

The History of the Yale Divinity Library

Prelude

A major reason for the establishment of Yale in 1701 was to supply New England with educated Protestant clergy.

By 1745, more than 200 of Yale's total 483 graduates had taken up the ministry, compared to 30 in medicine and 33 in law.

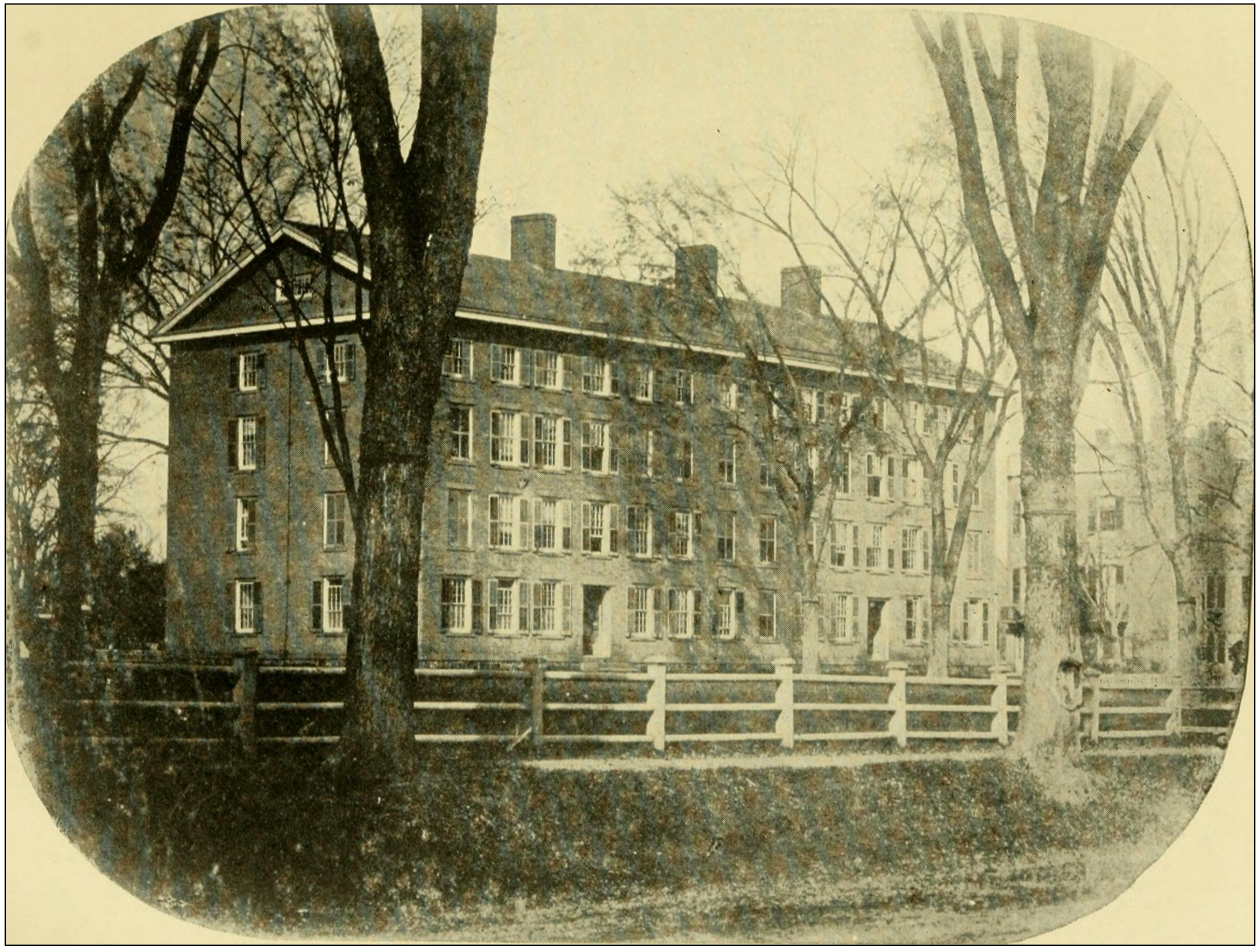
The study of theology was incorporated into the general curriculum and ministers typically began their professional service after an apprentice period of working and studying with established clergy.



A Front View of Yale-College, and the College Chapel, in New Haven, woodcut by Daniel Bowen (1786) – Yale University Art Gallery

The notion of a professional ministerial school separate from the college wouldn't exist in the Western world until the 19th century.

1822: The New “Theological Department” Is Formed



The Divinity College dormitory on the Old Campus, completed in 1836, from Timothy Dwight's Memories of Yale Life and Men, 1854-1899 (New York: Dodd, Mead and Co., 1903), page 326

In 1822, fifteen Yale College students (most of them graduating seniors) petitioned administrators to allow them to stay on and further pursue divinity studies. The new century had brought an expansion of America to the West, requiring new ministers. There was also concern that theological study had lost its prominence at Yale College over the decades because the curriculum reflected the accelerating advances in other forms of knowledge – in natural sciences, law, geography, modern languages.

A new “Theological Department” with separate funding and faculty was established in 1822. In 1835 Divinity Hall was constructed to house the students and classes of the Theological Department.

1869: A New Home and Dedicated Library for the Divinity School



East Divinity Hall, 1870

As the school grew, it was replaced by a new set of Divinity buildings erected beginning in 1869 at the corner of Elm Street and College Street (where Grace Hopper College now stands.)



A small reference library (left) was established within East Divinity Hall with a gift of \$4,000 from Henry Trowbridge as a memorial to his son Henry Stuart Trowbridge, who died at age seven.

1880s: The Campus Expands and Trowbridge Library Is Built



In 1881 a building was constructed to house the Trowbridge collection, made possible by the donation of funds by Frederick Marquand of Southport, Connecticut. The Divinity School campus when completed included from left: West Divinity Hall, Trowbridge Library, Marquand Chapel, and East Divinity Hall.



This Trowbridge reference collection was non-circulating and relatively small as students continued to use the central Yale library as their primary resource.

The Day Missions Library

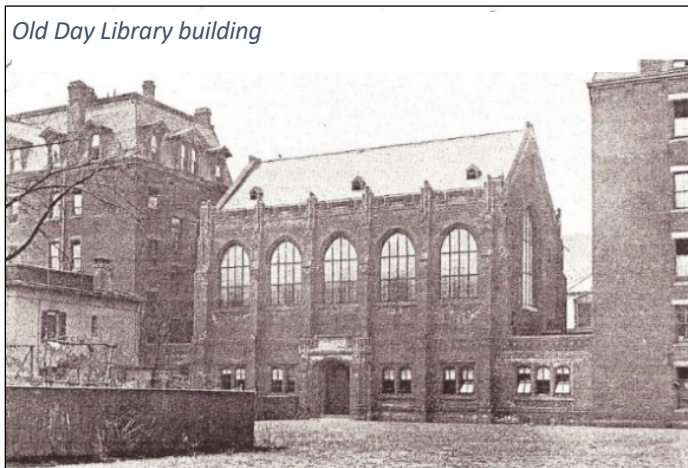
A second library collection that developed at the Divinity School was the Day



Day Library interior

Missions Library. George Edward Day was a professor of Hebrew language and literature who had an avid interest in foreign missions. Beginning in 1886 he devoted himself to building a collection on foreign missions, which he donated to the School in 1891. The Day Missions Library became the world's largest missionary library housed in a university.

The initial focus of the Day Mission collection was on six types of material: the history of missions in various countries, missionary biography, history and annual reports of missionary societies, works prepared and issued by missionaries for the use of natives, and missions to Jews.



Old Day Library building

After George Edward Day died in 1905, Day's estate gave \$100,000 to the upkeep and staffing of the collection he had donated. By 1913 the Day Missions Library had a new building designed by Delano & Aldrich—Collegiate Gothic,

fireproof, two floors, a reading room, museum, lecture space, and a storage basement—located between East and West Divinity Halls on the north side. Soon it contained 15,000 volumes.

The School and Library Collections Expand



The third collection that eventually merged into the Divinity Library was the Sneath Memorial Library of Religious Education, established in 1919. This collection was endowed by E. Hershey Sneath, professor of ethics and Christian education, and his wife Anna Camp Sneath, as a memorial for their son, Richard Sheldon Sneath, who died during the flu pandemic of 1918.

As Yale and the Divinity School expanded in the first part of the 20th century there was not enough room for the School in the central campus. It became clear that the Divinity School would need to find new premises. After an initial false start involving property on Hillhouse Avenue, Prospect Street was selected as the new location for the Divinity School.

A New Merged Library Collection for a New Home on Prospect Street

The Sterling Divinity Quadrangle was designed by the renowned architectural firm Delano & Aldrich, inspired by Thomas Jefferson's design of the University of Virginia, and opened in 1932.



With the greater distance between the Divinity School and central campus as of 1932, and with research interests expanding at the Divinity School, it was agreed that a separate Divinity Library would be necessary. The three original collections, Trowbridge, Day, and Sneath, were merged into the new Divinity Library and more broad collecting commenced. Initially, Dean Luther Weigle served as Librarian, and four faculty members functioned as curators for particular portions of the collection. Raymond P. Morris, initially appointed Assistant Librarian, became the Librarian in 1935. In the first twenty years of its existence, the Divinity Library increased more than five-fold. It evolved from a small non-circulating collection to a collection with research strength in several areas.

Establishing Parameters for the New Divinity Library



Raymond P. Morris, Divinity Librarian from 1935 to 1972, was instrumental in developing a cooperative collection development policy agreement between the Divinity Library and the University Library. By 1969, the Library contained 266,688 cataloged volumes and was adding about 7,000 volumes per year. The holdings of Sterling Memorial Library continued to be complementary to Divinity holdings, as Sterling held 106,000 volumes classified as religion at this time. The Divinity Library was assigned primary responsibility for the documentation of Christian church history, thought, and practice.

The China Records Project

Another legacy Raymond Morris left to the Divinity School Library was an archival program that grew out of the [China Records Project](#). This Project was initiated by the National Council of Churches in the United States as an attempt to gather primary documentation for the history of Christian missions in China. The Council designated the Yale Divinity Library as the “official repository” for these materials. In addition to the documentation of mission programs of the church, the China Records Project collection includes eyewitness accounts of events in China during turbulent times, materials related to medical and educational work, and explorations of Chinese culture. Also included are reflections on the mission effort, its contributions, shortcomings, and failures.

The Library now holds more than 2000 linear feet of manuscript materials related to mission work and the Christian church in China and more than 6000 linear feet total of archival material.



One of the thousands of photographs received in connection with the China Records Project documents an immunization clinic in Sichuan

Technological Advances and Expansion of Special Collections



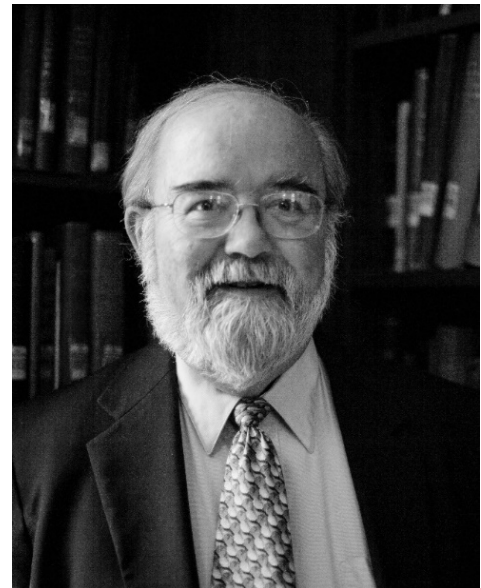
Raymond Morris's successor as Divinity Librarian, **Stephen L. Peterson**, inherited a library with forty years of tradition, including a newly adopted collection development policy and a leadership role in theological librarianship.

Within his first ten years at Yale, Peterson guided the Divinity Library in its transition from a manual card catalog to an automated bibliographic system and oversaw an additional renovation of the Library.

Peterson continued the Library's commitment to comprehensive documentation of world Christianity and expanded the Library's services to include a full service archives and manuscripts department.

Steady Growth and Entry into the Digital Age

Paul Stuehrenberg succeeded Stephen Peterson as Divinity Librarian in 1992 and oversaw the Library's continued growth until 2014. Stuehrenberg was responsible for the innovative [Latourette Initiative](#), which added significant microform and digital documentation of world Christianity to the Library's holdings. The establishment of Yale's Library Shelving Facility in nearby Hamden, with delivery service of library materials, has meant that more Library space can be devoted to study spaces and classrooms rather than book stacks. The Divinity Library was a frontrunner at Yale in terms of creating and acquiring digital collections.



The Andover Newton Theological School Library and Special Collections are Merged in the Divinity Library



Stephen Crocco succeeded as Divinity Librarian in 2015 and served until 2021. Crocco oversaw the merger of Andover Newton Theological School's library and archival collections into the Divinity Library.

Physical and Digital Transformations

The Divinity Library was renovated and expanded at various times since 1932. In 1955 a building adjacent to the Library, which previously housed the Divinity School's handball and squash courts, was renovated to provide additional stack space.

In the 1970s interior renovations reconfigured the Library's spaces and again beginning in 2000 major renovations took place in connection with the upgrade of the entire Divinity Quadrangle. More recently, under Dean Greg Sterling, the Library's Trowbridge Reading Room (right) was redecorated and refurnished.



As digital content has taken an increasingly prominent place in the holdings of libraries, the Divinity Library has kept pace with acquiring books and periodicals in new formats and has actively digitized archival holdings to make them more accessible.

A Library Worthy of the School



The Day Missions Reading Room

Currently the Yale Divinity Library collections total:

- more than 550,000 volumes of monographs, serials, and pamphlets
- more than 270,000 pieces of microforms
- more than 6,000 linear feet of manuscript and archival materials
- significant digital collections

The Divinity Library's collections are an integral part of the University Library's fifteen million print and electronic volumes.