with an emphasis on practicality, moral virtue, and character development. An illustration of practicality for the student body occurs in a message drawn from Isaiah 40 in which Gregory observes, “The student often grows weary with his long pursuit of learning. . . .” Solberg suggests, and archival material affirm, that the messages in chapel were to encourage the student “. . . to live nobly and emphasized the power of ideals to change lives.” He notes,

Gregory usually officiated at the brief ritual. He offered prayer and led both a responsive New Testament reading and recitation of the Lord’s Prayer. . . . This ceremony was much less distinctly religious than the holy worship which had characterized the antebellum period and still obtained in many colleges. Trustees usually attended chapel when the Board met in Urbana and often spoke; Gregory advised on studies, warned against disorder, and informed his charges about contemporary events. Students themselves frequently gave informal or formal addresses.<sup>28</sup>

Gregory believed in the importance of chapel to the new institution’s general well-being. He argued,

This daily assemblage of the whole body of students is in my estimation one of the most

<sup>25</sup>Franklin W. Scott, ed., *The Semi-Centennial Alumni Record of the University of Illinois* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois, 1918) xi. The student mentioned is John Ockerson, who entered the University in 1869.

<sup>26</sup>Gregory refers to Second Baptist Church, Chicago, 7 August 1870. A possible indicator that this message was preached from this locale.

<sup>27</sup>“Unpublished Sermon Manuscripts,” John M. Gregory Papers (2/1/1), University Archives, Main Library, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, Ill.

<sup>28</sup>Solberg, *University of Illinois* 178. Such themes are replicated today in many Christian colleges that mandate chapel attendance.



important educationary [sic] influences of a general character among us. It affords opportunities for familiar practical lectures on subjects not taught in classes and yet high importance to the formation of character. The general discipline of the University depends largely upon this daily assembly.<sup>29</sup>

From the outset, the fledgling University would be, as Solberg points out, “avowedly Christian but non-sectarian.” That the new University should have a strong Protestant flavor would be expected. Statewide census statistics of Illinois in 1870, just two years after the founding of the University, suggest that there were 722 Baptist organizations, 212 Congregational, 1,426 Methodist, and 595 Presbyterian, not counting other smaller Protestant denominations included in the census enumeration. In contrast, Roman Catholic organizations numbered only 290 statewide and were largely confined to the greater urban areas, such as Chicago, where Catholic immigrants were likely to assimilate. Jewish representation and non-Protestant groups were likewise minimal by comparison.<sup>30</sup> In summary, “The People of Illinois—whose leading denominations were Methodist, Baptist, and Presbyterian—never doubted that the old faith should be perpetuated at Urbana.”<sup>31</sup> However, such religious flavor characteristic of Illinois was generic. Numerous denominational colleges existed within the state which competed for Illinois students, many of which had greater tradition and educational reputation than the new Industrial University. Because of this, it is likely that “. . . the more pious youths avoided what the public regarded as a secular school and went to church colleges.”<sup>32</sup>

Gregory’s religious views and influence prompted stinging rhetoric from his critics. During the school’s earliest history, external attacks against Gregory and the direction of the new university appeared in many Illinois papers, often

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<sup>29</sup>*The Ninth Annual Report of the Board of Trustees of the Illinois Industrial University* (Springfield, Ill.: Weber & Co., Printers for the State, 1878) 10.

<sup>30</sup>Data were derived from on-line sources for general comparative purposes only. United States Historical Census Data Browser, available from <http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/census/>; Internet accessed 6 November 1999; This site is made available with the cooperation and consent of the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR).

<sup>31</sup>Solberg, *University of Illinois* 176.

<sup>32</sup>See *Ibid.*, 179. Similar phenomena exist today. In addition to the students’ religious pietism, parental religious perceptions and affiliation probably factored heavily in the decision to attend a “secular” state university vis-a-vis a church college. Solberg points out that Illinois produced very few students who entered the ministry (less than ten out of 846 graduates in the period ending in 1894). Statistical evidence suggests that by 1885 only two alumni from the Illinois Industrial University had identified themselves as “Clergymen” on occupational registers—0.5% of alumni population (“Statistics of the Alumni of Colleges and Universities in the United States,” *Report of the Commissioner of Education for 1884-1885*. [Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1886] clxxxvi-clxxxvii.)—and this at the time when Gregory’s influence was established. By way of contrast, Illinois Wesleyan had produced 57 “clergyman” or 26% of the alumni population; Knox College had produced 68 clergy alums, or 13% of the alumni population; no data for that period were available from Wheaton College.

originating from a local board member, M. L. Dunlap, who wrote under the pseudonym "Rural." In one case, an Illinois paper editorialized, "The cream of the huge joke which the trustees have perpetrated upon the people of Illinois, is the fact that the Regent and all the Professors in the University . . . are all preachers, not very powerful ones at that. . . . [sic]"<sup>33</sup>

Many early critics felt the new University reflected more of the old guard New England liberal arts college where the ancient languages and professional training (including ministerial training) marked the education of their young people. These antagonists viewed Gregory's efforts at the University as replicating the older collegiate tradition, including religious training and moral development, rather than forging a new type of practical and scientific education in agriculture and mechanical sciences, which would benefit the farm or mechanic's shop.

*The Formation of the Chapel Experience.* From its inception under Gregory's regency, chapels were an integral part of daily life at the new Industrial University. The earliest faculty minutes record that chapel was allotted a fifteen minute slot at 8:15 a.m. in an already very full day. Modern college students would shudder under the work loads prescribed by the faculty. Breakfast was taken from 6:45 to 7:15 a.m. First recitations occurred from 7:15 to 8:15 a.m. After these came chapel (8:15 to 8:30 a.m.), lectures and drill (alternately, 8:30 to 9:30 a.m.), then recitations (9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.). Dinner took place from 12:30 to 1:00 p.m., followed by labor, usually on the campus farm, from 1:00 to 3:00 p.m., then access to the library (3:00 to 6:00 p.m.), supper (6:00 p.m.), and study time (7:00 to 10:00 p.m.).<sup>34</sup> The first student of the University, James N. Matthews, in a letter to his father, corroborates such a schedule.<sup>35</sup> In addition to chapel, students had to attend

<sup>33</sup>John Milton Gregory Papers, (2/1/1), University Archives, Main Library, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, Ill. The editor goes on to identify the theological doctrines of Atonement, Predestination, Election, the Perseverance of the Saints, the Immaculate Conception, Immersion, and Justification by Faith as important, but that scientists and agriculturalist should be included among the college faculty, in addition to "the preachers."

<sup>34</sup>Senate Coordinating Council, Faculty Record, March 13, 1868 to September 13, 1879, (4/1/1), University Archives, Main Library, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, Ill. The aforementioned time table is recorded on 28 March 1868 by G. W. Atherton as secretary (hereafter referred to as the *Faculty Record*). Such a daily schedule appeared to be problematic. Student discipline issues appear at significant discussion levels in the early faculty records—especially absenteeism which precipitated numerous admonishments and expulsions from the Regent and University, respectively.

<sup>35</sup>James N. Matthews (Champaign) to Dr. William Matthews (Mason), 3 October 1868, James N. Matthews Papers, 1868-1872 (41/20/26), University Archives, Main Library, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, Ill. Matthews writes, "I will give you a programme of our daily labor. 7 A.M. three classes recite. 8 A.M. chapel exercises. 9 A.M. three classes one of which is my Latin. 10 A.M. three classes one of which is my Algebra. 11 A.M. farm work. 12 o'clock we have dinner. 1 P.M. Agriculture, which is my class, . . . 2 P.M. Chemistry, . . . 3 P.M. there is a class in Botany and book-keeping, and Algebra. 4 P.M. drill or lecture. From 5 P.M. to 7 P.M. is recreation, from 7 to 9 study hours. This programme is not exact, but as near as I can guess it."

Sunday services in the community along with a Sunday afternoon chapel at the University.

It appears that very early in the institution's history, the chapel period expanded from the initial fifteen minutes allotted by the faculty. By the fall term of 1868, chapel was increased to thirty minutes (8:15 to 8:45 a.m.).<sup>36</sup> To insure prompt attendance, "hall sergeants" were assigned and students were to assemble according to their hall "for passing to the chapel for morning services." Such a march to chapel exercises by the students was memorialized in an alumni poem entitled "The Retrospect of Seventy-Four":

*How sweet t'would be, could we but hear  
Again the bugle call  
Which summon'd students far and near  
Promptly in line to fall*

*We'd march most willingly to chapel now  
Nor grudge the moments spent  
In song and prayer with lecture how  
Withal to live content.*<sup>37</sup>

Though attempts were made to encourage student piety in chapel exercises, and church attendance was expected,<sup>38</sup> local churches failed to welcome the University students. Nathan Ricker, discussing his own experiences as an early graduate observed, "Students generally attended the churches, but were not warmly welcomed there, and no attempts were specially made to interest them."<sup>39</sup>

***The Nature of the University Chapel.*** Faculty were assigned the task of monitoring student absences and excuses related to chapel. Surprisingly, few chapel exemptions are recorded in the earliest years of the institution, in spite of significant student discipline and excuse problems which appear in faculty discussion. The first excuse noted by the faculty record was a request for a student Morris to be excused from chapel and by a parent, Mr. McKinley, to keep his son from chapel ". . . for a

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<sup>36</sup>*Faculty Record*, dated 14 September 1868.

<sup>37</sup>Alumni Association, Class of 1874, "The Retrospect of Seventy-Four," [1914], (26/40/101), University Archives, Main Library, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, Ill.

<sup>38</sup>The faculty determined at the 15 September 1868 faculty meeting ". . . that all students, unless specially excused, be required to attend the religious service of Sabbath afternoons, & that the morning chapel services for that day be postponed to the afternoon" (*Faculty Record* for meeting dated 15 September 1868). It appears that Illinois initially followed the customary practice of earlier morning chapel before dismissal to area churches that was common in many antebellum colleges.

<sup>39</sup>"The Story of a Life, 1922-26, 1953," Nathan C. Ricker Papers, 1875-1925 (12/2/22), University Archives, Main Library, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, Ill.

time on account of illness.”<sup>40</sup> The next recorded excuse was a Sunday chapel exemption for student Columbia, possibly due to the student's home in close proximity to the University and his father's participation in the local Baptist church.<sup>41</sup> The first hint of compliance problems was recorded at the 25 April 1870 faculty meeting. The faculty passed a motion that “. . . the students who fail in their duties at the Chapel Exercise in Prof. Baker's Dept. will not be allowed to recite in any of their classes until they are excused from or perform such duties.”<sup>42</sup> No additional information is provided. Faculty members also occasionally spoke in chapels; again from the “Retrospect of Seventy-Four”:

*Professor Taft we'll ne'er forget,  
The great uncombed was he.  
Methinks sometimes, I hear him yet  
In chapel, preach economy.*<sup>43</sup>

Chapel also afforded the University the opportunity to communicate business matters and campus-wide information to the students as a community. In one example, the faculty requested that the Regent “. . . explain to the students at chapel the importance of selecting their department of study and urge then the selected departments with their names [sic].”<sup>44</sup> Gregory had advocated that chapel was both beneficial to the kind of discipline and drill the institution sought to cultivate and in unifying the University as a community.

Review of the faculty record in regards to chapel suggests several themes. First, the start and allocated time for chapel in the daily regiment changed frequently in the early years of the institution. Numerous explanations, often within days of

<sup>40</sup>*Faculty Record* for meeting dated 6 December 1869. As a humorous side note, the first student appealing for a chapel excuse, “student Morris,” was likely John Calvin Calhoun Morris, evidently named for the Geneva Reformer!

<sup>41</sup>*Faculty Record* for meeting dated 22 May 1871. The excuse likely refers to student Thomas B. Columbia whose father, Curtis F. Columbia, was a prominent Champaign farmer and merchant who attended the local Baptist church. See “Curtis F. Columbia,” *Biographical Record of Champaign County, Illinois* (Chicago: S. J. Clarke, 1900) 56. Such an exemption appears to be consistent with the *Faculty Record*. At the 10 April 1871 meeting, student “R. R. Salter was excused from attendance at chapel on Sundays and Monday mornings to go home” (*Faculty Record* for meeting dated 10 April 1871). Home for student Salter was in Joliet, Will County, Ill., approximately 116 miles from the University.

<sup>42</sup>*Faculty Record* for meeting dated 25 April 1870.

<sup>43</sup>Alumni Association, Class of 1874, “The Retrospect of Seventy-Four,” [1914], (26/40/101), University Archives, Main Library, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, Ill.

<sup>44</sup>*Faculty Record* for meeting dated 17 October 1870. This request was likely due to the identification of course of study both in student records and institutional promotional literature. At another faculty meeting, it was voted that “. . . the library rules be read in chapel to morrow” (*Faculty Record* meeting dated 29 January 1872).

each other, are possible as to why the time of chapel changed.<sup>45</sup> The frequent changing of start time and allocation suggests that the faculty “fit” chapel around lectures and recitations and not vice-versa.<sup>46</sup> By the early 1870s, chapel time had been returned back to the original fifteen minutes to accommodate academic scheduling. It is interesting to note that reduction of chapel time by the faculty coincides with complaints by students about faculty attendance at chapel. In a humorous jib at the faculty, students ran an advertisement in the student paper stating, “WANTED—The presence of our faculty at chapel exercise in the morning.”<sup>47</sup> Gregory, while on leave, exhorted his faculty to attend chapel as a good example to the students because “the chapel exercises have always constituted in my esteem the central element and chief factor in our system of discipline.”<sup>48</sup>

Second, faculty records say nothing of discussion regarding chapel content or assignment of chapel responsibilities other than who would monitor excuses. Student discipline, class absenteeism, scholarship questions, curricular matters, and committee reports, all appear to dominate agenda items. Records regarding chapel appear as secondary issues, suggesting the University faculty viewed chapel as ancillary.

Finally, in contrast to class and recitations, few excuses are noted for absenteeism from chapel. This further suggests several things. Compliance was

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<sup>45</sup>For example, the chapel time was originally set for 8:15 a.m. and given fifteen minutes time (28 Mar 1868). This was changed in the fall term to 8:15–8:45 a.m., increasing allocation to thirty minutes (14 Sept 1868). The following spring, chapel time was again changed by faculty directive to 8:30–9:00 a.m. (15 Mar 1869). Discussion of chapel times was again conducted at the 5 May 1869 faculty meeting with no change implemented. In the fall, chapel time was again set by the faculty at 8:30 a.m. (10 Sept 1869), but quickly changed five days later to 7:30 a.m. (15 Sept 1869). In January 1870, chapel time was cut down to twenty minutes to allow for the recitation schedule. By November 1871, chapel was back to the original schedule of 15 minutes at 8:15 a.m. (13 Nov 1871). Senate Coordinating Council, Faculty Record, March 13, 1868 to September 13, 1879, (4/1/1), University Archives, Main Library, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, Ill.

<sup>46</sup>This writer concludes that the college faculty probably failed to share the Regents' enthusiasm for the chapel exercises due to overextension of responsibilities. Solberg has observed that Gregory did carry a disproportional amount of institutional responsibility, and it was Gregory who was the strongest advocate for the chapel exercises. Gregory's frequent travels to promote the new university probably left chapel responsibilities to an already extended faculty. While it appears Gregory was present at most faculty meetings where chapel was discussed, the prioritization of chapel by Gregory, coupled with his travels to promote the university, left the faculty with additional responsibilities to maintain. It is certainly possible that the faculty did support the general tenor and purpose of the chapel, but felt its intrusion into already heavy institutional work loads. Further study is necessary to explore faculty perceptions of chapel importance. See Winton U. Solberg “The University of Illinois Struggles for Public Recognition,” *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* LIX (Spring 1966):5-29.

<sup>47</sup>*The Student* (Urbana, Ill., February 1873) 9, (41/8/802) University Archives, Main Library, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, Ill.

<sup>48</sup>Joseph R. DeMartini, “Student Protest During Two Periods in the History of the University of Illinois: 1867-1894 and 1929-1942” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Ill., 1974).

either not a problem, an unlikely proposition given what was known of other universities at the time, or not enforced, suggesting again low levels of faculty commitment or priority. Academic matters preoccupied the attention of the faculty and the chapel was likely relegated to lower level of importance, especially given the demands of starting a new university.

***The Period of Decline: Selim Hobart Peabody, 1880–1891***

The chapel experience at the University of Illinois under the second Regent, Selim Hobart Peabody, brought changes and challenges to religious life at the University.<sup>49</sup> Peabody's own religious credentials as new Regent raised the ecclesiastical eyebrows of many a local clergymen. His daughter observed,

When my father was recalled to take the Regency of the University, the religious people of the community were more than a little aroused. It was unusual that a man without a clergyman's training and experience, without a clergyman's prestige, should be a college president. The new Regent was a scientist. Was he a Darwinian? Would he countenance infidelity? These and similar questions were put to him many times, and he was at some pains to reply.<sup>50</sup>

Peabody maintained an open pulpit policy in chapel and invited visiting clergymen to speak when religious conferences were held in the local community. Such an open platform afforded visitors the opportunity to decry both the Regent and the lack of religion at the University. Following a chapel, one minister was overheard saying, "I tell you, I have given this godless University a good shaking today."

At the time of Peabody's appointment, chapel absence by the faculty was increasing as an issue on the campus. Editors of the student paper fired a salvo across the faculty deck when they critically observed,

Why do not the professors attend chapel more regularly? Some of their number, it is true, are seldom absent, but a far greater number only appear at long intervals, and a few are not present during the exercises, on an average, twice a year. We think that this is not just as it should be. It is setting an example to the students which, if they should follow, would cause trouble at once. But really, now, we can't see how a professor who has not been to chapel for a whole term can have the heart to pass judgement upon a student who has three unexcused absences in the same time, if a professor has no interest in the chapel exercises and the whole student body of assembled students, we do not know any better way for him to show it than to stay away regularly from chapel. If his work will not allow him to attend all the time, he can certainly gladden the students with his presence at least occasionally. We can assure them all that with their presence the exercises are

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<sup>49</sup>For a uncritical discussion of the life of Peabody, see Katherine Peabody Girling, *Selim Hobart Peabody: A Biography* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1923).

<sup>50</sup>Girling, *Selim Hobart Peabody* 155-156.

more interesting and agreeable than without it. If it were proper to suppose that any of them could understand slang, we would appeal to them mildly to brace up and come to chapel.<sup>51</sup>

To prove their point further, the student editors tracked and published faculty attendance through the fall term of 1880 by identifying each faculty member by name, including number of days present and number of days absent from chapel, beginning on 27 September through 10 December, 1880. Of the fifteen University professors, average daily attendance was estimated at 7.47, approximately one-half the faculty.<sup>52</sup>

To say that the chapel services were problematic to Peabody would be an understatement. Solberg has summarized the challenge of chapel to Peabody's regency:

But the students did become increasingly opposed to compulsory chapel. This inherited program posed a problem with no easy solution. It was still the rule in American higher education. The University of Wisconsin had pioneered among state institutions in making attendance voluntary in 1868. Harvard took the lead among private colleges and in 1886 abolished a chapel requirement which had stood for a quarter of a millennium. The Harvard Chaplain at the time was Francis Greenwood Peabody, a relative of the Regent. In nearly all other schools of higher learning, however, the traditional religious rite remained in force.<sup>53</sup>

The situation at Illinois was becoming increasingly problematic. In summary,

Students found the daily assemblies monotonous and boring. Men still had to form in military ranks and be checked off before marching into the ceremony. Peabody tried to make the specifically religious component brief, and yet it caused grumbling. Critics maintained that a phonograph record could have said the Lord's Prayer more effectively than did the Regent. Even the secular parts of the programs met opposition. The novelty of every senior giving a chapel oration, introduced in 1887, soon wore thin. Occasionally an older speaker informed or entertained, but too often an authority lectured on discipline. And students continually object to the fact that faculty members rarely observed the duty they imposed on their students.<sup>54</sup>

Undoubtedly, one of the most significant challenges to institutionally-

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<sup>51</sup>*The Illini* (Urbana, Ill., 20 October 1880):4.

<sup>52</sup>*The Illini* (Urbana, Ill., 15 December 1880):8.

<sup>53</sup>Solberg, *The University of Illinois* 303. It is more than an interesting historical coincidence that the Chaplain who presided over the demise of Harvard's chapel, and thereby ended an era, was a relative of the Illinois Regent.

<sup>54</sup>Solberg, *University of Illinois* 303-4.

sponsored, compulsory chapel at the University of Illinois was the Foster North affair which erupted on the campus in 1885. North, an avowed agnostic, began a personal boycott of chapel that escalated into a faculty confrontation over chapel non-compliance.<sup>55</sup> The issue quickly moved beyond the perimeters of the University into the Illinois courts. Eventually, the University would be vindicated in its position, but not before the winds of change began blowing across the Illinois prairie. Girling, stating Peabody's view, wrote,

The Regent, while insisting upon chapel attendance, ruled that students who requested to be excused because of religious conviction should have their scruples respected. He made the law out of consideration for the Jews and Roman Catholics in attendance, though none of them, so far as he knew, ever took advantage of it. When, however, there came an attempt to abolish, not only compulsory attendance, but even the chapel service itself, my father maintained and won a sturdy conflict.<sup>56</sup>

Though Peabody permitted excuses for religious objections, North refused such exemption on agnostic grounds, arguing that to receive an exemption he must believe something first. Arguing that he lacked any conviction, he noted that such an exemption would not be possible.<sup>57</sup> Clearly, North sought legal remedy for compulsory chapel rather than the personal exemption which the University was willing to grant. The impact of the Foster North affair would reverberate through Peabody's regency.

Lack of faculty support for compulsory chapel, coupled with the first significant student challenges began setting the stage for the ultimate demise of the chapel experience at Illinois. By the early 1890's, student discontent was finding its expression in chapel disturbances and disruptions—enough to cause the student editors to rally to the defense of the beleaguered exercises. In 1891, they observed the following student behavior,

It is not the business of the ILLINI to do any preaching, but there are a few things, to

<sup>55</sup>For a brief synopsis of the Foster North affair, see Winton U. Solberg, "The Conflict Between Religion and Secularism at the University of Illinois, 1867-1894," *American Quarterly* 28 (Summer 1966):183-99, or Solberg, *University of Illinois* 304-8. For a fuller treatment, see Foster North, *The Struggle for Religious Liberty at the University of Illinois* (Los Angeles: Wetzell, 1942).

<sup>56</sup>Girling, *Selim Hobart Peabody* 157. The "sturdy conflict" is a reference to the Foster North case and its effect on the Regency of Peabody.

<sup>57</sup>North cites the following waiver used for chapel excuse: "WHEREAS, At the daily assembling of the students of the Illinois Industrial University in the apartment called [sic] the chapel religious services are held, to wit, the reading of the New Testament scriptures and the recitation of the Lord's Prayer; and, WHEREAS, Attendance upon the listening to any religious services is repugnant to my religious convictions, and in violation of what I conceive to be my rights of conscience. Therefore, I \_\_\_\_\_, a studenty [sic] of mature age, of said university, respectfully ask of the regent and faculty thereof that I may be excused from attending and listening to such religious services" (North, *The Struggle for Religious Liberty at the University of Illinois* 11).



which we all must plead guilty, the remedy of which will affect certain University affairs like oil does the dry parts of a machine. First of all is the noise and disorder that so often occurs in chapel. Of course we all know that the few minutes spent in chapel, is a very inopportune time in which to read papers, tell stories or display any gymnastic acquirements. We also know that it is very improper to cheer sacred music and very foolish to cheer every little funny remark or plain statement that any speaker may make. The Regent and all other sensible speakers, the band, and the choir would much rather be greeted by thoughtful, appreciative silence and attention. There are times when hearty applause is perfectly reasonable. Let us try to confine our cheers to such occasions.<sup>58</sup>

Evidently, their exhortations went unheeded. In February of the following year they again offered a rebuke to the offending minority.

It is said by wise men that the only way to find out whether a man has any respect for himself, is by observing the manner in which he treats others. If this is true, there are a few among our number who ought to be somewhere else. Such thoughtless clapping of hands, hissing, and promiscuous whispering as has of late been done in chapel by certain students, is thoroughly disgraceful.<sup>59</sup>

In addition to the aforementioned disruptions by the malcontents, fugitive sources suggest that the students glued the Bible shut, "letted eye-water," and set off stink-bombs.<sup>60</sup> Reminiscences by Peabody's daughter of the ". . . smartly atheistical followers of Ingersoll, who had Shavian powers of irritation," reflect on their disruptive powers. She writes,

They posted scurrilous notices on the chapel door. They absconded with the pulpit Bible,—which did not catch the Regent napping, however, because he carried a pocket Testament. They got on Class Exhibition programs (the meetings were held in the chapel) and took delight in shocking the community. And they did no little harm, because they were quoted as representing the University's teachings. They sometimes tried to interrupt chapel service with tramping. The sincere ones among them thought they were fighting a battle for freedom and enlightenment. That their efforts were characterized by bad taste tended to render them futile; they moved by contrary suggestion, arousing religious zeal in opposition. My father forgave much to their youthful ardor because of their sincerity; but they were an unqualified nuisance, as they meant to be. Although comparatively few, they were capable agitators.<sup>61</sup>

Expanding student enrollments by the 1890's created a more religiously

<sup>58</sup>*The Illini* (Urbana, Ill., 17 December 1891):18.

<sup>59</sup>*The Illini* (Urbana, Ill., 29 February 1892):12.

<sup>60</sup>Cited by DeMartini, "Student Protest During Two Periods in the History of the University of Illinois: 1867–1894 and 1929–1942" 142. This researcher was unable to verify these problems from primary archival sources due to document damage and missing materials.

<sup>61</sup>Girling, *Selim Hobart Peabody* 157.

diversified student body than the one encountered in the early years of the institution's history. What began with an enrollment of 77 students in 1868 had expanded to 519 students by 1890.<sup>62</sup> Such diversification diluted the religious homogeneity which had marked the early years of the University.

### ***The Final Demise: Thomas Jonathan Burrill, 1891–1894***

Following the departure of Peabody, the University of Illinois began, as Solberg puts it, “a major transformation,” as the University undertook the task of modernization and movement toward institutional prestige in the window afforded by the resignation of Peabody. Burrill, the third and acting Regent of the University, was no stranger to the University, having served with Gregory as a professor. Burrill's own religious beliefs were not hostile to religion. Burrill himself joined a student Bible study in the early years of the University.<sup>63</sup>

The sweeping changes effected by the acting Regent included the beleaguered chapel exercises. Rather than continue the chapel out of nostalgic sentimentality or collegiate tradition, Burrill recognized the changing winds and set the University on a new course. Compulsory chapel met with a quiet end. Solberg summarizes,

The demise of compulsory chapel, which collapsed at Urbana like the one-hoss shay, also created a better atmosphere. As soon as Burrill grasped the reins he induced the Faculty to terminate the military formation for entering and leaving chapel, a constant source of misdeeds. Without announcing the fact, authorities stopped checking attendance at chapel shortly thereafter, although the University continued to hold a chapel exercise. Members of the Board attended the ceremony as late as May, 1893, and Burrill thought regular student attendance was among the best in the nation. But in the fall of 1893 laboratories, shops, and drawing rooms were excluded from the rule requiring all University rooms to close during the assembly period, and in March, 1894, the Faculty resolved to discontinue the exercise after June. In recommending this policy to the Trustees, Burrill explained that it would permit better use of time for academic purposes in an increasingly large and complex institution. “Other reasons” also lay behind the suggestion, but Burrill never elaborated on this vague phrase. He admitted privately that most students would not miss the rite, and Draper later wrote that chapel came to an end because it had become irrelevant—“really a bore to everybody.” On this pathetic note the University abandoned the ancient practice, and a decline in religious fervor facilitated public acceptance of the act.<sup>64</sup>

## **CONCLUSIONS, AN OBITUARY, AND HISTORICAL LESSONS**

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<sup>62</sup>“Growth of the University by Years,” *The Semi-Centennial Alumni Record of the University of Illinois* lxxxii.

<sup>63</sup>Solberg, *University of Illinois* 180.

<sup>64</sup>*Ibid.*, 375-76.

The termination of the chapel experience at the University of Illinois can be attributed to several key causes. Outside the University, political and social factors brought about by changing values within the academy in general and Illinois specifically contributed to the demise under the general rubric of secularization. While a ubiquitous theme, secularization during the period of 1880 to the turn of the century is well-documented and correlates with the changes experienced at the University of Illinois. The Foster North affair was indicative of such change and inevitable within an expanding state university student population.

Several factors entered into the decline of the chapel from within the University. Gregory's vision of the chapel experience probably was mirrored by his faculty and was not shared with equal passion by his successor, Selim Peabody. Institutional support beyond the first Regent's own beliefs in the value of the chapel experience faded with his resignation. Faculty that might have shared the consensus on the value of chapel exercises were under institutional pressure in a variety of academic and non-academic areas. Further compounding the difficulty was encroaching secularization on the one side and competing denominationalism on the other. The non-sectarian nature of the compulsory chapel experience rendered it vulnerable to change or obsolescence, more so than at institutions that maintained a strong theological vein or denominational heritage.

Solberg offers as a concluding obituary,

Thus had the legacy bequeathed by triumphant Protestantism and the old sectarian college transformed. The changes had been gradual and their full effect lay in the future. Without doubt much of value had been lost in the process.<sup>65</sup>

Perhaps no more fitting epitaph is written than that of Henry Claus, whose 1913 survey of chapel practices records the death of chapel at the University of Illinois. In a terse statement, he writes: "UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS: No chapel services held."<sup>66</sup> Institutionally-sponsored religious exercises were dead, but not without leaving an historical legacy.

Descriptions of the nineteenth-century chapel experience often parallel the problems that plague many Christian colleges with their mandated chapels today. Student resistance to mandatory attendance in the midst of full schedules, levels of chapel formality rooted in bygone tradition and removed from a true sense of worship, faculty indifference evidenced by absenteeism, the desire by some students to "beat the system" evidenced in the excuses devised to conceal noncompliance, and even the occasional "prank" in chapel—all mirror the problems found in the nineteenth century.

Historical lessons for today's educators abound. If the words of the

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<sup>65</sup>Solberg, "The Conflict Between Religion and Secularism at the University of Illinois, 1867–1894" 199.

<sup>66</sup>Henry T. Claus, "The Problem of College Chapel," *Education Review* 46 (September 1913):185.

preacher are true, "There is nothing new under the sun,"<sup>67</sup> then modern educators whose campuses mandate compulsory chapel might consider the lessons of the nineteenth-century Illinois experience. Shifting student demographics and diversity will inevitably bring changes regarding institutional-sponsored religious activities such as chapel. Though many Christian colleges feel a certain immunity to the problems of a public state university, changing student populations are creating a climate that bears some similarity to that which precipitated the Foster North affair. Christian colleges which have loosened, or even abandoned, confessional or doctrinal statements to attract and expand constituencies (often because of financial exigencies) may suddenly find themselves in a predicament similar to Illinois in 1885.<sup>68</sup>

Second, many Christian liberal arts colleges, like Illinois in its formative years, will find faculty who relegate chapel to a lower personal or professional priority due to broad academic responsibilities and extended institutional work loads that prevail in a small college environment. Although faculty may share, and even believe in, the value of the chapel experience, academic workload management frequently militates against participation and involvement.

Third, chapel importance will often follow the imprimatur of the regent, dean, or president. Leadership influence will likely shape not only the purpose of chapel, but its priority as well. The desire to build a campus community may well eclipse spiritual benefits in priority in some leaders' minds. More than one institution has experienced the degeneration of chapel from pious worship and learning to "assembly hall" celebrations or community gatherings for some perceived corporate benefit. On the other hand, leaders who see the spiritual benefit of chapel may use it in its historic antebellum sense. The other danger is replication of the chapel experience as nothing more than nostalgic sentimentality or denominational tradition.

The chapel experience is an integral part of the history of American higher education and worthy of scholarly exploration in the literature. The legacy of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign recalls the opportunities and challenges of the chapel experience and causes reflection on a bygone era within the state universities.

No better summary is available than that of Patton and Field in their aptly titled work *Eight o' Clock Chapel*.

Chapel more than any other spot, *was* the college. Once a day, at least, we became aware of ourselves as a whole. Traditions gathered there and were handed down. Profes-

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<sup>67</sup>Ecclesiastes 1:9 (New American Standard Bible).

<sup>68</sup>The reader is referred to James Tunstead Burtchaell, *The Dying of the Light: The Disengagement of Colleges and Universities from Their Christian Churches* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998). This landmark work does an excellent job of documenting the shift from theological heritage to encroaching secularization within several key denominational institutions.

sors—they attended far better forty years ago—became generally known; student leaders emerged; we went directly from chapel to classroom, . . . the day started with a common center.

Altogether, “Eight O’ Clock Chapel” was an institution not lightly to be esteemed. By faculty and students alike it was recognized as a symbol of college unity and life. The college today which, by reason of its size, lack of homogeneity, or on other grounds, abandons the good old custom, whatever may be the gains, is bound to lose something of vital worth. Why else do graduates ten years out so generally vote in favor of a compulsory system?<sup>69</sup>

Scholars of colleges and churches would do well to remember the link that tied them together and not relegate it to historical misremembrance or scholarly obscurity.

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<sup>69</sup>Cornelius Howard Patton and Walter Taylor Field, *Eight o’ Clock Chapel: A Study of New England College Life in the Eighties* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1927) 201.