

GODS AND SCHOLARS: RELIGION AND CORNELL UNIVERSITY'S FOUNDATION
MYTH

A Thesis

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Fredrika Louise Loew

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ABSTRACT

Cornell University's foundation narrative focuses intensely on the nonsectarian clause in the institution's charter, with the 'godless' nature of the university and its commitment to secularism forming the basis of the narrative. Though parts of the narrative are true, Cornell's Protestant-heavy founding and early relationships with religion have been left out. This paper examines Cornell University's primary archival material from 1865 to 1890 and secondary sources and reconstructs the religious foundation narrative of the university, which takes into account the strong Christian ethics upon which the university was in fact founded. In addition, the paper discusses the initial desire for a secular university, as well as investigates broader issues of identity reappropriation and analyzes the differences between the accepted narrative of Cornell's foundation myth and the primary texts.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Fredrika Loew received her Bachelor's degree in Archaeology and Near Eastern Studies from Cornell University in 2012. During her senior year, she began working as a Collections Assistant and Processor in Cornell's Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, where she has been working ever since. In the fall of 2014, she entered the Employee Degree Program to pursue her Master's degree from the Cornell Institute for Archaeology and Material Studies with a focus on museology and religious studies. She graduated in 2016 after two years of courses and library work. Every summer she travels to Israel, where she works as a registrar at the archaeological site Abel Beth Maacah. She will continue her work in the library, and her digs during the summer, for the next year before possibly pursuing her PhD.

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Introduction

The nineteenth century was a time of transition for the American university. Slowly, old universities were adopting a more scientific and secular approach, and new institutes—such as Cornell University, founded in 1865—were writing nonsectarian directives into their charters. Other schools, such as the University of Pennsylvania, University of Georgia, and Brown University, had been nonsectarian for decades,¹ but none were as vocal about their opinion on religion as the Cornell founders. Still, the move to secular thought, in a country where Protestant practices were inherent in all aspects of life, did not exclude religion from campuses. The narrative of this young university in rural New York State—a group of scholars facing criticism from the Christian press as well as other universities but continuing to practice irreligion² and secularism on campus—is one that is still told to incoming freshmen and upperclassmen alike.³ Like the foundation myths many countries and religions are based upon, Cornell’s foundation myth revolves around this narrative. But how true are the claims? The assertion that Cornell has always been nonsectarian and has been called the ‘godless’⁴ university is quite true, but the rest of the story, including Cornell’s Protestant-heavy founding, is not included in the popular myth. Cornell currently has a strong commitment to secularism, but an examination of the University’s original relationship with religion, and Christianity in particular, reveals a different picture. In this thesis,

¹ Morris Bishop, *A History of Cornell* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1962), 84. See also Waterman T. Hewett’s book, *Cornell University, A History*.

² Irreligion, meaning absence of or hostility to religion, is frequently attributed to Cornell in the archival primary sources such as *The Cornell Era*.

³ The *Cornell Chronicle*, November 18, 2015, mentions that since its founding, “Cornell has been a secular place”. (<http://www.news.cornell.edu/stories/2015/11/cornell-rewind-secular-school-missionaries>). In addition to several other similar references in University publications, campus tour-guides frequently tell this narrative.

⁴ It is unclear when and who first used this term to describe Cornell, but it is referred to in early sources such as: *The Cornell Era*, 1870, which appears to be the first reference; *The Cornell Daily Sun*, Volume VIII, Number 4, 3 October 1887; Volume IV, Number 7, 1 October 1883; and many later articles. A.D. White quotes the term frequently when discussing accusations against the University.

I will examine the Cornell University's primary archival material from 1865 to 1890 and secondary sources to reconstruct a foundation narrative that takes into account the Christian ethics upon which the university was in fact founded. In addition, I will discuss the initial desire for a secular university, as well as investigate broader issues of identity reappropriation and the differences between the accepted narrative of Cornell's foundation myth and the primary texts.

Theoretical Considerations

Just as nonsectarianism was confused with atheism by many Church leaders in the nineteenth-century discussions of Cornell, the term is now commonly considered synonymous with secularism. This confusion calls for a thorough definition of these terms and their use in the primary texts. Firstly, the topic this paper is centered around: religion. A concise and all-encompassing definition is not simple to obtain. As Jonathan Smith discusses in his article "Religion, Religions, Religious," 'religion' has over fifty accurate definitions.⁵ In this paper, I use the term 'religion' to refer to a system of faith, beliefs, and ritual practices. 'Nonsectarian', as defined by Oxford Dictionary, means "not involving or relating to different religious sects or political groups." This definition seems to align with the founders' use of the term. White, for example, writes to the Trustees that "Cornell University is forbidden to favor one religious body above another",⁶ not that Cornell could have no religion at all. Contrarily, 'sectarian' denotes or

⁵ Jonathan Smith, "Religion, Religions, Religious", *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*. Ed. Mark Taylor. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998. This article offers a great analysis of the terms and several different definitions.

⁶White's report from "The Committee to whom was referred a communication relative to the establishment of a Theological Seminary at Ithaca", unpublished, in: Cornell University Board of Trustees Records, #2-3-74, box 77. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

concerns a sect or sects.⁷ Secular, on the other hand, means “not connected with religious or spiritual matters.”⁸ In general, secular refers to an absence of religion, while nonsectarian is more closely related to non-denominational. In this paper, I will demonstrate that when discussing Cornell’s founding, the difference between nonsectarianism and secularism is paramount and has not been fully accounted for. The University was *not* secular, but whether it set out to be absolutely secular or nonsectarian is difficult to say. The use of the terms nonsectarian and sectarian in the primary sources, coupled with White’s conflicting relationship with religion (discussed in greater depth later), muddle an otherwise clear picture of Cornell’s founding.

Contrary to popular belief, Cornell began as a Christian University. One need not delve deep into the archives to discover this; Morris Bishop’s *A History of Cornell* states it clearly: “President White insisted that Cornell, though nonsectarian, was Christian.”⁹ Yet the idea that Cornell bred atheists and that the students were “raw recruits for Satan”,¹⁰ which was once a criticism but now a proud claim, persists. The phenomenon of turning a negatively ascribed attribute into a positive identifying characteristic is evident within Cornell’s foundation myth and will be discussed further in this thesis.¹¹ Co-founders Andrew Dickson White and Ezra Cornell argued against the accusations of godlessness and insisted on the Christianity of the University in their respective inaugural addresses: “We will labor to make this a Christian institution—a

⁷ Oxford Dictionary definition.

⁸ Oxford Dictionary definition.

⁹ Bishop, *A History of Cornell*, 190.

¹⁰ This quote is mentioned several times in the *Cornell Era* (1873 is the first appearance) as well as later in the *Daily Sun*, citing it as being from an article in the *Northern Christian Advocate* from September-October 1873. The *Northern Christian Advocate* is not available online and the Cornell Library Microfilm does not contain this issue, so the exact context of the phrase as it relates to Cornell needs more research.

¹¹ This form of reappropriation is defined by Galinsky et al. as “to take possession for oneself that which was once possessed by another”, turning a negative into a positive. Galinsky, *The Reappropriation of Stigmatizing Labels: Implications for Social Identity*, 222.

sectarian institution may it never be.”¹² “It shall be our aim and our constant effort to make true Christian men, without dwarfing or paring them down to fit the narrow gauge of any sect.”¹³

As a Biblical archaeologist must grapple with tying together the Biblical narrative and artefactual evidence, I tied together the foundation myth of Cornell with the primary source material to show the inaccuracies of the narrative. The archival evidence from students, trustees, administrators, and faculty shed light on the factuality of the narrative and provide a window into how religion influenced and was influenced by the students and the administration. The primary and secondary sources highlight not only Cornell’s religiosity in the mid- to late-nineteenth century, but America’s as well.

Methodological Considerations

This thesis is the culmination of information from archival sources and an exhibition that I curated in Cornell’s Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, titled “Gods and Scholars: Studying Religion at a Secular University.”¹⁴ The exhibition displayed nearly one hundred religious texts and manuscripts owned by Cornell, many of which were collected and donated by Andrew Dickson White, and organized them into areas of study, such as architectural or linguistic. Appendix 1 contains the captions for all items in the exhibit. In addition to finding hundreds of religious texts from around the world which students were interacting with in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, I also searched through early archival documents to uncover more

¹² Andrew Dickson White’s inaugural address, from: *The Inauguration of Cornell University: reprinted from the account of the proceedings at the inauguration October 7, 1868* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1921).

¹³ Ezra Cornell’s inaugural address, from: *The Inauguration of Cornell University: reprinted from the account of the proceedings at the inauguration October 7, 1868* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1921).

¹⁴ The online exhibition is available here: <http://rmc.library.cornell.edu/godsandscholars/>

information on religious life at Cornell. The exhibition's aim was to show how religion was taught, but not proselytized, in Cornell classrooms in the nineteenth century. (Interestingly, I faced administrative resistance regarding the content of the exhibition and was told make sure that I did not proselytize, and was reminded that the university is secular.) Students in the nineteenth century were in continual contact with the vast array of religious texts, from Qur'ans and Bibles to Buddhist texts and Egyptian papyri. Because the exhibition focused mainly on the administrative side of the University's religious politics and collecting, I began to wonder how the nonsectarian stance affected students and how the administrative practices filtered down to them. The more I researched early religious life at Cornell, the more I discerned its importance in the development of Cornell's narrative and secular education. Why is Cornell's relationship with Christianity not included in the foundation myth? How did the students feel about religion on campus during the nineteenth century, and how did they experience it in their daily lives? These questions are not adequately accounted for in the secondary literature. This thesis sets out in part to correct for this omission.

The Nature of the Sources

With the entirety of Cornell's archives at my fingertips -- one-hundred and fifty boxed-up years of Cornell history -- I needed to narrow down my focus. Since I am most interested in the foundation myth, I could immediately narrow my date range to the nineteenth century and further to the first years of Cornell's history, from 1865 to 1890. After I pinpointed my dates I was able to begin exploring the archives. Because all collections are different and contain a variety of media, my criteria were fairly broad; the collection needed to contain material within my date range,

pertain to Cornell students or administrators, and involve religion. From there, I could narrow down within a collection as needed.

Primary Sources: Archival Procedures and Pitfalls

While curating the exhibition, my interests lay mainly with A.D. White and his views on religion and collecting. While researching possible books for the exhibition, I was surprised by how many contained his bookplate, or notes in his own hand. I saw the breadth of subjects he collected and began to fully understand the importance he placed on using primary sources as teaching aides. I decided his materials would be the best place to begin the search for religion and early Cornell history. His papers proved to be particularly important but, unlike Ezra Cornell's, are not digitized. His massive collection of over two-hundred and forty boxes (over one-hundred cubic feet) contains more than one-hundred and fifty boxes of correspondence, each containing hundreds of letters ranging from his youth to his death. I began with these chronologically arranged boxes, which, save for about four boxes, have no item-level descriptions and are dispersed on shelves all around the vault. Because of the numerous cart-loads of letters, I focused on the formative years between 1865 and 1875, though the exhibition required researching the early 1880s and 1890s as well. Thankfully, White's letters are in generally good condition, with only a small portion presenting rips, tears, or water damage. They do not have any special handling requirements and no gloves are needed (in general, gloves are only used on vellum, photographs, or original artwork. Wearing gloves when handling paper can actually decrease dexterity and result in torn pages.) The chief obstacle, however, was White's handwriting. It took hours of deciphering to become familiar with his near-illegible penmanship, and months later I still struggle to read his hastily-written manuscripts. Even though these first one-hundred and fifty boxes are labelled as

correspondence, almost every folder contains additional papers that may have been mailed with letters. All of the letters have been unfolded and lay flat, and are no longer with their envelopes, so it is difficult if not impossible to tell what may have been mailed together. These additional papers include newspaper clippings, legal petitions and reports, pamphlets, White's notes and receipts, and advertisements. In addition to these boxes of correspondence, I sifted through boxes once labelled as "miscellaneous manuscripts", "clippings", and "Cornell material."¹⁵ These very inadequate descriptions piqued my curiosity about the contents of these old, browned boxes. A common issue with finding aids that is not unique to Cornell is inaccurate or extremely broad descriptions. Archival research often requires creative thinking, searching through ambiguously labelled boxes, and corresponding with the archivists. It was in White's broadly described boxes where I found early drafts of speeches, announcements, drawings of buildings, and White's personal copies of Cornell publications, many of which contain his own annotations. Because of the highly acidic nature of some of the paper used, many of the clippings and publications were extremely brittle and fragile and required extra care and stabilization. I worked closely with the Conservation Department to repair and stabilize these items. I became adept at skimming through nineteenth-century handwritten letters, searching for any reference to religion as it related to Cornell. White's collection proved to contain the most important material and required the most painstaking efforts. The number of boxes that did not fall within my date range or were not accurately described is enormous and likely contain very relevant manuscripts, waiting to be found by a researcher lucky enough to stumble upon them.

¹⁵ Those boxes now have folder-level descriptions in the online guide, available at: <http://rnc.library.cornell.edu/EAD/htmldocs/RMA00002.html> .

In addition to White's papers, I also looked through Ezra Cornell's material, which is conveniently digitized and available online¹⁶. After searching through the founders' collections, I began to search the periphery. By considering the people with whom White and Cornell corresponded, I was able to dig deeper into other important figures whose collections we may have. References in these letters led me to the collections of George Lincoln Burr (White's personal librarian and later a professor), Henry Sage, the Board of Trustees, and more. In many cases, the references were a dead end, but sometimes, fortuitously, they led to more discoveries within the boxes.

With help from the Cornell library catalog and advice from the University Archivist Evan Earle, I searched through old registers, faculty biography folders and collections, deceased alumni folders, students' papers, and student scrapbooks. The scrapbooks are particularly interesting in their reflection of students' interests. Many contain tickets and programs of sporting events, photographs of friends, scenery, and copies of course exams. I recorded any item relating to religion on campus or which reflected personal views on religion. Unfortunately some of the scrapbooks are not well preserved. A type of paper, similar to construction paper, was often used in large scrapbooks and becomes extremely brittle over time. Some scrapbooks have pages that have all but disintegrated or which have so much acidic glue as the adhesive that the original clipping or program is now unreadable.

Secondary Sources

The most important secondary source for this paper is Morris Bishop's *A History of Cornell*, which is arguably the best, and most interesting sourcebook on Cornell history. It is important to note a

¹⁶ Ezra Cornell's collection guide and digitized material is available at: <http://rmc.library.cornell.edu/EAD/htmldocs/RMA00001.html>.

few issues I encountered with his text. Bishop graduated Cornell in 1913 and includes his personal experiences in his book. He was acquainted with the early Cornell administrators and faculty, such as White, and while this offers a unique insight and narrative feel to Bishop's book, it would be impossible for his writing to remain unbiased. For example, he may have been less likely to portray the negative aspects of his favorite professors or mentors. Because I have no personal attachment to the early influential Cornellians, I am able to avoid such bias in this thesis. In addition, Bishop fails to adequately cite his references. One particularly frustrating instance was his reference to a small student pamphlet that I had hoped to find, which he cites as being located "in an 1873 Scrap Book, C.U. Archives."¹⁷ The archives currently have dozens of scrapbooks that cover that date range, so locating this particular pamphlet was a fruitless endeavor. By providing call numbers and folder-level citations, I am hoping to provide easier access to the primary sources for researchers.¹⁸ In addition, I worked to find primary sources that Bishop did not use and explore issues that he did not extensively cover.

Religion and Secularism in Nineteenth-Century America

What caused the shift from religious to secular in American universities of the nineteenth century? Before 1870, colleges in America functioned as "the intellectual arm of American Protestantism."¹⁹ Even the nonsectarian colleges were under the protective wings of Christianity. Though these schools, including Cornell, may not have taught divinity classes designed to train ministers outright, they did bring Christian theology into classrooms in the form of lectures on

¹⁷ Bishop, *A History of Cornell*, footnote on page 192.

¹⁸ Because of my collection processing background, I was also able to provide updated descriptions of collections and materials within the collections in our online finding aids for researchers.

¹⁹ John H. Roberts, *The Sacred and the Secular University* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, c2000), 20.

moral philosophy, the purpose of which was to educate men in the morals and ethics of Christianity. But the mid-nineteenth century was a time of heightened interest in the sciences; in fact, by 1870, more than thirty institutes had some sort of science program. Numerous academies focused on the religious applications of science and taught Natural Theology, which tried to prove God's existence through science, and astronomy to observe God's heavens.²⁰ In general, religion flourished on campuses throughout the nineteenth century. But not everyone favored religion's union with science. Beginning around 1830, select scholars endeavored to explain natural phenomena without God. Though there was resistance to this approach at many academic institutions, people like White and Cornell pushed for science to be divorced from religion. By the latter third of the century, more institutions were following suit. John Draper, scientist and author of the *History of the Conflict between Religion and Science* (1874), and White both criticized Christian theology for impeding scientific advancement, promoting unfounded ideas, intolerance, and obscurantism.²¹ White discusses his feelings of science and religion in a letter to George Lincoln Burr, about an early draft of his manuscript *A History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom*: "of course my contention is that science, in clearing away the shells, and husks, and rinds of myths from the kernel of pure truth, or at least in creating an atmosphere in which these shells and husks and rinds naturally fall away from the kernel of pure truth necessary to the higher sustenance of morality and religion, is a benefit..."²² These types of bold declarations only provoked the numerous critics of Cornell's nonsectarian religious stance.

White and Cornell's desire for a scientific and agricultural institution was felt around the country during the time of the Civil War. There were few colleges in the United States that offered

²⁰ Roberts, *The Sacred and the Secular University*, 22.

²¹ Roberts, *The Sacred and the Secular University*, 63.

²²Letter from Andrew Dickson White to George Lincoln Burr, June 20, 1889. Andrew Dickson White Papers, #1-2-2, Box 57, Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

instruction in science and technology, and even then the education was only valued for its applications in railroads, mechanics, and other popular utilizations.²³ Colleges were finally ready in the mid-century for a university that offered a bachelor's degree in the sciences.

In 1862, Senator Justin Morrill passed the Morrill Land Grant Act, giving land to each state to help finance the building of or additions to colleges in agriculture and the mechanic arts. White and Cornell took advantage of this act to found their university. There was competition for the New York land, however, from the religious People's College. Cornell and White won the entirety of the land grant for their new university, but their success led to further accusations of irreligion from sectarians. White and his faculty agreed to require students to take courses in the natural sciences, and offered a four-year program in agriculture.²⁴ Those who lost the Morrill Act land, alarmed by the election and nonsectarian declarations of a president of Cornell who was deemed atheist, teamed up with the Protestant press against the University.²⁵ These sentiments, or at least the fear of being associated with a 'godless' university, reached the New York State government as well. At White's Presidential inauguration, New York Governor Reuben Fenton, scheduled to attend, cancelled at the last minute and was replaced by Lieutenant Governor Stewart Woodford. In White's copy of the event program, he wrote, "But Gov. Fenton was afraid of Methodists and Baptists and other sectarian enemies of the university and levanted the night before..."²⁶ Despite the concerns spread by the local and national press, Ezra Cornell and Andrew Dickson White pushed on with their plan for a nonsectarian university.

²³ Bishop, *A History of Cornell*, 52

²⁴ Roberts, *The Sacred and the Secular University*, 64.

²⁵ Bishop, *A History of Cornell*, 83-84.

²⁶ Order of Exercises for Cornell University's first presidential inauguration, October 7, 1868. Andrew Dickson White Papers, #1-2-2, Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University.

The Founders

Who were these two visionaries who dreamt of a secular school and coeducation? Exhaustive biographies and autobiographies abound about Ezra Cornell and Andrew Dickson White. I will focus here on their upbringings and relationship with religion. Ezra Cornell was born in 1807 to a family of farmers and artisans, and raised in DeRuyter, New York. He worked as a carpenter for many years in Ithaca and also travelled selling a new type of plow. In the 1840s, Cornell created a plow to dig ditches to lay telegraph pipelines in, and became an associate of Samuel F.B. Morse. He built his fortune from his continuing work and innovations with the telegraph, became a New York State Senator in 1863, eleven years before his death, and provided funds and land scrips to his new university.²⁷ His early experiences with technology and agriculture kindled his interest in founding an agricultural university. Cornell's family were Quakers, though Cornell himself was disowned by the Society of Friends for marrying Mary Ann Wood, a Methodist. He later became affiliated with the Unitarian Church. He believed that God was directing world affairs, and that science was merely the newest means of God's revelation.²⁸ Cornell's letter from the laying of the Sage College cornerstone clearly describes his feelings regarding religion on campus: "The principal danger to be encountered by the friends of education, and by all lovers of true liberty is that which may arise from sectarian strife. From these halls, sectarianism must be forever excluded, all students must be left free to worship God as their conscience [sic] shall dictate, and all persons of any creed or all creeds must find free and easy access, and a hearty and equal welcome to the educational facilities possessed by the Cornell

²⁷ Bishop, *A History of Cornell*, 15-16.

²⁸ Bishop, *A History of Cornell*, 26.

University.”²⁹ With this verification for the advancement of science, he pushed for a nonsectarian university free from the restrictions faced at denominational colleges.

Andrew Dickson White was born in Homer, New York, in 1832, to an affluent family of devout Episcopalians. He grew up as an avid reader; he began collecting books early on and later amassed several thousand books, manuscripts, and photographs, which he donated to the Cornell library. He longed to go to Yale for his undergraduate degree, but his father insisted he attend the Episcopalian Hobart College in Geneva, New York. After one year there, he made the move to Yale. He lived in France and England and became a professor at the University of Michigan in 1858. He moved back to Syracuse in 1860, and was elected to the New York State Senate in 1864, where he met Ezra Cornell. After cofounding Cornell in 1865 and becoming president of the university in 1867, White held many diplomatic positions. He died at his home in Ithaca in 1918.

White’s views on religion and science are well documented in his diaries, letters, and autobiography, as well as in his two volume book *A History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom* (1896), but how he felt about his own religion, or lack thereof, is not as clear. While White was never confirmed as a youth, much to the dismay of his family, and never took communion, he was far from atheist. He preferred his own theological system, stated he prayed every day, and occasionally made reference to himself as Episcopalian.³⁰ Regardless of his denomination or religious daily life, White viewed himself as a Christian. His views were influenced by his readings in ecclesiastical history, the lives of the saints, and the Qur’an. His interest in religious texts, which he collected in large numbers and donated to the Cornell library,

²⁹ Ezra Cornell. Letter “to the coming man and woman,” at the laying of the cornerstone of Sage Hall. Ithaca, New York, May 15, 1873. See Appendix 1.

³⁰ Bishop, *A History of Cornell*, 46.

fed his distrust of theological dogmatism and its damaging relationship with science.³¹ His chapter on religion from his 1896 book sings the praises of the religious men he had known as well as discusses the virtues of religion in society. As White states, "...what the world needed was more religion rather than less; more devotion to humanity and less preaching of dogmas."³²

After carefully reading through boxes of White's correspondence, dog-eared pamphlets, and even nearly-illegible drafts of his autobiography, I believe he wanted Cornell University to be more secular than it had become during the first several years. White's hesitancy to include discussions of religion in early administrative documents, his writings on the danger of religion in education, his defensiveness and occasional exaggeration³³ of the religious presence on campus, and the fact that his initial designs for a university did not include a chapel all support this idea. If White found religion to be an absolute necessity on campus, he likely would have erected a chapel for the students immediately or made a clear plan to. He built a chapel only when pressured by the trustees and after he was offered an endowment. He had to reconcile his own feelings of religion, science, and education with the needs of the students and the wants of the trustees and benefactors, which he references in his autobiography: "I was brought into the main charge of the newly established Cornell University; and in this new position, while no real change took place in my fundamental religious ideas, there were conflicting influences, sometimes unfortunate, but in the main happy."³⁴ This does not mean that White and Cornell were altogether opposed to religion on campus, but it may have had a larger presence in the administration than they would have liked. They were both businessmen and intelligent politicians who had founded a university in rural

³¹ Andrew Dickson White, *Autobiography of Andrew Dickson White*, (New York: Century Co., 1907), 558.

³² White, *Autobiography of Andrew Dickson White*, 560.

³³ See quote and discussion on Page 14

³⁴ White, *Autobiography of Andrew Dickson White*, 564.

upstate New York, and had to garner support and funds. Cornell was responsible for the financial aspects and building management, while White made the educational plans. In White's report on the organization of the University, submitted to the Board of Trustees in 1866,³⁵ he did not mention the two most controversial issues: nonsectarianism and coeducation. As Bishop suggests, White knew of the trustees' sensitivities.³⁶ The charter indicated that the university would always be nonsectarian, but was silent on how extensively religion would be practiced on campus. Could it be that White used the word 'nonsectarian' to placate the trustees instead of the word 'secular'? It is difficult to say, but if the nation responded so negatively to a nonsectarian doctrine, surely White knew people would not respond favorably to a secular school. White's own ambivalence to sectarian religion may represent the beginning seed of the foundation narrative.

When classes opened in 1868, though it was nonsectarian, Cornell was run as a Christian institution. White's general rule was to not respond to the frequent religious attacks from the press, but he made occasional exceptions, such as in this response to the editor of the *Northern Christian Advocate*:

First: That there had never been a public exercise, inauguration, commencement, laying of a cornerstone or other which has not been opened and closed with prayer by an evangelical clergyman.

³⁵ "Report of the committee on organization, presented to the trustees of the Cornell University. October 21st, 1866." Albany: C. Van Benthuysen & sons, printers, 1867.

³⁶ Bishop, *A History of Cornell*, 78

Secondly: That not a working day has there been since the opening of the institution which has not been begun with Christian prayer, including the Lord's Prayer, and with the reading of the scripture.³⁷

The material evidence supports White's first declaration, though he may have exaggerated the second. Commencement programs, Class Day Exercises³⁸, and building dedications³⁹ all began with the Lord's Prayer or a scriptural quote, though none list a closing prayer. Also, he did not mean that each day began with compulsory prayer, which Cornell did not have, but that students had the opportunity to attend morning prayers. As illustrated in this quote, religion lay in the very brickwork of campus, and the students were exposed to it on a daily basis.

The Administration and Religion

Cornell was continually charged with irreligion by newspapers like the *Northern Christian Advocates* and fellow scholars, such as Princeton president James McCosh,⁴⁰ and the administration felt compelled to respond. Pressured by wealthy trustee and benefactor Henry Sage, the University built Sage Chapel. In an offer White couldn't refuse, Sage paid to build the chapel (as well as the Sage Women's College). Before the opening of Sage Chapel in 1875, Protestant students and faculty would attend churches in downtown Ithaca. The building of the chapel itself

³⁷ Andrew Dickson White, "Reply to about religion at Cornell University", 1870. Andrew Dickson White papers, #1-2-2, Box 168 Folder 12, Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University.

³⁸ Cornell University commencement programs and class printed materials, #37-8-346, Box 1, Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

³⁹ Cornell Building Files, #47-10-4032, such as Barnes Hall and Sage Chapel, contain the original dedication programs.

⁴⁰ References to the criticism from McCosh can be found in the 1873 *Era* and White's correspondence from August, 1873. I have not been able to find either the original letter, article, or transcript of his criticism.

was mildly controversial, as the charter clearly laid out the nonsectarian nature of the university. It was due to Sage's funding, as well as continuous outside attacks and pressures, that the chapel was built. White supported the idea, believing that students should have a place to worship, but made the chapel non-denominational. Henry Sage wanted to appoint a full-time chaplain to run the services, but White preferred to invite visiting pastors and lectureships. In this way, Sage chapel was able to accommodate Catholic, Jewish, and Protestant speakers as well as host lectures on a variety of religious topics. Services were heavily attended, particularly in the afternoon⁴¹, and at times it was standing-room only.⁴²

White insisted in his publications that Cornell had the first voluntary chapel services, though the University of Virginia had already offered them since 1825.⁴³ The first register from Cornell paints a slightly different picture: "Simple religious services are held daily in the University Chapel, which all students, except those specially excused for due cause shown to the faculty, are expected to attend. Students are also expected to attend some religious service on Sunday."⁴⁴ This early voluntary chapel service still meant that students needed an excuse from faculty to not attend. The passage remained the same until 1871, when the wording was changed to "simple religious services are held daily in the University Chapel, which students are expected to attend."⁴⁵ By 1873, it was abridged to a truly voluntary system, perhaps as the trustees and faculty were becoming more comfortable with the new University. A section on "Religious Instruction" was added to the register, which does not reference student attendance but describes

⁴¹ An editorial in the *Daily Sun* estimated that at least half of the student body was present at afternoon services. "A Unique University", *The Cornell Daily Sun*, Vol. III (55), December 11, 1882.

⁴² Bishop, *A History of Cornell*, 194. See also correspondence 1872-1875 in the Andrew Dickson White papers, #1-2-2.

⁴³ Bishop, *A History of Cornell*, 141.

⁴⁴ *The Register*, Cornell University, 1868-1869.

⁴⁵ *The Register*, Cornell University, 1871-1872.

the Chapel that will “exemplify the influence of Christianity upon the world.”⁴⁶ Regardless of the register’s rules, many students did not regularly attend chapel.⁴⁷

Religious life factored deeply into campus life, making its way also into the University’s epicenter of instruction: the classroom. In the same letter to the editor of the *Northern Christian Advocate*, White mentions that nine out of ten faculty members were Christian, though he states that it was not a requirement for hiring them.⁴⁸ Classes such as Moral Philosophy, which tied philosophy and religious studies with Christian morals, were required for students. Reverend William Wilson, who centered his instruction on Christian values, taught this course that had gained popularity across colleges nationwide. But along with the required moral philosophy, White and Cornell were strong and vocal supporters of the sciences and required students to take science classes at the beginning of their education instead of at the end. White himself also taught several history classes, and we can see in his lecture notes that religion was a prominent theme as an object of study. Unlike other professors, White’s interest in discussing religion spread beyond standard Christianity. His lecture outline for a class on religion includes a discussion of the ‘sacred books of all religions’, as well as on Judaism, Catholicism, Protestantism, Mohammedanism, and Mormonism. Other professors, such as Felix Adler, brought their religious beliefs into the classroom and openly criticized Christian ideals and ethics.⁴⁹ Despite these very early roots in the teaching of religion, a Religious Studies program was only officially created in 1992.

⁴⁶ *The Register*, Cornell University, 1873-1874.

⁴⁷ Bishop, *A History of Cornell*, 141

⁴⁸ Andrew Dickson White, “Reply to about religion at Cornell University”, ca. 1868-1871. Andrew Dickson White papers, #1-2-2, Box 168 Folder 12, Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library. Page 2.

⁴⁹ Adler was dismissed two years after being hired, though the University insisted it had nothing to do with his Biblical critique and was simply because his term ended. Bishop, *A History of Cornell*, 192. References also appear in the *Daily Sun* and White’s reply is published in the *Cornell Era*, 1874.

Classes also offered a time for students to interact with religious texts, though it is important to note that the teaching of religious texts did not mean the proselytizing of religion in this context. Cornell's collections were flourishing in the first fifty years of its founding, and White sought to buy particular groups of religious works in his collecting. During the 1880s he and his librarian George Lincoln Burr acquired hundreds of manuscripts on the Protestant Reformation as well as on European witchcraft. These books and manuscripts range from small, poorly-preserved fragments of witch trial transcripts to large, ornately decorated Bibles and prayer books.⁵⁰ These texts were brought into classes on architecture, art history, linguistic studies, history, and culture, as objects of study. The students were able to interact with these texts during lectures as well as in the library. In one letter, Burr writes to White, "The lectures have gone off smoothly. . . I even ventured at times to interpolate brief explanations, and of course illustrated the lecture with the original editions of the Reformers' works."⁵¹

The Students and Religion

The academic and social urgings of the students pulled the administration's puppet strings, as it were, and affected the country's views of the young university. The *Cornell Era*, along with the *Daily Sun* and other student publications, perhaps provide the clearest window into the student body's thoughts on early life at the university. Throughout Cornell's first decades, students were consistently defending Cornell's nonsectarianism, criticizing their peer institutions for oppressive religious rules, and celebrating their own religious freedom. As one editor of the *Cornell Era* writes:

⁵⁰ The *Gods and Scholars* exhibition website contains photographs and call numbers for many of these fragments and manuscript.

⁵¹ Letter from George Lincoln Burr to Andrew Dickson White, November 2, 1883. George Lincoln Burr Papers, #14-17-22, Box 1. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

Although the religious privileges offered at the University are eminently of a superior character they, nevertheless, often receive unfavorable criticism, and usually from those prejudiced against the non-sectarian principle that the University upholds. At the close of every college year some new feature of religious work has been inaugurated that attracts the attention of all classes; and this is effected either through the Christian Association, which receives the earnest support of many members of the Faculty, or by the action of the University authorities. Non-sectarian Cornell certainly is, but few denominational institutions favor their students in a better manner, neither can they boast of a greater proportional attendance at regular services even when it is made compulsory. A recently published statement of the Rev. G. R. Van DeWater, D.D., rector of St. Andrew's, at Harlem, and a chaplain of Columbia College, is of interest in relation to this subject. From a passage in which he comments on the various religious methods in vogue in educational institutions the following extract is made; "Of course the free system is the best. Christianity needs a free atmosphere, and religion thrives best when left to stand for itself. Look at Cornell. It is professedly non-sectarian. By its charter, its faculty or board of trustees can never have a majority in favor of any religious body or of unbelief either. It is the strongest Christian college in the country today."⁵²

This quote has several points of interest, the first being the publication date of 1890. Cornell was still actively criticized twenty-five years after its founding, so much so that students felt a need to

⁵² *The Cornell Era*, 1890-1891, 185.

address it in their publication. This writer also defends Cornell's religious stance and supports the presence of religion on campus. Further, it proves that not all religious citizens opposed Cornell's nonsectarian design.

This quote moreover shows that chapel services were heavily attended. The students even brought the Young Men's Christian Association to campus in 1869, a year after classes began. Later, the YMCA became the Cornell University Christian Association and finally Cornell United Religious Work. The Christian Association met on Sundays and midweek for Bible study. Daily 8 AM prayers were led by Reverend Wilson, the registrar and an Episcopalian clergyman, although the lectures were always non-denominational.⁵³ The University also had no shortage of contemporary journals and books on religion; Barnes Hall once housed a library of contemporary religious texts. Correspondence, such as this letter to White from his personal librarian George Lincoln Burr, underscores the library's immense popularity:

...Am depositing the books on Palestine and on religion on the Association's shelves at Barnes Hall. The shelves in the tower room are not yet ready, but are under way. You will be pleased to know that two or three weeks ago, happening into Barnes Hall of a Sunday, I found two of our brightest seniors good-naturedly quarreling over the copy of "The Bible for Young People" (given by you). Each was reading it through and they are by no means its only readers.⁵⁴

⁵³ Bishop, *A History of Cornell*, 141.

⁵⁴ George Lincoln Burr to Andrew Dickson White, February 13, 1890. Andrew Dickson White Papers, #1-2-2, Box 60, Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

Students could quarrel not only over contemporary texts, but also the historical books and manuscripts contained in White's library. White placed great importance on collecting religious texts, using them in the classroom, and making them available to students.

Published at the end of almost every edition of the *Cornell Era* or the *Cornellian* in the nineteenth century were the graduating class statistics, serving essentially as the lineup of the religious make-up among students, as well as their feelings towards co-education, prohibition, politics, or even how they wore their facial hair. Table 1 illustrates the consolidated religious statistics for the classes of 1870 (two-year program students) to 1887, which I compiled using either the *Cornell Era* or the *Cornellian*,⁵⁵ though there are a few years (1872-1873, 1882, 1885) which did not have a question on religion in the questionnaire, were not published, or were possibly not collected.⁵⁶ Thankfully, the library has several well-preserved copies of the *Cornell Era* and the *Cornellian*, in addition to the digitized versions. Table 1 is organized by graduating class in the left hand column, with religious groups and the number of self-identified students in the following columns.

Students were free to answer the questionnaires however they wished. One must keep in mind, however, that there are a few issues with this type of statistic. Students may have been compelled to answer in a certain way, or leave a blank, to fit in with their friend groups, to please

⁵⁵ The majority of the nineteenth-century editions of the *Era* and the *Cornellian* are available for browsing online at Cornell eCommons or Cornell HathiTrust websites. The class statistics are usually in the volume index or the table of contents, under "statistics." 1876 statistics were found in the class Souvenir Book, Cornell University commencement programs and class printed materials, #37-8-346, Box 1 folder 8, Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library. 1874 statistics were found in: Hunt Bradley, Collector. Cornell University Class of 1874 Collection, #41-4-554. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

⁵⁶ I was able to find the original questionnaire for the class of 1872, but not the final statistics. Interestingly, the questionnaire did not include a question on religious affiliation. Cornell University commencement programs and class printed materials, #37-8-346, Box 1 folder 4, Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

their family, or to be humorous. One student stated his religion was ‘materialism’, and others answered as ‘heathen’ or ‘infidel’, which are likely reappropriations of common accusations. Also, many students did not fill out the survey sheets at all. Therefore, the results seen in Table 1 are not exact, but offer merely a glimpse into the demographics of each class. We see an unsurprising result: the majority of students at Cornell, and definitely of those who answered, were Protestant or, more broadly, Christian. We also see numbers vary drastically from year to year. 1875 had three Liberals, for example, which spiked to nineteen the next year. Perhaps organizations or groups of students filled their forms out together. These class statistics can also be useful in determining when the first self-identified Jew, Buddhist, Muslim, etc. entered Cornell. For future analysis, one could record the number of students who were members of the YMCA or Christian Association or other religious programs in the *Cornellian* and in the Cornell United Religious Work collection.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Cornell United Religious Work records, #39-2-1468. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

Year	Christian*	Protestant**	Jewish	Liberal***	Non-sect.	Atheist	No answer	Other
1870	5	13	1	0	0	1	0	2
1871	6	35	0	1	0	0	0	2
1874	12	31	0	15	1	0	5	7
1875	8	32	0	3	3	0	4	0
1876	7	28	0	19	2	0	1	2
1877	8	22	0	16	0	0	0	0
1878	10	25	1	16	5	7	1	1
1879	17	23	2	15	1	0	3	2
1880	12	33	0	9	5	4	0	8
1881	17	21	1	17	3	1	0	6
1883	7	28	0	3	1	0	29	0
1884	11	29	0	4	1	0	1	1
1886	14	44	3	0	0	9	0	0
1887	4	29	2	0	0	4	13	0

TABLE 1.

*Christian: Includes students who answered Christian, Campbellite, Catholic, Swedenborgian, Mormon, Orthodox, Unitarian, or Universalist.

**Protestant: Includes students who answered Protestant, Presbyterian, Methodist, Methodist Episcopal, Episcopal, Dutch Reform, Reform Church, Society of Friends, Quakers, Lutheran, Baptist, Free Will Baptist, Congregationalists, Moravians, Religion of Humanity, or Evangelical.

***Liberal: Includes students who answered Liberal, Independent, Rationalist, Moralist, or Free Thinker.

Though many students took their religion seriously, several of their peers found humor in the “godless” accusations and formed the Young Men’s Heathen Association, or the Infidel Association, in the 1870s. I argue that this was the beginning of the reappropriation of these negative labels into Cornell identity. These ‘heathens’ would publish satirical articles, one in which they put God on trial before realizing there was no God.⁵⁸ Though these organizations were satirical and unofficial, many pious critics used the groups as further proof of the rampant atheism on campus. The first year of the Infidel Association had a membership of thirty students,⁵⁹ a relatively large portion of the overall student body, which numbered around 350-450, for an unofficial, ‘heathenistic’ club. But with dwindling membership, the Association failed to remain on campus. “Too many saints among the freshman,” the *Niagara Index* noted.⁶⁰

Besides the Young Men’s Heathen Association and the Infidel Association, another satirical group known as the Hillians (sometimes spelled Hillions) formed in the mid-late 1870s. From the records it seems that the Hillians, meaning one who dwelt on the Hill, were separate from the Heathen Association, but equally appropriated the ‘godless’ criticisms leveled against the University. The first mention is in the 1877-1878 *Cornell Era*, simply stating that the Annual Hillian Banquet was held, and lists the officers. In later years, a full description was given: a group of students created a mythical deity and annual ceremony. The deity was forged from clay by a Mr. Cushing, who modeled it after an early human skull he saw in a museum. When it was unveiled at the Hill Supper, “its debut was celebrated in song and dance, poems were read, speeches made,

⁵⁸ Bishop, *A History of Cornell*, 192.

⁵⁹ *The Rochester Campus*, March 1879.

⁶⁰ *Niagara Index* Vol. 11 (1878).

and various other orgies such as only college students can enjoy, were indulged in.”⁶¹ When not being worshipped, the deity lived in the bowels of McGraw with Uncle Josh, a custodian who worked in McGraw and whose office was a popular gathering place for students between classes.⁶² Along with a High Priest and an Orator, the Hill Deity had a custodian, who destroyed it upon dropping it some years later. After the clay deity broke, the students looked for a new god, “one they can see.”⁶³ After some convincing, DeForest Van Vleet, class of 1877, offered to craft a new deity. The *Cornell Era* leaves the appearance of the god to the reader’s imagination. No photographs of the Hill Deity or the celebrations have been found, despite the fact that over fifty students and alumni attended these annual banquets.

The Young Men’s Heathen Association and the Hillians, in addition to answers of “heathen” in the register statistics, appear to be the early stages in the reappropriation of the “godless” and “atheist” accusations which have formed part of the narrative myth and are a point of pride. Galinsky describes in detail the processes that lead to reappropriation and the various pitfalls along the way. By using the negative labels ascribed to Cornell as an identifying feature, “[t]he distinctiveness of the group and the label is maintained, but it is simply the negativity that is challenged”⁶⁴ and the positive self-esteem of the group is enhanced. Over the decades, the labels were used with increasing frequency until they became commonplace, positive descriptors of the University. Galinsky centers his paper around the reappropriation of derogatory terms such as ‘queer’, but the phenomenon can be found within religion as well. The term ‘Jesuit’, for example, considered an insult beginning in the sixteenth century, has been reclaimed.⁶⁵ Knowing when and

⁶¹ *The Cornell Era*, 1883-1884, page 252.

⁶² Several references are made in the *Era* and by Morris Bishop (*History of Cornell*, page 96) to “Uncle Josh.” The exact identity of this man requires more research.

⁶³ *The Cornell Era*, 1883-1884, page 252.

⁶⁴ Galinsky, “The Reappropriation of Stigmatizing Labels: Implications for Social Identity,” 232.

⁶⁵ John O’Malley, *The First Jesuits*, (Harvard University Press: 1995) 69.

why Cornell students and faculty turned their negative labels into positive descriptors is essential to understanding the history of the current foundation myth.

Conclusion

Ezra Cornell and Andrew Dickson White were flexible with their original ideas for religion at a university. The founding myth of a great, irreligious university that bred atheists under the guise of being nonsectarian may not be entirely false, but wildly understates the role of religion on campus. The labels of irreligion and secularism have now been reappropriated and play an important part of Cornell's identity, so much so that the University did not have an official Religious Studies program until 1992 and the thought of an exhibition of Cornell's religious texts was controversial. Because of the reappropriation of nineteenth- and twentieth-century accusations, many Cornell faculty, staff, and students have forgotten about Cornell's long-standing relationship with Christianity and religion, and it has slowly been written out of the narrative. As I have illustrated, most nineteenth-century students and faculty at Cornell fought against these labels and reappropriation that are now a centerpiece in Cornell's foundation narrative. It is only when one searches through the correspondence, legal documents, students memorabilia and publications, and history books that the foundation myth can be dissected and accurately reconstructed: Cornell University was founded as a nonsectarian--but openly, and publicly Christian--institution with a thriving religious community involving both faculty and students. The fact that the University was organized as a Christian institution based on Christian values does not diminish its status as one of the first nonsectarian, scientific universities, which was the basis for later secular institutions, or downplay its unique status among nineteenth-century schools, and it should be embraced as part of the institution's history. But there are still more questions that can

be answered. I have focused only on the nineteenth century, and much can be said about the changing dynamics of the past hundred years. Religious demographic statistics could be collected for a broader date range. The idea of reappropriation, identity, and the use of the term ‘secular’ could be further examined. The issues brought up in this paper merely scratch the surface of a much larger study of religion and Cornell’s history based on the archival evidence and opens the door for a more complete reconstruction of the Cornell narrative. This type of analysis could easily be applied to other institutions and the results may alter the way historians view the evolution of American universities.

APPENDIX

Gods and Scholars: Studying Religion at a Secular University

From its founding in 1865, Cornell University has been firmly nonsectarian, welcoming students and faculty of any religion, or no religion at all. This approach was controversial in the mid to late 19th century, when the majority of American universities were religiously affiliated; Cornell was called the “Godless” university by many. However, religion was in no way absent from campus life. On the contrary, with the rapid growth of its library collections, the new university began seeking out religious works of all types and eras. By the time the first incoming class arrived in 1868, instructors and students could interact with a vast array of sacred works. These materials supported courses on topics such as architecture, art history, philology, social reform and injustice, and literature. They were also used to complement sermons in the University chapel. This exhibition highlights the collecting of religious texts at Cornell and introduces many of the figures who have built the collection over the past 150 years.

This exhibition contains materials from the Rare and Manuscript Collections, as well as several artifacts from the Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art.

Andrew Dickson White. Reply to questions about religion at Cornell University. Circa late 1860s – early 1870s.

According to Cornell’s first president, A.D. White, Cornell was regularly accused of being a Godless university that breeds atheist students. While White did not usually dignify such attacks with personal responses, he did on occasion write to newspapers and journals in defense of the university, as he did in this letter to the editor of *The Northern Christian Advocate*. He writes that while no one was required to practice a certain religion, the majority of faculty members were Christian and ceremonies were opened and closed with prayer, though participation was not mandatory.

Ezra Cornell. Letter “to the coming man and woman,” at the laying of the cornerstone of Sage Hall. Ithaca, New York, May 15, 1873.

“The principal danger to be encountered by the friends of education, and by all lovers of true liberty is that which may arise from sectarian strife. From these halls, sectarianism must be forever excluded, all students must be left free to worship God as their conscience [sic] shall dictate, and all persons of any creed or all creeds must find free and easy access, and a hearty and equal welcome to the educational facilities possessed by the Cornell University.

Photograph of Andrew Dickson White.

Photograph of Ezra Cornell.

The Cornell Era, 1877-1878.

As part of the graduating class statistics, students had the option to list their religion. The majority were Christian, with a small percentage of Jewish students as well as one claiming his

religion to be ‘materialism’. Some students found humor in the “Godless” accusations and formed the unofficial Young Men’s Heathen Association in the 1870s.

The Study of Architecture

A lover of architecture, Andrew Dickson White collected thousands of architectural books and images in the late 1860’s, forming the largest library on the subject at the time. In 1871, he donated his massive collection to Cornell on the condition that the university form a department of architecture. Even after he donated the bulk of his collection, A.D. White continued to acquire and donate materials to the department and library. Among his great gifts to the university were over 13,000 architectural photographs portraying buildings from around the world, including churches, mosques, and archaeological ruins. Many of the religious works in other library collections can also be used for architectural studies, as they often depict or describe places of worship.

Parabaik Manuscript. Burmese, circa 1850.

Buddha seated inside a temple from the story of *Buddha and the 31 Planes of Existence*.

Photograph of McGraw Museum, 1880s.

Cornell’s first museum, located in McGraw Hall, housed not only the collections of natural history, geology, paleontology, and art, but also the architectural photographs. In this image, the photographs can be seen in the cabinets on the upper level. Today, these photos are housed in the Library’s Rare and Manuscript Collections.

Temple of Bel, Palmyra, Syria. Mid-late 1800s.

This photograph of a temple (incorrectly labelled as the Temple of Bacchus) from the site of Palmyra is an example of the importance of the architectural photographs. Many of the structures pictured in A.D. White’s collection are no longer standing. Photographs are all that remain. The ancient Temple of Bel at Palmyra was destroyed by the terrorist organization known as the ‘Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant’ on August 30, 2015.

Buddhist manual, circa 1930.

This Thai Buddhist folding book contains images of pagodas as well as text on how to construct them.

The Study of Art History

Cornell’s Fine Arts Library began with A.D. White’s donation of his architecture library in 1871, and continued to expand. It originally housed the architecture materials as well as casts, drawings, and sculpture, as described here in White’s own notes on the collection. This

collection included thousands of casts of gems and medallions depicting classical images through contemporary figures. Today, one can study these religious texts and objects - from beautifully hand drawn images of Hindu deities to the pictographic catechism from the Andes - from an art historical perspective.

Leaf from Flemish Book of Hours, circa 1450.

Leaf from a Book of Hours with pen drawing of God the Father with crucified Christ, late 1100s.

Students studying European art could work with texts such as these two leaves. They illustrate two different styles, one with a lone pen drawing and the other fully embellished with gold paint and floral border.

Book of Hindu Deities. 1860-1900.

Gift of Elizabeth Martin Slutz.

Quechua Prayer Book, 1800s, possibly from Chile.

This manuscript contains pictographic representations of various religious texts, including the Apostles' Creed, Salve Regina, and Ave Maria. This page depicts the Ten Commandments. The manuscript is a mnemonic aid and not a rebus; each symbol is a semantic sign and illustrates a complex idea or meaning. For example, the man with his leg wrapped around a woman depicts the act of adultery in the 6th commandment, and covetousness in the 10th. Because each symbol can have multiple meanings, translation would be almost impossible if the material were not already known or, in this case, labelled at the top of each page in Quechua and occasionally Spanish. Since it is not phonetic, the text can be read by speakers of any language. Catechisms such as this one were used by Catholic missionaries to spread Christianity despite linguistic difficulties. This catechism would have been used to teach people who belonged to the Quechua-speaking community but could not necessarily read. The art represented in the book shows a clearly European influence on native culture. The capes, suits, and hats shown in the pictographs were common in Europe in the nineteenth century, and would have been brought to the Andes by the mid-nineteenth century.

Purchased as part of the Huntington Free Library, 2004

Buddhist Prayers. Gold paint, shellac and ink on palm leaves. Late 1800s – early 1900s.

Grand Tour souvenir reliefs with descriptions, 1820s.

Andrew Dickson White. Description of the Fine Arts collection, circa 1870s.

Photograph of Mr. and Mrs. William F.E. Gurley, circa 1930s.

William F.E. Gurley and Katherine Eberly Gurley were both patrons of the Cornell library system. William, class of 1877, was a geologist and charter member of the Geological Society of America. He was a well-known paleontologist, poet, and collector of art and books, despite being almost completely blind. The Chicago Art Institute is home to his extensive art collection, and Cornell is the lucky recipient of many of his books. He created a small book fund for the library in the 1930s in memory of his late first wife, and his second wife Katherine continued Gurley's legacy after his death by donating hundreds of their books to Cornell in the 1940s. Among these donations were several handwritten Qur'ans and books on the Near East and Near Eastern languages.

The Study of Objects

Numerous cultures around the world do not put their religious practices in writing. For others, including Pre-Columbian cultures in Mesoamerica, there are only a few surviving texts. When the University libraries don't possess any primary documents, the Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art and the Anthropology Collections in McGraw Hall can help fill the gaps. The items in this case, all on loan from the Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, represent cultures for which we have no documents.

Pregnant Female "Venus" Figurine, Ecuador. 2300-2000 BCE.

Jade Avian Axe-God Pendant, Costa Rica. 500 BCE-800 CE.

Bat-god Urn, Mexico. 250-550 CE.

This Zapotec urn, like the other example in this case, was likely placed at the entrance to a tomb or within the interior. It could have contained perishable offerings such as food or beverages.

Zapotec Funerary Urn, Mexico, 750-1200 CE.

Rubbing Oracle (Itombwa) and Implement, Kuba. Circa 1900s.

A diviner uses this instrument in order to determine the guilt of a person, generally applied to those believed to be witches. The diviner rubs a round, handled disk (now missing) across the smooth surface of the "belly" of the carved figure. If the disk sticks, the accused is believed to be guilty; if the disk slides easily, the accused is innocent. Craftsmen carve divining implements in various shapes; the crocodile and dog forms are most common. The male figure depicted here with Kuba scarification, is simply a human form. It does not represent either the accused or a deity.

The Study of Languages

"For a thorough appreciation of any literature, a knowledge of the language in which it is written is indispensable" (*Cornell University Register*, 1875-1876).

Cornell offered a panoply of language classes beginning in the 1870s. Besides the classical languages, professors also taught Asian languages such as Chinese, Japanese, and Sanskrit, aided by the acquisition of the Bopp collection. In 1919, Charles Wason donated his massive collection of western language books on China; the Library's collections of Asian books and manuscripts, many of which were religious texts in dozens of languages and scripts, have continued to grow to this day.

Buddhist fragments on birch bark and palm leaf. Sanskrit, 300-600.

Known as the "Buddhist Dead Sea Scrolls," these fragments belong to a corpus of texts found in Afghanistan. Combined with more than 1000 fragments in Berlin, the British Library, and the Schoyen collection, among others, the manuscripts contain many unknown Buddhist texts as well as the oldest witness to texts of Mahayana Buddhism.

Gift of Bruce Ferrini, 2007.

Devi Mahatmyam. Sanskrit, undated.

This Hindu text describes the victory of the goddess Durga over the demon Mahishasura. It forms part of the Markandeya Purana in secondary scripture. The original text was likely composed between 400-500 CE, and is a central text of Shaktism (a denomination that focuses on worship of Shakti or Devi, the Divine Mother).

From the collection of Franz Bopp, purchased in 1868.

Kitab Koran: tetedakanipun ing tembung Arab, kadjawekaken. Javanese, 1858.

A Javanese translation of the Qur'an.

Vinaya Sangaha. Buddhist text in Pali, Burmese script, 1793.

Qur'an, selections, 1800s.

Catalogue of the Franz Bopp Collection, 1868.

In the early years of the University, there was a need to build the library collections quickly. To provide the books needed to serve multiple subjects, the Library purchased several large subject collections. For example, in 1868, A.D. White purchased the massive collection of German philologist Franz Bopp. The University's tactic for building a large library was to buy collections and not focus solely on individual books. The Bopp collection contains texts and grammar books on many South Asian and Near Eastern languages. This catalogue contains original markings and notes.

The Study of Languages

Along with the Classical, Romance, and Germanic languages, Hebrew was one of the earliest languages taught at Cornell. Under Professor Frederick Roehrig's and William Wilson's instruction, students could translate the Old Testament as part of their language studies. Daniel

Willard Fiske began teaching Arabic and Persian, and at the turn of the century Nathaniel Schmidt was offering hieroglyphic Egyptian and Assyrian. Some of the best--or only--materials in these languages owned by Cornell at that time were religious texts.

Samaritan Pentateuch, 1750-1895.

This copy of the Pentateuch is written in the Samaritan script, though the liturgical texts themselves may be written in the Hebrew, Arabic, or Aramaic language. This Samaritan version contains significant grammatical and semantic differences from the Jewish Pentateuch.

Gift of Nathaniel Schmidt.

Ethiopic Manuscript, mainly hymns, in Ge'ez. 1700s.

Gift of Nathaniel Schmidt.

***Maḥzor*. Amsterdam: Yetome Shelomoh Props, 1737 or 1738.**

A Jewish prayer book, mainly containing holiday prayers.

***Psalterium coptice*. Berlin: F. Dümmler, 1837.**

This psalter is in both Coptic and Arabic, printed side by side for linguistic studies or practice.

Franz Bopp Collection, purchased in 1868.

Vellum Ethiopian scroll containing fragment of the New Testament and prayer to the Blessed Virgin. In Amharic. 1600-1900.

Gift of J. Holmes, 1914.

***Kozer ha-mikra Epitome Bibliorum continens insigniora Veteris ac Noui Testamenti dicta Hebraicè, Chaldaicè, Syriacè, Graecè, Latinè, et Germanicè*. Wittenberg: Haeredes Ioannis Cratonis, 1578.**

The New Testament in Hebrew, Chaldean, Syriac, Greek, Latin, and German.

Fragment of the Book of Bartholomew, a New Testament apocryphal text, written in Sahidic Coptic. 800s.

Gift of Bruce Ferrini, circa 2000.

Clay Bulla, Sumerian, in Cuneiform script. Circa 2000-3000 BCE.

This official seal contains a list of goods needed for ritual offerings. The tablet indicates that several quantities of the date fruit were needed as offerings to various deities on different days. Cuneiform is one of the earliest forms of written language.

Aramaic incantation bowl. Circa 500-800 CE.

These Near Eastern ritual bowls were usually buried upside down to trap evil spirits and protect the holder. The writings around the inside of the bowl were prayers, spells, an alphabet, or sometimes just gibberish to sell the bowl to an illiterate customer.

Photograph of Nathaniel Schmidt.

Nathaniel Schmidt began teaching at Cornell in September of 1896. As professor of Semitic studies, Schmidt focused his language lectures on the translation of texts, including the Mishnah and Talmud in Hebrew, the Qur'an in Arabic, and the Book of the Dead in hieratic and hieroglyphics. A gifted linguist, Schmidt also taught courses in Assyrian, Aramaic, Ethiopic, and Coptic, as well as comparative Semitic philology. His dedication to forming a strong Near Eastern Studies department led to the enhancement of the library's collection of Near Eastern literature and the purchase of the August Eisenlohr collection of Egyptology and Assyriology in 1902.

***Book of the Dead* fragments on linen. Hieratic, circa 1000 BCE.**

Gift of Bruce Ferrini, 2007.

The Study of Languages

As with most institutions in 19th century America, Cornell offered classes in the Romance and Germanic languages and built library collections to support them. Students could even enter into Greek or Latin programs for their Bachelor's degree. While collections in European languages thrived, materials in Native American languages remained relatively limited until the acquisition of the Huntington Free Library Native American Collection in 2004, which contained thousands of books and manuscripts by and about indigenous groups. A selection of books in Native American languages are displayed here, created by Christian missionaries to aid in conversion, as well as texts in European languages.

S.A. Worcester and E. Boudinot. *The Acts of the Apostles translated into the Cherokee language.* New Echota [Ga.]: John F. Wheeler, 1832.

Epistles of St. Paul, with commentary, 1100-1135.

This commentary on the Pauline epistles is written in Latin. The text of the Bible itself appears in large characters in a central column on each page; brief interpretive comments, or "glosses," are written between the lines, while longer remarks appear in the margins. The comments correspond to those of the *Glossa ordinaria*, or "Standard Gloss" of interpretations of the Church fathers, which was compiled from the ninth century onward.

Liber Psalmorum Davidis regis et prophetae: Ex Arabico idiomate in Latinum translatus.
Rome: Ex typographia Sauariana, 1614.

This copy of the Psalms is written in two columns, one in Arabic and the other in Latin.

Gift of Mrs. William F.E. Gurley, 1944.

Biblia Pitschna. In Scuol: tras Iacob Henric Dorta, 1666.

Willard Fiske collected not only Icelandic materials and the works of Petrarch and Dante, but also texts in the Rhaeto-Romance languages, which originated in northern Italy and Switzerland.

New Testament in Greek. Amsterdam: Wetsteniana, 1698.

Gift of Benno Loewy, 1919.

John Eliot. *Mamusse wunneetupanatamwe Up-Biblum God naneeswe Nukkone Testament kah wonk Wusku Testament.* Cambridge, Mass.: Samuel Green, 1685.

Written in Algonquian, a language historically spoken by tribes along the Atlantic Coast and Great Basin, this book represents the first Bible printed in continental America in a Native American language. This book is the second edition.

Purchased as part of the Huntington Free Library Native American Collection in 2004.

The Gospel according to St. Mark, translated by A.C. Garrioch, into the language of the Beaver Indians, of the Diocese of Athabasca. London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1886.

Written in the Tsattine language.

Purchased as part of the Huntington Free Library Native American Collection in 2004.

The History of the Book

The history of the book is written, as it were, in the very pages of this collection. A.D. White and subsequent collectors sought out handwritten books and other manuscripts that pre-dated the advent of Western printing. These books were important not only for their content, but also for their value in teaching the history of the creation and transmission of text. The leaf from the Gutenberg Bible, for example, is often used to show the first book printed in the West with movable metal type. Others, such as the miniature Bibles and prayer books, demonstrate the various techniques in printing and binding as well as the competition between printers to create the smallest (or largest!) books as novelties. The Qur'an exemplifies the uses of paper, with gold leaf pressed into it, and the medieval fragment of the Book of Hours shows the process of illumination.

The New Testament of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Cedar Rapids, Iowa: Torch Press Book Shop, 1895.

Leaf from a Gutenberg Bible, 1454.

Qing dynasty wooden printing block on the Great Immortal He, circa 1880.

Printing tools: ladle and screwdriver, 2000.

The Study and Practice of Religion

The University had no shortage of contemporary journals and books on religion in the early twentieth century. Barnes Hall once housed a library of religious texts, though rare and valuable materials were not stored there. Local lecturers and faculty also gave talks on world religion at Sage Chapel. Students were given the opportunity to choose religious groups to join or form, and in 1869 they created a chapter of the Young Men's Christian Association. As of 2015, Cornell United Religious Work is located in Anabel Taylor Hall and holds multi-denominational services and worship.

Arcanum Arcanorum, 1743.

Manuscript copy of a mystical Gnostic text.

Joseph Smith. *The Book of Mormon: an account written by the hand of Mormon, upon plates taken from the plates of Nephi*. Palmyra, New York: E.B. Grandin, 1830.

Purchased by A.D. White.

Andrew Dickson White. Religion lecture outline, circa 1860s-1870s.

President White's outline for a lecture on religion includes a section on the sacred books of all religions as well as the literature of the Jews, the Eastern Church, the Roman Church, Protestants, Mormons, and Mohammedans (Muslims).

1-2-2, 175 folder 9

***Torah nevi'im ketuvim*. Basel: M. Wahl, 1612.**

***Haftarot ha-Torah*, in Aramaic and Hebrew, 1673.**

Gift of Isaac Rabinowitz

***Liber Adami sue Razielis*, 1600s.**

A Cabbalistic text in Latin.

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Cyanotype print of Sage Chapel.

Cyanotype print of Barnes Hall.

Reed leaf manuscript, portraying Buddhist imagery, undated.

Ethiopian service book and satchel, to be carried by a priest, 1900s.

On loan from the Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art.

Ethiopian hand cross, undated.

On loan from the Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art.

Abenaki Catholic Prayer book, in the Abenaki Native American language, late 1800s – early 1900s.

***Chong dao tang Yi jing da quan hui jie*. China: Wen gong shu yuan cang ban: Fu wen tang zi xing, Kangxi xin you, 1681.**

17th century edition of the ancient Chinese divination text, the I Ching.

Witchcraft and Witch Hunts

Andrew Dickson White and his personal librarian George Lincoln Burr were deeply interested in collecting and studying materials on religious persecution and, in White's terms, the warfare between science and religion. Naturally, the duo turned their collective attention to the witch hunts of Europe as a prime example. Together they formed one of the premier collections on witchcraft and related materials.

Johann Luxenburger, Friedrich Sesaner of Luttum. Dreifacher Hollenzwang--book of magic, charms and invocations to compel demons, circa 1557.

Manuscript copy of a “Hollenzwang,” a book containing invocations and charms intended to compel the demons to do one's will. It draws its inspiration from Dr. Faust’s Wunder-Buch (1501) and includes several drawings.

Letter to Salem court by William Good, September 13, 1710.

Here, William Good writes to the Honourable Committee requesting compensation for the death of his wife Sarah, convicted of witchcraft in 1692. He also mentions their baby, who died in prison, and their young daughter who has “little or no reason” left after several months of incarceration.

Acquired by George Lincoln Burr.

Minutes of the Trial of Dietrich Flade.

The tragic story of Dietrich Flade was of particular interest to Burr, who spent months in Germany researching his life and death. Flade, a judge and witness to many persecutions of alleged witches, made many enemies in his public post. In return, he was tried and accused of witchcraft himself. He was strangled and burned in 1589.

Letter from George Lincoln Burr to A.D.White, April 8, 1886.

“... I have stumbled, today, on a bit of unsuspected evidence that is so important to my researches here, and in particular throws such a flood of light upon the fate of the unfortunate Flade, that I cannot resist the impulse to share it with you...I find the most indubitable indications that the death of Flade was the result of a contrived plot...” Burr’s theory that Flade was executed first and foremost for speaking out against the witch hunts was later disproved.

Reformation

In contrast with persecution and social injustice, A.D. White and George Lincoln Burr also collected numerous materials on the Protestant Reformation and the famous Reformers, including Luther, Calvin, and Melancthon. As mentioned in the letter from Burr to White, these original works, such as an edition of the Lutheran Bible shown here, were used to illustrate the lectures each gave on the Reformers.

Martin Luther. *Biblia das ist die gantze Heilige Schrift Deudsch.* Wittenberg: Hans Lufft, 1534.

***The Bible translated according to the Ebrew and Greeke.* London: Christopher Barker, 1589.**

This Bible, known as the Geneva Bible, preceded the King James version by 51 years and was the primary Bible of 16th century Protestantism. In addition to the Biblical texts, this Bible contains scriptural aids and maps and is believed to be the first ‘study bible’.

Martin Luther. *Deudsch Catechismus*. Wittenberg: Johan Schwertel, 1572.

Letter by Martin Luther, copied by a contemporary, circa 1522.

Index auctorum et libroru[m] qui ab Officio Sanctae Rom. et Vniversalis Inquisitionis caueri ab omnibus et singulis . . . Rome: Antonium Bladum, 1559.

This list of books and authors banned by the Catholic Church in 1559 contains many famous Reformers, including Martin Luther.

Portrait of Martin Luther.

Portrait of Philip Melanchthon.

Letter from G.L. Burr to A.D.White, November 2, 1883.

“The lectures have gone off smoothly. . . I even ventured at times to interpolate brief explanations, and of course illustrated the lecture with the original editions of the Reformers’ works.”

The Study of Literature

The earliest written narratives were almost always religious: creation myths, prayers, psalms, and parables that have become touchstones within – and even beyond – their cultures. Some have endured for millennia, even outliving the gods they celebrate, due to their poetic beauty and the elemental truths of human nature they express.

***Nihon shoki*. Edo: Suharaya Mohē, Kansei, 1793.**

Also called “The Chronicles of Japan,” this text is a copy of the second oldest book of Japanese history, originally completed in 720. It begins with the Japanese creation myth, followed by many other myths and histories of rulers. It is a sacred text of relatively new Shintoism.

Ethiopic manuscript, 1700s.

This service book contains many prayers as well as the Song of Songs and stories of the miracles of the Blessed Virgin. The Song of Songs is considered to be one of the earliest recorded pieces of poetry in the Bible.

August Eisenlohr collection, purchased in 1902.

Psalms in Arabic, 1687.

Gift of Mrs. William F.E. Gurley, 1944.

Bhadrabāhu. *The Kalpa sutra, and Nava tatva: two works illustrative of the Jain religion and philosophy.* London, Oriental Translation Fund of Great Britain; Bernard Quaritch, 1848.

This text contains the translation (as well as notes on the translation) of the original Sanskrit biographies and stories of the important Jain figures Mahavira and Parshvanath.

Gift of Benno Loewy, 1919.

A.D. White lecture notes on Literature, including Christian Literature. Circa 1870.

Benno Loewy

An active Freemason and appeals lawyer from New York City, Benno Loewy's interests spread far beyond his law classes at Columbia University. In addition to books on law, his personal library contained over 50,000 items related to the Freemasons, theater, culture, and literature. Loewy had no affiliation with Cornell, but bequeathed his collection to the University library in 1919 because of its nonsectarian stance. It arrived in train cars in 1923, after four years of litigation.

Turkish Qur'an leaf.

Eleze McKenzie collection.

Qur'an Leaf. 1122.

Eleze McKenzie collection.

Sanskrit text from the Bhagavad Gita. 1800s.

Eleze McKenzie collection.

Portrait of Martin Luther.

***The Holy Bible.* London: Christopher Barker, 1585.**

This Bible, known as the Bishop's Bible, is believed to be the base text of the King James translation. It was created by bishops as a replacement for the objectionable, Calvinist Geneva Bible and was authorized by the king.

***The Holy Bible, conteyning the Old Testament, and the New.* London: Robert Barker, 1611.**

First edition of the King James Bible.

***The Byble in English.* London: Edwarde Whytchurche, 1553.**

A later edition of the Great Bible, the first authorized English Bible, which was meant to be read aloud in services.

Gift of William Gerhard Mennen.

Balinese ancestral festival, carved from teak.

Gift of John M. Echols.

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