REUBEN T. DURRETT, THE DURRETT COLLECTION, AND THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

BY EDWARD M. WALTERS*

On April 28, 1913, Walter Lichtenstein, Librarian of Northwestern University, acting as agent for the University of Chicago successfully completed negotiations with Colonel Reuben Thomas Durrett and his family of Louisville, Kentucky, for the purchase of the Colonel's famous historical library which consisted of rare books, manuscripts, journals, diaries, portraits, and miscellaneous materials relating to the early history of Kentucky and Virginia.[1] Immediately informing Ernest D. Burton, Director of the University of Chicago Libraries, of his success, Lichtenstein cabled that he "had arranged to take the collection for $22,500."[2] Later the same day Lichtenstein wrote a long letter to Burton on his Hotel Seelbach stationary, elaborating some of the details of the negotiations and expressing relief that negotiations were ended:

> I shall be glad when I receive . . . the contract note and have it signed, as naturally enough now that the negotiations are ended the Durretts are beginning to have regrets, and it will be well to have it all tied up legally as soon as possible.[3]

By May 4 all details had been completed; the material had been packed in two hundred eighty-seven cases and marked, and was on its way to Hyde Park in a special railway car with a "corrugated iron roof."[4] The sale of the Durrett Collection to the University of Chicago was complete. A major collection of historical materials about Kentucky came to rest on the shores of Lake Michigan, far removed in place and time from the history that they describe.[5] Durrett, himself in failing health, lived only a few months longer and died at the age of eighty-nine on September 16, 1913, ending an era that a Kentucky writer sympathetic to Durrett has labelled "the flowering of Kentucky History."[6]

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1 Telegram from Walter Lichtenstein, Louisville, Kentucky to Ernest D. Burton, April 28, 1913, University of Chicago Library Archives.

2 *Ibid.*

3 Autograph letter from Walter Lichtenstein, Louisville, Kentucky, to Ernest D. Burton, April 28, 1913, University of Chicago Archives.

4 Telegram from Walter Lichtenstein to Ernest D. Burton, May 5, 1913, University of Chicago Archives.

5 Another set of papers, the Shane papers, have gone out of the state since then. See Robert E. McDowell, "Capsule Sketch of The Filson Club," *The Filson Club History Quarterly*, 43 (July 1969), 287.

6 Willard R. Jillson, *The Flowering of Kentucky History: A Chronology of the Life and Times of Reuben Thomas Durrett, 1824-1913* (Frankfort, Kentucky: Roberts Printing Co., 1946).

How this major collection of primary materials about Kentucky could slip away to another state is the central theme of this essay, for the transfer itself has affected the writing of Kentucky history. A secondary theme of the essay is Reuben T. Durrett's career as a prominent citizen of Louisville, collector of books and manuscripts, and supporter of libraries and museums. Running throughout all of it are the characteristics of a classic book collector — serious devotion to his subject, boundless energy in collecting, and anxiety about the ultimate fate of what he had accumulated.

While it is not necessary to give extensive biographical material on Colonel Durrett, certain aspects of his career lend perspective on the ultimate disposition of his library. These can be summed up and discussed in three broad areas: (1) Durrett's early life and education, (2) his legal career and civic activities, and (3) his founding of, and relations with, The Filson Club. Each area will be discussed in turn.

Standard biographical sources of Reuben Thomas Durrett tend to portray him as a classic Virginia Gentleman and emphasize those points in his career that fortify this image.[7] These accounts accent his legal training (Brown and the University of Louisville) which endowed him with a reverence for law and made him an avid collector of the works of early legislatures; his ancestry that could be traced to a distinguished French family of whose writings his own library included a few samples in vellum bindings; his sense of honor which led him to duel with a rival Louisville newspaper editor; his inclination to write poetry and history; and his gift of oratory — examples of which appeared occasionally in the Louisville press. Although no full-length biography of Durrett exists, it appears from portraits and comments of his contemporaries in The Filson Club that this image of Durrett approximates the truth.[8]

Durrett was born in Henry County on January 24, 1824, the son of a family that claimed to trace its origins as far back as three and a half centuries to the Frenchman Jean Duret, of whom *Biographie Universelle* records "merita la reputation d'un savant

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7 *The National Cyclopaedia of American Biography* (New York: James T. White & Co., 1921), p. 368, and *Dictionary of American Biography* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1930), V, 550-51; and see sketch of Durrett in *Library of Southern Literature: Compiled Under the Direct Supervision of Southern Men of Letters* (New Orleans: The Martin and Hoyt Co., 1907), IV, 1456-61. These three works will be abbreviated *Cyclopaedia*, *DAB*, and *Southern Literature* in citations that follow.

8 Preston Davie, "Personal Reminiscences Concerning Some of the Founders of The Filson Club" *The Filson Club History Quarterly*, 18 (July 1944), 128.

jurisconsulte."[9] It appears that Durrett was reasonably diligent in his genealogical pursuits in that he acquired two of the works of his distinguished ancestors for his library, both commentaries on criminal law. He also acquired the works of two other ancestors, Louis Duret (d. 1527) and Claude Duret (d. 1611). The immediate ancestors of Durrett (his grandfather Francis Durrett) came from England to Spottsylvania County, Virginia, later moving to Henry County. Durrett's father William was a wealthy farmer and, according to a contemporary, built the first "brick house that was built in Henry County."[10]

The shorter biographical accounts give very little information on Durrett's early life except to say that he "grew up on his father's farm" and that he acquired "as good an education as the schools of his native county could afford."[11] Later he attended Georgetown College in Scott County for two years before transferring to Brown University in Rhode Island where he took the A.B. degree graduating "with the usual honors in 1849."[12] From Brown he returned home to Kentucky and took his law degree from the University of Louisville in 1850. Durrett's valedictory address upon his graduation from the law school is testimony to the character of the education he received, and tends to support those who, like Willard R. Jillson, believe Durrett to be of the "old school" of Virginia Gentlemen. The address is a long carefully constructed speech addressing in turn parents, fellow classmates, and law school professors, interweaving quotation from classics like Ovid with the legal wisdom of Hooker. He characterizes his law school professors as "the oracles of the noblest of sciences,"[13] and mixes this classical touch with the customary sentiment of such an occasion: "We go abroad into the world to cast our lots with those of other men. But we cannot part with you thus abruptly. Your warm kindness toward us and the valuable instruction you have given us have bound us to you by ties that we shall sunder with sadness."[14]

For almost thirty years following his graduation from Law School, Durrett practiced law in Louisville, and his career, except for the interruption of the Civil War, is marked by steady ac-

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9 Maurice Joblin, *Louisville Past and Present: Its Industrial History as Exhibited in the Life-Labors of its Leading Men* (Louisville: J. F. Morton, 1875), p. 254.
10 J. Stoddard Johnston, "Reuben Thomas Durrett," *Southern Literature, IV*, 1461.
11 Joblin, *Louisville Past and Present*, p. 255.
12 *Ibid.*
13 *Ibid.*, p. 256.
14 *Ibid.*

complishment and the accumulation of wealth. During that time, Durrett won a brief term on the Louisville City Council (1852), campaigned for Winfield Scott for president, and spent a few weeks in prison (1861) for his outspoken views on secession.[15] It was also in this period that Durrett won a victory in a celebrated murder case, the Lobstein murder trial, in which Durrett was reputed to have delivered his "most elaborate and effective" speech before a jury.[16] A portion of that speech was printed in the *Louisville Courier*, and its effectiveness appears to stem from the light in which it cast Durrett's rival, Colonel Phil Lee, prosecutor, also of Louisville. According to Durrett Lee was a "monomaniac" upon the subject of hanging:

> He thinks that every man that comes into his power must be convicted no matter what may be his case. So soon as an offender's name is mentioned to him he begins to think of the gallows or the prison. He can never separate the accused from the hangman's halter or the jailer's key. He has thought so much of the gallows and the prison that he dreams of them by night and contemplates them by day. They are to him familiar things, and the vision of a fellow mortal suspended between heaven and earth, with a halter around his neck, and his eyes distended from the sockets, and his tongue pendant from quivering and pallid lips, is to him a dream of joy. The prison door grates sweet music in his ears as its heavy hinges turn upon the victim who is shut out from the sunlight of heaven and the companionship of fellow mortals. . . . He has become, as it were, a breathing, moving, acting embodiment of denunciation and impassioned appeal. Gall and wormwood seem to have taken up their abode in his once kind heart. He has prosecuted until his heart has become marble. He feels no more. Conviction is the idol at whose shrine he worships. He knows no other god; and with the devotion of an Eastern zealot he offers daily sacrifices at the altar of his idol. Oh gentlemen of the jury, if such able and good men as Colonel Lee can thus become mono-maniacs upon the subject of prosecuting criminals to conviction, may I not ask you to shield my poor client from the anathemas which I know he is about to thunder against him?[17]

The tactic was successful, and Durrett won his case, apparently establishing an enduring reputation at the Louisville bar.

One final episode in his civic activities should perhaps be included in this discussion, both for the perspective it adds upon the ultimate disposition of the Colonel's library and for the light which it sheds upon his attitudes as a collector — a subject of which there is very little information available. This episode is the role of Durrett in the founding of the Louisville Public Library.

In the latter part of 1871 several citizens of Louisville, aware

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15 *Ibid.*; also *DAB*, 551.
16 Jillson, *Flowering of Kentucky History*, p. 19.
17 *Louisville Courier-Journal*, January 29, 1871, p. 3.

of the inadequacy of library facilities in the city, began to discuss plans for a public library. One group of citizens favored "a circulating library on the associating principle" with members paying annual fees for the use of books.[18] Another group with which Colonel Durrett was associated took the view that "books should be forever absolutely free to any reader or scholar who might desire their use."[19] Ultimately, Durrett drew up a charter and then secured the passage through the legislature of a bill creating "The Public Library of Kentucky." At the first meeting of the Board of Trustees of the Library, Durrett was unanimously elected President and delivered a speech which reveals the motives for his active support of the public library movement in Kentucky. Of his initial interest in public libraries he explained:

> About one year ago in the investigation of a subject of which I was interested, it became necessary for me to refer to a book not in my private collection, and which could not be purchased in the city. There was then but one public library in our city, and to that I resorted for the needed volume. I found it in the library of the Young Men's Christian Association, then on the corner of Fifth and Walnut, now no more. The book was an odd volume of a broken set, all the rest of the numbers which were gone, and this only remaining one in very bad condition. The back was gone, but upon its front page it bore evidence of having been in half dozen other libraries before it got into the Young Men's Christian Association.[20]

Durrett went on to explain that his examination of the former marks of ownership indicated that the book had once belonged to the Louisville Library Association, to the Mechanics Institute of Louisville, to the Kentucky Historical Society Library, to the Louisville Franklin Museum, to the Mercantile Library Association, to the Kentucky Mechanics Institute, and finally to the Young Men's Christian Association. What was most puzzling to Durrett about this much-travelled volume was that, of the seven institutions in which it had resided, only one, the Young Men's Christian Association Library, was then in existence. Six of the institutions had passed out of existence, he said, leaving this "poor, old mutilated volume as a monument over their graves."[21]

Durrett next searched for an explanation of why six of these institutions had failed to survive and concluded that all failed for the same reason — the pay system. The charters of each institution had given the libraries the right to charge for the use of books

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18 Joblin, *Louisville Past and Present*, p. 266.
19 *Ibid.*
20 *Ibid.*, p. 266.
21 *Ibid.*, p. 267

and to Durrett this was a "fatal error." "One by one the paying members dropped off, until there were no members to pay and no books to pay for. The same result happened over and over again for a series of fifty-five years, and in my opinion, the charging for the use of the books was the cause of the failures."[22] Therefore Durrett was determined to aid in the foundation of a library "that would be forever free to the gratuitous use and enjoyment of all."[23] Subsequently, Durrett was successful in drafting the charter and aiding its passage through the Kentucky legislature. He would remain a life-long supporter of the Louisville Free Public Library, an institution that many of Durrett's contemporaries believed was destined to inherit his library.[24]

Although little contemporary information is available on the subject, it is clear that by 1875 Durrett's reputation as a collector of historical materials about the state of Kentucky was clearly established. A short biographical sketch of Durrett appeared in that year in a work entitled *Louisville Past and Present: Its Industrial History as Exhibited in the Life-Labors of Its Leading Men.* The short sketch provides one of the few contemporary assessments of his collection while it was still being assembled. After discussing some of the personal family items in the collection, the author of the sketch turns to the Kentucky and Americana portions of the collection:

> He has Filson's Kentucky of 1784, of which few copies are in existence; Jefferson's Notes on Virginia, 1787; Imlay's America, 1797; Marshall's Kentucky, 1812, in one volume, and the edition of 1824 in two volumes; McMurtrie's Louisville, 1819, also quite rare; Otis's first Louisville Directory, 1832; Morehead's Boonesborough Address, 1835; McClung's Sketches, 1838; Butler's Kentucky, 1834; Collins' Kentucky, 1847; Casseday's Louisville, 1852; and all the more recent histories and pamphlets relating to his state.[25]

Although it is clear from the context that the writer of the biographical sketch had visited the library, and knew Durrett personally, he unfortunately gives no clues as to how Durrett acquired the collection or how large the collection was in 1875.

Durrett retired from the practice of law in 1880 and entered full-time upon his avocation of collecting and writing. Many of his activities in these areas were associated with an organization

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22 *Ibid.*

23 *Ibid.*

24 One source reports that the Louisville Free Public Library had refrained for thirty years from buying rare books of Kentucky history because it expected to acquire Colonel Durrett's collection upon his death. See Otto A. Rothert, *The Filson Club and Its Activities, 1884-1922* (Louisville, Kentucky: John P. Morton Co., 1922), p. 11.

25 Joblin, *Louisville Past and Present*, p. 256.

which he helped organize and served as president of until his death in 1913.[26] That organization was The Filson Club, a Louisville historical society in continuous existence since 1884. Soon after his retirement, with the Kentucky State Historical Society floundering and on unsure ground, Durrett sought support for the organization of a local historical society in Louisville. Precedent and interest in such an organization had already been established because of Durrett's habit of occasionally assembling friends to take what the *Louisville Courier* called "historic excursions" into the Kentucky countryside and, using authentic maps such as the first map of Kentucky made by John Filson in 1784, visiting old forts, cemeteries, and mansions.[27] On one such occasion in July, 1883, Durrett had been accompanied by the former governor of Ohio Charles Anderson, and it is believed that plans for a local historical society were first discussed on this occasion.[28]

These plans at length bore fruit on May 15, 1884, when eight men met in Durrett's library at 202 East Chestnut Street and organized a club devoted to the preservation and dissemination of historical materials relating to Kentucky. It was established that the club would meet on the first Monday in every month in Colonel Durrett's library, and this tradition was maintained almost until his death.[29] The club was without a name until Durrett read the first paper to the members on June 26, 1884, entitled, "John Filson, the First Historian of Kentucky: An Account of His Life and Writings, Principally From Original Sources."[30] According to one of the members present at that meeting, Durrett's paper was of such quality that someone suggested that the club be called The Filson Club.[31] Durrett's paper was later published as the first issue of The Filson Club Publications, the preface of which elaborated on the objectives of the club to include "the collecting and preserving the history of Kentucky, and especially those perishing scraps of history and biography which have never been published."[32] This publication gives a different account of the origins of the club's name, indicating that the name was chosen

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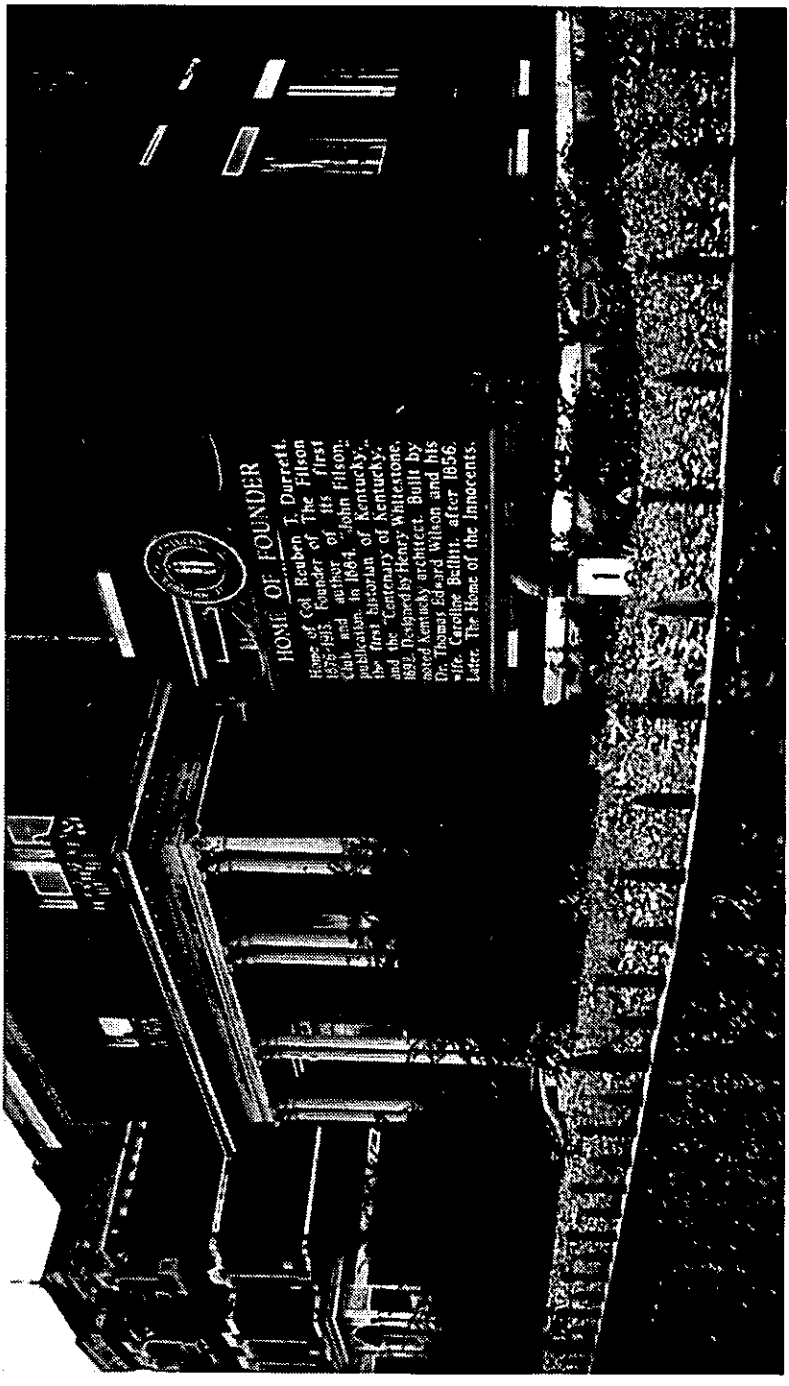
26 See Hambleton Tapp, "The Founding of The Filson Club," *The Filson Club History Quarterly*, 18 (July 1944), 141.
27 Otto A. Rothert, "Historic Excursion, July, 1883 — One of the Forerunners of the Founding of the Club," *The Filson Club History Quarterly*, 18 (July 1944), 154.
28 *Ibid.*
29 Jillson, *The Flowering of Kentucky History*, p. 25.
30 Reuben T. Durrett, *John Filson: The First Historian of Kentucky* (Louisville, Kentucky: The Filson Club, John P. Morton, 1884).
31 Richard H. Hill, "The President's Message," *The Filson Club History Quarterly*, 46 (April 1972), 121.
32 Reuben T. Durrett, *John Filson*, p. 3.



The Durrett Home and Historical Marker

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The Durrett Home and Historical Marker

Lin Caufield

first and that Durrett was then asked to prepare a paper on Filson for the next club meeting. In any case, Durrett had founded an historical society called The Filson Club by June, 1884, and would spend the remainder of his life writing for its publications, speaking at its formal occasions, and taking "historical excursions" with its membership.

From 1884 to 1913 meetings were held in Colonel Durrett's library at his residence, the main feature being a prepared paper, a set lecture, or an informal talk followed by an open discussion of the subject and occasionally some personal reminiscences. Following the discussion, apple cider and gingerbread were served along with what came to be referred to as "Filson Club Cigars," supplied by a local member. The meetings were open only to members, personally invited guests, and members of the press. Down to 1913 no formal records of the meetings were kept and only occasional notes were kept to be read as minutes for the next meeting. The annual dues of the club were three dollars, but this amount was insufficient to cover the expenses incurred in the annual publication, and one source records that Durrett himself paid the difference, a sum estimated at over a thousand dollars a year.[33] Thus, in a very real sense, Durrett was not only a founder of The Filson Club but a sustainer as well.

All three areas of emphasis in this account of the life of Reuben Durrett — his education, civic activities, and his relationship to The Filson Club — provide the background necessary to comprehend the multiple forces which were in operation when serious negotiations were undertaken between Durrett and the University of Chicago in 1912 for the sale of his highly prized historical collection. On the one hand, his education and training were of sufficient depth and quality for him to seek the best possible arrangements for the safeguarding of his lifetime's collecting. On the other hand, as a civic leader in Louisville, there were strong pressures to leave the collection in the place he had assembled it, and as a founder of The Filson Club, there were sentimental reasons to leave the library to its membership. According to one charter member of The Filson Club, Durrett had on two separate occasions offered his collection free to The Filson Club.[34] He advocated in 1896 that the Club raise funds to buy the Custom House of Louisville at Third and Liberty streets, make the building fire-

33 Rothert, *The Filson Club*, p. 10.
34 *Ibid.*

proof, and devote the building to the collection and preservation of historical materials, using his library (donated free) as a nucleus for a library and museum. In 1901 Durrett again advanced the same plan but this time for the Norvin Green residence at Second and Broadway. In each case the small Club was not able to secure enough funds to effect purchase. Finally, one Filson Club member has reported that as late as June, 1912, Durrett expressed his intention of leaving the library to the Louisville Free Public Library which had occupied a modern fire-proof building since 1908. This was the setting when the University of Chicago, at the urging of history professor William E. Dodd, began to seriously explore the possibility of acquiring the Durrett Collection for its libraries.

It is unclear from the correspondence in the University of Chicago Archives exactly who at the University of Chicago was first apprised of the existence of Durrett's library. Presumably any number of historians at the university could have known of the library through the publication of Theodore Roosevelt's *The Winning of the West,* published in four volumes from 1889-1896, because Roosevelt acknowledges heavy use of Durrett's library. Professor William E. Dodd, who did not come to the University of Chicago until 1909, professes to have used the library while a student at the Virginia Polytechnic Institute around 1890. Dodd later took the Ph.D. at the University of Leipzig and taught at Randolph Macon College in Virginia before joining the University of Chicago history department as a specialist in American history.

Whoever learned of the existence of Durrett's library initially, Professor Dodd and Professor A. C. McLaughlin, another history professor visited it in June, 1910, with an eye to acquiring it for Chicago, but they came away uncertain as to Colonel Durrett's intentions: McLaughlin wrote to President H. P. Judson of the visit that

> Mr. Durrett is very uncertain as to what he wants to do with his library. He thinks he ought to give it to Louisville, but his family does not wish him to give it away at all. He is now eighty-six years of age, and my own belief is that he will die without doing anything about it. He said there were two other persons besides us to whom he ought to speak before selling the library. He once offered it to the University of Illinois for $50,000.[35]

McLaughlin was unable to estimate how many volumes the library contained "because they are scattered about in various rooms," but

35 Letter from A. C. McLaughlin to President H. P. Judson, June 17, 1910, University of Chicago Archives.

he thought that it "would be a good thing for us if we could get those books, not only because of their actual value, which is great, but because of the reputation it would give us and the nucleus it would give for further development."[36]

Although the University of Chicago file on the Durrett Collection does not reveal steps taken by professors Dodd and McLaughlin to garner support for the acquisition of the Durrett library throughout the remainder of 1910 and 1911, the Social Science Group of the faculty presented a formal proposal to the President and the Board of Trustees "to devise some plan whereby this library can be saved to us and to the scholars of the Mississippi Valley who need it so much."[37] The three-page document, signed by eighteen faculty members including along with Dodd and McLaughlin, such distinguished figures as Conyers Read, James H. Breasted, and Charles Merriam, is perhaps most interesting for its revelation of how the Social Science faculty chose to argue its case for acquisition. Using an argument often heard in university circles, the Social Science Group cited an unequal distribution of source materials between scientific disciplines and the social sciences and stated that social scientists' "claims ought to be placed on the same level of importance as Scientific Departments requiring laboratories and equipment."[38] Thus, the faculty chose not to argue their primary case on the basis of the merit of the collection (this appears to have been imperfectly understood at the time). They argued instead that scientific disciplines fared better when they asked for equipment and laboratories while social scientists had a more difficult time in presenting their case for acquiring library and source materials. Their document also included a superficial description of the collection which, according to them, contained 30,000 volumes, 40,000 pamphlets, and long runs of newspaper files.[39]

The proposal of the Social Science Group to the President and Board of Trustees ultimately spurred others into active consideration of acquiring the Durrett library. The proposal was referred to the Director of the Libraries, Ernest D. Burton, who conferred with his Associate Director, J.C.M. Hanson. Neither man had

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36 *Ibid.*

37 Memorandum to the President and the Board of Trustees, November 23, 1911, from the Social Science Group, University of Chicago Archives.

38 *Ibid.*

39 J. C. M. Hanson to Ernest D. Burton, January 31, 1912, University of Chicago Archives, and Ernest D. Burton to Dr. T. W. Goodspeed, February 2, 1912, University of Chicago Archives.

definite knowledge of the Durrett library but both gave a qualified endorsement of the purchase of the collection based strictly upon certain library considerations: (1) that funds for purchase of such a collection come from an extra appropriation and not interfere with present work of the library and (2) that the installation of the collection be deferred until certain reorganizational projects associated with the move into the new Harper Memorial Library be completed.[40] Hanson, an experienced cataloguer, warned that "acquisition of so large a number of books would of course demand an extra force of cataloguers and classifiers, additional clerical service, appropriations for freight and cartage, supplies of various kinds, and shelving."[41] On February 2, 1912, Burton forwarded his qualified endorsement to T. W. Goodspeed of the Board of Trustees, and on the same day he received another prodding letter from Professor Dodd saying that "anything you can do to bring this matter before the University authorities would be advancing the interests of all of us . . ."[42] Dodd's letter was forwarded on to the Board of Trustees.

Although the archives are again silent on specific measures taken to secure the library throughout most of 1912, it is clear that Professor Dodd secured permission from the university authorities to take an option to buy the collection for the price of $45,000. On this basis Dodd secured an agreement from Colonel Durrett on December 20, 1912. The agreement, signed by Durrett and witnessed by Dodd, read:

> I hereby agree to sell to the University of Chicago my library, including portraits and engravings, except those of members of my family and the Stuart's Washington and one of the George Rogers Clark paintings, all books of all classes, newspaper and magazine files, maps, pamphlets, clippings, documents, and manuscripts (including transcripts) for the sum of $45,000. It is understood that the library is to be kept together in so far as this is feasible and is to be known as the Durrett Collection of the University of Chicago. It is further agreed that this offer may be withdrawn by me at the expiration of sixty days if it has not been accepted by that time.[43]

Dodd immediately forwarded the agreement to President Judson for his reaction along with his estimate of the worth of the collection, at this time a figure of $35,000. Judson's reply of December 24, 1912, was that the $45,000 price was too high and that "the

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40 *Ibid.*
41 *Ibid.*
42 William E. Dodd to Ernest D. Burton, February 2, 1912, University of Chicago Archives.
43 Option Agreement dated December 20, 1912 signed by R. T. Durrett and witnessed by William E. Dodd, University of Chicago Archives.

condition of holding the collection together under the name of the present owner" would probably have to be waived if the collection were purchased by the University.[44] It should be here pointed out that by the end of 1912 the university held an option to buy a library that was without a catalogue, whose size had been variously estimated, whose content was only imperfectly understood but whose reputation was esteemed.

In January, 1913, the question of the value of the collection moved into the forefront of the negotiations. Dodd corresponded with Sara Durrett, who appeared to be conducting negotiations for her father-in-law, and offered $35,000 for the collection. After conferring with Durrett, she indicated that she could "probably get a compromise offer of $40,000" and that she was exploring the possibility of writing Princeton or the University of Illinois.[45] Dodd reported these negotiations to President Judson with the observation that he "had no fears from any other source than Harvard" but that he wished not "to delay" because Durrett "may die at any moment and we should then have opponents in the Kentucky newspapers whose editors have the most exaggerated idea of its value."[46]

With time running out on the sixty-day option to buy the collection, Professor Dodd urged President Judson on February 1, 1913, to offer $35,000 saying "if we can get it at that price, it will be the best I had ever hoped for."[47] For reasons that are not altogether apparent, President Judson, who already had taken preliminary steps to secure a donor for the collection, declined to make the offer and selected instead to secure an agent who would go to Louisville and appraise the collection and then handle any further negotiations from there. Although it is not exactly clear why President Judson chose this particular plan of action, it is known that he had a reputation for sound financial management. It was common sense to get an unbiased assessment of value from a bookman before proceeding to purchase an uncatalogued collection of books, documents, and miscellaneous materials for a substantial sum.

The agent selected to handle the appraisal was Walter Lichten-

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44 Harry Pratt Judson to W. E. Dodd, letter of December 24, 1912, University of Chicago Archives.

45 Sara E. Durrett to William E. Dodd, letter of December 27, 1912, University of Chicago Archives.

46 William E. Dodd to Harry Pratt Judson, letter of January 2, 1913, University of Chicago Archives.

47 William E. Dodd to Harry Pratt Judson, letter of February 1, 1913, University of Chicago Archives.

stein, Librarian of Northwestern, who had considerable experience in such appraisals and who, by his own account, had in seven years made similar purchases for other American libraries in excess of $130,000. On February 17, he received a letter of introduction to Mrs. Durrett and instructions from Ernest Burton, Director of Libraries. Burton wrote:

> We should be glad to have an estimate of the approximate number of volumes in each portion of the library and of its market value. You will of course wish to put this report in writing and to include any information which will be of value to us in determining whether or not to secure the funds for the purchase of it.[48]

Lichtenstein accepted the assignment on the 18th and was in Louisville on the 19th of February.

Lichtenstein surveyed the collection on the 19th and 20th of February, and while he declined at that time to give an estimate of the whole collection, he communicated his "preliminary impressions" of the collection to Burton on the 20th. His initial impression was in marked contrast to Professor Dodd's enthusiasm. While he noted that there were some books of "considerable value," he also noted that "the books are in poor condition, some of the sets are certainly incomplete, and the most valuable books would have to be collated." It was Lichtenstein's first impression that "Mr. Durrett's ideas of the commercial value of the collection are exaggerated."[49]

Lichtenstein's formal report to President Judson was filed on February 21 and was entitled "A Report on the Durrett Collection at Louisville, Kentucky" and was a significant document in the ultimate acquisition of the Durrett Collection by the University of Chicago.[50] Although compiled in only two days' time, the report provided a critical analysis of the collection on which to base a reasonable offer. Lichtenstein divided the collection into five categories: bound volumes, pamphlets, manuscripts, newspapers, and maps. He reported that the collection contained 20,000 bound volumes, 250 "pasteboard letter files" of pamphlets, 200 volumes of atlases and loose maps, and an unspecified number of manuscript and newspaper files. To estimate the value of the collection, he multiplied the number of volumes of average worth by a set

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48 Ernest D. Burton to Walter Lichtenstein, letter of February 17, 1913, University of Chicago Archives.

49 Walter Lichtenstein to Ernest D. Burton, letter of February 20, 1913, University of Chicago Archives.

50 A Report of the Durrett Collection at Louisville, Kenucky Prepared for the University of Chicago by Walter Lichtenstein, Ph.D., February 21, 1913, University of Chicago Archives.

price of $1.00 a volume and then added in the estimated value of the more noteworthy items. With the manuscripts and newspapers, he set the value at $15,000 but cautioned that "a manuscript is worth just what one is willing to pay for it."[51] The report also contained an evaluation of the poor condition of the collection with the counsel that "the collating and cataloguing costs almost as much again as the mere acquisition of the books."[52] Under these considerations Lichtenstein estimated the value of the collection at $22,500 and concluded that the collection would be "a very worthy purchase by the University of Chicago."[53]

Events subsequent to the Lichtenstein report were in reality a kind of denouement for the acquisition of the Durrett library. President Judson relied heavily upon it as a negotiating figure for the collection; Lichtenstein's services were retained to complete negotiations with the Durrett family, and the final price settled upon was $22,500. Professor Marcus Jernigan was dispatched from Chicago to help with the packing, and by the 9th of May the Durrett Collection was in Chicago.

Two major questions remain to be asked. Why did Durrett and his family accept the price of $22,500 for the collection after asking a price as high as $50,000? And why was the collection sold to the University of Chicago and not kept in Louisville? As to the latter question, a personal friend of Durrett and member of The Filson Club, Otto A. Rothert, wrote in 1922 that Durrett sold his library because he feared that it might be dissipated and find its way into private hands, that he feared that any public library controlled by a city government might be at some time dominated by unscrupulous politicians, and that he believed there was "a great lack of interest" in collecting and preserving history in Louisville.[54] Other more partisan members of The Filson Club have suggested, like Hambleton Tapp, that Durrett was ill when the purchase was completed. "The minds of persons," he wrote, "in their eighty-ninth year suffering from a third or fourth stroke of paralysis may be presumed to be infirm."[55] Of these two views of the sale presented in printed sources, this author is inclined to accept Mr. Rothert's. The drop in the price appears to have been a direct outcome of the Lichtenstein report which was probably the first

51 *Ibid.*
52 *Ibid.*
53 *Ibid.*
54 Rothert, *The Filson Club*, pp. 10-11.
55 Hambleton Tapp, "The Founding of The Filson Club," 150.

serious attempt ever to appraise the commercial value of the collection. Durrett's price had been based on the sentiment and pride of a collector; Lichtenstein's was based on the professional knowledge of a bookman.