

## **A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS (1970, Revised June 1, 1983)**

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The history of the University of Illinois is the history of over 250,000 people who have studied, taught and worked at the University and several million Illinois taxpayers who make annual investments in higher education. A democratic, land-grant institution, the University of Illinois is one of the largest state universities in the United States.

John Milton Gregory came to Illinois in 1867 to organize the Illinois Industrial University as the "West Point for the working world." A student of a master educational innovator, Eliphalet Nott of Union College, Gregory devoted thirteen years to fashioning a university on the muddy prairie. Instruction in the liberal arts aroused the hostility of legislators and champions of "industrial education". Attempts at agricultural education proved premature. Most early graduates took the engineering curriculum or entered business. Gregory experimented with student government and brought an academic culture to the Illinois prairies. Most of his students were from nearby counties. Recurring clashes with trustees and students led to his resignation in 1880.

The 1880's brought financial hardship to the institution. In 1885, the Illinois Industrial University became the University of Illinois to indicate the aspirations of faculty and alumni and to avoid confusion with schools for delinquents. Selim H. Peabody struggled to maintain academic standards and sell the University's lands. Peabody's strict policies came under vigorous attacks by students and developing alumni groups. In 1891, the Board of Trustees forced him out of office. Chosen by popular vote after 1887 and representing interested alumni groups, the trustees sought a strong, yet progressive administrator. In a three year search, they offered the presidency to Woodrow Wilson and Rev. Washington Gladden. While they searched, the University began a period of rapid growth under the capable guidance of Acting Regent Thomas J. Burrill. Fraternities, intercollegiate athletics and liberalization of regulations reflected the social values and interests of the students.

In Andrew S. Draper, the trustees found an aggressive exponent of American values schooled in the politics of the State of New York. A successful disciplinarian and legislative lobbyist, Draper continued a building program begun in 1892, hired an able faculty and broadened the University's offerings by adding schools of law, library science and medicine. Beginning in 1889, enrollment, courses and departments began a rapid increase that has continued to the present. After 1909, a similar increase in library resources made the University Library one of the largest in the nation. The agricultural (1888) and engineering (1904) experiment stations called public attention to the University's research interests. In 1899 Dean Eugene Davenport mobilized the state's agricultural interests to put the College of Agriculture on firm footing with a \$150,000 appropriation for a building. With the development of colleges, the deans allied themselves against Draper, who returned to New York in 1904.

Illinoisan Edmund J. James became President in 1904. In the next sixteen years, he made a major contribution to the growth of the University. A master of public relations and legislative tactics, James secured outstanding young faculty in direct competition with other universities and won significant new appropriations from the state legislature. Midwestern state universities all grew at about the same time and rate. James brought the University of Illinois to prominence by the quality of the men he hired and the programs he began. Class rivalries and Bob Zuppke's winning football teams contributed to campus morale.

Long-time administrator David Kinley served as president from 1920 to 1930. A zealous champion of the University, which he fondly referred to as "an oasis of intellectuality in a desert of fertility," Kinley maintained a building program and handled increasing enrollments. The University became known as one of the strongest fraternity campuses in the country. An American response to the social, housing and governance problems accompanying mass higher education, the fraternity system reached a peak in the late 1920's under the guidance of Dean "matriarchal, patriarchal" Thomas Arkle Clark. Kinley's successor, President Harry W. Chase served only three years, but was able to liberalize and revise university statutes and liberalize student regulations.

The severe economic depression and conservative management nearly halted building construction during President Arthur C. Willard's term from 1934 to 1946. The three exceptions were significant. When the old University Hall began to collapse in 1938, the University replaced it with Gregory Hall and the Illini Union. The Union was the first building devoted to social and service functions. The third major building project in this period were the first modern Men's Dormitories, which were built in 1941.

The end of World War II opened the way for unprecedented growth and the growing pains that it brought. The percentage of the state budget allocated to higher education had fallen from 14% before World War I to 3% before World War II. The "architect" of the new university was George D. Stoddard. An Iowa psychologist, Stoddard appointed several young deans who soon came into conflict with veteran faculty and conservative community influences. A series of crises eventually resulted in Stoddard's dismissal by the Board of Trustees in 1953. Fired for political and ideological reasons, Stoddard's removal aroused widespread faculty concern. While alumni and legislative concern for a successful intercollegiate athletic program has usually been channeled into constructive activities, public awareness and acceptance of a broad social role for the university has been negligible. Trustees, legislators and taxpayers have seldom asked the University of Illinois to bear the responsibility for economic growth, cultural cohesion and radical social change.

After a biennium under former Comptroller Lloyd Morey, the Trustees chose David D. Henry as president. With a professional presence and administrative skill, Henry accelerated the building program and presided over a period characterized by the rapid growth of the Graduate College and increased federal support of scientific and technological research and development. After World War II, state support of higher education was directed toward regional universities. Although the University remained the preeminent state-supported institution for graduate work, its proportion of the tax dollar for higher education declined from 78% in 1948 to 49% in 1968. Between 1958 and 1970, the number of dormitory units tripled. Urban commuter campuses and a junior college system represented new departures in higher education in the 1960's. In 1967, the University reorganized into Urbana-Champaign, Chicago Circle and Medical Center (Chicago) campuses under chancellors, and in 1982, the two Chicago campuses merged. The 1960's were also characterized by increasing student and faculty unrest over governance and social priorities. The state continued to supply two-thirds of the University budget, but the federal government provided nearly 90% of the income for research.

Throughout its brief history of slightly more than a century, the University of Illinois has

been a prominent force for social mobility and demonstrated an ability to meet changing social needs. It reflects the values of four internal and many external constituencies. Within the institution, the students, faculty, administrators and non-academic staff each shape the character of the institution. Between 1938 and 1970, its physical growth in a service-oriented economy brought a 12-fold expansion in the staff compared to a 5-fold increase in faculty. Outside influences are represented by the state legislature, trustees, benefactors, alumni, parents, employers and those who shape public opinion. The last category includes both the press, and faculty and administrators at other institutions of higher education. Once described as "the worst of the best" and a "sleeping giant" unable to overcome the problems of numbers, the University has emerged as a highly selective "multiversity" with over 25% of its students in graduate or professional programs. With a huge residential campus located in a small city in rural America, the University plays a unique role in the history of higher education. The history of the University of Illinois is that of students seeking emancipation, identity, qualifications for employment and knowledge; of staff seeking professional opportunity, a challenging role in a dynamic institution and a understanding of the complex and perplexing business of educating the elites which must both manage and transform society.

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