A CAMPUS GROWS

The Gift of Vision

Early donors of land, artwork, scientific specimens and books gave the University its physical and intellectual foundation.
When dozens of Native Americans gathered along the Maumee River in northwest Ohio in 1817 to sign a treaty brokered by territorial governor Lewis Cass, their signatures – simple “X” marks, as they were – set into motion the richest custom at the University of Michigan.

By making a gift of land to the fledgling “University of Michigania” in Detroit, the Indians were the first benefactors, beginning a practice that stretches deeper into the institution’s past than the practice of teaching, the sharing of a library, or the granting of diplomas.

For nearly two centuries, philanthropy has shaped the university with gifts of land, artwork, scientific specimens, books and cash. When Wilfred B. Shaw, the director of alumni relations, set out in the early 1930s to catalog the history of giving at Michigan, the result was a 50-page treatise to President Alexander Ruthven about gifts large and small, including three deer heads for the School of Forestry; dynamos for the Engineering College; 100 volumes of Russian history from Grand Duke Alexis; 40 acres of Ann Arbor real estate.
Whether in Detroit or Ann Arbor, gifts of personal property and private wealth led to signature features of the University’s look and feel. Without the native tribes of the Great Lakes region or the business leaders of Washtenaw County, it’s difficult to imagine the path the University of Michigan might have followed.

Native American lands, 1817
Totaling 1,920 acres, the land grant by three native tribes came one month after the founding of the “University of Michigan” in the riverfront trading post of Detroit. Between 1825 and 1936, university trustees sold the parcels to pay off debts and support a small school that had been erected on Bates Street in Detroit. The total return on real estate amounted to $5,880.

Central Campus, 1837
When Michigan entered statehood in January 1837, it spurred the reorganization of the state’s lone university, including a governing board of regents. The university would have three departments of learning: literature, science and the arts; law; and medicine. Tuition was not to exceed $10, and no student would be turned away if he (all students being male until 1871) could not pay.

Most significantly, the University would move from Detroit to neighboring Washtenaw County – a shift triggered by an offer from the Ann Arbor Land Company. While hardly a selfless offer, two tracts were proposed by Ann Arbor’s businessmen; regents voted to accept a 40-acre plot alongside State Street. A sprawl of peach trees, wheat and pasture, the parcel would become the heart of U-M’s campus.

Saginaw Forest, 1903
The Saginaw Forest was neither in Saginaw nor rife with timber when Regent Arthur Hill – he of Hill Auditorium distinction – donated the 80 acres to his alma mater.

With U-M having established a School of Forestry in 1903, Hill felt it important that students have a living laboratory and designated a tract of land 5 miles west of Ann Arbor. The soil was poor and thin, there were few trees and much of the area had been extensively farmed. Still, 80 acres of rural land presented quite an opportunity for the young forestry program; within a year of the gift, 40 species of saplings planted by students and faculty were taking root to complement small stands of oak and hickory.

Hill, one of the state’s most successful lumbermen, lived his entire life in Saginaw, and stipulated that the new forest bear the name of his hometown. Saginaw Forest remains a primary feature of environmental education, and is operated by the School of Forestry’s descendant: the School of Natural Resources and Environment.

Ferry Field gate, 1904
When Detroit businessman Dexter Ferry gave 27 acres to the University of Michigan in 1902, the intent was to provide a playing field for football. Two years later, Ferry supplemented his gift with $9,500 for a brick-and-limestone wall to surround the field. The piece de resistance would be an ornamental gate at the northeast corner of Hoover and State streets.

The wrought iron gate was the design of noted Detroit architect Albert Kahn. While Ferry Field has long since given way to the sprawl of the athletic campus, the gate still stands – albeit in a new location – as a symbol of U-M athletics.

Nichols Arboretum, 1906
Alumni Walter (Class of 1891) and Esther Nichols (Class of ’94) deeded 30 acres of Ann Arbor farmland for a botanical garden and arboretum. Located east of campus and bordered by the Huron River to the north and Geddes Avenue to the south, the land operated as both arb and gardens for about a decade. A separate botanical gardens – an establishment called for by faculty unhappy with the arboretum – was a boon for the arboretum.

The property officially became the Nichols Arboretum in 1923, during a decade that brought numerous plantings and gardens. Today’s Arb is approximately 123 acres.

(One of the Arb’s most popular features, its spectacular Peony Garden, was itself a gift. Dr. William Upjohn, a graduate of the Medical School and founder of the Kalamazoo pharmaceutical firm that would bear his name, was a peony enthusiast. He donated plants from his extensive collection to U-M in 1922.)

Hill Auditorium, 1910
The death of Regent Arthur Hill gave birth to one of U-M’s most iconic and important structures.

Hill’s bequest left $200,000 to build a campus hall “for the gathering of the students and college body, and their friends, on large occasions such as graduating exercises and musical festivals; … I request that it be open to the people of Ann Arbor, among whom I have enjoyed both when a student and during my connection with the Board of Regents a generous hospitality …”

Designed by Albert Kahn, the auditorium originally seated 4,300 guests. With its parabolic interior, the facility has exceptional acoustics – a prerequisite of the Board of Regents when seeking designs. “A whisper from the stage can be heard in any portion of this great hall,” wrote Shaw, the alumni relations director.
In compiling the inventory of early philanthropy, Shaw gave ample credit to early donors, who came forward at a time when the University was still raw and unorganized. These supporters, he said, claimed a kind of ownership of this new place of learning. Providing the tools of learning - scientific specimens, books, telescopes - gave one a stake in the future. “Almost from the first, despite the lack of assistance from the State, the University became an institution of the people. A real sense of responsibility on their part was developed.”

*Brockhaus’ Konversations Lexikon, 1840*

The first recorded gift from an individual came from a well-to-do fur trader who never set foot in Ann Arbor.

Charles W.W. Borup was an educated Dane who wanted to see that his children also experienced the joys of learning. While living in an American Fur Co. outpost in the Wisconsin Territory on the western shore of Lake Superior, Borup persuaded his boss to provide a governess to teach his children.

“You have a family yourself and well know the anxiety a parent must feel for his children’s education,” Borup wrote. Borup and his wife, Elizabeth, had at least six children.

Borup shipped Brockhaus’ *Konversations-Lexikon*, a highly regarded German encyclopedia set, to Ann Arbor, where U-M had yet to offer its first class. But with his donation and several thousand books purchased for the University in Europe by botany professor Asa Gray, the U-M had a solid scholarly foundation in its fledgling library.

The Borup gift can still be found in U-M’s Special Collections Library.

*Detroit Observatory, 1854*

On the day he was inaugurated as U-M’s first president, Henry Phillip Tappan made it clear that for the university to thrive as a true research institution, it needed an observatory. Afterward, when a prominent Detroit businessman asked the new leader how the people of Detroit could help, Tappan was direct: Raise money for the finest telescope possible.

They did. Led by Henry Walker, Detroiter contributed $15,000 to build and equip what would be one of the world’s most advanced observatories. Tappan responded by naming the facility in their honor; the Detroit Observatory stood on a hilltop a half-mile from the northeastern edge of campus.

While medical buildings and residence halls today dwarf the Observatory, its telescope still functions and the building is open regularly for public tours. It sits on the National Register of Historic Places.


*Zoology specimens, 1859*

A graduate of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, Lt. William P. Trowbridge spent all of one year as a U-M faculty member, teaching mathematics in 1856-57. The job was not what he expected – there is no record of what, exactly, he had hoped for – but he left to return to the Army.

Before his year in Ann Arbor, however, Trowbridge was stationed along the Pacific coastline of the United States. In his spare time, he collected thousands of amphibian and reptile specimens, which he donated to the Smithsonian Institution. After consulting with Trowbridge, Smithsonian leaders forwarded the vast collection to U-M; a native of Troy, Trowbridge wanted to specimens to go to his home state.

President Henry Tappan, a vocal advocate of scientific research, was thrilled with the donation, which laid the groundwork for U-M’s Museum of Natural History. “The Regents of the University are thus encouraged to put forth an enlightened zeal in the cause of science, and will endeavor to build up, in this young University of the North-West, a great and well-ordered Museum that shall reflect honor upon the State,” Tappan wrote.

*Collection of iron ores, 1862*

Neither flashy nor exotic, the ores, fluxes and manufactured iron donated during the Civil War were designed for the University’s geology and mineralogy collections.

What was notable were the donors: Eber Ward Owen and Aaron Cone Jewett, both graduates of the University, making their gifts the first ever made by U-M alumni. Owen was an 1860 graduate of LSA; Jewett received his master’s degree two years later.

Since their gifts in 1862, not a year has passed without support from Michigan graduates.
Labadie Collection, 1911
Sentiment compelled anarchist Jo Labadie to give to U-M his remarkable collection of radical literature, materials that chronicled “the struggle of the underdog.”

Labadie was a member of the Socialist Labor Party who also organized the first real labor union in Michigan, the Knights of Labor. He became known as “the Gentle Anarchist” because of his friendly ways.

When he contacted the Board of Regents in 1911, Labadie asked that his archive – rich in advocating anarchy, communism and other radical strains – be treated fairly. He had offered the collection once before, he said, but university officials and faculty “were not yet sufficiently advanced in toleration, the principles of freedom and in knowledge … and that if it were donated then it might be stowed away in some garret and lost probably forever.”

But he wanted U-M to have the collection, because his family had called Michigan home for nearly 200 years and because his daughter, Charlotte, was currently a senior.

President Harry Hutchins assured Labadie his collection was welcome. “The University belongs to the people and is always willing to work for the interests of the people; to do what it can in the way of giving information and in the work of general uplifting.”

The Labadie Collection, part of U-M’s Special Collections Library, today is the country’s oldest collection of radical literature.
The earliest endowed support of students and faculty came from strangers – two New York state women with no connection to each other or to Ann Arbor. What bonded them was their appreciation for U-M’s decision in 1870 to admit women. Their respective gifts began a legacy that has evolved into thousands of endowed chairs, fellowships and scholarships on all three U-M campuses.

*Barbour Scholarships for Oriental Women, 1917*

While U-M admitted its first international students beginning in the late 1840s, it wasn’t until the 20th century that a specific scholarship was available to attract scholars from other countries. Alumnus and Regent Levi Barbour wanted women from Asian nations to experience a U-M education. Originally designated for undergraduates, the Barbour Scholarships began to attract graduate students seeking their doctorates. In 1948, the award became a graduate scholarship, which today is administered by the Rackham School of Graduate Studies.

Barbour’s gift created U-M’s first significant fellowship for international students.

“The idea of the Oriental girls’ scholarships is to bring girls from the Orient, give them an Occidental education and let them take back whatever they find good and assimilate the blessings among the people from which they came,” Barbour wrote to U-M President Harry B. Hutchins.

Barbour had no sisters or daughters, but was adamant about women having equal access to higher education; doing so “would raise the standard of the home and of society.”

Hundreds of women from China, Japan, Turkey, India, Sumatra, Korea, Malaysia and the Philippines have called themselves Barbour scholars.

*Seth Harrison Scholarships, 1895*

A grande dame of the Victorian era laid the groundwork for financial aid to support Michigan students.

Clara Harrison Stranahan – close friend of Andrew Carnegie, founding trustee of Barnard College, arts patron of New York City – led a life of privilege that was preceded by a career as a teacher. “Experienced as an educator, she possessed a strong appreciation of the great value and power of more complete intellectual training for women,” proclaimed the trustees of Barnard College after her death in 1905. “She was a constant champion of our cause.”

Her wealth came via her husband, James S.T. Stranahan, a Brooklyn congressman and business magnate. She had no known connection to Michigan, either state or university. But she apparently appreciated U-M’s decision in 1870 to admit women; in 1889, she contacted President James B. Angell about establishing scholarships for any progeny of her father, Seth Harrison. With 10 children, Harrison’s grandchildren and great-grandchildren could be expected to provide generations of offspring. (Having married later in life, Clara Stranahan had no children.)

She mailed a $25,000 check to Angell in 1895 and placed few additional stipulations on potential scholarship recipients. If a student did not graduate, “some education is far better than none.” Should a student be expelled, any aid would “forever” be moot; however, “genuine repentance and contrition” could revive the support. For those recipients who excelled and graduated, Stranahan provided $50 for each year of their study as a sort of commencement gift.

The Seth Harrison Scholarship was the first to be endowed at U-M, has been awarded to dozens of Harrison descendants, most recently in the 2012-13 academic year.

*Elizabeth Bates Professorship of Diseases of Women and Children, 1898*

Like Clara Harrison Stranahan and a number of early benefactors, Dr. Elizabeth Bates had no connection with the University of Michigan. But she did have a fondness for its actions.

When she died, the New York physician left her estate – “a pile of gilt-edged securities,” in the words of one writer – for U-M to create its first endowed professorship. She specifically wanted the University to support a member of the medical faculty who would educate female medical students in the diseases of women.

A graduate of the Women’s Medical College of Pennsylvania, Bates indicated she was impressed by U-M’s commitment to educating women. By endowing a chair, she asked that University continue to provide medical education to women.

Since 1898, seven physicians have held the Bates chair.
Angeline B. Whittier Fellowship, 1903
When he died in 1903, Saginaw businessman Joseph B. Whittier left instructions in his will that $4,000 be donated to the University to endow a botany fellowship in memory of his mother, Angeline. Whittier attended the University for two years shortly after the Civil War, but never graduated; he went on to become a lumber and salt manufacturer in Saginaw.

Within months of receiving the endowment, the Department of Botany awarded a $200 stipend to the first Whittier Fellow in Botany – Alfred Dachnowski, who would earn his U-M doctorate in 1906. His fellowship came at a time when U-M students spent about $400 a year on classes, housing and meals.

The Whittier gift was one of only a handful of fellowships being established at the University in the nascent days of the 1900s. “Most of the stronger universities have received sums for the endowment of a considerable number of such fellowships, which secure the attendance of brilliant and promising scholars,” President James B. Angell said in 1904 in his annual report to the Board of Regents. “A good many of our most gifted graduates are thus every year called away to other institutions.”

Today’s Whittier Fellowship is awarded to advanced graduate students of plant biology.

Helen Newberry Residence, 1913
At the turn of the 20th century, female students lived in either sorority houses or a scattering of 30-plus private rooming houses in Ann Arbor that were inspected, approved and supervised by the dean of women. While adequate, the system provided few opportunities for women to truly live and work together as scholars.

That changed in 1913 when three siblings – John S. Newberry, Truman H. Newberry and Helen Newberry Joy – offered a gift of $75,000 for a women’s dormitory. They wanted the hall to be named in memory of their mother, Helen Handy Newberry.

Two decades earlier, Helen H. Newberry donated $18,000 for a building to honor her late husband, alumnus John H. Newberry; the result was Newberry Hall, a Richardsonian structure that housed the Student Christian Association. Now, the latest Newberry gift would establish the first residence hall for U-M students, male or female.

Helen Newberry Residence opened in the summer of 1915 and continues to be a women’s hall. It stands along the old Newberry Hall, now the Kelsey Museum of Archaeology.
CHAPTER 5

Culture and Creativity

Where early U-M leaders looked to the state to support “immediate educational activities” such as classrooms and laboratories, they turned to philanthropists for gifts large and small to sustain cultural features. These were aspects of a university that “practical-minded taxpayers” would not necessarily embrace. And yet, Shaw wrote, without libraries, museums, student unions and the like, Michigan “would be an infinitely poorer place spiritually and culturally.”

Nydia, 1861

A life-sized statue was a sight unseen by most Ann Arbor citizens at the start of the Civil War. The gift of Nydia, the Blind Flower Girl of Pompeii, caused such a stir that people queued up outside University Hall and willingly paid a small admission fee to observe the marble sculpture.

Nydia was the work of Randolph Rogers, an Ann Arbor-born sculptor who found success in Rome. “The subject is so beautiful, and the character of the blind flower girl so pure,” he said, “that all who have a heart must feel interested in her.”

That included U-M President Tappan, who vision of a great university included an art gallery. When he saw Rogers’ rendering of Nydia, he knew she needed to be a part of the campus.

U-M faculty and Ann Arbor citizens came together to establish the Randolph Rogers Art Association, raised the $1,700 asking price, and presented Nydia to the University. Still a feature of the U-M Museum of Art, it was the first significant work donated to the University.

Frieze Memorial Organ, 1893

The magnificence of Hill Auditorium is amplified by the majesty of the massive pipe organ that stands at the rear of the stage.

Engineered and built in Detroit, the 3,901-pipe organ was designed for the 1893 World’s Columbian Exhibition in Chicago. Following the great fair, the organ was taken apart, shipped to Ann Arbor and reassembled in University Hall. In 1913, with the opening of Hill, the great organ again was moved.

Its place on the Michigan campus was made possible by the University Musical Society, which appealed to music patrons across the state and beyond to help purchase a great organ for the University. The successful campaign for a pipe organ fulfilled a longtime desire of UMS founder, Henry Simmons Frieze, who also served as U-M’s interim president on three different occasions.

“This organ will become an educational force in the hearts and lives of our young people…. May it touch and thrill their inmost natures…lifting them away from that which is mean and trivial into the clear shining of the ideal,” said Professor Francis Kelsey, one of the campaign’s lead proponents.

Through the years, the Frieze Memorial Organ has been reconstructed and expanded; of its nearly 7,600 pipes, only a handful of the originals remain. But it remains a signature feature of the University’s commitment to music education and performance.

Video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qW9-a0QI72s

Stearns Collection of Musical Instruments, 1899

Frederick Stearns was a Detroit manufacturer who traveled the globe to collect rare and interesting musical instruments. At the turn of the 20th century, he gave his 940-piece collection to the University, and continued to add to it until his death in 1907.

“He was an idealist, a lover of beauty and a born collector,” wrote Albert A. Stanley, the University’s first director of music, who catalogued the pieces. “Representing seventeen years of tireless and energetic labor, (the collection) stands as his most fitting monument.”

The uniqueness of the instruments cannot be ignored: An 1875 porcelain violin from Germany; a rare 11th century Buddhist temple gong known as a mokugyo; a Mexican mandolin crafted from the entire shell of a turtle; a shoko, the first metal instrument introduced into Japan; a double slide trombone, dating from 1823 Paris; and a moose call fashioned from bark by a Mi’kmaq Indian of Canada and used by Stearns himself on hunting trips.

The Stearns Collection has grown to 2,500 instruments, making it the largest assemblage of musical instruments at any North American university.

—Kim Clarke

This article was drawn chiefly from Support of the University of Michigan from Sources Other than Public Funds or Student Fees, 1817-1934, by Wilfred B. Shaw; Encyclopedic Survey of the University of Michigan; History of the University of Michigan, by Elizabeth M. Farrand; “Detroit Observatory: Nineteenth-century training ground for astronomers,” by Patricia S. Whitesell; “Clara Harrison Stranahan: Donor of the Seth Harrison Fund,” by Bethany Lovell Wilson; Catalogue of the Stearns Collection of Musical Instruments, by Albert A. Stanley; Michigan: The Story of the University, by Kent Sagendorph; The Fur Trader and the Indian, by Lewis O. Saum.

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