Thomas Garrigue Masaryk — philosopher, sociologist, politician and statesmen — was born on March 7, 1850 in Hodonin (Moravia). In 1872, he entered the University of Vienna as a student of philosophy and later attended the University of Leipzig. There he made the acquaintance of Miss Charlotte Garrigue, an American, whom he married in 1878. A year later he received his PhD in Philosophy and was given the rank of “docent.” In 1882, Masaryk was appointed to the newly founded Czech professorship of philosophy and sociology at Prague's Charles University, and served in that capacity for more than a generation. After World War I began, he traveled abroad to gain the support of the Allied Powers for an independent Czechoslovak state. In 1917, he helped establish Czechoslovak Legions in Russia, France, and Italy and in September 1918 became the Chairman of the interim Czechoslovak government. In Washington on October 18, 1918, Masaryk published the Declaration of the Independence of the Czechoslovak Nation. He served as the new republic’s first president (its "President-Liberator") and held that position through re-election until 1935, when he resigned because of declining health.

The portrait of Masaryk was painted by Otto Peters (1882-1952) who was known for his portraits of Czech politicians and public figures, including Prime Minister Antonín Švehla, Speaker of the Parliament František Soukup, Prince Bedřich von Schwarzenberg, and General Rudolf Medek. Though the portrait of Masaryk is not dated, it is reasonable to assume that it was executed in the mid-1920s, when Peters produced the bulk of his work.

The portrait was presented to the University of Chicago on April 13, 1970, by Thomas John Bat’a, the president of the Bat’a Shoe Company of Ontario, Canada. The presentation ceremony honored the Czech and Slovak Studies program in the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures, established in 1962. Representatives of the University, as well of Chicago’s Czechoslovak community, attended. The commemoration of Masaryk at the University recognized the direct contact between the man and institution. In 1902, the University invited Masaryk to present a series of lectures as a guest of the Crane Foundation. The main topic of the lectures was Czech history and culture, but Masaryk also treated the problem of modern European nationalism and small nations, the Slavs in
particular. [See *The Lectures of Professor T. G. Masaryk at the University of Chicago, Summer 1902*. Lewisberg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 1978.]

Masaryk returned to the University sixteen years later to speak as a representative of the interim Czechoslovak government, which at the time had full support from the United States and President Wilson. Masaryk’s lecture, delivered in Mandel Hall on May 27, 1918, addressed the situation in Europe after World War I and the Czechoslovak resistance against Austro-Hungary and Germany.

The Library holds a nearly complete collection of everything published by and about Masaryk and his family in its general Slavic collection and in the Archives of Czechs and Slovaks Abroad (ACASA) located in the Special Collections Research Center (SCRC). In addition, Masaryk’s correspondence with the University administration regarding his visits and lectures are held in the University Archives, also housed in the SCRC.

*This portrait was restored in 1999 in honor of Miriam Hansen (1949-2011), at the time the Ferdinand Schevill Distinguished Service Professor in the Humanities, on the occasion of her 50th birthday.*