

Documenting Regional History by the Big Fish in the Small Pond

For almost any college or university in the United States, the local history of the host town or city is likely to be documented in some way in the institution's archives. The documentation can be implicit with records of the president concerning town-gown relations, or the repository might serve as the archives for city governmental records or records of semi-private agencies. In the case of Manuscripts and Archives at Yale University, our coverage of New Haven history goes even further. Many of our collections of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century papers are of individuals and families who had a long association with both New Haven and Yale University. Even if our holdings did not include the papers of several New Haven mayors or the quasi-independent New Haven Redevelopment Agency, we are a major resource for New Haven history.

In 1638 the Puritans led by Theophilus Eaton and John Davenport founded the New Haven Colony along the Long Island Sound. Davenport had hoped to establish a college in the young colony, but his dream was not realized during his life. It was not until 1701 that the Reverend James Pierpont, who was unhappy with the state of the declining Puritan church in what became the Connecticut Colony, organized a group of ten ministers to establish a college that would educate men for the clergy as well as for public service. On October 9, 1701, the colonial legislature of Connecticut, meeting in New Haven, passed "An Act for Liberty to Erect a Collegiate School" that opened in Saybrook along the coast at the mouth of the Connecticut River, approximately thirty miles east of New Haven. Over the next fifteen years, the students became discontented with Saybrook. The Trustees, some of whom were the original founders as well as their successors, selected New Haven as the new site. It was chosen because the town agreed to provide the school with greater financial

support than either Saybrook or Hartford that was the dual capital of the Connecticut Colony along with New Haven.¹

Almost three hundred years later, Yale and New Haven are closely linked. There have been both good and bad times with this relationship. In the early twentieth century, Yale was a major contributor to the local economy, but certainly not the largest by any means. Manufacturing primarily supported the city's economy. In 1900, Morris F. Tyler, the University Treasurer, told the local Chamber of Commerce that Yale was

interested in having New Haven well governed. It wants good streets, good police protection, good fire protection, a good and ample civic life for its students.... In one way it has already done a good deal, and hopes to do more. I mean in the way of beautifying the city. It is the aim of the University authorities that every building it erects shall be not only convenient and useful to the University, but an addition to the beautiful and attractive things in the city."²

About ten years later and periodically thereafter through the early 1990s, studies of the current taxation questions and the local benefits derived from this privately endowed university were undertaken.³ By the middle of the twentieth century, many of the early twentieth-century industries left New Haven or were substantially reduced in size, both in physical plant and the number of employees, which affected tax revenues. By 1962, Yale was then the second largest employer in

¹ *Yale University and New Haven/Michelin*. Greenville, S.C.: Michelin Travel Publications/Michelin North America, 2000, page 32; http://www.library.yale.edu/mssa/YHO/brief_history.html [as of July 29, 2005]

² Morris Franklin Tyler, *The University as a Business Institution in New Haven. A paper Read Before the Chamber of Commerce of New Haven, February 14th, 1900*. New Haven: Pub. by order of the Chamber, 1900, page 15.

³ The most recent one, *Economic Impact: Yale & New Haven*, was published by Yale in 1993 by the Office of the Secretary, Yale University.

the New Haven area with 5,000 employees after Olin Mathieson Chemical Corporation with 5,900 employees.⁴

During much of the post-war years, Yale appeared to isolate itself from the city. Yale made some efforts under former presidents A. Bartlett Giamatti and Benno C. Schmidt, Jr., from the late 1970s to 1992 to improve relations with New Haven by making contributions for services such as fire protection. In addition, Yale supported the state legislative program known as PILOT--payment in lieu of taxes--to help supplement the city's budget by providing funds for tax-exempt property. In 1993, with the selection of Richard C. Levin as the twenty-second president of Yale University, a new era began in which both the city and the university recognized the need for better cooperation. When introduced as the next president, Levin noted that one of his main goals would be to work with "New Haven officials to help solve some of the city's economic problems..." He wanted to construct a positive town-gown relationship between New Haven and Yale. "Asked by a reporter what his first act would be as President, Levin replied that it would be to shake the hand of New Haven mayor John Daniels, who had been invited to the event."⁵

Today, Yale "is New Haven's largest real estate taxpayer and the biggest contributor to the City budget beside the state."⁶ With Yale's current ambitious building program in place, it is also the largest payer of building permit fees.⁷ The next largest employer is also a non-profit--Yale-New Haven Hospital.

⁴ *Yale in New Haven* (New Haven: Yale University, 1962), page 8.

⁵ *Yale Alumni Magazine*, v.LVI, no.8 (Summer 1993), p.37.

⁶ <http://www.yale.edu/onhsa/facts.htm> [as of July 7, 2005]

⁷ <http://www.yale.edu/opa/v33.n27/story1.html>

Even on a regional basis, there is no other company or organization that has as many employees as the university, that contributes as much to the economy, or that has as much influence, directly or indirectly, over the character of the city and outlying areas.⁸ As of fall 2004, Yale employed over 3,200 faculty and had an additional 8,000 people employed in the ranks of managerial and professional, clerical and technical, and service and maintenance. One of the largest area private employers is the research and development program of an international company's North American pharmaceutical division. It employs 300 pharmacologists, molecular biologists, biochemists, chemists, and scientific support staff.⁹ Clearly Yale has been and will continue to be the major force that drives the regional economy. While the biotech businesses that exist in and around New Haven remain healthy, no new economic enterprise is likely to overtake the university's financial contributions to the city. Even with these companies paying taxes on their land and buildings, the amount of money they pump into New Haven's economy is small compared to Yale's. In a major announcement this spring, Yale agreed to make annual contributions to the city over the next fifty years that will total approximately \$470 million.¹⁰

How are we documenting the economic, social, and cultural changes and the relations between Yale and New Haven?

Since its founding, Manuscripts and Archives has implicitly and explicitly documented the relations between Yale and New Haven. Seventy-five years ago Sterling Memorial Library opened with several special collections that were brought together in 1963 to establish the current Manuscripts and Archives. With this consolidation, Manuscripts and Archives was organized into its present

⁸ The academic faculty and administrative and support staff at the different levels slightly exceeded 11,231 with a student enrollment of 11,359.

See <http://www.yale.edu/oir/factsheet.html> [as of July 31, 2005]

⁹ <http://www.bayerpharma-na.com/science/st0103.asp>;
<http://www.bayerpharmana.com/science/st0101.asp> [as of July 14, 2005]

¹⁰ <http://www.yale.edu/opa/v33.n27/story1.html>

setup with two main responsibilities: collecting and preserving papers that document a wide array of persons, institutions, and subject areas, many of which have a strong link to Yale, either to the institution itself; to the faculty, students, alumni, and other members of the Yale community; or to areas in which Yale has had strong teaching and research interests. These areas are defined as public policy and administration; diplomacy and international affairs; political and social thought and commentary; science, medicine, and the environment; legal and judicial history; the visual and performing arts; urban planning and architecture; environmental policy and affairs; and psychology and psychiatry. In addition, the department has extensive holdings on New Haven, Connecticut, and New England history.¹¹ The other part of our department is responsible for collecting and preserving Yale's archival records, including administrative files in paper, electronic and audio-visual formats, and administrative and student publications. Yale's tercentennial in 2001 provided an opportunity to formalize a records management system that is structured so that offices take responsibility for their records. A smaller, but equally important, component of the department is the Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies that began in the late 1970s as a New Haven-based project and later became part of the Yale Library under Manuscripts and Archives.

Many of our New Haven area collections of personal and family papers were received during the first half of the twentieth century. In the 1960s, we began to collect the papers of several New Haven mayors and a local urban planner. Richard C. Lee served as mayor from 1954 to 1969 and agreed to donate his papers to Manuscripts and Archives. During his seven terms, New Haven successfully received more federal money per capita than any other American city for urban renewal. As a "model city," many of New Haven's business and some residential districts were completely redeveloped and transformed. Edward Joseph Logue was the development

¹¹ http://www.library.yale.edu/mssa/about_manuscripts.html [as of July 29, 2005]

administrator for Lee from 1954 to 1960. Ed Logue's brother Frank served as mayor for two terms from 1976 to 1980. By the end of Frank Logue's term as mayor, the redevelopment was completed.

When there is a perceived need, we are proactive in collecting manuscript materials. Following a collection development retreat in 1999, one of the areas in which we decided to be proactive and document were the years of Richard Lee as mayor, more than thirty years after he was first approached about donating his personal papers. Part of the interest in developing collections in this area and time period was the statement made by President-elect Levin in April 1993, and also because Douglas Rae, a professor of political science as well as of organization and management in the School of Management, started teaching a course on New Haven history. Rae had also been the chief administrator from 1990 to 1991 for John Daniels, New Haven's first African-American mayor. Many students in Professor Rae's class wanted to write their papers on the redevelopment history of New Haven, and their only resource were the mayoral papers of Richard C. Lee. Reading as much as was available for this period of New Haven's history, we identified several organizations and key players whom we wanted to contact. One recurring name that kept coming back to us was the quasi-independent New Haven Redevelopment Agency that oversaw all of the urban redevelopment projects. After several telephone calls to various city agencies, I located an administrator familiar with the redevelopment agency's records because he was serving as the acting director for ongoing redevelopment activity. Two colleagues and I and the acting director met at a tractor trailer park near the New Haven / West Haven border in late 2002. The park is a large fenced-in-field located near the Long Island Sound and not in the best part of town, thus exposing the records to all of the worst environmental conditions--extreme temperatures and humidity and the possibility of vermin. Other than the fence, the only other security was a padlock on each trailer,

thus making the records susceptible to theft or other types of destruction. A flashlight was needed to read the file drawer labels if there were any.

While the city was interested in having the records saved, it was unable to do anything on a practical scale that would make them accessible and guarantee their preservation. By law, the city could not transfer physical ownership to Yale, so both parties agreed to a deed of deposit. We were willing to contribute the staff time and supplies needed to gain basic intellectual access to the seventy-five file cabinets that eventually filled 769 boxes of records for the general period from the 1950s to 1995. We knew it would be an extremely valuable collection for students and scholars interested not only in New Haven's history but also for social and urban historians interested in the redevelopment of American urban areas during the Great Society era. And city administrators would now have much easier access to their files, although this was not our primary interest. With the previous storage conditions due to the lack of a city archives or records center facility and knowing that the local historical society will never be able to provide space and staff resources, the likelihood of the records being withdrawn and Yale losing money on supplies and staff time is very remote.

Special effort was put into gaining minimal intellectual access to the Redevelopment Agency's records. We were committed to reboxing the records, making a preliminary list, creating a catalog record in Yale's online catalog, and barcoding the boxes so that they could be sent to our reading room from the library shelving facility several miles away. This level of processing meets the standards we set for making a collection available for research.

During the same time that two senior staff members, an archives assistant, and a retired agency employee spent two afternoons a week working on these records in the basement of a former bakery, Yale purchased the records of a local law firm and its predecessors responsible for handling much of the real estate title search activity in the New Haven area from the mid-nineteenth century onward. With over 1,165 feet of abstracts of title, subdivision records, government redevelopment project files, land record volumes, and index cards, we further increased our holdings on New Haven history.

How do we balance our time and resources between regional collections and institutional records?

Currently our collecting activity on New Haven is reactive, but we hope to continue to build on our Richard C. Lee and New Haven resources by acquiring the papers of prominent individuals associated with the Lee years and the records of the Community Progress, Incorporated. CPI was funded by the Ford Foundation to help the most needy citizens of New Haven in job-training and placement programs. The Redevelopment Agency attacked the perceived bricks and mortar problems of the city, and Community Progress, Inc., addressed the economic and social issues of the citizens. Tearing down old slum areas and replacing those buildings with new structures did not address the problems of the poor and that was where Community Progress entered the picture.¹²

We could also be interested in the papers of the current mayor, John DeStefano, whose terms have run almost concurrently with Levin's tenure as president. They both dovetail neatly with each other in trying to make New Haven a better place to live, work, and study. There have been joint projects between both entities, some funded in part by Yale or some Yale-centric projects endorsed by the

¹² Bernard Asbell, "Dick Lee Discovers How Much is Not Enough," *New York Times Magazine*, September 3, 1967.

city. At this point I do not know whether we would have a strong interest in his papers. But DeStefano could contact Yale's president who may indicate an interest in having the mayor's papers preserved at Yale. And since DeStefano is raising money to be the Democratic gubernatorial candidate in 2006, we may know sooner rather than later.

For our institutional records, the staff of three archivists and an archives assistant has as their main functions the university records services program, the cataloging of Yale publications, and processing university records. Two archivists provide several hours of reference service each week. Departmental projects may cut across the division between personal papers and institutional records, but the majority of the work of the university archives staff is limited to that function.

Over the years the university archives has also had an implicit involvement in documenting New Haven's history. Various university offices have direct or indirect connections and ties with the city going back as far as the early twentieth century. The Office of the University Secretary has long maintained as one of its responsibilities relations with the community.¹³ A separate Office of Community Relations in the mid-1970s later assumed many of these efforts.¹⁴ The records of this office and earlier work on community relations are well documented in the university archives. In the 1990s, the Office of Community Relations evolved into the Office of New Haven and State

¹³ Records of the secretary's office, Yale University (RU 49), 1899-1953.

¹⁴ Records of the secretary's office, Yale University, concerning community relations (RU 53), 1939-1988. Yale Council on Community Affairs (YCCA) was organized under the Office of the President, at the direction of President Kingman Brewster, on April 9, 1968, to deal with problems in the New Haven community and to initiate programs related to human and neighborhood development. As part of a reorganization in late 1969, it was recommended that an Office of Community Affairs Development (OCAD) be established to take an active responsibility for working with neighborhood, community, faculty, and student organizations and to advise the YCCA. The Council was to have a policy advisory role only. In 1973-1975, the OCAD was put under the Office of the Secretary and later discontinued. The Office of Community Relations (ca. 1976-1990) and the Office of New Haven and State Affairs are two later offices that served the same function.

Affairs. While it took on a broader mission, it is actively involved in areas with issues relating to taxation of non-academic buildings and parking requirements when a new building is constructed. The President and the Vice President and University Secretary are all involved in New Haven affairs. The university archives has records of these two university officers going back to the late nineteenth century, and their records document Yale's relations with New Haven. The Yale Corporation, the governing body of the university, must ultimately approve major initiatives of the university, including any with New Haven; the Corporation's records go back to Yale's founding in 1701. On a more academic level, the records of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute document an educational partnership that began in 1978 and continues today between Yale University and the New Haven public school system. We also have a large photograph collection that documents primarily the streetscapes of New Haven in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. At the student level, Dwight Hall, the Center for Public Service and Social Justice at Yale, is a student-run organization with over sixty different service and advocacy groups that "foster civic-minded student leaders and promote service and activism in New Haven and beyond."¹⁵ Its large archive is part of our holdings.

How do we balance the need to be proactive in collecting with the desire to retain collegial relations with other area and state institutions?

The various repositories in Connecticut have distinct collections and collecting areas. There is little overlap and hence little competition in collecting. We work with other local, regional, and state repositories when manuscript materials are offered to us that do not fit into areas where we are currently collecting or have collected in the past. Manuscripts and Archives is completely comfortable in suggesting that a collection offered to us may be much better placed at another local or statewide institution. This works to our advantage when one of these institutions is offered

¹⁵ <http://www.dwighthall.org/> [as of July 11, 2005]

material not necessarily appropriate for them but appropriate for us. As an example, last month a small collection of personal papers of an alumnus and later Yale professor was offered to the local historical society. In 1861 Yale awarded the first doctoral degrees in the United States, and Arthur Williams Wright was one of the three to receive the degree that year. The library services manager of the New Haven Colony Historical Society recommended that Wright's papers would be more logically placed with us, and the donor agreed. Up to this point, we did not have any collection of papers relating to Wright, a pioneer in the study of molecular physics and chemistry.

Even though one of our strengths over the years has been New Haven history, when local or regional collections come to our attention, we try to steer them toward the New Haven Historical Society. With a staff of two working in the library, they are not able to handle large collections adequately. Nor, do I think, would the Society be willing to invest staff, time, space, and other resources into a large collection placed on deposit by the city. Similarly, when we are offered collections that focus on a particular ethnic group in the New Haven area, we direct those collections to the even smaller Ethnic Heritage Society that is based at Southern Connecticut State University. Other collections offered to Manuscripts and Archives that are considered out of our collecting area are almost always referred to national institutions, rather than a regional one.

Do community activist interests create challenges for us as a private university that is otherwise not affected by government open records laws?

In the case of New Haven Redevelopment Agency, both the city and Manuscripts and Archives wanted the records available to researchers as soon as possible. With the personal papers of the two former mayors and the urban planner, deeds of gift were executed between each of them and Yale.

In the case of Richard Lee, he added a provision that researchers must sign an access agreement

"to preserve the confidentiality of the individuals documented in these papers. [The

researcher must also] refrain from making any disclosure that would identify any person as the subject of these papers. No name or other information making possible the specific identification of an individual will be used in the formal or informal oral presentation or conversation, nor in any teaching exercise, nor in any disseminated products that results from [one's] research."¹⁴

Yale records that contain information on New Haven history are governed by University restrictions, which is thirty-five years in most cases for administrative records and fifty years for Corporation records. Researchers can petition the Vice President and University Secretary to have closed records opened for research.

Conclusion.

Collecting local and regional records or personal papers falls within our mandate and our mission to collect and preserve primary resources and make them available for teaching and research. And we have been fortunate over the last seventy-five years that we have not had to compete with other repositories to document New Haven history. When appropriate, we are only too happy to refer a possible collection to another local institution.

For all of the countless times, whether justified or not, that people and the media claim that Yale is isolated from its host community, Manuscripts and Archives, with its substantive documentation on New Haven history, is open to any member of the public, and we actively encourage students in the local public and private schools to make use of our collections.

¹⁴ Access agreement for the Richard C. Lee Papers (MS 318) available in Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.