APPENDIX A. DRAPER ON ALTGELD

Andrew Sloane Draper (1848-1913) was President of the University of Illinois from 1894 to 1904, and later wrote about the dedicated, controversial Governor, John Peter Altgeld (1847-1902). An edited version of Draper's article follows. ¹

Governor Altgeld's interest in the University of Illinois was keen, rational, and effective. The fact of it is beyond question and the genuineness of his interest is not open to doubt. Of course he likely thought it good political policy to aid the University. The governors of the state had all alleged their regard for the institution, but their concern had not been of the aggressive kind. There had not been much in the preceding years to quicken their concern about it, for the State University movement had not therefore shown much vigor or determination. But when Mr. Altgeld became governor it was becoming clear enough to discerning men that it was going to have an early and decisive evolution in all of the states. He doubtless saw a political opportunity. The governors before him had been Republicans, and he was a Democrat. The board of trustees had from the founding consisted almost wholly of Republicans, but now it had a majority of very capable Democrats. He was astute enough to see that he and his party would get credit for being interested in the University. Indeed they might gather a large measure of credit for it because the Democratic party had not ordinarily been credited with any special concern about liberal education. But it would be wholly unjust to assume that his interest was merely partisan or political. He was not only a leader of the Democratic party; he was intensely democratic in his feelings: he sympathized with the poor: he literally hated aristocracy, and he reasoned that endowed universities were aristocratic: he wanted all the boys and girls of the state to have the same educational opportunities as the children of the wealthy, and he believed that a tax-supported university developed up to the plane of the other universities would not only do much for many deserving students who would otherwise not have their opportunity, but also much for the common thinking, for the ordinary industries, for the other institutions of the state, and for the administration of the state itself.

¹ Andrew Sloane Draper, "Governor Altgeld and the University of Illinois," Alumni Quarterly, VII (Apr. 1913), 77-82.
I became president of the University soon after he became
governor, and very likely in consequence of it, although we were
total strangers. My political sympathies were completely at
variance with his and with those of two-thirds of the trustees. I
had not been a candidate for president; the trustees had come into
another state and sought me out and urged me to accept the posi-
tion. There were many things to make me wonder at it and this
difference in politics was one of the most striking of them. I had
alluded to it and they had assured me that politics had nothing to
do with the administration of the University; that they cared noth-
ing about my politics for they knew I would not obtrude my politi-
cal affiliations upon the institution; and that the Governor was in
full accord with them and anxious I should accept their invitation.

Governor Altgeld came to the University to see me the first
day of my service, August 1, 1894. I had gone there early so as to
get settled and learn the roads around and through the buildings be-
fore the teachers and the students returned from their vacations.
Learning that I was to be there that day, he was on hand to see what
sort of a foreigner the trustees had caught. [Draper had been Cleve-
land Superintendent of Public Instruction prior to his tenure at Illi-
nois.] But his curiosity about me was certainly no greater than
mine about him. He had a reputation which had aroused my interest,
possibly my apprehension. We went into a room alone and com-
muned together for a long time. What he said satisfied me of his
sincere interest in the institution and gave me confidence that we
could work together. Of course he complained about the lack of sup-
port and of the bad management of which he alleged the Republicans
had been guilty. I assured him that there was no harm in his saying
that, but I would have to pass it by if the delinquents would tread the
winepress with sufficient assiduity thereafter. He talked of the
things he wanted done: they were good things to do and showed that
his sympathies were genuine and that he had given not a little thought
to an involved and rather depressed situation. He wanted more
buildings, more teachers, more students, more carrying of liberal
learning to all the people and all of the interests of the State, and
much more money to do things with. It was a little surprising to
hear a live governor talk like that but there was nothing in it to dis-
hearten me. I put the political business squarely up to him saying
that we could make no substantial headway and in time would surely
come to grief unless we ignored all partisanship and urged all parti-
sans to work with us to upbuild a real university. He accepted this
completely and said he would ask nothing of me in the special inter-
est of his party or any member of it, and that he would personally
and officially respond so far as he properly could to all the calls I should make upon him in the interests of a far great university.

He kept that promise with enthusiasm. We not only knew that University appropriations which passed the Legislature would have the executive approval, but he was not at all averse to helping us get appropriations through the legislature. And he made it very easy and pleasant for us to go to him at all times and places. Let me illustrate by a concrete instance. The first legislature in my administration was Republican in both branches. The University asked for $150,000 for a new library and administrative building, and small sums ($12,000 each I think) for an observatory and a president's house. The operating appropriations was asked to be advanced, if I remember rightly, from $60,000 to $90,000. These appropriations were thought large. Senator Dunlap had, with his usual skill, engineered the bill through the Senate after the elimination of the observatory and president's house, but the seasoned political skippers who managed appropriations in the House determined in their mess-room that that $150,000 for the library building must be killed. So they appointed a sub-committee of the appropriations committee, consisting of the most seasoned of their members, to consider the matter and report. It was well understood that they would report against the library building, and it was feared that their report would be adopted before the University people could do anything to stop it. It was eleven o'clock on a bad night when I received a message from Senator Dunlap that the sub-committee would report and the full committee would act at 2 p.m. the next day. Professor Burrill, Mr. Pillsbury, and I procured a "hack" and drove to Tolono through the mud and reached Springfield about daylight. Now think of calling up a governor on the telephone before seven o'clock upon such an errand. But that it what I did, and he said he was not dressed yet but to come to the mansion at once and he would see me very soon. I told him we could split up the Republicans on the committee, but we had got to have the solid Democratic support at once to save the library building. He said, "You attend to the Republicans: pay no attention to the Democrats, and I will see that every one of them is in the committee and votes for whatever you want." We did as he said. The sub-committee recommended that the library appropriation be stricken out, and then to show how very fair it wanted to be it recommended that the little appropriation for the observatory which the senate had stricken out, be re-inserted. We had a member of the committee ready with a motion to re-insert the library building and then took the opportunity to talk to them, and the motion to re-insert was
adopted 17 to 6. The Republicans divided, but the solid Democratic vote did the trick. In this way the observatory appropriation was left in, and both appropriations passed both houses and were approved by the Governor. Very late in the session and just before the bill passed, the chairman of the House Committee telegraphed me asking my consent to leaving out the library building on condition that an appropriation for a president's house should be inserted. The consideration for selling out the University was insufficient and the proffer was declined. In the end Professor Shattuck proposed to sell an outlying farm and put the money into a president's house, and that was done, with the cordial approval of all concerned.

[That was] only an example of Governor Altgeld's positive and continual activity for the University. . . . Governor Altgeld was misjudged in two directions. He was a far abler man than was realized, and he was not the anarchist that he was very commonly thought to be. He was intensely an American, understood the philosophy of our institutions very well and the structure of our framework of government very thoroughly. . . . Perhaps he was the boss "Progressive" of his day. His trouble was possibly that he felt for the unfortunate too deeply and without sufficient discrimination; he loathed, none too bitterly, the course of the lower courts in Chicago which dealt with the underworld, but he let his disgust carry him too far; he hated too intensely the opponents whom he could not like: he read German socialist literature too exclusively and let it have too large an influence upon the mind of a man who had reached his eminence. Yet none can say that his thought was not being projected into directions and dealing with hard problems that are compelling the serious thought of the country more and more year by year.

And in any event, he stood by the University of Illinois in the hour of her first great growth and of her imperative need: he exerted the powers of his great office in her behalf to the very limits; and while all the friends of that University, now grown great, may dissent with some of his opinions, no one of them is at liberty to speak unkindly of him.