

# The Case Legacy



## A man, a dream, a new kind of university

### How a visionary gift launched a college and shaped its personality forever

By Thomas P. Kicher

Photos courtesy of Case Western Reserve University Archives

**M**ost colleges and universities emphasized the liberal arts when the Case School of Applied Science broke the mold. Upon opening for classes in 1880, it was only the fourth college in the nation focused on a technical education—the first west of the Allegheny Mountains.

America was entering a manufacturing era and the frontier town of Cleveland had emerged into a bustling transportation center. Local visionaries, including a broad-minded philanthropist named Case, saw a chance to make the city a leader of new industries. That meant training young men to

apply principles of engineering, mathematics and science in laboratories as well as in local factories and in the field. That meant educating students who would get their hands dirty while advancing technology.

How did this vision arise in Cleveland? What were the issues of the day

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*I care nothing for money, but I am husbanding it for a purpose.*

– Leonard Case Jr., circa 1870

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that influenced the decision makers? Therein lies our tale. It's the story of a family of education enthusiasts and their lasting impact on the city they loved.

The Case School of Applied Science was established by Leonard Case Jr. via a trust deed, valued at \$1.5 million at the time of his death in 1880. He relied on the integrity of his trusted secretary, Henry G. Abbey, to execute his wishes. The citizens of Cleveland had long wished for an institution of higher learning to provide their young village the intellectual credibility and opportunity afforded eastern cities, much as Yale College provided for New Haven.

In order to appreciate the magnitude of the gifts of the Case family, we must begin with the Case family settlers, Meshach Case and Magdalen Eckstein, second generation immigrants from Holland and Bavaria, respectively.

As newlyweds, they journeyed from the East Coast to southwest Pennsylvania, on the frontier of civilization. Meshach was from an educated family and exhibited extensive practical skills. He fought in the Revolutionary War and suffered compromised health for the rest of his life. Both he and Magdalen were quite religious.

In the spring of 1800, the couple purchased 198 acres near Warren in Trumbull County. They were among the first 36 settlers in the Western Reserve.

As part of the settlement of the Northwest Territory, 3.4 million acres of land, reserved for the citizens of Connecticut, was sold to a group of investors for 35 cents an acre. General Moses Cleveland, an investor in the

transaction, conducted the survey and was authorized to establish a capitol on the bluffs just east of the Cuyahoga River.

Leonard Case Sr., the eldest son of eight children of Meshach and Magdalen Case, turned 14 shortly after the family moved to Warren. He was a robust and stout young man of boundless energy, able to provide the much needed “manpower” on the family farm. He was also a gifted writer and scholar, in spite of his limited formal education. In today's vernacular, he was home schooled.

He was stricken with a mysterious illness in the fall of 1801, bedridden for two years, and never fully recovered. He had limited use of his lower extremities for the balance of his life. Historians believe he had been stricken with polio, an illness not identified until the 20th century.



*Leonard Case Sr. arrived in the frontier town of Cleveland in 1816 to work for a bank. After amassing a fortune in railroads and real estate, he helped to build churches, temples, hospitals and libraries. Some call him Cleveland's first philanthropist.*

## FROM TOOLS TO BOOKS

Unable to farm, Leonard Case Sr. purchased books and began the study of surveying. In 1806, he went to work for the land office in Warren, where all land transactions were recorded. Then, in 1807, he became the private secretary to General Simon Perkins of the Connecticut Land Company. He was appointed clerk of the Court of Common Pleas of Trumbull County and deputy tax collector for non-residents of the Western Reserve.

Encouraged to study the law, he supported himself by serving as the justice of the peace and tax collector. He was admitted to the Ohio Bar in 1814.

In 1816, Leonard moved to Cleveland to become the cashier of the new Commercial Bank of Lake Erie. The bank did not survive the first financial crisis of the new country, but Leonard Case Sr. flourished in his new home. He followed a career in law and politics, specializing in the laws of real estate, taxes and land titles.

He married Elisabeth Gaylord, a quiet young woman from Middleton, Connecticut, in 1817. The couple welcomed a son, William, in 1818. Leonard Jr. was born in 1820.



*Elisabeth Case, William and Leonard's mother, is described in one historical account as a reserved and quiet woman who "rarely called upon her neighbors and was never in any sense a frequenter of society."*

# Tracking the Case influence on education, science and industry

<p><b>1800</b></p> <p>Pioneers Meshach and Magdalen Case arrive in the Western Reserve with a 13-year-old son, Leonard.</p>	<p><b>1818</b></p> <p>William Case is born.</p>	<p><b>1820</b></p> <p>Leonard Case Jr. is born.</p>	<p><b>1848</b></p> <p>Leonard Case Sr. helps create the Cleveland Library Association and the village's largest public library.</p>	<p><b>1864</b></p> <p>Leonard Case Sr. dies.</p>
<p><b>1816</b></p> <p>Leonard Case Sr. moves to Cleveland and marries Elizabeth Gaylord.</p>		<p><b>1833</b></p> <p>Leonard Case Sr. helps found Cleveland Lyceum, a forum for lectures and debates.</p>		<p><b>1862</b></p> <p>William Case dies at age 44.</p>

Leonard Case Sr. was soon recognized as one of the leading citizens of Cleveland, a man whose advice and support was sought by many. After a term as president of Cleveland City Council and as an Ohio Legislator, he returned to banking and concentrated on making Cleveland a transportation center, in part by contributing lakefront land for railroads.

During the financial crisis of 1837, he was able to acquire businesses and vast real estate tracts by buying the delinquent mortgages and paying overdue tax bills.

Leonard Case Sr. amassed a fortune, becoming one of the richest men in Cleveland, where he owned more than 2,000 acres of land. At the same time, he was generous with his philanthropic gifts, supporting churches, schools, hospitals and many civic organizations. It appears he was guided by the provisions of the original gift of the Western Reserve to the citizens of Connecticut, which dictated that the Connecticut Land Company set aside up to 500 acres in each 25 square-mile township for schools, churches, public buildings and a "Town Square."

The designers of the Reserve sought to build communities, and Case obliged. Not all of his ideas met with acclaim.

Leonard and Elisabeth lived near the center of the village, on Public Square.

They gifted the village with the Erie Street cemetery, at today's East Ninth Street, only to be criticized for selecting a location that was "too far from the settlement." That decision cost him re-election to city council. The residents of Cleveland simply did not want to travel that far into the woods to visit their dead.

His gifts of property to religions spanned all denominations, Christian and Judaic, but excluded the Catholic faith. This might be attributed to family history and Grandfather Eckstein's persecution by the Catholic Church in Bavaria.

## TWO BROTHERS, TWO PERSONALITIES

Leonard Sr. was a role model for his sons, challenging and supporting them to follow him in lives of service and philanthropy to the citizens of Cleveland.

William and Leonard Jr. were raised in an atmosphere of privilege. Never having to work, they devoted their adult lives to community service and philanthropy, continuing to make gifts to the village of Cleveland throughout their lifetimes. During Leonard Sr.'s later years, William assisted his father in managing a vast empire of land holdings and was instru-



*William Case, the more outgoing and adventuresome of the Case brothers, was an avid outdoorsman who corresponded with John Audubon and served a term as mayor of Cleveland. He died at age 44, leaving Leonard the only heir.*

mental in establishing the network of railroads around Cleveland.

William, a consummate outdoorsman, was well known among the sport hunters and the conservationists. He gathered and preserved an extensive collection of animals and birds native to Ohio and Michigan. He was frequently cited by John J. Audubon as a reference in the identification of new bird species and their habits and houses.

<p><b>1880</b></p> <p>Leonard Case Jr. dies, leaving \$1.5 million for a new university. (A gift worth about \$37 million today).</p>	<p><b>1884</b></p> <p>Henry Dow enrolls, begins experiments that lead to Dow Chemical.</p>	<p><b>1887</b></p> <p>Michelson-Morley experiment launches modern physics.</p>	<p><b>1907</b></p> <p>Albert Michelson becomes first American awarded Nobel Prize in science.</p>	<p><b>1967</b></p> <p>CIT and Western Reserve become Case Western Reserve University.</p>
<p>The Case School of Applied Science opens with 16 students in the former Case home near Public Square.</p> <p><b>1880</b></p>	<p>Classes move to new Case Main Building on current campus.</p> <p><b>1885</b></p>	<p>Professor Dayton Miller produces first full body x-ray, begins Cleveland's medical imaging expertise.</p> <p><b>1896</b></p>	<p>CSAS renamed Case Institute of Technology.</p> <p><b>1947</b></p>	



Leonard Case, Jr., Cleveland's wealthiest bachelor in his day, made the Case School of Applied Science his legacy.

William was also known for his expertise as a horticulturist, planting acres of imported ornamental and fruit trees on the shores of Lake Erie and breeding a new species of berries. He served a term as Mayor of Cleveland and, following his father's leadership, continued the practice of planting shade trees, helping Cleveland earn the nickname "Forest City."

Leonard was the more cerebral, focusing his attention on languages and literature. He was a published author and translator. He was also an accomplished

mathematician and astronomer and developed a close friendship with John N. Stockwell, starting in the winter of 1864. Stockwell was also an accomplished mathematician and astronomer and shared many manuscripts with Leonard, including a five volume treatise, "Mecanique Celeste," by Pierre-Simon Laplace (1749-1827). It summarizes his development of calculus-based classical mechanics, an important tool in modern engineering problem solving. They were known to have spent hours discussing their common interests in mathematics, astronomy and statistics.

Poor health forced Leonard into the life of a recluse, taking comfort in his books and studies.

### AN ARC OF WONDERS, A NEW ECONOMY

William and Leonard Jr. used Case Hall, a building across the street from their home near Public Square, to organize a group of young men into a salon. There, they would gather and discuss the advancement of science, art and literature. The group called itself the "Arkites," as they met in a building that housed their collection of preserved animals, birds and shells.

The contents of the "Ark" became the foundation for the Cleveland Museum of Natural History. Their library became the foundation of the Cleveland Public Library, where William served as the first president. In 1850, William founded Cleveland University, but a lack of support and the selection of questionable leadership doomed the effort almost from the start.

The industrial revolution had dawned with the development of the steam engine, mining and metallurgy, factory manufacturing, electric power and lighting and the chemistry of photography, lubrication and fuels. The public was keenly interested in scientific phenomena, including astronomy—particularly the behavior of comets and meteors. They exhibited growing appetites for new science, both natural and physical, which they consumed for both their entertainment and livelihood.

The most powerful influence on William and Leonard Jr. was certainly their father, Leonard Sr., who taught himself the elements of land surveying, which is based on the mathematical fundamentals of Euclidian Geometry. Leonard Sr. used this important technical skill, along with his writing talents, to secure employment as the land clerk for the Connecticut Land Company. He managed to build a



*The "Arkites," the Case brothers and their fellow science enthusiasts, met in a clubhouse across the street from the Case home. Their "ark-like" collection of flora and fauna became the foundation of the Cleveland Museum of Natural History.*

successful career in banking and finance by becoming the legal authority and political leader of the frontier village of Cleveland.

At the time of his death in 1864, Leonard Sr. was one of the richest men in the Western Reserve, owning more than 2,000 acres of prime land. One noteworthy parcel, stretching from St. Clair north to the lake and from East 26th Street to East 55th Street, became the industrial and transportation center of Cleveland.

William died two years before his father, at age 44. So when Leonard Sr. passed, the family's entire inheritance was left to Leonard Jr.

Relatives and strangers alike appealed to him for financial assistance. Growing weary of the requests, he delegated the distribution of personal gifts to Henry G. Abbey, his personal secretary. Four years before his death in 1880, Leonard Jr. established a trust deed for the establishment of a school of applied science. The balance of the Case family estate was left without the protection of a will, sparking an ugly battle between Leonard Sr.'s and Elisabeth's siblings that was ultimately settled by the court.

By gifting the city with the Case School of Applied Science, Leonard Jr. extended his father's dream and supported Cleveland as a manufacturing and industrial center.

### **A SCHOOL OF APPLIED SCIENCE**

Some historians report that few understood the intent of Leonard Case Jr. in establishing the Case School

of Applied Science. Many claimed that even the board of trustees did not understand what he envisioned. There were no other schools with such a name. However, I believe that Leonard and his fellow "Arkites," which included Henry G. Abbey, understood his vision. It was shaped by many hours of discussion and conveyed to John Stockwell, the school's first faculty member, via conversation and correspondence with Leonard Jr. Stockwell accepted the



*The Case homestead near Public Square was the first home of the Case School of Applied Science. Classes were held in the house; chemistry and physics labs were in the barn. Students made astronomical observations from the backyard.*

