



# UNION

THE IU LANDMARK CELEBRATES 100 YEARS  
OF BRINGING PEOPLE TOGETHER

By Pete DiPrimio, H&L

PHOTO: Pete Schreiner/H&L



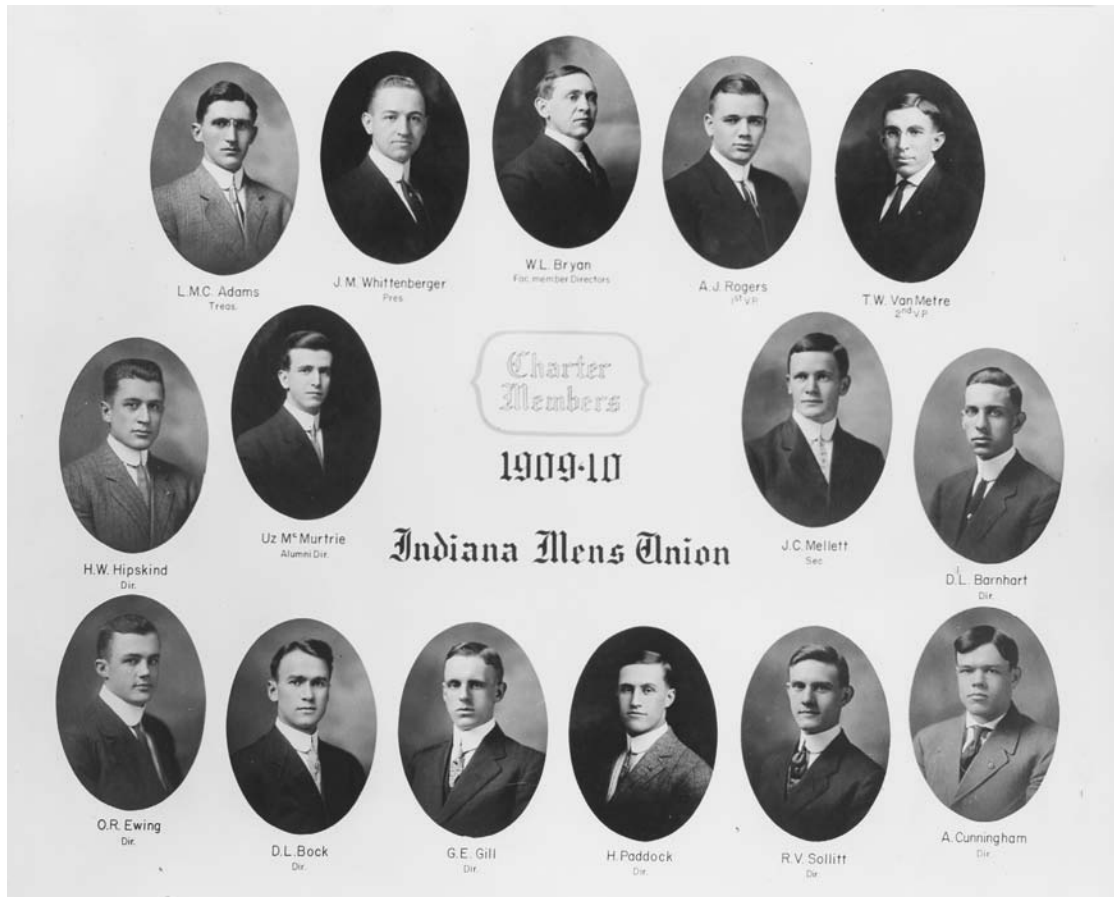


PHOTO: IU Archives

Andrew Dahlen continues the can't-we-all-get-along legacy. The Indiana Student Union Board president sits in harmony in the Indiana Memorial Union, discussing the passion driving the upcoming 100th anniversary celebration of the Student Union's creation. It's about creating "energizing events," he says. It's "unifying a diverse student body."

"The Union Board has something for everyone," he says. "If you like a debate, such as gay marriage, there's something for you. You can join a committee. Students are involved in discussions of expanding the Union building. We have hundreds of events each year."

Events include the occasional lecture from Colin Powell, the occasional concert from the Rolling Stones, the occasional appearance of Gene Tierney, and even poker playing and watching movies.

All that leads to one over-riding question:

Who's Gene Tierney?

We'll get to that in a moment.

Dahlen doesn't give students haircuts against their will, or go all WWE on some poor freshman or force fellow students into watching, say, replays of the latest episode of "Real Housewives of New Jersey."

For this we can thank the spirit of John Whittenberger.

Who's John Whittenberger? The Indiana Memorial Union auditorium is named after him. He's the man who saw something wrong with uncivil behavior on campus and worked for change. He's the guy who made the IMU and the Student Union possible.

Flash back to the Teddy Roosevelt era, when talking softly and carrying a big stick ruled. Whittenberger was on the seven-year graduation plan at IU. He enrolled in 1904 and was set to get his degree in 1911. No, he wasn't a slacker wasting his parents' money while he dropped classes, changed majors and partied like it was, well, 1909. He'd attend school for a semester, drop out to return to his Peru, Ind., home to work as a school principal, then re-enroll.



Young men enjoy the IMU, 1945. PHOTO: IU Archives



Herman B. Wells in the IMU, March 1944. PHOTO: IU Archives



Students gather in the IMU, Sept. 1967. PHOTO: IU Archives

In 1909, Whittenberger returned to IU and found rivalries between freshmen and sophomores and fraternity members and independent students had turned the fall semester into brawling adventures better suited for bare-knuckle fights.

He decided students deserved better. He proposed a student union for men to help turn hostility into good will and fun. Why not women?

Men made up a majority of the student body at the time. Men were the ones guilty of the rowdiest behavior. Finally, men ruled in those days because they could vote (women didn't get that right until the 19th Amendment passed in 1920), earned most of the money and could get away with it.

IU President William Lowe Bryan loved the student union idea. He said "The Union should be a great force making toward unity of University spirit and life."

So the Indiana Union was formed on Dec. 6, 1909, with Whittenberger as first president. The organization moved into the east wing of the Student Building and soon all sorts of cool stuff—for those who found billiard tables and magazine subscriptions cool—was donated. Membership, which cost \$1 a year, grew from 115 to 400 (including students, faculty and alumni) faster than you could ask, "Who's Gene Tierney?"

## COLLEGIAL SPIRIT

Robert Meyer pitches the concept of bringing student life and order and fun together. He's the IMU assistant director of activities and events, and his job exists in part to ensure that happens.

Cheryl Crouch talks of bringing a more collegial atmosphere by using social events to bring everybody together. She's the IMU executive director of marketing, which means she's spreading the news.

They are among the key figures in an organization that, as Crouch says, is the "flagship student union in the country in terms of how it should be run."

"It's the most active and efficient and professional," she says. "We take it very seriously."

Seriously enough, Meyer says, that the International Association of College Unions is based in Bloomington.

Still, don't confuse seriousness with stuffiness. The Student Union office at IMU is a popular spot—if you can find it in the building's sometimes Byzantine design.



“There are three to four students there day and night,” Dahlen says. “Often more. It’s a popular place to hang out.”

And just in case you forget who to credit for all this, there’s the John Whittenberger Society. It was founded in 1981 and has 800 members around the world. It is, Meyer says, the second-most active organization on campus in terms of participation and giving and scholarships.

Speaking of Whittenberger, in the spring of 1910 he was re-elected as union president. But he contracted typhoid fever and died in September of that year.

Still, his organization grew. A billiard tournament drew a huge crowd in the years leading to World War I. Soon the space in the Student Building was filled with a music and trophy room, a billiard and pool parlor, something called a “loafing” room and a barbershop.

Dance bands and theatre groups were popular events. The Cincinnati Symphony performed. A film series began with popular silent movies that cost 5 cents a ticket to see famous stars such as Charlie Chaplin, Mary Pickford and the vampire Nosferatu. The Union began getting paintings from famous Brown County artist T.C. Steele. That was the beginning of what is now IMU’s extensive art collection.



A performance at the IMU, Sept. 1967. PHOTO: IU Archives

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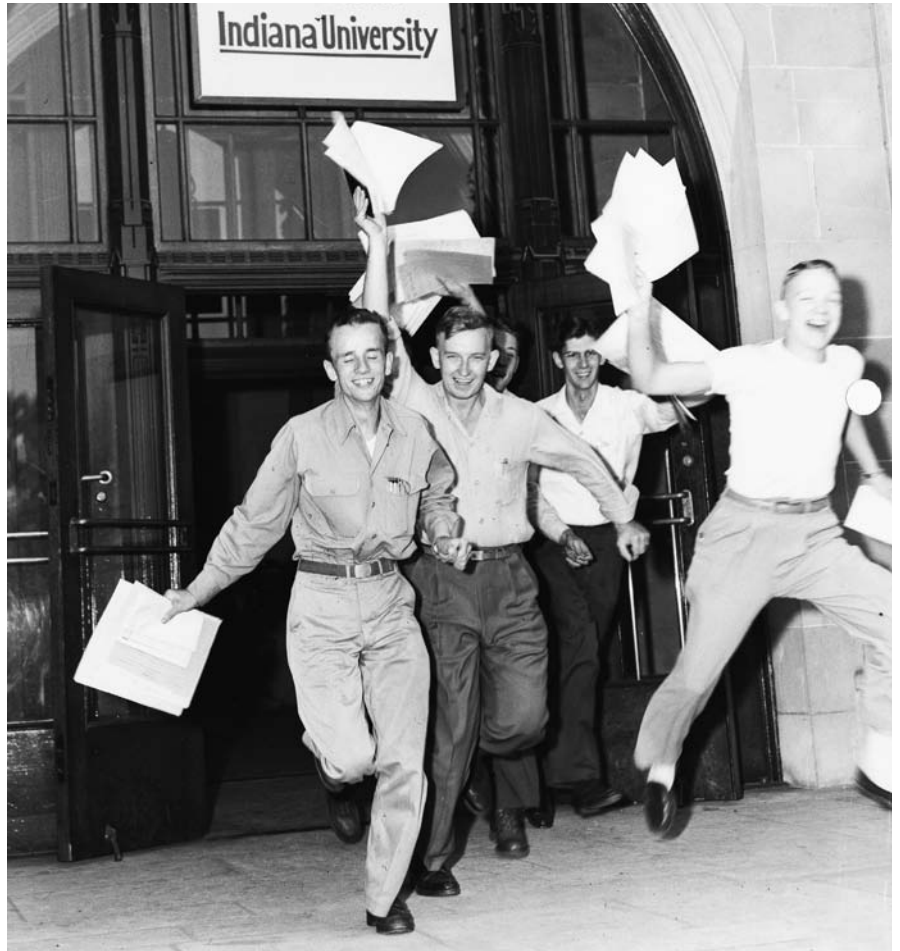


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In 1929, the architectural firm of Granger and Bollenbacher was chosen to build a separate Memorial Union. It was dedicated in 1932 and has undergone expansions in the late 1930s, the late 1950s (including the bowling alley and solarium) and the 1990s (including a food court).

Along the way, famous aviator Amelia Earhart showed up to give a lecture before disappearing in the Pacific during an attempt to fly around the world. Then Union Board members discussed whether to allow women in the billiard room. The

final verdict—no. However, in a unique bit of perspective, the all-male Union Board did choose the cheerleaders.

That practice no longer continues. In fact, by 1953, women were allowed to join the organization, play pool and pick their own cheerleaders.

In the 1960s, students watched the Kennedy-Nixon debate from the TV and Trophy Room. Young comics such as Jonathan Winters and Shelly Berman put laughter in college life. A disco was opened in the late 1970s called Club Lautrec.

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In the 1980s, speakers came from the world leader ranks. Polish leader Lech Walesa, political expert William Buckley, cutting-edge writer Kurt Vonnegut and actress Jane Fonda offered their perspectives while Student Union leaders offered theirs, with this caveat—no taking political sides. Instead, there were “Live From Bloomington” shows that featured the hottest local bands—“A big question was who’s the band for next week,” Crouch says—to help raise money for Hoosier Hills Food Bank. And for those with more national musical tastes, John Mellencamp, Tori Amos, the Dave Matthews Band and Counting Crows performed.

Now we’re in the 21st Century and once again there’s a push to expand the Memorial Union, which at 500,000 square feet is already the largest student union under one roof in the United States. Students want a bigger computer lab and more computer space.

A university master plan has the Memorial Union as the hub for the university—“central to the community of the campus” as former IU President Myles Brand once said—by directing that future buildings be constructed in the general IMU area, specifically a Woodlawn Avenue corridor that would extend to Memorial Stadium.

For now, though, the focus is on the 100-day countdown to the Centennial Celebration. It starts in August and ends on Dec. 6. Festivities include a scholarship banquet, an auction, tours of the facilities, a reception and even the burial of a time capsule.

“It’s another chance to bring people together,” Dahlen says.

## HISTORIC MOVIE BEAUTY

So who was Gene Tierney?

First, Gene was a she, an actress once called the “most beautiful woman in movie history” by Darryl F. Zanuck, the founder of 20th Century Fox, a big-time movie studio back in Hollywood’s Golden Era. Tierney was the Scarlett Johansson of her day.

She appeared in plenty of movies, broke plenty of hearts and even earned an Oscar nomination for the 1944 hit, “Laura.” She showed up at the Memorial Union in September of 1942 to help sell war bonds and, of course, spread the unifying message.

Somewhere, you figure, John Whittenberger was smiling.



Under a painting of Elisha Ballantine painted by T.C. Steele, a student takes a nap in the IMU. PHOTO: Jeremy Hogan



Students play a friendly game of pool at the Union Back Alley. PHOTOS: Jeremy Hogan



Students cram for finals in the IMU. PHOTO: Jeremy Hogan



PHOTO: Pete Schreiner/H&L

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