

A HISTORY OF QUEST CLUB
By John D. Beatty [Presented by Bruce Haines, October 4, 2019]

The birth of Quest Club occurred quietly on an autumn evening late in 1911, when three businessmen gathered for dinner at the home of Edward H. Merritt on Woodland Avenue. Merritt, co-founder of the Trade Mark Title Company, was joined by Charlie Fitch, an insurance agent and former manager of the Jenney Electric Company, and Enos Puckett, president of Fort Wayne Oil and Supply Company. After dinner, perhaps over cigars, they discussed the founding of a new club, which they hoped would promote “greater cooperation and exchange of ideas between the active businessmen of Fort Wayne.”¹ Calling it “the Quest Club,” they soon won the commitment of four others: Albert Bond, nicknamed “Packy,” the president of Packard Piano Company; Myron Downing, manager of the National Biscuit Company; Arthur Hall, president of Lincoln National Life Insurance Company; and Edward Yarnelle, president of the Mossman-Yarnelle Company. Together, these seven men incorporated Quest Club on December 1, 1911, planting the seed for what would become the longest-running professional and business luncheon meeting club in Fort Wayne.² Yarnelle would become its first president.

Many other social and business clubs flourished in the city in 1911, including the most prominently the Commercial Club, the forerunner of Chamber of Commerce, which promoted Fort Wayne’s business and industrial interests to local investors and the outside world.³ But Quest Club, from its inception, had a different purpose. At a time when technological innovation was occurring at an almost bewildering pace, it would promote

¹ Max J. Blitz, “History of Quest,” 17 September 1943, Quest Club Archives, Allen County Public Library, page 1.

² John P. Irvin, “The History and Future of the Quest Club,” in *The Quest for Fort Wayne: An Anthology of Papers about Fort Wayne, Indiana*. (Fort Wayne, IN: Allen County Public Library, 1994), 327-330.

³ Fort Wayne Commercial Club, *Fort Wayne Year Book for 1906* (Fort Wayne: Fort Wayne Commercial Club, 1906), n.p.

education and self-improvement. Believing that scientific principles of efficiency could be applied to business management, the founders argued that with proper training and exchange of information, anyone could make his firm more profitable and productive.

By 1911, managing a business in Fort Wayne had become more complicated than it had been in the nineteenth century. New firms such as Lincoln, Wayne Knitting Mills, General Electric, S. F. Bowser, Wayne Oil & Tank Company, and the Dudlo Manufacturing Company were changing the industrial face of the city. It was no longer sufficient for an executive to join a company and rise through its ranks through on-the-job training. There were new opportunities for shipping goods and new challenges ranging from labor union demands, changing office technology, and mentoring salesmen, to marketing products through more sophisticated forms of advertising.

Coping with these changes demanded new administrative skills, and at that time no business schools existed to provide training in corporate management. It is worth noting that none of the seven charter members of Quest Club had any education beyond high school. All were self-made men who had advanced in their firms through on-the-job experience. They realized their world was changing, and they needed a place to exchange ideas.

Quest Club, they believed, would offer a forum for doing just that, providing collegial support as well as guidance from outside experts. Its initial objective, formulated just weeks after being incorporated, was “to bring to Fort Wayne [each month] some speaker of national reputation to talk on some phase of advertising, salesmanship, or business management.”⁴ Merritt, the club’s librarian, began to amass a collection of books on business administration for circulation to the new club’s members,

⁴ “Quest Club in Elegant Home,” *Fort Wayne Sentinel*, 2 January 1912, page 2.

apparently because the public library did not yet have a strong business section.⁵ In January 1912, Yarnell and Merritt secured an auditorium on the fourth floor of the Physicians' Defense Building at Wayne and Clinton streets for meetings. Forty-one businessmen signed on as members, and after months of planning, the club presented its inaugural lecture on an evening in September 1912. In that first *Quest* paper, William Ganson Rose, president of the Cleveland Advertising Club, urged members to support the patronage of home industry while also sharing their enthusiasm for the city itself. "A city is a living, pulsing, institution with heart and soul and character," he noted. "Its character depends upon its citizens. Its value to you depends upon your service to it."⁶

Self-improvement and better management remained *Quest* Club's by-words through its first decade. A statement in the club program from 1913-1914 described the organization as "a wide awake body of busy businessmen whose intense and earnest desire is more light on business efficiency."⁷ In addition to hosting guest speakers at evening meetings every third Friday, members of the club began presenting their own papers on business topics to a supportive audience of fellow members at weekly luncheon meetings. During that first full season of 1913-14, they heard papers on such topics as "Business Organization," "Production Department," "Selection of Salesmen," and "Cashing in on an Advertising Campaign."⁸

Frederick J. Thieme, superintendent of the Wayne Knitting Mills, remarked on the novelty of sharing such techniques to fellow businessmen, who were often competitors. He explained in 1914:

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Fort Wayne News*, 26 September 1912, page 2.

⁷ *Quest Club Business Lectures Meetings, 1913-1914*, original program, Allen County Public Library.

⁸ *Ibid.*

The power of ... the Quest Club lies largely in the fact that the membership is willing and freely brings for free distribution by means of thoughts and papers, their experience and conduct of their business. This one thing is a revelation to many people, for whoever heard of a man discussing in a paper before a party of businessmen the private affairs of his own business for the benefit of these men, so that they might get some good out of it for themselves ... I have heard talks given by capable men in this club ... that have awakened a new conception within me of the duties of employer and employee; of a fortunate one to those less fortunate; of a resourceful man to those who are helpless, and by carrying these ideas into my business [I] have succeeded in getting better results for the concern.⁹

If sharing business information and strategy was new to Fort Wayne, the initial format of Quest Club was not. The founders had modeled it after the lecture and library societies that had flourished across America before the Civil War. Members of these so-called athenaeums or lyceums read books from private club libraries, undertook original research, and presented papers to fellow members while burnishing their own professional credentials.¹⁰ The Young Men's Literary Association and the Fort Wayne Lyceum, both founded in 1846, had joined to form the Allen County Working Men's Institute in 1855.¹¹ Despite its name, the Institute attracted both professional men and skilled artisans as members, amassed a circulating library of several thousand volumes, and featured lectures on a wide range of subjects.¹² After the Civil War, its popularity had waned when other educational venues became more widespread.

What distinguished Quest Club from these earlier societies, at least initially, was its exclusive focus on business. According to its constitution adopted in 1919, "the object of the club shall be the study and discussion of the application of the scientific principles of salesmanship, advertising, sales management, and business management ... to develop a

⁹ Frederick J. Thieme, "The Power of Association," original paper, October 1914, Quest Club Archives, Allen County Public Library.

¹⁰ Stewart Winger, "Lincoln's Alma Mater: The Lyceum and the Making of a Self-Made Man," *Lincoln Lore*, no. 1894 (Fall 2008): 42; see also Carl Bode, *The American Lyceum: Town Meeting of the Mind*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956), 93.

¹¹ Bert J. Griswold, *Pictorial History of Fort Wayne, Indiana*. (Chicago: Robert O. Law, 1917), 1: 434-435. The original minutes of the Working Men's Institute, 1855-1866, are in the collection of the Genealogy Center, Allen County Public Library.

¹² George R. Mather, *Frontier Faith: The Story of the Pioneer Congregations of Fort Wayne, Indiana, 1820-1860*. (Fort Wayne: Allen County-Fort Wayne Historical Society, 1992), 161. See also Charles Poinsette, *Fort Wayne during the Canal Era, 1828-1855*. (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Bureau, 1969), 196-197.

closer relationship among its members” and to “avoid taking part in the discussion of political issues of a partisan character,” a restriction that was later ignored.¹³

Although the constitution would remain unchanged until 1975, the nature of the club began to evolve almost immediately. The circulating library became an early casualty. Max Blitz, an early member of the club, recalled in 1943 that “the development of the club decreased the importance of the library and increased the importance of talks by each member and by outside speakers.”¹⁴ Perhaps, too, the public library’s business collection had grown stronger.

The membership also became more diversified, helping to fuel its evolution. While still exclusively a club for white men, many of the new members came increasingly from non-business professional backgrounds. Several local attorneys became early and ardent supporters, including James M. Barrett, Edward Hoffman, Benjamin Heaton, and Albert E. Thomas, the first of the legal profession to join in 1918. Barrett would serve as president two years later. Several local clergy also became members, beginning in the spring of 1921 when the Program Committee invited the Rev. Robert Little of First Presbyterian Church to present a guest paper titled, “Social Conditions in Fort Wayne.” He received an invitation to join soon afterward. Paul Krauss of Trinity English Lutheran Church followed in 1926 and Charles Houser of Plymouth Congregational Church in 1934. Krauss, like Little, had also addressed the club as a guest speaker several years before on “Optimism in Christianity,” part of a trilogy of guest papers that also included

¹³ Quest Club Constitution, 1919-1920 season roster, in John P. Irvin, “The History/Future of the Quest Club,” in Quest Club, *The Quest for Fort Wayne: AN Anthology of Papers about Fort Wayne, Indiana*. (Fort Wayne: Allen County Public Library, 1994), 340.

¹⁴ Max J. Blitz, “History of Quest,” 17 September 1943, Quest Club Archives, Allen County Public Library, page 1.

“Optimism in Business” and “Optimism in Building.”¹⁵ Over the years, local clergy from many congregations, both Christian and Jewish, have been Quest members.

The first educator, William J. Hess, joined the club in 1924 when he served as production manager for the Van Arnam Manufacturing Company. In 1930, after he became vice president of Indiana Technical College, he opened the door for other teachers and university officials to follow. In the ensuing decades, several superintendents of Fort Wayne Public Schools would become members, including Merle J. Abbett, Aaron T. Lindley, Lester Grile, Bill Anthis, and Thomas Fowler-Finn. School principals included R. Nelson Snider, Jack Weicker, John Young, and in the 1980s, Levan Scott, the first African-American member. Rex Potterf, head of the Social Sciences Department of Central High School, joined in 1930, and four years later, when he became Head Librarian of the public library, he began a long association of the club with the library.¹⁶ For many years he presented annual papers focusing new books and assured Questors that library staff would assist with researching papers. Other head librarian members have included Fred Reynolds, Rick Ashton, and Jeff Krull.

Medical professionals also became a significant component of the club. Charles Meigs, an “eyesight specialist,” was an early member before 1918, though the first physician, Dr. Karl Eberly, did not join until 1934, afterward becoming a popular club president.¹⁷ Other physicians who followed him in the 1930s included Drs. Victor Hilgemann and D. F. Cameron. Dozens of other physicians have followed over the years.

At Quest Club’s ten-year anniversary during 1922-23, the Program Committee invited several members to give short papers on “What I Get Out of the Quest Club.”

¹⁵ “Optimism Discussion at Questors Meeting,” *Journal Gazette*, 22 April 1922.

¹⁶ Dawne Slater-Putt, *Beyond Books: Allen County’s Public Library History, 1895-1995*. (Fort Wayne: Allen County Public Library, 1995),

¹⁷ Irvin, “The History and Future of Quest Club,” 342-344.

Robert Koerber praised Quest for the “really big speakers [invited] to Fort Wayne,” from which he and fellow members gained knowledge. Packy Bond stated that he had begun to apply new principles to his business, Packard Piano Company. Having suffered a major labor dispute with his workers, he blamed himself for the trouble and later adopted a new business model that, he said, enhanced productivity, reduced hours, and increased employee wages. Pastor Robert Little stressed the importance of ethics that the club provided, stating that “business needs contact with the church and the church with business.” Bert Griswold, advertising executive and Fort Wayne historian, underscored the civic importance of Quest, emphasizing that through the club, “it is possible to cope with and neutralize ideas advanced by those opposed to ...ideals which are for the good of the community.”¹⁸

By the mid-1920s, while still dominated by business-related papers, Quest Club’s noon program began to reflect the membership’s increasingly varied interests, another crucial phase in its evolution. Political, municipal, historical, and cultural topics began to appear occasionally as paper topics, with club members challenged to distill the essence of what was often a complex subject in the span of only a few pages. It appears likely that Questors could choose their topics. Among the earliest offerings of the 1920s were “Problems Involved in the Absorption of Returning Soldiers,” “Fort Wayne’s Future Water Supply,” “The Work of a National Campaign Committee,” “Effects of Women’s Suffrage in the Presidential Election,” and “Civic Pride: What Do I Owe My City.”¹⁹ By the 1930s, new topics included “The Romance of the Radio,” “Is Malnutrition of Children an Antecedent to Crime?” and “The Webster-Hayne Debate 100 Years Ago.”

¹⁸ “Opening Quest Luncheon Meeting,” *News-Sentinel*, 13 October 1922.

¹⁹ Irvin, “The History and Future of Quest Club,” 346.

During these years the venue of club meetings moved from the Wayne Club to the Anthony Hotel and later still to the third floor of the Commercial Club. In 1927, it moved to the Chamber of Commerce Building, where it remained for many decades before moving to the Fort Wayne Women's Club on the third floor in the same building.

In addition to the substance of Quest papers, the format of the club's programming also changed with the passing years. At the outset, monthly evening meetings were its principal focus and usually reserved for outside guest speakers, while club members provided the Friday noon talks. This format remained in place at least through early 1922, when the club announced in April that Herbert Hoover, then Secretary of Commerce, and George Goethals, engineer of the Panama Canal, would address the club in coming weeks.²⁰ Eventually, enthusiasm for the evening lectures waned, and they were dropped for a period of years before reemerging during the 1929-1930 season. They continued sporadically until the 1936-37, when they were discontinued permanently, probably due to the expense of speaker fees during the Depression.

Quest Club often became involved with other clubs in the city to promote various civic causes. For a time in the 1920s it sponsored a volley ball team that competed against other clubs at the Y.M.C.A. In another competition, the club formed two sales teams - one headed by G. Irving Latz and the other by W. H. Scheiman - to participate in a fund-raising campaign promoted by the Council of Social Agencies. Blitz recalled, "The spirit and energy shown by the two Quest Club teams formed one of the most important factors toward the success of the drive."²¹

²⁰ *News-Sentinel*, 9 April 1922.

²¹ Blitz, "History of Quest," 3.

As Quest Club experienced a variety of changes, it solidified its reputation as the preeminent professional and business association in Fort Wayne. It also became famous for its fellowship and elegant social events. Parties represented an essential aspect of Quest from its beginning, with two and often three given each season: a fall or Harvest Home party, a Christmas Party or “frolic,” and a third party in the spring, first called the Gridiron Meeting and later known as the President’s Party or simply the Spring Party. The purpose of the latter, according to Blitz, was to review the previous season’s activities and spend all of the money remaining in the club treasury.²² It also strengthened “the fellowship that develops during the club year ... exemplify[ing] the idea that business and professional men may be human beings in spite of the break-neck speed at which the world is now traveling.”²³

The local press often covered these affairs, which were sometimes held in private homes but more often at the Fort Wayne Country Club, the Fort Wayne Women’s Club, or in a public ballroom. In 1919, one of the earliest Quest parties at the Country Club featured a dinner followed with a performance by soloist Mary Anna Kaufman of Chicago. The *Journal Gazette* announced that “those going early will enjoy an evening at golf and other outdoor games.”²⁴

In 1921, a party at the home of John B. Franke in the Forest Park neighborhood dazzled club members with colored globes on strings of lights. Searchlights sent beams into the sky, and mezzo soprano Elsie Illingworth and an ensemble of other performers entertained on an outdoor stage beside a pond. Club members and their guests strolled through the wooded grounds, dined at outdoor tables, and after listening to the concert,

²² Blitz, “History of Quest,” page 6.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Journal Gazette*, 17 June 1919.

went indoors for an organ recital. According to the *News-Sentinel*, “the whole brilliant affair was conducted in a manner and on a lavish scale that marked it as a new type of social entertaining for the city.”²⁵

Prohibition did little to curtail the flow of alcohol at some of these events, but usually when wives were not present. Blitz recalled a Quest stag party at the house of attorney Benjamin Heaton, and “by bribery or influence, real beer was available when there was supposed to be no such luxuries during Prohibition.”²⁶

The themes of other parties ranged from musical programs to dramatic readings by actors to lectures by variety of authors and personalities. Some of the better known speakers were poet Edgar Guest, announcers Lowell Thomas and H. V. Kaltenborn, journalist Earl Wilson, and actor John Carradine, who read passages from Shakespeare.²⁷ Not all of these lectures lived up to their advance billing. In what may have been the worst Quest Party in history, Packy Bond hired the author and engineer Harrington Emerson to speak on business efficiency in January 1915 at the Commercial Club. Bond promoted it as a special event for wives, mothers, and daughters of club members, and invited the general public. What followed was a disaster. The roast pork dinner was served undercooked and cold, while Emerson spent the evening speaking in a soft voice and writing figures on a blackboard with his back to his audience. Blitz wrote: “I can still visualize Bond ... pulling his chair up close to the speaker, cupping his hand to his ears, awaiting the long expected interesting part of the discussion. He sat in this pose for a long period of time, waiting patiently, just like the rest of the audience, and finally he leaned

²⁵ “Remarkable Entertainment Is Furnished Quest Club,” *News-Sentinel*, 24 September 1921.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Irvin, “The History and Future of Quest Club,” 352-353.

back in his chair, dropped his hands to his side, and gave it up.”²⁸ The criticism that followed was unrelenting. Five years later Bert Griswold drew a cartoon with the names of all of the club members running in a stampede. One member asks, “What’s the cause of the riot?” Another responds, “Why [W. E.] Doud and [Charles] Meigs have suggested that we invite Harrison Emmerson [sic] to give another talk on efficiency at another banquet at the Commercial Club.”²⁹

Other parties considered failures included a 1941 party with the theme, “A Night in Old Mexico,” hosted by President John Hoffman. Hoffman’s son recalled that the party was so bad that the membership never let his father forget it.³⁰ Other bombs included a Spring Party that featured a zither player and another featuring the noted author Studs Terkel, who refused to wear a tuxedo and made little effort in his performance.

Of course, most Quest parties were enjoyable, and some were quite different from what we have come to expect. Many featured special prizes and souvenirs for club members and wives. Blitz recalled bingo parties with prizes of turkeys, serving sets, and cash. At a party held in the Wolf and Dessauer department store, members sat in parties of eight, and each table had a roasted turkey, considered a great delicacy. One club member was designated as the carver for each table and received the carving set as a souvenir.³¹ When the club celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary in 1938 at the Fort Wayne Women’s Club, more than 175 were served, and each of the ladies received a silver cake cutter.³²

²⁸ Blitz, “History of Quest,” 3.

²⁹ Anonymous [Bert J. Griswold], “The Quest of the Quest Club, or Nipped in the Bud,” cartoon, *Scrapbook of Fort Wayne History*, volume 125, unpaginated.

³⁰ Irvin, “History/Future of the Quest Club,” 352.

³¹ Blitz, “History of Quest,” 7.

³² “25-Year Members of Quest Club Honored,” *News-Sentinel*, 18 May 1938.

Other parties had special themes or gimmicks. At the Gridiron Meeting at the Wolf and Dessauer auditorium in May 1922, the *News-Sentinel* reported that “a novel program [was] hilariously conducted.”³³ Each member received a telephone, and the grid was wired so that every member could listen in on the calls. A number of mock calls were made, including some from “lady friends” of the members, while former presidents were arraigned and upbraided in a humorous vein for their management of the club.

Musical presentations were especially popular and usually more successful than lectures, with choral groups being especially popular. Members of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra presented a private concert at the home of E. M. Wilson in the 1920s.³⁴ In 1939, the Welsh Imperial Singers performed before the club and hundreds of guests at the Shrine Theatre. Walter Hansen, the *News-Sentinel* music critic, thanked President Walter Bohn for the “fine civic spirit which prompts you to making the city of Fort Wayne a place concerned not only with the material and more or less hum-drum affairs of life, but also with that sorely needed element which is called culture.”³⁵

When the Purdue University Glee Club performed in May 1947, a reporter for the *News-Sentinel* commented, “The Glee Club was at its best in medleys of Cohan and Berlin songs, though its interpretation of ‘Among My Souvenirs’ was possibly the most moving and dramatic event of the evening.”³⁶ The Glee Club returned on many other occasions. The seventy-five member National Swedish Chorus performed in 1956, to which the *Journal Gazette* remarked that the performance was “simply an unforgettable

³³ “Quest Club Celebrates: Novel Program Given at Annual Gridiron Banquet,” *News-Sentinel*, 3 May 1922.

³⁴ Blitz, “History of Quest,” 6.

³⁵ Walter A. Hansen, “Welsh Imperial Singers,” *News-Sentinel*, 16 January 1939.

³⁶ Floyd Logan, “Purdue Glee Club, Choir Win Applause,” *News-Sentinel*, 9 May 1947.

display of perfect blending of voices, though considerably varied in age and probably in training.”³⁷

For many of these large performances, each club member was permitted to invite between ten to twenty guests, with the Shrine Auditorium being a frequent venue. These large public parties continued into the late 1950s, but were later discontinued when a ruling by the Internal Revenue Service threatened the club’s tax status. Club member and attorney Paul Philips “negotiated a settlement with the IRS, and the club paid back taxes for several years.” This event and the general rise in expenses brought an end to public parties and reduced the evening parties to two per season, the Fall Party and the President’s Spring Party.”³⁸

Despite the attention given to parties, the heart of Quest Club has always been its Friday noon programs. By the 1950s and 60s, papers became longer and more diversified in scope. While business and economic topics still predominated, members looked increasingly at a variety of political, historical, municipal, and social topics in an effort to broaden the club’s focus. Some examples included “Can a Free Press Be a Responsible Press?” “Should Red China Be Admitted to the U.N.?” “McCarthyism;” “Our Diminishing Natural Resources,” “Pyramids of the New World,” “Judging Thomas Jefferson,” and “The Role of Public Schools in Integration.” Some were humorous, most were serious, and all were followed by engaging discussion.

During some seasons, the Noon Program Committee assigned a series of papers that examined controversial topics from several angles. Election issues were favorite subjects, while communism became the focus of three papers in 1965: “Karl Marx, the Man and

³⁷ Donald Allured, “National Swedish Chorus,” *Journal-Gazette*, 17 November 1956.

³⁸ Irvin, “The History/Future of the Quest Club,” 351-352.

His Times,” given by Allan McMahan; “Changes in Communist Theory and Practice,” presented by Rabbi Frederick Doppelt; and “What Can We Do to Change Communist Thinking?” by the Rev. John Meister. During the 1962-63 season, Bill McNagny took the pro and Bud Jones the con on a study of the principles of the John Birch Society. In 1974-75, Reid Chapman argued for and Art Richard against the subject, “Should Churches Stay Out of Secular Affairs?”

Club member Cliff Milnor pointed out in the 1960s, with great amusement, a fact that every club member already knew - that Quest Club had strayed far from its original constitution in its proscription against political topics. He stated that a new pattern had been adopted: “Disregard the Constitution and do as the Noonday Program Committee tells you.” However, not until in 1975, under the presidency of Lindy Moss, did the club adopt a new constitution that more accurately reflected its evolution away from its business roots: “The object of this club shall be to provide members of our community who are interested in social, economic, cultural, political, and historical information, an opportunity to present and discuss papers prepared by club members.”³⁹

Continuing into the 1960s, the local media covered club lectures and considered them newsworthy events. Some topics were so timely that they prompted members into action in the community. According to club member Ernie Williams, editor of the *News-Sentinel*, these papers were “seminal” because they “impacted on our cultural or economic growth or improved our way of life in some way or other.”⁴⁰

One of the first such lectures had occurred as early as 1917, when America prepared to enter World War I. That year, club members heard a rousing patriotic address from H.

³⁹ Quest Club constitution, Program booklet, 1976-1977.

⁴⁰ Ernest E. Williams, “75 Years of Quest Papers,” 4 April 1986, Quest Club Archives, Allen County Public Library.

H. Merrick, general manager of Armour & Company of Chicago, which immediately afterward led to the formation of the Fort Wayne Council of Military and Naval Affairs. The council served as a clearinghouse for patriotic events and enterprises, preventing overlap and promoting “the general welfare of the community.”⁴¹ Twenty-five years later, Blitz recalled that club members from previous years were responsible for the development of the local Y.M.C.A, the paving of Calhoun Street, the location of International Harvester in Fort Wayne, and the elevation of railroad tracks, all of which resulted from discussions at the club.⁴² In 1952, Joseph Dye’s paper, “The Fort Wayne Cultural Center” inspired the formation of the Fort Wayne Fine Arts Foundation, a local fund-raising agency and umbrella organization for the arts in Fort Wayne. Significantly, it would become only the third such agency to be formed in the nation.⁴³

Another community achievement resulted from Alfred Kettler’s paper, “A New University for Fort Wayne,” given during the 1957-58 season, in which he laid the groundwork for what would become Indiana University-Purdue University at Fort Wayne.⁴⁴ In his year-end summary of the Quest season, Cliff Milnor commented: “A new university for Fort Wayne was delivered by A. W. Kettler on November 1 ... To his credit, Al did not lay the cornerstone of a combined Indiana-Purdue University, but he laid before us the foundation of a dream which can, and must, become a reality if we are to provide our youth with the educational advantages which we think they need.”⁴⁵ Three years later Kettler offered another paper in which he announced the year 1963 as the target date for beginning classes.

⁴¹ *Fort Wayne Daily News*, 14 April 1917.

⁴² Blitz, “History of Quest, page 2.

⁴³ *Ibid.* See also Anita Cast, “History of the Arts in Fort Wayne, Indiana,” in John D. Beatty and Phyllis Robb, eds., *History of Fort Wayne and Allen County, Indiana*. (Evansville: M. T. Publishing, 2006), 1: 240.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Cliff Milnor quoted in *ibid.*, 6.

Mac Parker's 1980 paper, "Industry – Boon or Blight – Fort Wayne's Future," became the catalyst for the formation of the Corporate Council, the Fantus Study, and reorganization of the local Chamber of Commerce.⁴⁶ He presented it subsequently to the Rotary Club, and it was used as a think tank session in 1982. A year later club historian John Irvin attributed this paper as the source for "our redirection and commitment to economic growth, business development, and leadership development" in the 1980s.⁴⁷ Parker later gave three more papers that assessed the continuing evolution of the local economy over the course of later decades.

Still other papers led to the writing and publication of books. Bert Griswold regaled the club during an evening lecture about life in early Fort Wayne, a prelude to the eventual publication of his *Pictorial History of Fort Wayne*, in 1917.⁴⁸ George Mather's papers, "Saints and Skeletons in Fort Wayne Church Closets," and "History of Churches in Fort Wayne," both presented in the 1980s, culminated in his book, *Frontier Faith: The Story of the Pioneer Congregations of Fort Wayne, Indiana*, published in 1992.⁴⁹ Al Zacher's papers on Woodrow Wilson, James Madison, and Franklin D. Roosevelt helped inspire an interest in presidential history, leading to his eventual authorship of *Trial and Triumph: Presidential Power in the Second Term*, published in 1996.⁵⁰ David Bennett's paper on Vice President, Thomas Riley Marshall led him to continue his research and eventually write a full-length biography, *He Almost Changed the World: the Life and Times of Thomas Riley Marshall*, published in 2007.⁵¹

⁴⁶ Irvin, "The History and Future of the Quest Club," 354.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ Bert J. Griswold, *Pictorial History of Fort Wayne*. (Chicago: Robert O. Law, 1917). See also Blitz, "History of Quest," page 4.

⁴⁹ George R. Mather, *Frontier Faith: The Story of the Pioneer Congregations in Fort Wayne, Indiana*. (Fort Wayne: Allen County-Fort Wayne Historical Society, 1992).

⁵⁰ Alfred J. Zacher, *Trial and Triumph: Presidential Power in the Second Term*. (Fort Wayne: Presidential Press, 1996).

⁵¹ David J. Bennett, *He Almost Changed the World: the Life and Times of Thomas Riley Marshall*. (Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2007).

By the 1980s, it became clear to many members that the standards for the club's papers and the demands of research had become more rigorous, another key element in its continuing evolution. As expectations grew, the results were often memorable and occasionally even profound. Mac Parker, a club member since 1977, commented in 2006, "The papers are more involved and take longer preparation time since I became a member about 30 years ago. In preparation of one of these papers, I reviewed some earlier papers dating back to the 40s and 50s, and you could see that there was not the research time or depth of thought as in papers currently. Overall, I believe the papers have gotten better."⁵²

During the 1980s and 1990s, Questors presented papers ranging widely from literature and the arts to science, economics, popular culture, ethics, and future change. Some examples included "Genetic Engineering," "The Genius of J. S. Bach," "The Future of Philanthropy," "Terrorism," "Where Are We on the Information Superhighway," "Understanding Picasso," "Salmon Rushdie and International Censorship," and "Why People Hate: Prejudice in America."

The demographics of its membership also changed, though slower than by most community standards. Originally an all-white club for men, Quest Club admitted its first African-American member, Levan Scott, in the 1980s and its first women, Joanne Lantz, Barbara Burt, and Marilyn Moran Townsend, in 1992. Though widely favored at the time, the decision to break the gender barrier resulted from discussions that had lasted nearly a decade. In 1982, John Irvin conducted a survey that had gleaned a range of comments from members. He reported his findings in a paper presented in 1983 and

⁵² Maclyn Parker, Quest Club Questionnaire, 1 June 2006.

concluded, “I can say candidly that the future prospect of women becoming members of Quest is doubtful.”⁵³

On October 4, 1985, as the club prepared to celebrate its 75th year, the Program Committee and club president William Latz invited Cosette R. Simon, executive director of the local Y.W.C.A., to deliver the opening lecture, “Women of Fort Wayne.” Though Simon did not join the club, her appearance began to influence attitudes toward women and the club. Williams recalled that “there was a sprinkling of women in the audience” to hear Simon’s address.⁵⁴ Increasingly afterward, they began to appear more frequently as luncheon guests, and Williams added, “This feminine infiltration seemed to mark a significant trend to the backbenchers at the non-eating table.” Still remaining skeptical of the change, he quoted his wife as questioning why any woman would want to join Quest Club, and he concluded that her attitude “should give the insecure among us some relief.”⁵⁵

The issue continued to simmer, however, and many Questors favored integration. It was eventually forced in 1992 when several members rose at an annual meeting to say they could no longer remain in the club if it did not include women. By 2009, the club roster included thirty women out a total active membership of 110. Several have served as president, including Barbara Burt, Anita Cast, and Dana Wichern. Two married couples have also become members, including Wichern and her husband, David Platt, who joined in 1998, and Mary Baldus, who joined in 2006 after her husband Hugh, who joined in 1994.

⁵³ Irvin, “The History and Future of the Quest Club,” 353.

⁵⁴ Williams, “75 Years of Quest Papers, 17.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

The twenty-first century has brought a number of innovations to club programming. In 2006, John Stafford, director of IPFW's Community Research Institute, offered what was termed an "impetus" paper, "What Successful Cities Have to Say to Fort Wayne," in which he assessed in detail the downtown improvement strategies of several cities comparable to Fort Wayne. A large number of community leaders gathered to hear the address at a time of intense interest in reinventing the downtown area. A panel discussion followed several months later, consisting of formal responses by club members Sr. Elise Kriss, George Huber, and Mac Parker. In 2009, the club heard Adie Baach give a paper on Shakespeare's *MacBeth*, which was later followed by a special performance and discussion of the play at First Presbyterian Theatre. Both of these changes reflected a willingness of the Programming Committee to explore new formats for study and member interaction. Some papers have included musical performances by the presenters, such as Joan Goldner's paper on Mary Magdalene and Jim Wooten's on King Arthur.

A new appreciation for the club's heritage began to take root in the twenty-first century. In 2006, the club initiated plans for recognizing members of fifty years. The first honorees were Allen Steere, a former Lincoln Life attorney, and Bud Latz, a former executive of the Wolf and Dessauer Department Store, while Richard Doermer, former president of Indiana Bank & Trust, followed in 2007 and attorney James Barrett III, a third-generation member, in 2010. In 2008, the club created a website and the next year, with the assistance of the public library, began the process of digitizing all of its past papers, numbering nearly 2,000.

A number of factors have remained keys to Quest Club's continuing success as Fort Wayne's pre-eminent professional club. First, it has continued to attract prominent

leaders in the community, making it a desirable club to join at a time when membership in more traditional social clubs is declining. The demands remain relatively minimal for active members: attend at least six meetings a year and present a paper once every four years. Members have also considered dues to be affordable. Long considered to be one of the most inexpensive clubs in the city, annual dues in 1912 were just \$15, rising to \$25 in 1929, increasing to \$35 in 1952, and to \$50 in 1975. Today they stand at \$225, which reflect the increasing cost of meals, printing, and facility rental.

Second, the club has retained its intellectual substance. In a world of quick sound bytes, it is cherished for exalting the search for knowledge, applauding original research, honoring the effort it takes to present a topic in all of its multi-faceted dimensions, and affirming its members' passion for life-long learning and intellectual curiosity. Over time, as Mac Parker said, its papers have become more demanding to research and write with the result that they have assumed a higher standard than at any previous time in its history.

Third, the club's black-tie parties are also something of an anachronism, but a most welcome one. In an age when most tuxedos are worn only for weddings, Quest parties have become remnants of an earlier time when social events were more lavish affairs. We all enjoy having occasions to dress up and make or renew friendships at these gatherings.

Fourth, at key moments in its history, Quest Club has shown an ability to adapt in order to improve itself. It did so in its first decade when it backed away from the lyceum library model to a businessmen's luncheon club. It changed again when it began allowing other professionals outside the business community to join, and then adapted further by allowing a great variety of topics to be discussed outside the business sphere. And finally,

it evolved again when it dropped its white-male model and allowed minorities and women to become members. Both have greatly enriched the breadth and focus of the club, contributing to the raising of standards. Though there is much diversity in the club with respect to politics and religion, the club upholds mutual respect and civil discourse as core values.

What will the future hold for Quest Club in its next century? No one, of course, has a crystal ball, but it is safe to say that changing technology will undoubtedly continue to influence the style of club presentations. Already we are seeing an increasing number of Powerpoint presentations to enhance the spoken word and digital versions of papers on our website, so that we can catch up on what we have missed. It is certainly conceivable that as technology improves and becomes easier to master, multi-media presentations may become the norm. Our noon papers may become mini-documentaries complete with music, digital photographs and video, with the presenter as narrator. Perhaps, too, widespread use of video conferencing will also allow more members to participate in the luncheons from remote locations, making the six-meeting attendance requirement superfluous. The technology is already there: all one would need to do is link in.

Not all of these changes would be welcome, in my view, for while some papers require visuals, it is in some measure the simplicity of the Quest papers, the reading from the printed word, and the fellowship at the tables before and after the programs, that are essential components of the Quest Club experience. In preparing a paper, we hone our writing skills without the interference of gadgetry and puffery. And the informal contacts we make over lunch provide as much opportunity for learning and growth as do the papers. Through these friendships, we discover many facets of local leadership, and what

is truly extraordinary, we become part of a generational chain, linking old members of long-standing to younger, newer members, passing the torch of Quest tradition.

So let us celebrate the accomplishment of 100 years – no small achievement at a time when few institutions have the power to endure. I will close by predicting that the intellectual stimulation of the papers, coupled with the fellowship of the members, will continue to sustain Quest Club well into the twenty-second century.