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GUSSIE E. GASKILL AND THE WASON COLLECTION
OF CORNELL UNIVERSITY

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The service of Miss Gussie E. Gaskill to East Asian library development in the United States is certainly one of the longest of any of the persons who have worked in this field. In 1920 she began to organize and catalog the some 9,400 volumes which had recently been received by the Cornell University Library from the estate of Charles William Wason (1854-1918).¹ She was officially appointed Curator of the Wason Collection in 1927, when the funds from the Wason Endowment were received, and she continued to hold this post until her retirement in 1963. During these forty-three years, in the words of her successor Dr. Richard C. Howard, "the Wason Collection was gradually transformed from one man's personal library into a major research collection on China, and for over four decades the principal figure guiding this development was Gussie E. Gaskill."²

Miss Gaskill, who was born in Oskaloosa, Kansas, on January 5, 1898, received her Bachelor's degree from the University of Kansas in 1918. Even before entering college, she had developed a strong interest in history. This interest, especially in European history, was greatly strengthened during her college years, owing in large part to the influence of Professor Carl Lotus Becker (1873-1945), who was one of the most noted and prolific historians of his time, and was the author of numerous works on such subjects as the the eighteenth century Enlightenment, the French Revolution, the American Declaration of Independence, and the "Rise of a Democratic, Scientific, and Industrial Civilization."³ Professor Becker left Kansas at the end of Miss Gaskill's sophomore year, but she continued her study of American history under Professor Frank Heywood Hodder (1860-1935). She received her Master's degree in European History and International Relations from the University of Kansas in 1919.

In the same year she proceeded to Cornell University, to continue graduate study under Professor Becker, who had joined the Cornell University faculty in 1917. At Cornell she undertook work toward a doctoral degree, and at the same time served Professor Becker as a graduate assistant. By coincidence she arrived in Cornell only about a month after the private library of Charles Wason had been received. These 9,400 volumes, mostly in English, contained a great deal of material on the activities of Europeans in China; and in order to gain access to their contents, and to make them available to others, she began in 1920, with the encouragement of Professor Becker, to organize and catalog the collection.

In 1924 Miss Gaskill was appointed Curator of the President White Historical Library, named after Andrew Dickson White (1832-1918), the first President of Cornell University (1868-1885), and the first President (1884-1885) of the American Historical Association. She continued to serve in this capacity, in which she assisted students and guided them in the use of historical materials, until 1961. At that time the President White Historical Library lost its separate identity, and its holdings were merged with the general collections of the Cornell University Libraries. The memory of Cornell's first President, however, is today commemorated by the Andrew White Library, one of the reading

rooms of the undergraduate library, where much of the history section of the collection is maintained.

But since 1920 Miss Gaskill had been concerned with organizing the Wason Collection, to which she applied the Library of Congress classification system, even though that classification schedule was not adopted for the general collections at Cornell until some twenty-five years later. She also had been providing reference service on the Wason Collection, which she had finished cataloging by 1924. It is appropriate at this point to describe briefly the beginnings of the Wason Collection, since its original holdings formed the nucleus for the development of one of the major East Asian collections in America. In 1903 Mr. and Mrs. Wason visited China and Japan. Because of ill health Mr. Wason found it necessary to retire from his active business life in 1908. The next year (1909) he received as a Christmas gift a copy of Letters from China, by Sarah Pike Conger, wife of the American Minister to China from 1898 to 1905.⁴ It seems that reading this work stimulated in Mr. Wason a strong interest in China, and about 1910 he began to collect all the books he could find on China and the Chinese. After his collection had grown to some 2,000 volumes he turned over the actual purchasing to the Arthur H. Clark Company of Cleveland, Ohio. It is especially worthy of note that he not only collected these books; he also read them. At the back of many of the volumes in his collection are to be found his initials and the date on which he had finished reading that particular volume. In 1914 he drew up a trust agreement to leave the collection, which by then totaled about 9,400 volumes, to Cornell University, together with an endowment of \$50,000, the income from which was to be used for further enlargement of the collection. This was announced at a tea given in the library of his home in February 1917. Among those present on this occasion was his friend of many years, Professor T. F. Crane,⁵ who later wrote: "Those who heard him make this announcement will never forget his nobly expressed desire to bring China and the United States into closer intellectual relations. The great outlay of wealth in bringing together the library was not to gratify a collector's hobby, but to make China better known by every book in English relating to it."⁶ Although most of the works in the collection were in English, there were also some books in Latin, Portuguese, Spanish, and French, as well as maps, periodicals, and newspapers published in China. Of special interest is a collection of manuscripts pertaining to the Macartney mission of 1793 to the Chinese emperor, "obtained in part from the Macartney family itself," and three of the surviving volumes of the famous fifteenth century manuscript encyclopedia, the Yung-lo ta tien, to which two more volumes were subsequently added, bringing the total in the Wason Collection to five. There were also "some 500 manuscripts bound in 55 volumes, 750 pamphlets bound in 120 volumes, and files of 37 different English language periodicals and newspapers published in China. A special feature of his collection was the 62,000 separate articles taken from over 150 periodicals and bound into volumes, each with a typed table of contents."⁷

Mr. Wason died in 1918, the year after his gift was announced. Even though the collection was received by the University in 1919, it was not until 1927 that the funds from the Wason Endowment were made available. These funds had been earning interest at the rate of four per cent since the time of Mr. Wason's death. While continuing to serve as Curator of the President White Historical Library, Miss Gaskill was in 1927 appointed concurrently Curator of the Wason Collection. This was by coincidence the same year as that in which Dr. A. Kai-ming Chiu was appointed Librarian of the Chinese-Japanese Library at Harvard University (now the Harvard-Yenching Library), and Dr. Arthur W. Hummel was appointed to the staff of the Library of Congress. (In the year following, the

Division of Chinese Literature--now the Asian Division--was established, and Dr. Hummel was appointed its first Chief.)

But while Miss Gaskill was cataloging the Wason Collection, most of which was composed of works in English, she came to believe that her effectiveness would be enhanced if she studied the Chinese language. She first undertook the study of Chinese with a Chinese girl who was a student in Cornell at that time. Beginning in April 1923 she spent a year in New York, where she studied Chinese at the Wall Street Division of New York University. There she was instructed by an American who, as an employee of the National City Bank, had lived in China for some years and had studied Chinese.

In January 1924 Professor Paul Pelliot, certainly one of the most distinguished Asian scholars of this or any other country, visited Cornell at the invitation of the French Department to give a lecture in French. After the lecture, his host, Professor Othon Guérlac, who was aware of Pelliot's interest in Asia, brought him to visit the Wason Collection. Pelliot was extremely interested by the works he found there, and changed his travel plans to enable him to spend several additional days there in order to examine its holdings in more detail. He also urged Miss Gaskill, whom he met for the first time on this occasion, to come to Paris to pursue further study. In the spring of 1926 Professor Pelliot taught at Columbia University. Miss Gaskill was one of his students there, along with L. Carrington Goodrich (who had been appointed to the University faculty in 1925), Cyrus Peake, Ardelia Hall, and others. For the academic year 1926-27 she received the President White Traveling Fellowship, which enabled her to spend the year in Paris for further study.

Fortunately, during her undergraduate years Miss Gaskill, even though her major was in European history, had taken a minor in French. This had given her a good reading knowledge and a grasp of French grammar and idiom, but did little to help her speak. When she reached France in September 1926, therefore, she proceeded to Dijon for intensive work in understanding and speaking French. By the time she returned to Paris at the beginning of November, she had acquired a good speaking knowledge of French and was able to attend lectures in French without difficulty. During this year she studied the Chinese language at L'Ecole des Langues Orientales Vivantes with Professor Arnold Jacques Vissière (1858-1930), the author of several textbooks for the study of Chinese as well as several monographs on Islam in China. Her fellow students were a very cosmopolitan group, including Archibald Wenley (who later became Director of the Freer Gallery in the Smithsonian Institution) and several Danes, Russians, and Germans. At least for most of the year, however, there were no native speakers of French. Professor Vissière spoke not a word of English; the teaching was entirely in French, with an occasional German word thrown in by way of explanation. Later in the year a niece of Professor Henri Maspero joined the class; Professor Vissière then had a student to whom French was the native language. The lectures of Professors Pelliot, Maspero, and Granet, all of which were exclusively in French, dealt with Chinese history, society, institutions, and bibliography. These lectures were delivered at the Collège de France and at the Sorbonne.

After returning to the United States, Miss Gaskill resumed her work at Cornell, but during 1927 and 1928 she spent part of her time at Columbia University, supervising the cataloging of the Chinese collection. While in New York she met Dr. W. B. Pettus, who at that time was in the United States to raise funds for the institution which was then called the North China Union Language School and was later known as the College of Chinese Studies and as California College in

China. He urged her to come to Peking, then known as Peiping, to assist in the library of the Language School. In return, she would receive room and board on the premises of the School and free tuition. She left for Peiping in 1929 and returned to the United States in 1930.

During this year in Peiping, in addition to her language study and work in the library, Miss Gaskill received a very modest stipend from Cornell University to enable her to carry on acquisitions work for its Library. In the course of this work she became well acquainted with Dr. T. L. Yuan, then Associate Director of the National Library of Peiping, and with Mr. T. K. Koo, who in 1932 founded the Peking Union Bookstore to serve the needs of American libraries. With their cooperation, she was able to acquire over 7,000 volumes of Chinese works for Cornell, and to make arrangements for further acquisitions after her return.

During the years that followed, the Wason Collection grew steadily. Miss Gaskill, in addition to her library duties, taught a survey course in Chinese history, beginning in 1934. This course considerably increased the use of the Wason Collection. In the words of Professor Lauriston Sharp, "These indications of serious intent attracted to Cornell a Rockefeller grant used in part for the appointment of a Chinese cultural historian, Knight Biggerstaff, in 1938."⁸ In developing these plans, Miss Gaskill had many conversations with Mr. Mortimer Graves, who was then Administrative Secretary of the American Council of Learned Societies. Over a period of many years Mr. Graves played a major role in promoting the study of the Far East in American universities, both through helping to secure foundation grants and in placing faculty members to carry on these studies. It is to be hoped that someone will undertake the task of studying and describing in detail his many contributions.

A portion of this Rockefeller grant was assigned to the expansion of the Wason Collection. With the help of Professor Biggerstaff, Miss Gaskill undertook an active acquisitions program to acquire "all standard Chinese reference materials, scholarly journals, and basic historical works, giving special emphasis to the history of the Ch'ing period."⁹ During the years from 1938 to 1941 some 15,000 additional Chinese volumes were purchased in Peking, bringing the Chinese-language holdings of the Wason Collection to approximately 25,000 volumes.

During the war years the Army Specialized Training Program (ASTP) established a Chinese language and area program at Cornell. In this program Miss Gaskill worked with Professors Biggerstaff, Lauriston Sharp, a Chinese linguist, and Chinese tutors in giving "twelve-month and nine-month intensive courses on the Chinese area and language for Army personnel supposedly bound for China and adjacent regions."¹⁰ In June 1945 Miss Gaskill moved to Washington, D.C., where she worked in military intelligence (G-2) in the Pentagon until February 1946, when she returned to Cornell. After the war ended, Cornell University, which had been favorably impressed by the achievements of the ASTP program during the war years, decided to establish one or more language and area programs of its own. In subsequent years this initiative developed into the China-Japan Program and also the Southeast Asia Program, both of which are still being continued at Cornell University.

In 1948, from January to August, Miss Gaskill made another trip to China on funds provided by the Rockefeller Foundation. In spite of the unsettled conditions at the time, and the soaring inflation, she was able to obtain "several thousand volumes on early history, traditional literature, and philosophy, as well as some of the more important Chinese series (*ts'ung shu*), materials on Republican China

(1912-1949), and Japanese language works on China."¹¹ Acquisitions continued after her return to the United States; and during these last few years before the establishment of the People's Republic of China brought to an end communication between mainland China and the United States, another 15,000 volumes were added to the Wason Collection.

Approximately a year before Miss Gaskill's 1948 visit to China, she had undertaken one of her most important and enduring contributions to the field of East Asian Studies, the editorship of the Far Eastern Bibliography (now the Bibliography of Asian Studies). It may be appropriate here to recall the statement of Dr. Luther H. Evans, former Librarian of Congress: "Without bibliography the records of civilization would be an uncharted chaos of miscellaneous contributions to knowledge, unorganized and inapplicable to human needs."¹² The original impetus for the Far Eastern Bibliography, like many other innovations in the field of Far Eastern studies, came from Mr. Mortimer Graves, who early in the 1930s began to issue from his office in the ACLS a mimeographed list entitled "List of Articles on Chinese Subjects." In compiling these lists Mr. Graves received the cooperation of other specialists on the Far East. In 1936 this undertaking developed into the Bulletin of Far Eastern Bibliography, compiled by Earl H. Pritchard and issued from 1936 through 1940 under the auspices of the Committee on Far Eastern Studies of the ACLS. This was succeeded in November 1941 by the section entitled "Far Eastern Bibliography" in volume 1 number 1 of Far Eastern Quarterly. This continued to be edited by Professor Pritchard through 1945, with the assistance of various contributors, among whom Miss Gaskill appears in the May and November issues of 1942. In the issue of August 1946 Professor Pritchard announced that from then on the Bibliography "will be published as an annual, in one of the numbers of the Quarterly, probably the May issue, and it will contain a classified list of publications of the previous calendar year and an author index." The first annual issue appeared in the May 1947 issue of the Far Eastern Quarterly, which carried the additional title Special Issue: Far Eastern Bibliography 1946. At this time Miss Gaskill assumed chief responsibility for the compilation of the Bibliography, and the Cornell University Press agreed to undertake publication for a five-year period. In her work, Miss Gaskill was to be assisted by Mr. Cecil Hobbs (for Southeast Asia material), and by the former compiler, Professor Pritchard. In this issue it was further announced that the Bibliography would appear as a regular quarterly feature of the journal, but that reprints would be accumulated, provided with an author index, and issued each year as a separate volume. This pattern was followed in the Bibliography for 1947 (published in June 1948) and in that for 1948 (published in August 1949). During Miss Gaskill's 1948 visit to China, two of the quarterly issues of the 1948 Bibliography were compiled by John J. Notbe, then a graduate student at Cornell University, and now Professor of History, specializing in Chinese History and International Relations at the University of Maine.¹³ But Miss Gaskill resumed her work with volume 8 number 2, and continued through volume 13 (1953-54), when she was succeeded by Howard F. Linton of Columbia University. She continued, however, to contribute many entries to the Bibliography; she was still contributing to volume 22 number 3, published in September 1963, the year of her retirement.

During the years before her retirement, however, several important developments were taking place. The Orientalia Processing Committee at the Library of Congress was appointed in early 1953, and together with a national committee chaired by G. Raymond Nunn, then at the University of Michigan, it undertook to develop standard uniform cataloging rules for works in Far Eastern Languages. Miss Gaskill took an active part in these continuing deliberations, which

culminated in the adoption in 1957 of uniform cataloging rules by all leading American collections.

Closer to home, however, a number of grants were making possible the rapid expansion of the Wason Collection. Indeed, the increased demands of the China-Japan Program at Cornell were making such an expansion quite necessary. Grants from the Ford Foundation were received in 1956, 1957, 1962, and 1967--this last after Miss Gaskill's retirement--which "made possible expansion of the faculty, support of a sizable number of graduate students, and provision of facilities for research, the most important being the enlargement of the Wason Collection."¹⁴ In addition, in 1960 Cornell began receiving annual subsidies from the Office of Education to develop its East Asian Language and Area Center. Professor Shadick points out that these "were used mainly in support of the Wason Collection, to strengthen the teaching of the Chinese language, and to initiate instruction in Japanese with a view to the development of Japanese studies in several disciplines."¹⁵ The receipt of these grants made it increasingly necessary for the Wason Collection to strengthen its holdings as well as provide the means of doing this. The most recent survey of East Asian collections in America, conducted by Dr. Thomas Kuo, as of June 30, 1980, credited the Wason Collection with holdings of over 260,000 volumes.¹⁶

In the midst of all this activity, the time came for Miss Gaskill to retire. Her retirement, however, did not cause her to become inactive. Since her retirement she has overseen the construction of a new home, has taken an active part in the preservation of more than 130 acres of wooded land which she owns, and has conducted extensive research into the history of the Gaskill family, which arrived in Salem, Massachusetts in 1636.¹⁷ Both Cornell University and the field of East Asian studies as a whole have good reason to be grateful to her for her many lasting contributions.

Notes

1. Mr. Wason, born in Cleveland, Ohio, was graduated from Cornell University in 1876, with a degree of Bachelor of Mechanical Engineering. From 1877 until his retirement in 1908 he had an active and profitable career, both in railway management and subsequently in the administration of telephone systems. For further details, and the dates of his service in various companies, see "A Brief Biography of Charles William Wason, 1854-1918, Founder and Benefactor of the Wason Collection," in The Catalog of the Wason Collection on China and the Chinese, Cornell University Libraries (hereafter referred to as CWC), compiled and edited by Paul P. W. Cheng (Washington: Center for Chinese Research Materials, Association of Research Libraries, 1978-1980, Part I, vol. 1, p. xvii). The Center for Chinese Research Materials announced (Newsletter no. 37, Sept. 1984, and Supplement no. 3, January 1985) that a supplement to this Catalog, containing approximately 13,500 cards representing some 11,600 works cataloged between 1978 and 1980, would be published in 1985.

2. Richard C. Howard, "The Wason Collection on China and the Chinese," in CWC, Part I, vol. 1, p. xx. This valuable account, together with extensive notes recorded by Dr. Howard during his service as Curator of the Wason Collection (1963-1976), served as the source of much of the material presented in this paper. Another valuable source has been a series of extended telephone conversations with Miss Gaskill, during October and November 1984. She has been most gracious and helpful in supplying information which could have been obtained from no other source; she has also sent copies of several valuable items pertaining to the early years of the Wason Collection. It is also interesting to note that the first substantial collection of books in Chinese--some 350 volumes--had been received by Cornell University some years before the donation by Mr. Wason. In the "Minutes of the Library Council" for November 8, 1911, we read, "Letter read from S. Hu offering on behalf of the Chinese students in the University to present a collection of Chinese books to the Library if the Library will accept it. Librarian accepted offer." "S. Hu" is known to us as Hu Shih (1891-1962), who was a student in Cornell at that time.
3. Quoted from the title of one of his works, Modern History, the Rise of a Democratic, Scientific, and Industrial Civilization. (New York, Silver Burdett and Co., 1931. Reprinted in 1933, 1935, 1939, 1941, 1944, 1946, and 1952). One of his basic concepts, the idea that everyone makes history continually, and uses that history (i.e., his memory and documentation of events) in making everyday decisions, by many of the same processes as those used by professional historians, is elaborated in his Presidential Address delivered to the American Historical Association on December 29, 1931, entitled "Everyman His Own Historian," published in the American Historical Review, Jan. 1932, pp. 221-236.

Essentially the same title, Everyman His Own Historian: Essays on History and Politics, is used for a collection of seventeen essays by Professor Becker (all but one of which had been published previously), collected from various sources and published, upon the urging of his students, by F.S. Crofts and Co., New York, 1935.
4. Sarah Pike Conger (Mrs. E. H. Conger), Letters from China, with Particular Reference to the Empress Dowager and the Women of China (Chicago: A. C. McClurg and Co., 1909). This volume contains a detailed, close-up portrayal of life in the Legations when they were under siege during the Boxer outbreak of 1900. It also contains an account of Mrs. Conger's efforts in subsequent years to establish cordial relations with the ladies of the Court, along with glowing praise of what she perceived as the noble character, wisdom, foresight, and womanly tenderness of the Empress Dowager, Tz'u-hsi. However misguided these views may now seem, there can be no doubt of Mrs. Conger's enthusiasm and sincerity. Our concerns here are that Mr. Wason found the volume exceedingly interesting and that it stimulated him to learn all he could about China and the Chinese. For references to and brief quotations from seven contemporary reviews see Book Review Digest, vol. 5 (1909), p. 92.

Through the kindness of Dr. James H. Cole, current Curator of the Wason

Collection, I have received a copy of the dedication written on the flyleaf of this volume. It reads:

From Mother Breckenridge
Christmas 1909
Chas W. Wason

This book was the first book on
China purchased by me: the
commencement of my Chinese Library.
Chas W. Wason
5/30/15

Since the volume was a gift it seems strange that Mr. Wason states that he "purchased" it. Probably he means "acquired."

5. Thomas Frederick Crane, 1844-1927, who was at the time of the presentation Professor Emeritus of Romance Languages in Cornell University. A Bibliography of the Writings of Thomas Frederick Crane, Professor Emeritus, Cornell University, 1868-1924, was published without record of place or date, but probably in Ithaca in 1925. (The copy in the Library of Congress carries a handwritten presentation by Professor Crane "To Professor W. A. Hammond with cordial regards of his old friend the author," dated June 27, 1925. Presumably this presentation refers to William Alexander Hammond, 1861-1938, a writer on aesthetics and other branches of philosophy.)
6. This event, including the quotation from Professor Crane, is recorded in Gussie E. Gaskill, "Curator Describes Collection of Books on China, Donated by C. W. Wason '76," in The Cornell Daily Sun, January 16, 1928. It may be recalled that during the 1920s some friction arose between the widow of Mr. Wason and the then Librarian of Cornell University concerning the handling of the Endowment funds. Mrs. Wason, however, was much pleased by this account written by Miss Gaskill. She resumed her interest in and friendship with the Library, and later contributed funds which made possible the publication of The Travels of Lao Ts'an, by Liu T'ieh-yün (Liu E), translated and annotated by Professor Harold Shadick. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1952).
7. Howard, op. cit., p. xix.
8. Lauriston Sharp, "The Cornell University Southeast Asia Program," in Southeast Asia Catalog. Cornell University Libraries, compiled under the direction of Giok Po Oey (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1976), vol. 1, p. xiv.
9. Howard, op. cit., p. xxi.
10. Sharp, idem.
11. Howard, idem.

12. As quoted by Key P. Yang in "Library Resources and Needs for Korean Studies," in CEAL Bulletin, no. 73 (Feb. 1984), p. 32.
13. Further details of Professor Nolde's career appear in Directory of American Scholars, 8th ed., vol. 1, p. 557.
14. Harold Shadick, "The China-Japan Program of Cornell University," in CWC, Part I, p. xxv.
15. Idem.
16. CEAL Bulletin, no. 70/71 (Feb./June 1983), p. 76.
17. "Curator Reflects on Wason," in Cornell Chronicle, Oct. 19, 1978.