

A HISTORY OF QUEST CLUB AT 100 YEARS

By John D. Beatty

Presented October 7, 2011

The birth of Quest Club occurred quietly on an autumn evening late in 1911, when three businessmen gathered 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 Wesley Puckett, president of Fort Wayne Oil and Supply Company. After dinner, they discussed the possible 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 their venture “the Quest Club,” they soon attracted the interest 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 the club on December 1, 1911, planting the seed for what would become the longest-running professional and business luncheon meeting club in Fort Wayne history.² Yarnelle would become its first president.

Many other clubs flourished in the city in 1911, the most prominent being the Commercial Club, the forerunner of Chamber of Commerce, which promoted Fort Wayne’s business and industrial interests to potential investors and customers.³ But Quest Club, from its inception, had an entirely different purpose. It promised simply to promote the self-improvement of its members through education and shared experiences. Believing that scientific principles of efficiency could be applied to business management, the founders were convinced that through exchange of information, anyone could make a firm more productive and profitable.

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.

By 1911, running a business in Fort Wayne had become more complicated than it had been in the nineteenth century. New firms such as Lincoln Life, General Electric, and Dudlo were changing the commercial face of the city. When it had once been possible to rise through the ranks of a company and master all of its facets, executives were now expected to perform increasingly complex tasks for which they had no experience. They faced challenges that ranged from negotiating with labor unions and coping with changing technology to marketing products through more sophisticated advertising campaigns and improving customer service.

Coping with these changes demanded new administrative skills, and at that time, no business schools existed to provide degrees in corporate management. It is worth noting that none of the seven charter members had any education beyond high school. All were self-made men who realized that they needed a place to exchange ideas and keep abreast of new trends.

Quest Club, they believed, would offer a forum for doing just that, providing both collegial support and guidance from outside experts. Its initial objective 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 club members.⁵ In January 1912, Yarnell and Merritt leased 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 local industries while sharing their enthusiasm for Fort Wayne. “A city is a living, pulsing, institution with heart and soul...,” he noted. “Its character depends upon its citizens. Its value to you depends upon your service to it.”⁶

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

⁵ *Ibid.*

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

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 it 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, club members began presenting their own papers at weekly luncheon meetings. During that first full season of 1913-14, they learned about such topics as "Business Organization," "Production Department," "Selection of Salesmen," and "Cashing in on an Advertising Campaign."⁸

Frederick J. Thieme, president of the Wayne Knitting Mills, remarked on the novelty of sharing such knowledge among competitors:

The power of ... the Quest Club [he explained in 1914] lies largely in the fact that the membership ... brings for free distribution [through] 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 ... I have heard talks ... 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 knowledge was in some measure new to Fort Wayne, the initial format of Quest Club was not. The founders had modeled it after the library and lecture societies that had flourished across America in the nineteenth century.¹⁰ Members of these so-called lyceums read books from private club libraries, undertook original research, and presented papers to fellow members as a means of burnishing their professional credentials.

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

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Frederick J. Thieme, "The Power of Association," 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. In Fort Wayne, the Young Men's Literary Association and the Fort Wayne Lyceum, both founded in 1846, had merged to form the Allen County Working Men's Institute in 1855. Attracting both professional men and skilled artisans as members, it amassed a circulating library of several thousand volumes before the advent of the public library, and it featured member lectures on a wide range of subjects. After the Civil War, it had disbanded when other educational venues became more widespread. See 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. See also 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.

What distinguished Quest Club from these earlier societies, at least initially, was its exclusive focus on business. According to its first 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 closer relationship among its members” and to “avoid taking part in the discussion of political issues of a partisan character.”¹¹

The constitution would remain unchanged until 1975, but the nature of the club began to evolve almost immediately. The circulating library became an early casualty, perhaps because the public library’s growing collection of business books had made it unnecessary.¹²

The membership also became more diversified in education and experience and began to include men from professional backgrounds outside of business. Together, they helped fuel the first phase of Quest’s evolution. Several attorneys became early and ardent members, including James Barrett Sr., Edward Hoffman, Benjamin Heaton, and Albert Thomas, all joining in 1918. In 1921, the Rev. Robert Little of First Presbyterian Church was invited to present a paper titled, “Social Conditions in Fort Wayne.” He was invited to join afterward. The Rev. Paul Krauss of Trinity English Lutheran Church followed in 1926 and Charles Houser of Plymouth Congregational Church in 1934.¹³ Clergy from both Christian and Jewish congregations have been Quest members ever since, forming a strong club tradition.

Quest’s first educator, William Hess, joined in 1924 when he served as production manager for the Van Arnam Manufacturing Company. In 1930, he became vice president of Indiana Technical College and opened the door for many other teachers, principals, and university chancellors to follow. Rex Potterf, a teacher at Central High School, joined in 1930, and four

¹¹ 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.

¹² Max J. Blitz, “History of Quest,” 17 September 1943, Quest Club Archives, Allen County Public Library, page 1.

¹³ “Optimism Discussion at Questors Meeting,” *Journal Gazette*, 22 April 1922. Krauss, like Little, had also addressed the club as a guest on “Optimism in Christianity,” part of a trilogy of papers that also included “Optimism in Business” and “Optimism in Building.”

years later, when he became Head Librarian of the public library, he began a long association of the club with the library.¹⁴ For many years he presented annual papers about new books.

Physicians also became a major component of the club. Charles Meigs, an optometrist, joined before 1918. Dr. Karl Eberly followed in 1934, becoming a popular club president.¹⁵ Other prominent physician members of the 1930s included Victor Hilgemann and D. F. Cameron.

When Quest celebrated its tenth anniversary in 1922, the Program Committee invited members to give short papers on “What I Get Out of the Quest Club.” Robert Koerber praised the “really big speakers [invited] to Fort Wayne.” Packy Bond admitted applying new management principles to Packard Piano Company and increasing profits.¹⁶ 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 underscored the civic importance of Quest, stating that through the club, “it is possible to ... neutralize ideas advanced by those opposed to ... ideals which are for the good of the community.”¹⁷

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 issues began to trickle in occasionally as paper topics, though the papers were only a few pages long. By this time the Noon Program Committee assigned the topics to members in order to encourage research and study for self-improvement.¹⁸ 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

¹⁴ Dawne Slater-Putt, *Beyond Books: Allen County’s Public Library History, 1895-1995* (Fort Wayne: Allen County Public Library, 1995), 24-25.

¹⁵ Irvin, “The History and Future of Quest Club,” 342-344.

¹⁶ When Packard experienced a major labor dispute, Bond blamed himself for the trouble and later adopted a new business model learned at the club. He said he was able to enhance productivity, reduce hours, and increase employee wages.

¹⁷ “Opening Quest Luncheon Meeting,” *News-Sentinel*, 13 October 1922.

¹⁸ S. W. McGill, “The Quest Club, Founded 1911, Fort Wayne, Indiana” (Typescript, 1948), page 2.

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

the Radio,” “Is Malnutrition of Children an Antecedent to Crime?” and “The Webster-Hayne Debate 100 Years Ago.” 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 new Chamber of Commerce Building, where it remained for many decades. Later it moved to the Fort Wayne Women’s Club on the third floor in the same building.

While paper topics began to broaden, the format of the club’s programming also evolved. Initially, 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 that Herbert Hoover, then Secretary of Commerce, would address the club.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 1936-37, when they were discontinued due to the expense of speaker fees during the Great Depression.

In this era, 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. It also took part in fund raising competitions against other clubs.²¹

By the 1920s Quest had also become famous for its elegant social events. Parties were an essential aspect of the club 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. The purpose of the latter, according to charter member Max Blitz, was to review the previous season’s activities and papers and to spend all of the money remaining in the club treasury.²² He added that it strengthened “the fellowship that develops during the club year ... exemplify[ing] the idea that business and

²⁰ *News-Sentinel*, 9 April 1922.

²¹ Blitz, “History of Quest,” 3. In one competition, the club formed two sales teams – one led by G. Irving Latz Sr. and the other by W. H. Scheiman, in a fund-raising campaign promoted by the council of Social Agencies. Blitz said that “the spirit and energy shown by the two Quest Club teams formed one of the most important factors toward the success of the drive.”

²² Blitz, “History of Quest,” 6.

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 events, which were sometimes held in private homes but more often at the Fort Wayne Country Club, the Women’s Club, or in a public ballroom. In 1919, one of the earliest Quest parties at the Country Club featured a dinner followed by a performance from soprano 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 on Forest Park Boulevard 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 musicians 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, 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, magic shows, and lectures by variety of authors and celebrities. Some of the better known speakers were poet Edgar Guest, journalists Lowell Thomas, H. V. Kaltenborn, and 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 dinner in history, Packy Bond

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Journal Gazette*, 17 June 1919.

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.

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 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 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 Harrington 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 A Spring Party that featured a zither player was also panned, as was another featuring 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 dining room, 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

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.

and received the carving set as a souvenir.³¹ When the club honored its twenty-five-year members in 1938, more than 175 were served, and each of the ladies received a silver cake cutter.³²

Other parties had special themes or gimmicks. At the Gridiron Meeting 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 upbraided in a joking manner for their management of the club.

Musical performances remained standard fare at many club parties. In the 1920s, members of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra presented a private concert for the club at the home of E. M. Wilson.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 ... 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 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 display of [the] perfect blending of voices.”³⁷

For many of these large performances, each club member was permitted to invite between ten and twenty guests, with the Shrine Auditorium being a frequent venue. Club members served as ushers. These large public parties continued into the late 1950s, but were later discontinued when

³¹ Blitz, “History of Quest,” 7.

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

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.

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

a ruling by the Internal Revenue Service threatened the club's tax status. Attorney Paul Philips negotiated a settlement, and for several years the club paid back taxes. This problem and the general rise in expenses brought an end to these public parties and reduced the number of evening parties to two per season, the Fall Party and the President's or Spring Party.³⁸

The parties notwithstanding, 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, a variety of political, historical, municipal, and social topics continued 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 generally by engaging discussion that was longer and probably more animated than what we have today.

During some seasons, the 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 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?"

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 forbidding political discussions. 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

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

presidency of John Young, 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

The local press covered club lectures into the 1960s and considered them newsworthy events. At one time a local radio station wanted to broadcast them live. 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 in 1917, when America prepared to enter World War I. Club members heard a rousing patriotic address from H. H. Merrick, general manager of Armour & Company of Chicago, which led immediately to the formation of the Fort Wayne Council of Military and Naval Affairs, which coordinated the local war effort.⁴¹

Max Blitz recalled that the development of the local Y.M.C.A, the paving of Calhoun Street, the relocation of International Harvester, and the elevation of local railroad tracks all 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.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 ... he laid before us the foundation of a dream which can, and must,

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.

⁴¹ *Fort Wayne Daily News*, 14 April 1917. Club meetings were suspended in 1918 on account of the war.

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 A. W. Kettler, “A New University for Fort Wayne,” November 1956, Quest Club Archives, Allen County Public Library.

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.

Mac Parker’s 1980 paper, “Industry – Boon or Blight – Fort Wayne’s Future,” became the catalyst for the formation of the Corporate Council and the Fantus Study.⁴⁶ A year later, John Irvin attributed this paper as the source for “our redirection and commitment to economic growth, business development, and leadership development.”⁴⁷ Mac later gave three more papers that assessed changes the local economy during each ensuing decade.

Still other papers led to the 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 inspired an interest in presidential history, leading to his 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 to the writing of a full-length biography, *He Almost Changed the World: the Life and Times of Thomas Riley Marshall*, published in 2007.⁵¹

By the 1980s, it became clear to many members that the standards for club papers had become more rigorous, another key element in its continuing evolution. As expectations grew, the results were often memorable and occasionally even profound. As one member commented in 2006, “The papers are more involved and take longer preparation time since I became a member

⁴⁵ Cliff Milnor, “Quest Club Year in Review.” 1957. Quest Club Archives, Allen County Public Library.

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).

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 that ranged a wide gamut from literature, the arts and science to 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.”

A favorite paper from this period was Bill Latz’s “Sex after Sixty,” presented in 1981. Another memorable though tragic event was David Peters’ lecture on “Palestinians,” scheduled for February 1980. As he began the paper, Peters suffered a massive heart attack and died at the podium. His paper was never given, though it remains in the Quest archives.

The demographics of Quest’s membership also changed, though slower than by most community standards. Originally an all-white club for men, Quest admitted its first African-American member, Levan Scott, in 1982, 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 member survey and 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 74th 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. Ernie Williams

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

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

recalled that “there was a sprinkling of women in the audience” to hear the address.⁵⁴ Increasingly afterward, they began to appear more frequently as 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 increasingly, 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 2011, the club roster included thirty-eight women out of 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.

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 strategies for downtown improvement in 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. A panel discussion followed several months later, consisting of formal responses by 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 Program Committee to explore new formats for study and member interaction. Some

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

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

papers have included musical performances by the presenters, such as Joan Goldner's paper on Mary Magdalene and Jim Wooten's on King Arthur.

In 2006, the club initiated plans for recognizing members of fifty years. The first honorees were Allen Steere and Bud Latz, while Richard Doermer followed in 2007 and 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 success over the last century. First, it has continued to attract a diverse group of city leaders from many different professional disciplines, and together, they bring a variety of intellectual approaches to the topics addressed in papers. The quality of this membership continues to make Quest a desirable club to join at a time when membership in many 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.⁵⁶

Second, in addition to its diversity, the club has elevated its intellectual substance over the years. In a world of quick sound bites, our members exalt the search for knowledge and value original research. We honor the effort it takes to present a topic in all of its multi-faceted dimensions, and we affirm our members' passion for life-long learning and intellectual curiosity. We enjoy exchanging ideas, sharing our research, and exploring the unknown. With papers becoming more demanding to research and write, the result has been that club standards for papers are higher now than at any previous time.

Third and most important, at key moments in its history, Quest Club has shown an ability to adapt and evolve in order to improve itself. It did so in its first decade when it backed away from the lyceum model in favor of a businessmen's luncheon club. It changed again when it began

⁵⁶ Quest has long been considered to be an inexpensive club. Annual dues in 1912 were \$15, rising to \$25 in 1929, increasing to \$35 in 1952, and \$50 in 1975. Today they stand at \$225, which reflect the cost of meals, printing, and facility rental.

allowing other professionals to join, and then again by encouraging a great variety of paper topics outside the business sphere. And finally, it evolved yet again when it dropped its white-male format and allowed minorities and women to become members. All of these changes have greatly enriched the breadth and focus of the club, contributing to the raising of its standards. Though there is diversity with respect to politics and religion, it upholds mutual respect and civil discourse as core values.

What will the future hold for Quest Club in its next century? While historians should never make predictions, it is safe to say that changing technology will continue to influence in some way the style of club presentations. It is certainly conceivable that as technology improves and becomes easier to master, multi-media presentations may become the norm. Perhaps our noon papers will become mini-documentaries with music, digital photographs and video, with the presenter as narrator. Perhaps, too, the widespread use of video conferencing will also allow more members to participate in the luncheons or even present papers from remote locations.

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 reading from the printed word, the fellowship at the tables, and the questions and comments after the programs that are essential components of the Quest Club experience. I hope they never disappear. The papers allow us to hone our writing skills, and even more important, the informal contacts we make over lunch and the discussions that follow provide as much opportunity for learning as do the papers themselves. Through these friendships, we discover the many facets of local leadership and the wealth of our members' life experiences. Who can forget the wit of Reid Chapman, the erudition of George Mather, or the incredible memory of Allen Steere?⁵⁷ Though we have no way of preserving these informal exchanges, an extraordinary thing often happens in them: we become connected through the generations and through our experiences. We learn, we are enriched, and in the process, the traditions of our club are passed down.

⁵⁷ See Allen C. Steere, *An Overview of Quest Club, Yesterday and Today* (Fort Wayne: Quest Club, 2010).

So let us applaud the accomplishment of 100 years – no small achievement at a time when few institutions anywhere have had the power to endure. We have educated our members in countless ways, we have enhanced our community by our presence, and we are still a vibrant organization with a fascinating membership. Now *that* is something truly worth celebrating.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Allen County Working Men's Institute Minute Book, 1855-1866. Original manuscript, Allen County Public Library.

Allured, Donald. "National Swedish Chorus." *Journal Gazette*, 17 November 1956.

Anonymous [Bert J. Griswold]. "Quest of the Quest Club, or Nipped in the Bud." Cartoon and brochure, ca. 1921, in *Scrapbook of Fort Wayne History*. Fort Wayne: Allen County Public Library, n .d., volume 125.

Bennett, David. *He Almost Changed the World: The Life and Times of Thomas Riley Marshall*. Bloomington: AuthorHouse, 2007.

Blitz, Max J. "History of Quest." 17 September 1943. Unpublished manuscript.

Bode, Carl. *The American Lyceum: Town Meeting of the Mind*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1956.

Cast, Anita. "History of the Arts in Fort Wayne, Indiana," in John D. Beatty and Phyllis Robb, eds., *History of Fort Wayne and Allen County, Indiana, 1700-2005*. Evansville: M. T. Publishing, 2006.

Fort Wayne Commercial Club. *Fort Wayne Year Book for 1906*. Fort Wayne: Fort Wayne Commercial Club, 1906.

Fort Wayne News, 26 September 1912.

Griswold, Bert J. *Pictorial History of Fort Wayne, Indiana*. Chicago: Robert O. Law, 1917.

Hansen, Walter A. "Welsh Imperial Singers." *News-Sentinel*, 16 January 1939.

Irvin, John P. "The History and Future of the Quest Club." (1982) in Quest Club, *The Quest for Fort Wayne: An Anthology of Papers about Fort Wayne, Indiana*. Fort Wayne: Allen County Public Library, 1984.

Journal Gazette, 17 June 1919.

Kettler, Alfred. "A New University for Fort Wayne." 1 November 1957. Quest Club Archives, Allen County Public Library.

Logan, Floyd. "Purdue Glee Club, Choir Wins Applause." *News Sentinel*, 9 May 1947.

- Mather, George R. *Frontier Faith: The Story of the Pioneer Congregations of Fort Wayne, Indiana*. Fort Wayne: Allen County-Fort Wayne Historical Society, 1992.
- McGill, S. W. "The Quest Club, Founded in 1911, Fort Wayne, Indiana." Typescript, 1948.
- Milnor, Cliff. "Quest Club Year in Review, 1957." Quest Club Archives, Allen County Public Library.
- News-Sentinel*, 9 April 1922.
- "Opening Quest Luncheon Meeting." *News-Sentinel*, 13 October 1922.
- "Optimism Discussion at Questors Meeting," *Journal Gazette*, 22 April 1922.
- Parker, Maelyn. Quest Club Questionnaire, 2006. Quest Club Archives.
- Poinsatte, Charles R. *Fort Wayne during the Canal Era, 1820-1860*. Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Bureau, 1969.
- Quest Club. *Quest Club Business Lectures Meetings, 1913-1914*. Fort Wayne: Quest Club, 1913.
- "Quest Club Celebrates: Novel Program Given at Annual Gridiron Banquet." *News-Sentinel*, 3 May 1922.
- Quest Club Program Booklets*, various years, 1913-2011.
- "Quest Club in Elegant Home." *Fort Wayne Sentinel*, 2 January 1912.
- "Remarkable Entertainment Is Furnished Quest Club," *News-Sentinel*, 24 September 1921.
- Slater-Putt, Dawne. *Beyond Books: Allen County's Public Library History, 1895-1995*. Fort Wayne: Allen County Public Library, 1995.
- Steere, Allen C. *An Overview of Quest Club: Yesterday and Today*. Fort Wayne: Quest Club, 2010.
- Thieme, Frederick J. "The Power of Association." 1914. Quest Club Archives, Allen County Public Library.
- 25-Year Members of Quest Club Celebrated." *News Sentinel*, 18 May 1938.
- Williams, Ernest E. "75 Years of Quest Club Papers." 4 April 1986. Quest Club Archives, Allen County Public Library.
- Winger, Stewart. "Lincoln's Alma Mater: The Lyceum and the Making of the Self-Made Man." *Lincoln Lore*, no. 1894 (Fall 2008).
- Zacher, Alfred. *Trial and Triumph: Presidential Power in the Second Term*. Fort Wayne: Presidential Press, 1996.