

Fortune and Faith in Old Chicago

A Dual Biography of Mayor Augustus Garrett
and Seminary Founder Eliza Clark Garrett

Charles H. Cosgrove

“Charles H. Cosgrove captures the personal, economic, and religious struggles of a unique nineteenth-century American couple. Steeped in original research, Cosgrove’s book not only brings the sights and sounds of Old Chicago back to life but also allows us to see how the Garretts formed a unique partnership, leading one to a career in early Chicago politics and the other to become the first woman in the United States to found a theological seminary.”—Christopher H. Evans, author of *The Social Gospel in American Religion: A History*

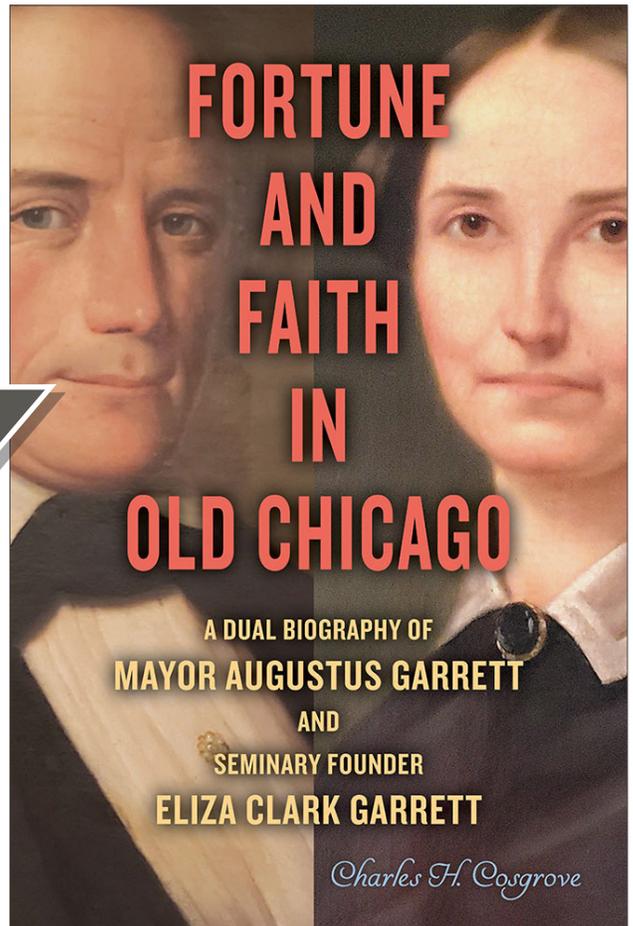
The first account of a highly influential
couple in antebellum Chicago

This well-crafted and engaging biography tells two equally compelling stories: an ambitious man’s struggle to succeed and the remarkable spiritual journey of a woman attempting to overcome tragedy. By contextualizing the couple’s lives within the rich social, political, business, and religious milieu of Chicago’s early urbanization, author Charles H. Cosgrove fills a gap in the history of the city.

After the Garretts moved from the Hudson River Valley to Chicago, Augustus made his fortune in the land boom as an auctioneer and speculator. A mayor during the city’s formative period, Augustus was at the center of the first mayoral election scandal in Chicago. To save his honor, he resigned dramatically and found vindication in his reelection the following year. His story reveals much about the inner workings of Chicago politics and business in the antebellum era.

The couple had lost three young children to disease, and Eliza arrived in Chicago with deep emotional scars. Her journey exemplifies the struggles of sincere, pious women to come to terms with tragedy in an age when most people attributed unhappy events to divine discipline. In 1853 she endowed a Methodist theological school, the Garrett Biblical Institute, thereby becoming the first woman in North America to found an institution of higher learning.

In addition to illuminating our understanding of Chicago from the 1830s to the 1850s, *Fortune and Faith in Old Chicago* explores American religious history, particularly Presbyterianism and Methodism, and its gendered approach shows how men and women experienced the same era in vastly different ways. The result is a rare, fascinating glimpse into old Chicago through the eyes of two of its important early residents.



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Charles H. Cosgrove is a professor of early Christian literature and the director of the PhD program at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, a union of schools descended from the institution founded by Eliza Garrett in 1853 and located on the campus of Northwestern University. He is the author of numerous books and articles in a wide range of fields, including theology, ethics, ancient music, and legal history. A lifelong native of the Chicago area, he is an aficionado of the city’s history.

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A Note to the Reader

Prologue

1. Newburgh Beginnings

An exploration of the couple's early lives as farmers in New York's Hudson River Valley includes descriptions of courtship rituals of the 1820s, as well as religious revivalism and the tent meetings that were a regular part of popular culture in post-Revolutionary America.

2. Prosecuted and Put to Cost

The Garretts embark on their first effort to remake their lives in one of the growing cities of the nation's newer states. Augustus hoped to "make his fortune," but their journey—first to Cincinnati, then to New Orleans and Natchitoches—brought only failure in business and sorrow when their two small children succumbed to cholera.

3. The Great Fairy Land of Fortunes

The Garretts go to Chicago just when the federal government removed the Potawatomi from Illinois and put massive amounts of land up for auction, sparking a craze in land speculation that immediately benefitted auctioneer Augustus. Meanwhile Eliza, raised by devout Presbyterian parents, wrestled with questions about God. Having lost two children, she failed to find the experiential peace through a "conversion experience" that the revival preachers promised, and she resigned herself to attending the small Presbyterian church in Chicago as an unconverted but faithful nonmember and volunteer for women's charity work.

4. Crash and Conversion

The Panic of 1837 was harsh for Illinois and Garrett's business enterprises. The sudden conversion of both Augustus and Eliza at a Methodist revival brought Eliza into Clark Street Methodist Episcopal Church in Chicago and connected her with influential Methodists who had big plans for higher education in the Northwest.

5. The Politician

Augustus's political career is explored during the depressed years after the Panic of 1837 when the growing city was in desperate need of basic infrastructure. Garrett won the mayor's office three times, but the results of his second victory were contested. The public inquiry that ensued revealed the hijinks of 1840s electioneering and led to a dramatic resignation by Garrett to defend his honor. Ever popular, he was reelected the following year.

6. Their Separate Spheres

Augustus's business career through the 1840s and the domestic life of the couple are described. Augustus had final say over all matters involving expenditure in the Garrett household, even dictating the style of the house they built and its furnishings. That situation changed when he died unexpectedly in 1848. Although Eliza felt utterly bereft, the tragedy left her an independently wealthy woman who could now fulfill the philanthropic ideals she had always hoped Augustus would support.

7. The Founder

The evolution of Eliza's plans to establish both a college for women and a theological school are chronicled.

Postscript

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