



The Cover—The Cavagna Collection: A Case Study in Special Collections

Designed for the Cavagna Collection at the University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign, the black-and-white bookplate depicts at its center the Cavagna family crest. The Cavagna family, from the Lombardy region of Italy, traces its name to 1112. Their crest consists of a gold lion on a red background. Crossing the lion is a blue band with a cestus in gold. Set above is a golden-crowned, two-headed black eagle on a gold background. Surrounding the crest is an ornate Italian Renaissance design, as befits the collection, with the university's motto,

Bookplate courtesy of the Cavagna Collection

“Learning and Labor,” modestly emblazoned across the bottom of the bookplate.

Acquired in 1921, the Cavagna Collection belonged to Count Antonio Cavagna Sangiuliani di Gualdana (1843–1913), Italian nobleman, writer, and bibliophile from Pavia. Born in Piedmont on 15 August 1843, he was the last of the Cavagna counts. In 1853 his cousin Antonio Sangiuliani, who had no heir, adopted him, thus allowing Cavagna to add the name of Sangiuliani to his surname.

Cavagna fought for the unification of Italy, which interrupted his study of law at several universities. Eventually he received the *laurea in legge* from the l'Università Pontificia in Rome in 1871. Active in public life until his death, he was also a member of many learned societies, academies, and institutions. He wrote over 160 publications, from short newspaper articles and obituaries to full-length books. Topics were chiefly on art, local and regional history, biography and genealogy, and catalogs of his own library and archives. He was a recognized authority on the local history of Lombardy and Piedmont.

Starting in the early 1860s, Cavagna built a library that centered around his research interests, with manuscripts on the study of the local history of Italian cities and towns, institutions, societies, and families. Spanning 1116 to 1913, the collection consists of approximately 30,000 volumes and 90 cubic feet of 138 portfolios of unbound manuscripts arranged alphabetically by place, 290 bound volumes of manuscript material (some 50 items predate 1600), and 100 volumes of later transcripts from Italian archives. It includes legal documents, maps, investitures, official documents on Italian local history, statutes of Italian communes and cities, regulations on banks and banking, and bibliographical, biographical, and genealogical accounts of Italian families and individuals. Other individual interests of Cavagna reflected in his library are opera and theater, education and health care for the poor and handicapped, travel literature, information on Italian spas and mineral waters, and literary pieces in celebration of marriage. The focus is primarily on Lombardy and Piedmont and secondarily on Tre Venezie, Emilia-Romagna, and Tuscany, with other regions less represented.

Covering such diverse fields, most of the works are in Italian, but there are also Italian editions of French publications, Latin works, Italian translations from the Latin, and German publications. The oldest item in the collection dates to 1116. An original parchment document of Henry V, emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, it concerns his disagreements with Pope Paschal II over the right of investiture.

Cavagna died on 5 April 1913. His four daughters, to whom he had willed the library, were unsuccessful in selling their father's library

locally. Neither the Pavia Historical Society nor the Ministry of Public Instruction had the funds to buy it. In 1914 a book dealer in Leipzig first alerted the University of Illinois Library to the availability of the collection for a princely sum. The University of Illinois librarian, Phineas L. Windsor, directed David Carnahan, chair of the Romance Languages Department at Illinois, to examine the collection while on a research trip in Europe. Windsor hoped that dealing directly with the family and bypassing the book dealer would lower the price. A direct quote from the family was indeed less than that of the book dealer.

The war prevented further negotiations. Illinois remained patient, thinking it might negotiate an even better price after the war. In 1919 the price remained the same, but the devaluation of the lire made it a more realistic purchase. By May 1919 Kenneth McKenzie, now chair of the Romance Languages Department, personally inspected the collection. In June the Senate Library Committee of the university unanimously recommended the purchase. Shortly thereafter, the university's board of trustees authorized a special appropriation. Only negotiations to arrange boxing, shipping, and insuring the collection remained. At this point the deal was nearly shelved, with the family threatening to back out and Italian authorities complicating the process. Permission to export finally came in March 1921.

By July 1921 the last of the 117 boxes, weighing 20 tons altogether, arrived in Illinois. Windsor appraised the collection: "looked at from a money point of view it is a great bargain, and looked at from the point of view of its influence on Italian studies here in Urbana [Illinois] it is difficult to overestimate the value of the collection."¹ Over fifty years later, a scholar echoed Windsor's assessment, considering the Cavagna Collection "one of the most remarkable and rich collections of its kind outside of Italy. And I would not be surprised if it surpassed even those single collections available for consultation in northern Italy."²

Despite the amount of material that did arrive, not all the items in Cavagna's library reached Illinois. There is evidence of items known to have been in the library that have since surfaced in communal archives in Italy. Suspicions have been aimed at Cavagna's son-in-law, who represented the family in its negotiations and in all likelihood sold some items locally. Other material identified as from the Cavagna library has appeared in other U.S. libraries.

Cataloging the collection began immediately after its arrival in Illinois. A lone librarian, Meta M. Sexton, devoted nearly her entire career to the project. By the time she retired in 1951, she had cataloged over 20,000 items. The remaining uncataloged items, mostly pamphlets, went into storage. Not until Illinois received an NEH grant in the early 1980s was funding available to catalog the balance of the collection and publish a comprehensive guide.³

Special Collections and the Making of a Research Library

The bookplate of the Cavagna Collection is one of the earliest at Illinois designed for a specific collection bought by the library. In the first quarter of the twentieth century, the library began singling out special collections with these bookplates and, in doing so, marked an important phase in the library's development: the library's strategy to buy important private libraries from Europe at that time led directly to the creation of a major research library in the Midwest.

The earliest years of the library did not foreshadow such growth. In early 1868, the first year the Illinois Industrial University offered courses, Regent John Milton Gregory traveled to New York. His month-long trip east to purchase books cost the university \$104.09 in travel expenses and resulted in a core collection of 644 volumes, costing \$1,000.⁴ The library's collection grew admirably during Gregory's tenure but declined after he left in 1880.

During the following decade, various faculty members in languages and classics indifferently managed the library. It did not improve greatly in size or service, with appropriations for books never exceeding \$1,500 a year. University of Illinois president Draper, appointed in 1894, expressed interest in the library by hiring its first full-time director in his first year. The director, Percy F. Bicknell, had no formal library training but had been an assistant librarian at the Franklin Institute in Philadelphia. Active in the profession, he was part of a group that formed the Illinois Library Association and was its first treasurer. An "ill-tempered" man, he was dismissed in April 1897 by Draper.⁵

With the advent of the Draper administration the university politicked for more funds from the state legislature to erect a separate building for the university library. Funds obtained, the university began construction on a library in 1896. It was completed in June 1897 and included facilities for the library and the newly established Illinois Library School. Grotzinger implies that it was Draper's wish to secure a competent librarian that drove his decision to hire Katharine Lucinda Sharp as librarian, which he did under the advice of Melvil Dewey.⁶ Dewey also gave the main dedicatory speech at the opening of the library. The student newspaper recorded his impressions of the new building: "The situation was admirable for the training school of the whole west, and he congratulated the University on having secured in Miss Sharp and Miss [Mary L.] Jones [the new assistant professor of library economy], librarians recognized throughout the country for the excellence of their work and for their peculiar adaptation to what he believed would prove the brilliant literary future of Illinois."⁷

Modeled on Sharp's own experience at Dewey's Albany school, the university library became the learning laboratory for the student body in the

library school. Sharp introduced modern library methodology and Deweyan efficiencies. Retiring in 1907, Sharp oversaw the growth of the academic program in librarianship at Illinois. She also administered the library, which grew from roughly 30,000 books to nearly 100,000, or more than threefold during her tenure. Many of the books and journals acquired during this period supported the disciplines predominant in a land-grant university, agriculture and engineering.

An acting director was briefly in place after Sharp's departure, and in 1909 Phineas Lawrence Windsor (1871–1965), a native of Illinois and an 1899 graduate of the New York State Library School, was appointed the permanent director. Better known by his friends as P. L. Windsor, he ushered in a long era of stability, retiring in 1940. Windsor, with the firm support of the University president, was the library director responsible for marshaling funds and shaping the development of the collection. During his tenure, nearly forty years after the university was founded, the university began focusing on what became a hallmark of the campus: the library.

After graduating from library school, Windsor had worked briefly at the Copyright Office in Washington, D.C., and the University of Texas library before coming to Illinois in 1909. Head of both the university library and the Library School for thirty-one years, he was an active member and high office holder of the ALA, the American Library Institute, the Bibliographical Society of America, the Illinois Library Association, and the Association of American Library Schools.

Windsor assumed directorship of the library during the presidency of Edmund J. James (1904–20). Educated in Germany, James believed that a great research university required a great library: “so important, so fundamental, so necessary is a great collection, or rather the group of collections, which we sum up under the term university library, to the work of the University that one might almost say a properly equipped university library would of itself in the long run build up a university.”⁸

With such administrative support and a goal established in 1912 to acquire one million volumes, Windsor was able to enlarge the collection in quantity and quality. Figures vary, but during his directorship the collection grew from 127,000 volumes to nearly 1.6 million and included many of the library's most important collections. Under Windsor, the library became the fifth largest library in the country. Further, it had grown from the thirteenth largest academic library to the third and the largest state university library, a position it still holds.⁹

The purchase of the Cavagna Collection in 1921 typified that of many other collections bought during the Windsor era. From 1909 until the end of the First World War, the library sought to purchase the private libraries of European scholars and collectors. Faculty on research trips or

vacations in Europe were given authority to scope out potential purchases. Statistics reflect growing support for the library in President James's era. Appropriations for the purchase of books increased from \$25,000 in 1908 to \$90,000 in 1920, the year of James's retirement. By the time Windsor retired in 1940, appropriations had increased only moderately to \$110,700.¹⁰

During the next phase under Windsor, after the departure of President James, collection development was aimed at supporting faculty research, complementing the university's emphasis on improving teaching and research in the humanities, social sciences, and fine arts. Two key faculty members were Thomas W. Baldwin, specializing in Shakespeare, and Harris F. Fletcher, specializing in Milton, who had joined the faculty in 1925 and 1926, respectively. With the support of the campus, the library focused on acquiring books dating from 1501 to 1700.

Many of these purchases went directly to the offices of scholars using them. In particular, Fletcher's library studies were overwhelmed with thousands of items. To address problems of space and increasing use, the library assumed control over the materials in 1937 and placed them in the newly designated Seventeenth Century Room. Six years later, under Windsor's successor, Robert B. Downs (1943–71), the library established a rare book room to oversee the Seventeenth Century Collection and develop a concerted program of both buying and maintaining rare materials and publicizing and providing access to them.

Since the formal beginnings of the Rare Book and Special Collections Library in the early 1940s, its holdings have grown to over 250,000 books, including 1,100 incunabula, over 44,000 microforms, and over 7,130 linear feet of manuscripts. Materials in the library range from major rare books such as the four Shakespeare folios, Audubon's *Birds of America*, the largest collection of the works of the poet John Milton in the United States, famous manuscript collections of H. G. Wells, Marcel Proust, and the Pulitzer Prize-winning poet W. S. Merwin, to extensive special collections in a wide variety of fields, including the Cavagna Collection.¹¹

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Notes

1. P. L. Windsor to Edmond J. James, 13 July 1921, Record Series 35/1/4, University of Illinois Archives, Urbana.

2. Eric Cochrane to Scott Bennett, 9 March 1976, from a Special Collection reference file on the Cavagna Collection in the Rare Book and Special Collections Library at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

3. Guides to the collection include University of Illinois, List of the Manuscripts and Printed Documents of the Archivio Cavagna Sangiuliani,

Sezione Prima, in the library, Urbana, 1932; Catalog of the Manuscripts and Printed Documents of the Archivio Cavagna Sangiuliani, Sezione Seconda, in the library, Urbana, 1948; Shelflist of the Pamphlets in the Cavagna Collection held in the Rare Book Room, Urbana, 1980. See also Marcella Grendler, *Keyword List of the Cavagna Collection* (Urbana, 1980). The introduction to Grendler's work is the basis for much of the history of Cavagna, his library and its contents, and the purchase of the collection.

4. John Hoffman, "Regent Gregory and the Founding of the University Library, 1868," *Non Solus* 9 (1982): 34-43.

5. For a history of the early years of the library, see the following: Evelyn Mildred Hensel, "History of the Catalog Department of the University of Illinois Library" (master's thesis, University of Illinois, 1936); Madeline Cord Thompson, "History of the Reference Department of the University of Illinois Library" (master's thesis, University of Illinois, 1942); Lucile E. Wilcox, "History of the University of Illinois Library, 1868-1897" (master's thesis, University of Illinois, 1931).

6. Laurel Ann Grotzinger, *The Power and the Dignity: Librarianship and Katharine Sharp* (New York: Scarecrow Press, 1986), 80.

7. "Dedication of the Library Building," *Illini*, 9 June 1897, 1074.

8. "Way in which Friends of the University of Illinois might contribute to its work . . .," Edmund James, ca. 1914, James Faculty Correspondence, RS 2/5/6, Box 43.

9. Statistics comparing sizes of academic libraries begin to appear in the library's annual reports for 1911-12. Different academic librarians around the country culled and shared the data.

10. Thomas Edward Ratcliffe, Jr., "Development of the Buildings, Policy and Collection of the University of Illinois Library in Urbana, 1897-1940" (master's thesis, University of Illinois, 1949).

11. A brief history of the Rare Book Room may be found in Arthur M. McAnally, "The Evolution of a Rare Book Collection," *Stecher-Hafner Book News* (April 1951).