

Rededication of the Renovated Alumni Hall

Remarks of Michael A. McRobbie

President, Indiana University

Alumni Hall

Friday, June 7, 2013

6:00 p.m. reception

6:45 p.m. dinner

1. ALUMNI HALL: A VIBRANT AND VITAL HUB OF CAMPUS LIFE

In 1960, on the occasion of the dedication of a new addition that made the Indiana Memorial Union the largest college union building in the world, Indiana University's 11th president, Herman B Wells, reflected on the function of this building.

"A union building," he said, "is the living room of a campus. It is the center of faculty and student life outside the classroom, library, and laboratory, and, in addition, fosters lectures, art festivals, and other cultural projects. It furnishes the one common meeting ground for all—for the freshman and the distinguished professor, for the organized and the unorganized. All are welcome and all are a part of its life."¹

Today, incidentally, is Herman Wells' birthday. He was born 111 years ago today, on June 7, 1902. It is fitting that we celebrate his birthday in this building that he loved so much and with a gathering of some of the university's most dedicated alumni and friends. I can't help but think that he would be very pleased.

From the time it opened its doors in 1932, the Indiana Memorial Union has indeed served as a common meeting ground for all and a center of faculty and student life. In Wells' words: "the living room of the campus."

¹ Herman B Wells, remarks at the Dedication of the 1960 Indiana Memorial Union addition, delivered April 9, 1960, Indiana University Archives.

And over the last eight decades, no part of this building has served as a more vibrant and vital hub of campus and community life than the space we re-dedicate tonight in its splendidly renovated and restored form: Alumni Hall.

During the Big Band Era, semi-formal dances were held here every Friday night. And, of course, Alumni Hall has been home to countless conferences, seminars, lectures, films, concerts, weddings, and alumni events over the years.

The Indiana Memorial Union, of course, like Memorial Stadium and Memorial Hall, which was then the women's dormitory, were products of the Memorial Fund campaign, Students, faculty, staff, and alumni of the university contributed generously to the fund to honor IU alumni who had died during the First World War.

The Indiana Memorial Union was the third and final of the memorial facilities to be completed. Given the Stock Market Crash of 1929 and the ensuing Great Depression, it is quite remarkable that pledges continued to be fulfilled and that construction began on the building in 1931.

The original intention was to call this room "Memorial Hall," but because the then relatively new women's dormitory already bore that name, the Trustees decided to avoid the possibility of confusion by naming it "Alumni Hall." Minutes from a 1932 Board of Trustees meeting described the name "Alumni Hall" as "a fine tribute to those loyal alumni who have given so much to make this building possible."²

2. RESTORING ACADEMIC AND STUDENT VITALITY TO THE OLD CRESCENT

As I mentioned earlier, this renovation is closely affiliated with a larger project designed to bring new academic and student vitality to the adjacent Old Crescent.

² Indiana University Board of Trustee minutes, May 6, 1932, p. 117. IU Archives.

The Indiana Memorial Union, as I have noted, has been a vibrant center of student life since it opened in 1932. But just a few yards from here in the adjacent Old Crescent, students walked through, but rarely had any cause to visit many of the buildings. Only about half of the magnificent iconic buildings that comprise the Old Crescent housed academic units. We simply were not using them in a way that properly reflected the university's core missions of education and research.

And so, in 2010, I asked the Provost and the Vice President for Capital Projects and Facilities to jointly convene a working group—the Old Crescent Academic Working Group—to develop a long-term plan for the return of the iconic buildings in the Old Crescent to academic purposes.

In addition to relocating administrative units and restoring classrooms and learning spaces in the Old Crescent, the working group also recommended that we improve, renovate, or reinstate the “grand spaces” in these buildings to their original purposes.

So, in April, we inaugurated Presidents Hall in Franklin Hall—the first of the “grand spaces” in the Old Crescent to be restored to its original grandeur. The space served for many years as the reading room when the library was housed in Franklin Hall, but it had been almost unused in recent years, becoming mainly used for storage. Presidents Hall can now accommodate regular instruction, guest lectures, symposia, and a wide variety of other functions. The room also now houses the official portraits of the 17 previous presidents of the university, which have been brought together and are now exhibited in chronological order for the first time.

Later this month, Vice President for Capital Planning and Facilities Tom Morrison will bring a proposal for the full renovation of Franklin Hall before the Board of Trustees for consideration for approval, funded with a much-welcome appropriation in the most recent State budget. And we plan to eventually renovate all of the buildings in the Old Crescent.

In May, Provost Lauren Robel presided over the dedication of a newly renovated state-of-the-art classroom, known as the Collaborative Learning Studio, in the Student Building. That large space was once home to the women's swimming pool and later served as the Geography Library.

We have also recently renovated nearby Owen Hall, which is now home to the administrative offices of the College of Arts and Sciences.

These renovations will help to address the shortage of venues for large events and will help create a more vibrant student environment in the Old Crescent by allowing a wider variety of special events to be offered in this historic part of the campus at all times of the day and the evening.

3. ALUMNI HALL

And now, as you can see, Alumni Hall has also been magnificently restored to its original grandeur.

The purpose of this renovation is to not only restore the previous functionality of this superb space, but also to provide new, 21st century functionality as part of a plan to utilize our facilities as effectively as possible, particularly our most historic ones.

With new floors, new walls, and a new ceiling, Alumni Hall truly has been refurbished from top to bottom.

The large curtains that hid the windows for many years have been removed, and mechanical drapes have been installed so that natural light can enter the room much of the time. This also allows us to admire the beautiful limestone work that surrounds the windows.

Some of Alumni Hall's new features are less visible, but no less impressive. The new state-of-the-art technology in the room includes LED lighting, a new sound system, and wireless Internet connectivity.

The room has also been soundproofed, not only to ensure the best possible sound quality, but also so that separate simultaneous events can be held in Alumni Hall and the adjacent Solarium.

Alumni Hall now stands ready to host the kinds of events I mentioned earlier for many more years. Moreover, this magnificent new facility will make it possible to bring innovative new events to campus and, perhaps, to revitalize some of our earlier traditions.

The new state-of-the-art sound system, for example, will make it possible for the Union Board to hold musical events of all kinds. We also plan to revive one of IU's great and beloved traditions, the annual Madrigal Feast, which was held in Alumni Hall for many years.

4. THE GREAT ORGAN, FISK OPUS 91

And for the first time, organ concerts and recitals will be a part of Alumni Hall.

As you have heard, a magnificent pipe organ built by C.B. Fisk, the nation's leading organ builder, has been installed in the balcony.

The three-manual, 44-stop, 2,838-pipe instrument, known as Opus 91, is a crowning addition to the refurbished Alumni Hall.

The Jacobs School of Music is now home to three Fisk organs. The company also built the Opus 135, the Maidee H. and Jackson A. Seward Organ, which was installed in

Auer Hall in 2009, and, last year, a smaller instrument, Opus 142, affectionately known to the organ department as “Baby Fisk,” a three-manual, six-stop, practice organ, which was installed in the Music Addition practice facilities. This is the largest number of instruments by this renown builder in any one location in the world.

Opus 91 was built in 1987. This French Baroque-inspired instrument was previously installed in a specially constructed concert hall at a private residence owned by the late Jacques M. Littlefield in Portola Valley, California. It is regarded as the most visually beautiful instrument ever built by the Fisk firm. Its pipes range in size from that of a pencil to over 32 feet, and they collectively produce sounds that span the breadth of human hearing.

In addition to being used for recitals, the organ will be a wonderful resource for students in the Jacobs School of Music’s organ department—the largest such department in the nation.

President Emeritus Ehrlich and former First Lady Ellen Ehrlich, in collaboration with Dean Emeritus Webb and others, played a key role in the organ's acquisition and its migration to Bloomington. President Emeritus Ehrlich, who now serves as a visiting professor in the School of Education at Stanford University, was familiar with the organ and advised us on its history and on the ways it might be used in an academic setting.

What some of you may not know is that in addition to dedicating this magnificently renovated hall and the Great Organ this evening, we will also be officially naming the organ.

I am delighted to announce that the organ will hereinafter be known as the Charles and Kenda Webb and Thomas and Ellen Ehrlich Great Organ.

And, of course, we all eagerly look forward to hearing Dean Emeritus Webb play the instrument in just a few moments.

5. SPECIAL THANKS

Every project—especially one as multi-faceted as this one—requires a great team that collaborates on the many details that ultimately come together to make it a success.

I would like to express my gratitude to some of the many people who helped make this renovation of Alumni Hall and the installation of the Webb-Ehrlich Organ possible.

I extend my deepest gratitude on behalf of Indiana University once again to President Emeritus Tom Ehrlich, and Dean Emeritus Charles Webb.

I also want to extend our gratitude to the Fisk Company, to Steven Dieck, the president of Fisk who is here with us tonight, to the Littlefield family, and all who helped bring the Opus 91 organ to IU. I commend Jacobs School of Music Dean Gwyn Richards and David Kazimir, curator of organs and carillons at the Jacobs School for their contributions.

I also want to thank Vice President for Capital Planning and Facilities Tom Morrison as well as the many design and construction professionals, both internal and external, who contributed to this project. Anjanette Sivilich of Moody Nolan Architects and John Seest of Arsee Engineering are here with us tonight. We extend our thanks to them as well as to the many people from Wright Consulting, Applied Engineering, Weddle Brothers Construction, and Stage Crafter who contributed to this project. Courtney Payne and Bob Richardson of the University Architects Office also lent critical support to this undertaking.

I also want to commend Indiana Memorial Union Executive Director Bruce Jacobs and IMU Associate Executive Director Thom Simmons, for their outstanding efforts on this renovation project.

And, finally and more generally, I would like to thank our Trustees for their steadfast and enthusiastic support and approval, not only for this project, but for all of the projects related to the restoration and renovation of the Old Crescent.

Let me extend my thanks to all of you for your efforts to make this ambitious vision a reality.

6. CONCLUSION

At the 1960 dedication of the Biddle Continuation Center, which I mentioned earlier, Herman Wells also said that “the era of the Union’s greatest usefulness lies ahead of us, far beyond anything which we can now foresee.”

Now, Alumni Hall, a space that embodies the history and traditions which are the bedrock on which the vitality of Indiana University is built, stands ready to serve this campus and community well into the 21st century—far beyond anything which we can now foresee.