

Spring 2014

## Founders Type Newsletter, Issue No. 55

Friends of NIU Libraries

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### Recommended Citation

Friends of NIU Libraries, "Founders Type Newsletter, Issue No. 55" (2014). *University Libraries Archive*. 10. <https://huskiecommons.lib.niu.edu/ua-library/10>

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Friends  
of NIU  
Libraries

# Founders' Type



A Newsletter of the Northern Illinois University Libraries and Friends of NIU Libraries

## John Peter Altgeld's Influence Still Visible

The most striking building on the Northern Illinois University campus is arguably Altgeld Hall. Most observers admire the stark Tudor Gothic "castle on the hill" without recalling the Illinois governor for whom it is named. The life of John Peter Altgeld is truly an American story and, to paraphrase the words of Illinois poet Vachel Lindsey, "need not be forgotten." Altgeld's influence is still visible 112 years after his death.



Altgeld was born on December 30, 1847 in the German village of Niederselters, in the Prussian state of Nassau. When he was three months old, Altgeld's parents immigrated to America. The two principle biographers of Altgeld, Waldo R. Browne (*Altgeld of Illinois: A Record of His Life and Work*, New York: B.W. Huebsch, 1924) and Harry Barnard (*Eagle Forgotten: The Life of John Peter Altgeld*, New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1938), record that "young Pete" worked hard on his family farm in Ohio and was often beaten by his stern father. At 16, Altgeld enlisted in an Ohio infantry regiment, but suffered more from illness than military action in the Civil War. Following the war, he attended secondary school rather than returning to farming. A capable student, Altgeld became a teacher and taught at various schools near Mansfield, Ohio. In 1869, he left Ohio and settled in Savannah, Missouri teaching and reading law. At the age of 24, Altgeld was admitted to the bar and soon became the city attorney for Savannah. Three years later Altgeld moved to Chicago to bolster his legal career.

Altgeld's rise from humble beginnings to respected attorney prompted biographers Waldo Browne and Ray Ginger (*Altgeld's America: The Lincoln Ideal Versus Changing Realities*, New York: Harper and Row, 1958), to suggest that his early life paralleled that of Abraham Lincoln. After successful years as a Chicago attorney, Altgeld began investing in real estate that culminated in his construction of the sixteen story "Unity Block" building at 127 Dearborn Street.

Altgeld's political ambitions became evident in his

first book, *Our Penal Machinery and its Victims* (Chicago: Janssen McClurg and Co., 1884). This treatise revealed his embrace of progressive reforms and led to close friendships with labor leader George A. Schilling and prominent attorney Clarence Darrow.

Altgeld was elected in 1886 as judge of the Cook County Superior Court. In 1891, Altgeld became Chief Justice of Cook County and published his second book, *Live Questions* (Chicago: Donahue, Henneberry Co.).

In 1892, Altgeld was elected governor of Illinois and became the first Democrat elected after the Civil War. Altgeld's term as Illinois' chief executive was soon marked by controversy with his pardon of the three surviving prisoners of the infamous Haymarket Square bombing and his dispute with President Grover Cleveland during the Pullman strike. His great successes, however, were the expansion of the University of Illinois and the building of new normal schools at DeKalb and Charleston. The governor also asserted his own architectural imprint on educational and other state buildings by insisting on the Tudor Gothic style that resembled medieval castles along the Rhine River.

Governor Altgeld exerted his political clout during the July 1896 Democratic National convention in Chicago. His strong support helped secure the Democratic nomination for William Jennings Bryan. Many authors, notably Ray Ginger, have argued that Altgeld might have won the presidential nomination for himself except that he was disqualified by his foreign birth.

After losing his bid for reelection in 1896, he returned to the practice of law by joining Clarence Darrow's firm. Staying active as a speaker and writer, Altgeld's final book, *Oratory: Its Requirements and Its Rewards* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr) appeared in 1901. Widely regarded as one of the finest orators of his day, Altgeld frequently noted in letters to friends that he had a special affection for the power of the spoken word. Altgeld died suddenly of a cerebral hemorrhage on March 11, 1902 a few hours after delivering a speech in Joliet.

In his 1956 book, *Profiles in Courage*, future president John F. Kennedy strongly praised Altgeld's act of political courage in issuing the Haymarket Pardons. Altgeld's most lasting legacy, however, is likely embodied in the imposing five "castle-themed" academic buildings at the University of Illinois, SIU—Carbondale, Illinois State, Eastern Illinois, and, of course, Northern Illinois University.

Ferald Bryan, President  
Friends of NIU Libraries



## A Note from the Friends Faculty Liaison

Spring is here! I have officially shoveled enough snow at this point in late January to be dubious of the weather cooperating with that notion, but nonetheless, the Friends of the NIU Libraries has some excellent programs coming up this Spring semester that we hope will tempt you to join us.

As you may have noted from our holiday card and invitations, we moved our Wine and Cheese reception to late January this year rather than the fall semester, mostly due to scheduling conflicts. I expect that if you didn't get a chance to join us on January 23<sup>rd</sup> for wine, cheese, and good company to kick off the Spring semester, we'll be back on track in early September once more.

Our second event for this semester is on March 4, 2014 at 7:30 pm. If you missed out on Open Access Week events sponsored by the library last October, this is your chance to catch up, and find out what's going. I will be providing a talk called "Open Access in a Nutshell" that will cover the basics of what Open Access is, how it relates to faculty and student research, and why it's important to us all at NIU, particularly in relation to recently passed state laws. Open Access Week in 2014 is October 20-26. Mark your calendars now, because I know that the University Libraries are hatching plans to bring more speakers to campus, provide more workshops, and to keep the conversation -- about how we make our publicly funded research more accessible -- moving forward.

Our third event for the Spring is on Thursday, April 10, 2014. NIU Alumni and teacher Lee Schreiner has been an avid collector of popular American sheet music for decades. He has generously begun gifting his massive collection to NIU, and the library will be celebrating with public exhibits of some of the highlights of his collection in April and May. In conjunction with this exhibit, Lee will be presenting on "American Social History Through Sheet Music." Join us and see how illustrated popular music reflects the social movements and historical events of its time.

While we have not yet set the date for the Friends Annual Meeting, rest assured, it is in the works and will happen over the summer. We are also looking at some excellent ideas for programming in the fall. I hope that you will continue to join us for events throughout 2014, and thank you for your ongoing support of the Friends of the NIU Libraries.

Lynne M. Thomas  
Faculty Liaison, Friends of the NIU Libraries

### Member Benefits:

Receive a 10% discount on merchandise at the following stores:  
-Ed Ripp Fine Art Books, Chicago

Friends tote bags! {email (aschroeder@niu.edu) or call (815-753-8091) Angie Schroeder for details.}

## The Historic Scenic Collection of the Chicago Lyric Opera: Creating Access Behind the Scenes

The Historic Scenic Collection, held in Rare Books and Special Collections, contains intriguing documentation, photos, blueprints, and advertisements of the Chicago Lyric Opera dating back to the early 1900s. This collection is an amazing 163 linear feet of materials, spanning an entire century of theatre performances. Highlights from the collection processed so far include glamorous production photos of scenes and actors, blueprints for the sets and stages, and contemporary programs handed out to avid theatre goers.



One of the more challenging parts of processing this collection has been the flattening of delicate, rolled-up blueprints. We constructed our own humidification chamber using two sterile refuse cans (one 20 gallon and one 44 gallon) with one layered inside the other. The innermost can has holes drilled into it and we place a mixture of water and concentrated Lysol (to keep mold from growing) in the bottom of our outermost container. We then place the blueprints inside the inner chamber and seal it with a lid adhered to blotter paper, which sucks up any excess moisture so that the blueprints won't be damaged. We kept them inside this chamber for about a week. Periodically checking on their progress until they were loosened enough to be taken out and flattened between two pieces of blotter paper with weighted glass placed on top, we then left them to dry for about four days. Once flattened and dry we placed them inside special nonreactive folders appropriate for long-term storage. These prints have fascinating notations on them left by the project engineers that created them, which makes them especially rewarding to conserve.



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The Historic Scenic Collection also contains a group of reference materials, mostly resources that both costume and set designers used for inspiration or accuracy. Among these are books and magazines containing material swatches, tapestry motifs, and ornate wood depictions, as well as periodicals and catalogues from which the Chicago Opera often ordered items for their productions.

Opera often ordered items for their productions.

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All the captivating photographic documentation that this collection offers has now also been properly processed and placed into safe acid-free containers and plastic sleeves. This painstaking endeavor is well worth the time and effort to access a unique period in Chicago's artistic history that we can provide to our patrons. We are soon going to complete processing the main



parts of this collection and will continue to work on unfolding the blueprints. Come by the Rare Books department at NIU to see this remarkable collection!

Annie Oelschlager, Manuscripts Processor

Tiffany Arnold, Graduate Assistant

### Save These Dates for Friends Events!:

Tuesday, March 4, 2014, 7:30 pm - *Open Access in a Nutshell -- Updated!* with Lynne M. Thomas, Curator of Rare Books and Special Collections and Associate Professor. Founders Memorial Library, Staff Lounge, lower level.

Thursday, April 10, 2014, 7:30 pm - *American Social History Through Sheet Music* with Lee Schreiner. Founders Memorial Library, Staff Lounge, lower level.

These events are free and open to the public!

### 2013-2014 Friends of NIU Libraries Board Members and Officers

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## What's new in Public Services?

2013 was a busy year in Public Services for NIU Libraries. A few of the changes include these:

1. Additional shelving on the 2nd floor. A new section of shelving was added on the north side of the escalator to accommodate the growing American history section of the collection. Careful identification of items to be moved to storage and the weeding of duplicates is not enough to keep up with the growth of our print collections; adding shelving on this floor is one of several ways we are addressing our space issues.
2. Moving current newspapers from the basement to the 1<sup>st</sup> floor. Founders' basement is particularly crowded, but at the same time, we have space to fill in current periodicals due to the migration of a large number of journal titles to online access. Moving the current newspapers (those we keep until microfilm arrives) frees up a full range of shelving in the basement for other storage.
3. Search and Hold for items not found by patrons. In the past, when patrons reported that they couldn't find items on the shelves, it was our practice to verify that the items were in their proper location and to inform patrons that help was available if they needed it to find these items. Now, when patrons report that they can't find items, we search for them and place them on the Hold shelf for the patrons to retrieve. This saves patrons from having to search again for the same items.
4. Local Requests function turned on in the catalog. NIU patrons can now request that items be pulled from the shelves and placed on hold. Normally, items are available for check out by mid-afternoon the business day following the date of request, and an email reminder is sent out the next day to remind the patron that the item is available.
5. We have added texting to our e-reference services. A new software program accepts chat, texting, and email, and keeps some basic statistics.
6. Increasing the number of students shelving during weekends and evenings. In conjunction with increasing space for items in the circulating collection, we have also increased the number of hours spent shelving to decrease the time it takes for circulated items to be returned to their home location. This is a huge help to patrons looking for popular items, and staff trying to assist them.
7. Developing procedures for patrons to read microcards and get scans of microcard content. Academic libraries still own unique content on microcards, but no microcard readers are commercially available. We found that our text enlarger for patrons with low vision will enlarge microcard content adequately, and a new scanner in Information Delivery Services can be used to scan such content (there is no printer attached to the text enlarger). After a time of having no access to the content in this format, we can now assist patrons with getting it.

We are continually evaluating our services to determine whether we are meeting the information needs of our users. Keeping services updated is an ongoing process! Thank you for your support of the University Libraries.

Rosanne Cordell, Associate Dean for Public Services

## Thank you to our Life Members (donating \$1000.00 or more)

Adra Baker-Gallagher  
Paul & Jean Burtness  
Glen & Dawn Ericksen  
Deborah Erickson  
James Erman & Lydia Vitello  
Glen & Jamie Gildemeister  
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Friends of NIU Libraries  
Founders Memorial Library  
Northern Illinois University  
DeKalb, IL 60115

Yes! I/We wish to join the Friends of NIU Libraries at the following level:

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  - \$100 Donor
  - \$50 Family
  - \$35 Individual
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  - Please charge to my
    - Visa  MC  Discover
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Make checks payable to Friends of NIU Libraries  
NIU also offers Payroll Deduction for faculty and staff

If a gift is in memory or in honor of someone, please include the purpose and the name and address to which acknowledgement should be sent.

Would you like any of the following brochures?

- Friends of NIU Library
- Ensuring the Future Trees Library Book Fund

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Mail to: Friends of NIU Libraries, Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, IL 60115-2868  
Thank you for your support!