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From the Archives: The Center for the Study of C.S. Lewis & Friends

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Biographical Information

The Center for the Study of C.S. Lewis & Friends, colloquially named the Lewis Center, resides within the Taylor University campus beneath the library in the Zondervan basement. Effectively, its beginning is found with the arrival of the Edwin W. Brown collection. The acquirement of the Brown collection ignited the beginning of the existence of the Lewis Center, and made way for the Center to prevail in the way that it does currently: a program that is committed to continually teaching students about the life and the works of C.S. Lewis and those of the friends with whom he wrote and discussed during his time as a Christian apologist.

The history of the Lewis Center depends on the Brown Collection and how one of the most extensive collection of the authors included made its way to the campus of Taylor University. “On February 13, 1997, the Edwin W. Brown collection arrived on Taylor University’s campus. Contained within the collection are first edition works by C.S. Lewis and some of his friends, influences and contemporaries, including Owen Barfield, George MacDonald, Dorothy Sayers, and Charles Williams” (Bane, n.d.). The acquisition of the Brown collection essentially begins even before the date of the arrival; the University had long before established an affinity for Lewis’s writings and instilled this affection within its students through Freshman seminars and an integration in many of the students’ major classes. This affinity was noticed by a Taylor student in the mid-nineteen eighties, the nephew of retired Indiana University Professor of Medicine, Edwin W. Brown; this is how the initial connection between Dr. Brown and Taylor University began (Bane, n.d.). When asked, Dr. Brown testifies that he “backed into” the world of antiquarian book collecting; he originally wanted to recreate the old English pubs, which fascinated him, in his own basement (Garringer, 1997). The start of his collection began when, in pursuit of decorating his pub, he bought several old Lewis books from

the Eagle and Child in Oxford, England, Lewis's local pub in which he would meet with his friends, including the notable J.R.R. Tolkien and Charles Williams. Prior to the acquirement in 1997, Dr. Brown had spent 23 years collecting the first-edition books and original manuscripts of the five authors included in the original collection (Garringer, 1997). Ten years prior to Taylor's obtainment of the collection, groups of Taylor students would be brought to Dr. Brown's home by their professors, namely mathematics professor Dr. David Neuhouser, to view the documents within the collection. Soon after this relationship was established, the attention of the University President, Jay Kessler, was caught; after only the initial visit from Kessler to Brown's collection did he recognize the benefit this sort of collection would be to Taylor, and almost immediately began speaking to Dr. Brown about bequeathing it to the University (Bane, n.d.). Clearly, this type of collection was not only valuable personally to Dr. Brown, but it was also held a significantly large monetary value; consequently, the two men met with an anonymous donor to conspire the details that would eventually lead to Taylor's acquirement of the collection.

Legacy to the Institution

The potential of the Lewis Center to contribute holistically to the legacy of Taylor University was recognized soon after its initial implementation. The intentionality the original members of the Committee took to ensure the growth and the continued value of the Center was a main determinant of the legacy it holds to this day. The members of the original committee include the first acting chair of the university committee, Dr. David Neuhouser. Those who served alongside him included David Dickey, Rick Hill, Bonnie Houser, Pam Jordan, Kimberly Moore-Jumonville, and Roger Phillips (Office, 1997). These individuals contributed much to The Center's start and its subsequent growth, which is what has made sure to contribute to its overall legacy to the university. The impact to the legacy that the Lewis Center has already had

and will continue to have on the institution as a whole can be recognized within the stated goals and purposes of the Brown Collection, as well as the continued responsibilities of the committee that works to maintain the legacy through the work and programming of the Center. The opening statement of the document that records the initial goals of the Brown Collection reads:

In all that we do, our primary objective should be to help build the kingdom of God on earth. We believe that both the writings of the authors in the collection and Taylor University help to promote God's Kingdom. Therefore, our complementary aims are to use this collection to encourage more people to read these authors and to attract support for Taylor by enhancing the spiritual and academic life of the university (Goals, 1997).

Within these stated goals is an expression of importance of the ideas found within the texts of the authors featured. These ideas are held in a higher priority than the physical aspects of the collection, "the bindings, first editions..." (Goals, 1997). A continued passion for these classic authors is a prime concern for the collection as well, as the founders state "Anything that attracts people to read and study these authors is worthwhile. We want the collection to act as a focal point, highlighting the enduring value of these authors" (Goals, 1997). Fortunately, many of the goals that were initially written have been attained and are currently being sustained; the continued growth of the collection is numerical proof of this. The original committee members prioritized this in writing with their expression of promoting research done by students, faculty, and other scholars; they add specific ideas and plans for the implementation of this idea as well. "To promote research by our students, staff, and visiting scholars, we will attempt to add primary materials (manuscripts, letters, and periodicals containing material by and about the authors), new anthologies, critical works, and biographies, as we have the resources" (Goals, 1997). The Center was also committed to expanding these ideals outside of the walls of just the Center,

mainly throughout the rest of the Zondervan library – “...we will work to strengthen our, already strong, holdings of works by and about these authors in circulating part of the Zondervan Library. This may include adding works by Tolkien, Chesterton, and other authors” (Goals, 1997). Included within the hopes for the expansions of the Center and the Brown collection were ideas of adding variety and diversity to the collection as well. The original committee members explain their wish to add different sorts of archetypes and visuals to add to the attractiveness and to the value of the collection, the addition of photographs, paintings, and other items owned by or related to the authors was an important objective within the early years of the center (Goals, 1997). (This was eventually executed with the acquirement of one of the most impressive additions to the collection, an original pencil sketch of C.S. Lewis drawn by one of his former students). Lastly, the original committee recognized very early the ways in which the Lewis Center could contribute heavily to the legacy of the institution of Taylor as a whole. With this recognition in mind, the members made sure to be intentional with even the placement of the collection, and treat it with the high regard that is deserved by a collection of this value. The members write: “In whatever ways we can we will try to make the collection and its setting as attractive as possible. The collection needs to be housed in a separate room to maximize its effectiveness, so we will explore ways and means to accomplish this” (Goals, 1997).

The Lewis Center does not remain stagnant in continuing the collection beyond its initial acquirement; since the Brown collection’s arrival its size has increased by 10 percent. One of the most recent additions is a collection of issues of a publication called “Good News for the Young” which featured serialized versions of poems and novels by George Macdonald (Bane, n.d.). Even for reasons other than the continued growth of the collection, The Lewis Center continues to be impactful to the institution in which it resides. First, there is much prestige associated with such

rare antiquities; but also, this type of collection provides greater visibility for the important Christian writers that the collection showcases – it helps to promote the values and ideals found within the writings (Bane, n.d.). Some of the most prominent items that have been collected recently or within the last two decades include an unpublished debate between C.S. Lewis and Owen Barfield called *Clivi Hamiltonis Summae Metaphysics Contra Anthroposophos Libri II*, and an unpublished poem by George MacDonald in his handwriting (Eagle, 2004, p. 10). Also among the list of most impressive instillations are the sets of letters from C.S. Lewis to Mary Neylan, who was one of Lewis’s former students and, eventually, one of his personal friends with whom he discussed issues such as his Christian understanding of marriage (Eagle, 2004, p. 10). Also included in this list of impressive acquisitions are several letters from C.S. Lewis and Warren Lewis (C.S.’s brother) to Jill Flewett Freud, who is widely known and understood to be C.S.’s inspiration for his character Lucy Pevensie in his series of children’s novels *The Chronicles of Narnia* (Eagle, 2004, p. 10). During World War II, when Freud was an adolescent, she was evacuated to the home that Lewis lived in called “The Kilns”. Lastly, a copy of *Mere Christianity* by C.S. Lewis with an inscription by Lewis to Joy Davidman and annotations by Joy (Eagle, 2004, p. 10). This is especially notable because of Lewis’s relationship to the recipient. Davidman was Lewis’s wife for the last four years of her life, and whose death inspired Lewis’s acclaimed novel *A Grief Observed*. Davidman’s annotations include sentences “What are all these kissings worth, If thou kiss not me?” on page 78, as well as on page 86: “What is the quieter love does not come? It cannot be achieved alone” under a section in which Lewis quotes the poem *Love’s Philosophy* by Shelley (Davidman, 1952). Clearly, the value of the pieces and works featured in the center add more to the legacy of Taylor University than solely monetary value, but the value of rarely encountered and deeply personal insight into the lives of the

featured authors. Dr. Neuhouser, the original head of the Brown Collection Committee has been quoted saying that the collection provides “a visible focus for study of the authors” (Bane). This statement reigns true considering the vast amount of works featured and the variety of what can be found within the Center. These pieces, and the ideals found within them continually contribute to the legacy of the University.

Impact on the Institution

According to the 2004 edition of an Edwin W. Brown pamphlet, “The cultural, literary, and religious arms of the collection can be expanded through the educational curriculum offering of lectures and seminars. In fact, Taylor University will have the potential to reach beyond the literary collection and bring C.S. Lewis scholars to the campus” (Eagle, 2004, p. 11). This declaration is also echoed and foreshadowed by the hopes found within the initially recorded goals of the collection committee, which also explicitly state an intent to produce programming furthering the knowledge and ideas of the authors featured: “[thus], we will plan colloquia or seminars and encourage visitors to and the scholarly use of the collection” (Goals, 1997). This promise was not stated lightly, as this idea is a major feature and a significantly successful aspect of how the Center impact the institution currently. An instillation of major significance to both the continuation of the study of these authors, and to the University itself is that of the Frances White Ewbank Colloquium. This in a bi-annual conference that gathers students and scholars internationally to present on (and to listen to) paper presentations, to participate in workshops, and to discuss with other scholars the work they have done regarding the work of the authors of the Brown Collection. From the first Ewebanks Colloquium in 1997, the event has expanded in both diversity of authors studied as well as in popularity and participation. The initial colloquium brought in a reported 75 registered guests, and by only the second colloquium held the number

of registrations jumped to 150, with 60 guests attending from off campus (November, 1999). From the first appearances of the Colloquium, the Center has been able to bring in widely acclaimed names to speak to the campus and the guests it attracts to campus, authors and admired authors and philosophers, respectively, like Madeline L'Engle and Peter Kreeft made their ways to Taylor's campus by way of the Lewis Center's colloquium in the very early years of its instillation. In 2004, the Center's committee was able to obtain Walter Hooper as the keynote speaker for the Colloquium; Hooper resided in England at the time and worked as a private secretary to Lewis and worked very closely with the Lewis Estate, as well as was an author and editor in the field of Lewis studies (Garringer, 2004). Hooper, along with author Barbara Reynolds, were names that then-current director Dr. David Neuhouser called "the greatest improvement" to the Center's work (Colloquium, 2004). Reynolds was brought from England as well to speak on her knowledge of and work with Dorothy Sayers. She worked closely with Sayers on her translation of Dante's Divine Comedy from Italian to English, and finished the translation after Sayers' death, as well as wrote about Sayers' life and edited her letters (Colloquium, 2004). The fact that the Center was able to obtain multiple speakers who interacted personally with some of The Center's authors, and subsequently were able to offer attendees unreported, first-hand accounts of these featured authors offered an extremely rare opportunity and a priceless investment to the type of value that the Center brings to the university. As the aforementioned goals of the Center state, one of the priorities of the Lewis Center is to continually remain dynamic, to keep working, moving, and planning. The most recently recorded Friends Committee meeting minutes that can be found in the Taylor University Archives, from October 2015, provide an example of how this continues to be accomplished. As members of the committee discussed the current work of the Center, items mentioned included

hosting the C.S. Lewis Society of Central Indiana, a presentation of a paper on Tolkien, in increase in the number of Freshmen coming in to see the Center as part of their Orientation class, and the start of a student-led Inklings Student Group (Ritche, 2015). This type of fervor continued into the 2017 year with the initial implementation of what is affectionately known as ‘Teas’, now an essential part of the Center’s current programming. The Teas provide “an informal time at the end of the week to fellowship and to exchange words and ideas, in the spirit of the Inklings” (Ricke, 2016). These events create a space for students and faculty to gather to just talk, or to focus on a specific work or author, perform readings from an author, or just concentrate on a topic of discussion. The collaborative and interactive nature of the Teas is a strong suit that contributes to the achievement of the founders’ original goals; students and employees are welcome to present their ideas, suggest others from whom they want to hear, and learn from each other through discussion. Learning and excitement over the works of the authors in included in the Collection is continuously being cultivated by these events and programming.

Conclusion

The Lewis Center holds much value inherently, and only continues to grow and add to this value by not ceasing efforts to do so. The ideals written on the pages that can be found within The Center are at the top of the priorities of The Center, and are where The Center claims its importance. These ideals reflect the values of and the legacy of the University as a whole. The Lewis Center can claim timelessness by continually producing programming centered around the works and authors found within the walls of The Center, reaching each new class of students. Current and future generations of Taylor students will be affected by the efforts of The Lewis Center, continuing the aforementioned legacy-based values. The continued love of learning, a standard that the university strongly claims, is the essence of the Lewis Center. When

considering the overall legacy of the institution, it is difficult to omit the mentioning of the Lewis Center, considering the vastness of history and current programming that it provides to the University.

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