

Encounters with *Genius Loci* Herman Wells at/and/of Indiana University

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*We are the children of our landscape; it dictates
behaviour and even thought in the measure to
which we are responsive to it.*

—Lawrence Durrell, 1957¹

*Upon John grew that affection which no one can
escape who walks long under campus trees; that
naïve and sentimental fondness at once fatuous and
deep, that clings to a man long afterward, and that
has been known, of mention of Alma Mater, to show
up soft in gnarled citizens otherwise hard-shelled
as the devil himself. To a peculiar degree the
Indiana milieu was created to inspire love. It has
the unspoiled generosity, the frankness, the toil, the
taciturn courage and the exasperating ineptness of
natural man himself. One listens to the winds
sighing through beeches, or plods through
autumnal drizzle with gaze divided between the
cracks of the Board Walk and that miraculous
personal vision that for no two people is produced
alike, whether it be conjured from books, or from
inner song, or from liquor, or from a co-ed's smile
or from all together. Because of this one berates
Indiana and loves her doggedly.*

—George Shively, 1925²

Presidential timber stood tall on the ground at the verdant campus of Indiana University (IU) in June 1920. The occasion was the university's commencement during its centennial celebration. All of the living former IU presidents—David Starr Jordan, John M. Coulter, and Joseph

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Swain—had come. Each one had served on the Indiana faculty before their selection as president, and both Coulter and Swain were alumni. The current president, William Lowe Bryan, was also an alumnus and Indiana faculty member before becoming president in 1902. So many other college and university presidents were drawn from the ranks of Indiana alumni and faculty beginning in the 1890s that IU possessed a growing reputation as the “Mother of College Presidents.”³

Indiana was not a particularly large, prestigious, or wealthy university. Located in the smallest state beyond the Eastern seaboard, it had the distinction of being the oldest state university west of the Allegheny Mountains, founded in 1820, four years after Indiana statehood. Pioneer Hoosiers made provision for higher education in the state constitution, but that dream had been caught in the thickets of Indiana politics ever since. Located on a few acres of cleared forest nearby Bloomington’s town center, it had been led by a succession of presidents who were also Protestant clergymen. By the early 1880s, the campus, now nestled up to busy railroad tracks, boasted two large buildings, a dozen faculty members, and a co-educational student body of about 135.⁴ In 1883, disaster struck in the form of a raging fire that destroyed the ten-year-old Science Hall, and a pungent administrative scandal erupted in the following year that caused the resignation of President Lemuel Moss. In short order, the Board of Trustees decided to move the campus to a twenty-acre plot five blocks east of the courthouse purchased from the Dunn family, and to appoint David Starr Jordan, a biology professor, as president in 1885, thus ending a half-century of leadership by members of the clergy.

The new campus arose like a phoenix on the old Dunn farm. Two buildings were rapidly constructed of bricks that were salvaged from the ruins of Science Hall or produced on site. They were followed later by stately limestone halls, hewn and shaped at nearby quarries and transported to campus on sledges pulled by oxen. Courses of study were also revised, with students now picking their major among many choices, including science and modern languages, instead of the set classical curriculum. Among the professoriate, an earned doctorate was becoming the standard credential. By 1902, when William Lowe Bryan, a philosopher and experimental psychologist, was chosen as president, the campus had grown into its new site. An arc of five substantial buildings was arrayed on the border of Dunn’s Woods, a preserve created from half of the original twenty acres. In contrast to the old campus, where the land was cleared of trees, now the forest served as an amenity and source of identification with the natural world and the pioneer past.

Sixty-seven faculty members supervised nearly eight hundred students on the woodland campus.

During the first two decades of the Bryan administration, IU experienced unprecedented growth and programmatic diversification. The student population doubled during this period, with a corresponding increase in faculty numbers. IU responded to the state's need for physicians by opening the School of Medicine in Indianapolis in 1903. New professional schools for nurses and for dentists, in 1914 and 1925, respectively, were also located in the capital city. On the Bloomington campus, the Graduate School was organized in 1904 to oversee graduate work, although PhD programs were slow in coming, and specialized professional schools were created for education (1908), commerce and finance (1920), and music (1921). Statewide general education was addressed by the formation of the Extension Division in 1912. Thus, in its first one hundred years, IU had expanded beyond the liberal arts to encompass many categories of training for the professions.

In the space of a century, IU had evolved from humble beginnings in the early nineteenth century, teaching classics to a small male elite, to a more diverse co-educational institution, in step with national trends of increasing disciplinary specialization, functional differentiation, and extracurricular offerings. It was an overwhelmingly white school, with a few African Americans in the student body.⁵ In its two decades under the Bryan administration, the university labored mightily to modernize its academic profile, creating professional schools and outreach programs to serve Indiana citizens while operating under frugal state appropriations. In contrast, some of its sister schools—the Universities of Michigan, Wisconsin, Illinois—had emerged as national leaders in research and service, using their increasing enrollments and more generous public support to make gains in scope, influence, and quality. Indiana remained a decent, if provincial, university.

The Old School Tie

Without the advantages conferred by status or affluence, Indiana did possess an unusually extensive network of educational leaders, much of it traceable to Jordan. As president, he realized that IU could not compete for faculty with an emerging elite of American research universities, among them Johns Hopkins, Clark, Chicago, Harvard, and Michigan. Thrown back on the university's human resources, Jordan began developing local talent for future IU faculty. Preaching the gospel of specialized research, the charismatic Jordan gathered promising

undergraduate alumni and assured them faculty positions after further “study in the East or Europe.”⁶ Both Swain and Bryan were members of Jordan’s “Specialist’s Club,” as were several other alumni faculty who spent their careers at Indiana.

When Jordan left Indiana in 1891 to become the first president of Stanford University, he took several IU faculty members with him, including mathematician Swain and geologist John C. Branner, whom he had met when they were students at Cornell in the early 1870s. In 1913, Branner succeeded Jordan as Stanford president. When Swain was Indiana president (1893–1902) and Bryan a department head, three future presidents got their undergraduate training in Bryan’s department—Elmer B. Bryan [no relation to William] (Franklin College, Colgate University, Ohio University), Ernest H. Lindley (University of Idaho, University of Kansas), and Edward Conradi (Florida State College for Women).⁷ Another disciple of Jordan, alumnus Robert J. Aley, became head of mathematics at Indiana before serving as president of the University of Maine and, subsequently, Butler University. Swain, who served as president of Swarthmore College from 1902 to 1920, was succeeded by Indiana alumnus Frank Aydelotte. Aydelotte, IU’s first Rhodes Scholar, graduated in 1900 and taught in the IU English Department from 1908 to 1915. Many other alumni graduates from the 1880s and 90s were presidents of normal schools and colleges, and several former faculty members became presidents of other U.S. universities, including Walter A. Jessup (University of Iowa).

This dense web of academic ties, originally fostered by necessity, kept Indiana from falling off the map of the Big Ten. It also opened a channel from the Midwest to California and the emergence of Stanford. Before the turn of the century, local Bloomington wits jokingly referred to Stanford as Indiana’s western campus. Undergraduate alumni such as psychologist Lewis M. Terman found faculty employment there.⁸ In 1922, the editor of the Indiana alumni quarterly noted how Indiana was supplying educational leaders in colleges and universities all across the United States: “Their fellow alumni rejoice in their progress and advancement in the educational world, but feel regret that the University and the state of Indiana must be deprived of their leadership.”⁹

Indiana’s *Genius Loci*

At the centennial commencement, former president Swain spoke of nostalgia for the Indiana campus, although he had been at the head of a different institution for nearly twenty years: “There are memo-

ries that cluster about the spirit of the place.”¹⁰ He was referring to Indiana’s *genius loci*, that distinctive dynamic of physical forms and psychosocial energies refracted through individual experience and community culture.

For one hundred years, Indiana served as the *alma mater* for generations of students, and faculty and students alike felt loyalty and a sense of kinship with the small Bloomington institution. With the move to a new locale in 1885 and increasing enrollments, the woodland campus exerted its charms of natural beauty in combination with changeable weather conditions and the parade of distinctive seasons. The Indiana milieu operated as a “cultural glue” to attract and fix the allegiances of its academic community and served as a social setting where university norms, rituals, and customs were enacted. Generation after generation, the campus had been “culturally instructive, introducing the individual to the rich set of information, values, principles, and experiences which art, landscape architecture, and architecture are capable of embodying.”¹¹

As a unique place, the campus remained a repository of psychic energies and cultural associations. It had an ongoing history as a physical entity as well as a non-material life as a stimulus and witness to human action and memory, summed up in the phrase *genius loci*. Typically translated as “spirit of place,” *genius loci* has played a special role in the development of American higher education and its institutions. Campuses have been set apart and deliberately cultivated to reflect the status of learning as well as to enhance the process of education.¹² The Indiana campus at Dunn’s Wood, only thirty-five years old in 1920, was already rich in architectural symbols and woodland beauty, and had a century of university history to draw upon as the institution looked ahead to the future.

Herman Wells, Collegian

In the fall of 1921, Herman Wells came to IU, enrolling as a sophomore and wanting to study business. Hailing from Boone County, in central Indiana west of Indianapolis, he spent his freshman year at the University of Illinois. Although Illinois had a top-flight business school and he enjoyed many of his classes, he found the campus “large, impersonal, and little stifling to me” and he was “wretchedly homesick.”¹³ He persevered, however, even through classes with five hundred fellow students, his marginal social life, and feelings of displacement. By midyear, he was invited to pledge a fraternity, but he had already decided to leave Illinois after two semesters and transfer to IU. His father, banker Granville Wells,

strenuously objected, arguing that the U of I College of Commerce and Business Administration was much better established than the fledging IU School of Commerce and Finance, which was still in its first year, and he was getting good grades as a freshman. The younger Wells pointed out that, since he expected to have his career in the Hoosier state, his IU connections would be more useful. He also had many friends going to school in Bloomington. Wells was a dutiful and respectful son, but determined on his new course. Granville finally relented, giving his increasingly independent son his blessing.¹⁴

Wells, intoxicated by the new environment, flourished at Indiana. He found a home-away-from-home by pledging Sigma Nu fraternity. It gave him, an only child, access to a brotherhood that depended on shared interest rather than blood relations, and a base to start fashioning an elective family. It also gave him another venue to hone his interpersonal skills and social intelligence. Continuing behavioral patterns set at Lebanon High School, where he was a top student, he became extensively involved in the financial and business management of student organizations, including the YMCA, the student Union Board, the university band, and his fraternity.

Wells maintained another pattern: he never went on dates or had romantic attachments. Popular in high school, where his peers voted him “Funniest” and “Best All-Around Boy” in the senior class, Wells claimed he was too busy “for dating, dances, or social functions other than those held at school.”¹⁵ On the large side physically, he was pleasant-looking, a sharp dresser, and always smiling. But something other than a schedule packed with classes, extracurricular activities, and after-school work might have made him reluctant to engage in this arena: a physiological anomaly. When Wells was fifteen, on the verge of his first year in high school in Lebanon, he contracted mumps, and suffered from the complications of orchitis, an inflammation of the testes that typically struck adolescent boys. Orchitis caused painful swelling and sensitivity of the testicles. At the time, folk medicine held that orchitis would make one sterile. So, with persistent pain in his groin and questions about his fertility, Wells navigated some challenging terrain as he matured.¹⁶

Sigma Nu Brother

For Wells, the Sigma Nu fraternity provided key venue for his ongoing self-transformation. He became a member of the Indiana chapter, Beta Eta, as soon as he arrived on campus in 1921, and he moved into the rambling chapter house located on Kirkwood, two blocks from campus.

Growing up as an only child, his fraternity brothers became the siblings he never had, and formed the beginnings of an elective family chosen by close association and mutual regard. Wells enjoyed the camaraderie of brotherhood and the busyness of communal living.

The fraternity house allowed Wells to display his penchant for organization and business management, and he was elected Treasurer in his junior year. Wells was not only studying business in class but also acting as a businessman outside of class. By this time, his college savings were almost exhausted, and his parents were not in a position to provide much help. He had to exercise his entrepreneurial skills to provide college expenses. His "Big Brother" at Sigma Nu, John Leonard, recalled:

Herman followed his father's profession, banking, by lending sums of money to those of us who were momentarily short of cash. Naturally he'd charge us a small fee, something like a quarter a week for the use of five dollars. We were grateful, Herman made a slight profit, and we learned at that early age the whys and wherefores of negotiating a loan.¹⁷

Another fraternity brother remembered an even more ingenious scheme. Wells installed a massive armoire in his bedroom at the frat house, purchased a stout lock, and set up shop making small loans to his friends. In exchange for the money, he would hold as collateral their tuxedos. Eventually the armoire would be bulging with formal wear. Payback time occurred as a formal dance approached, when the indebted friend would clamor for their tux, and Wells calmly said: "Not until you pay me!"¹⁸

In addition to providing a rich peer culture, the university also nurtured inter-generational relationships that Wells profited from. Although most IU professors were white males at that time, as a group they represented diverse academic interests and teaching styles. One junior professor, James Moffat, in economics, taught Wells, and also happened to be a member of Sigma Nu. Far and away more important, however, was the relationship that grew up between Wells and fraternity advisor, Ward Biddle.

Biddle was a native Hoosier and IU graduate of 1916. After several years working for small Indiana banks, he had returned to campus in 1923 to oversee the growing operation of the campus bookstore.¹⁹ Fiscally conservative, he was a liberal Democrat politically. In his role as chapter advisor, Biddle knew about the necessity for remodeling the tired chapter house to serve the needs of a growing membership. He also noted that Sigma Nu alumni lacked interest in a building program and

that the treasury was bare, so Biddle cautioned the enthusiastic active members that they would have to raise the needed funds themselves. The brothers turned to brother Wells, the resident financial expert, and elected him “Eminent Commander” (i.e., President) at the end of his junior year.²⁰

Wells forged a special relationship with Biddle, who was a decade older. They had a natural affinity, with common interests in educational affairs, the banking industry, and the Democratic Party. The younger Wells eagerly learned from his older fraternity brother, and Biddle appreciated the energy of the young dynamo that was leading Sigma Nu. They consulted regularly and mapped out a strategy to appeal to alumni of the chapter.

Relying on personal visits to alumni located in Indiana, Wells crisscrossed the state in the summer of 1923 trying to convince Sigma Nu’s to open their wallets. Wholeheartedly believing in the worth of the project, Wells used his natural charm to persuade. Explaining the need for enhancements to the existing facility, he argued that it would improve the long-term health and vitality of the organization. He called upon the rosy memories of college life that were held by some Sigma Nu’s, appealed to the pragmatic connections forged by fraternity membership, or invoked the high ideals found in its charter—whatever it took to persuade them to write a check.

Wells found the experience a great challenge, but also highly rewarding as the young man cultivated his public relations skills and business acumen at a new level. It was also the first time he traveled extensively around the state, giving him an “introduction to the highways and byways” of Hoosierdom. Exhilarated by movement, his horizons were literally expanded. The appeal was moderately successful, but the funds collected did not meet the costs of the new addition. With the assurance of an experienced banker, Wells took the lead in arranging a loan to cover the unmet remainder. The new addition, particularly the modern bathroom, was a strong selling point to prospective members during rush.²¹

Class of 1924 Graduation

Prior to the 1924 IU Commencement, the university celebrated another centennial: the opening of its doors to students in 1824.²² On May 7th, a tablet was laid on the old seminary campus on College Avenue marking the site of the first building. President Bryan, presiding over the commemoration, was in his element. Taking as his subject “the complete

university” ideal, he referred to the instruction in Latin that IU started with and asserted “we had not here then a complete university.”

The complete university, which all the universities in the world unite to make, cannot stop with one tongue living or dead. The complete university must deal with everything in a world where nothing is useless and where nothing is common or unclean. The complete university must teach those things which seem utterly useless,—if necessary, in glorious defiance of the ignorant, and must teach those things which seem basely utilitarian, if necessary, in defiance of the learned. The University can put no bound to its interests narrower than those of the poet whose word has become a proverb quoted in the dictionaries: “I am a man and nothing that belongs to a man is alien to me.”²³

The heady concoction of the Western tradition and university ideals flavored with local history was also present at commencement in June.

Nearly four hundred students received their Bachelor’s degrees at the 1924 ceremony, held in the Men’s Gymnasium. Wells was one of thirty-eight who received a BS in Commerce. In addition to his IU diploma, he received a gold watch charm—a wreath surmounted by a lyre, with IU in relief—for five hundred hours of service to the University Band.

Professor James A. Woodburn, a member of the Class of 1876, gave the commencement speech, entitled “Since the Beginning: A Retrospect.” On the verge of retiring from a forty-year career in the History Department, he was preparing a new history of IU. “Let us dedicate ourselves again to the University,” Woodburn implored,

But not to this university alone. Beyond the university is our state, beyond the state is our country, beyond our country is the world. The selfish motive, the provincial motive, the party motive, even the national motive is not sufficient. No motive is sufficient short of a motive for truth and humanity. We must be ready to strike with truthfulness and courage for every great cause in America or out of it.

Connecting this plea for internationalism to the celebrations of the university’s beginnings, Woodburn reminded the audience of the pioneer spirit that overcame “the physical forces of the wilderness” and was needed still today.²⁴

Wells drank it all in. Stirred by university rituals ever since he attended the freshman induction ceremony three years before, he felt a deep sense of belonging at Indiana as he transitioned into the ranks of the alumni. As he looked back on his collegiate experience, Wells recalled vividly:

For me it was an efflorescent period when my mind was open to receive a myriad of new ideas. It was also a time when my senses were so keen that they eagerly absorbed the beauty of the changing seasons in southern Indiana, the delicate pastel colors of spring, the drowsy lushness of summer, the brilliance of the fall foliage, and the still but invigorating atmosphere of winter. Music, literature, and art— my whole being

responded to the stimuli of collegiate life, in and out of the classroom. It was for me a time of response, growth, transformation, and inspiration.²⁵

The kaleidoscope of college events and personal experiences—the Indiana milieu—left an indelible imprint.

Betwixt Banking and Social Science

After he received his Indiana BS, Wells moved away and spent the next several years vacillating between further academic study and the pursuit of a career in banking. But his heart remained in Bloomington. He had felt the energy of Indiana's *genius loci* and had glimpsed a way of life that freed him from the personal impedimenta that had scarred his youth. After two years of living back with his parents in Lebanon, he returned to Bloomington in 1926 and enrolled in a Master's degree program in economics.

Wells embarked on a study of bank service charges for his Master's thesis. Fees for checking accounts and other transactions had been adopted by large, urban banks to recover some of the costs associated with additional bookkeeping and the maintenance of check clearinghouses. But they were not so common among small, rural banks located all over the rural Midwest. These country banks were being squeezed financially because their holdings were composed of many small accounts, yet their servicing costs were comparable to their larger brethren. Indiana was extreme in this regard, because of the large numbers of banks within its borders.

To gather empirical data on current practices and policies, Wells turned to the survey, a standard social science method. He devised a questionnaire to bank officials asking them to provide account data and information on existing or planned service charges. To get bank names and addresses, he contacted the Indiana Bankers Association (IBA). The IBA, a trade association serving the banking industry, was formed in the 1890s "to promote the general welfare and usefulness of banks and banking institutions and to secure uniformity of action, together with the practical benefits of personal acquaintance." By the mid-1920s, nearly all of the 1,100 banks in the state held membership.²⁶ In March 1927, Wells made the acquaintance of the IBA secretary, Forba McDaniel, to arrange for the Indiana bank questionnaire. She not only cooperated fully with his request for information, but also offered to send the questionnaire to all of the 1,100 IBA member banks, saving him the not inconsiderable cost of postage.²⁷ The scope of his study went beyond the Hoosier state. Wells identified one-, two-, and three-bank towns in Nebraska (eighty in total) that had fees for service charges and sent them a similar questionnaire.

He added data from recently published studies on bank service charges in North Carolina and South Dakota. Finally, he sent out two hundred personal letters to banks in all parts of the United States "concerning some phase of the problem."²⁸

The resulting 117-page thesis, titled "Service Charges for Small or So-called Country Banks," contained a careful review of the literature on bank service charges and an analysis of the empirical data that Wells painstakingly put together. Its conclusion did not offer arcane abstractions, but practical guidance of possible use for bank officers. Because country banks typically held a myriad of small accounts, the thesis argued for the need to institute service charges to avoid running at a loss. "The service charge has been shown to be an effective remedy for unprofitable services and accounts," Wells explained, noting that it had been introduced extensively in larger banks. "Therefore, we may say without fear of refutation that service charges are far more necessary for so-called country or smaller banks, than they are for any other type of bank, are just as feasible, and may be put into operation in such a way as to be received very graciously by the customer."²⁹

Wells received his MA at the June 1927 commencement. Calling on his new connections to the IBA, he arranged for the publication of his thesis in *The Hoosier Banker*, a monthly house organ edited by IBA secretary McDaniel. The lengthy manuscript was virtually unchanged when it appeared in two parts, in the August and September issues.³⁰

Armed with a new degree and a major publication, Wells accepted a teaching assistantship at the University of Wisconsin's doctoral program in economics in the fall of 1927. His major professor was department chair William H. Kiekhofer, a renowned teacher and the author of a popular economics textbook. Known to students as "Wild Bill," he was an old-school orator, lecturing to as many as 1,800 students at a time.³¹ His showmanship was grounded in meticulous preparation, which he extended to the training of his teaching assistants, of whom Wells was one. Later known as the father of college economics teachers, Kiekhofer modeled techniques for audience engagement that stood Wells in good stead later. As much as he enjoyed his first year of doctoral studies, Wells could not resist the lure of a job back in his home state.

The IBA had created a new position of field secretary. The association had decided to send an agent out in the field to gather information about the worrisome financial health of member banks. The Hoosier economy had suffered through several years of depressed farm prices, and banks, particularly small rural ones, were failing in increasing numbers. After

strenuous lobbying, Wells was hired as field secretary in 1928.³² Although he was “practically raised in a bank,” Wells received a crash course in recent Hoosier banking history. State banking laws were weak, and the industry operated in a *laissez-faire* environment. The state Department of Banking, created in 1920, had widespread authority over all banks, trust companies, building and loan associations, and the like. But the department had woefully inadequate personnel to supervise, much less inspect, financial institutions in the state on a regular basis.

Indiscriminant chartering was a major cause of bank failures. Because organizing a bank was easy, banks proliferated, giving rise to cutthroat competition. “New bank charters were being sought and obtained by church groups, lodge groups or political groups antagonistic to the church group, lodge group or political groups in control of existing institutions.” Many villages of five hundred people or less had two or more banks operating, and every county in the state had an average of a dozen banks. This era of “spite” banks and bitter competition led directly to banks taking risky loans and desperate measures to stay in business.³³

Against this backdrop, critical observers, including the membership of the IBA, had come to the realization that the “public interest may not best be served by the addition of new units without economic justification for their existence.” Reluctantly, banks were moving from a strict policy of *laissez-faire* into accepting some state regulation. “It is recognized that although banks are private enterprises,” said the IBA, “the public welfare has become so dependent upon their successful operation that they have become to some degree public institutions” and therefore subject to statutory regulations.³⁴

The work of the IBA was carried in several administrative divisions: Better Banking Practices, Education, Banker–Farmer Cooperation, Protection, Taxation, Legislation, County Organization, Publications, Research, and Public Relations. The field secretary’s position dealt with Research and Public Relations, which were related to all of the rest, so Wells’ bailiwick connected to every other IBA division.³⁵

The Happy Traveler

The first step for the IBA field secretary was clear: to gather data from the more than one thousand banks scattered around the state. An automobile was a necessity. Wells admired the Chevrolet coupe that his parents drove to visit him in Madison—their first new car—but he had never learned to drive one. So he acquired a Ford and learned to drive. Country roads, mostly dirt or gravel, laid down for horses, buggies, and

carts, were gradually being upgraded for automobiles, and were interconnected with an emerging state and federal highway system. For a young man of twenty-six, owning a car and having access to the open road was exhilarating. For Wells, it was doubly exciting. The automobile was a tool for work and it satisfied an itch for freedom and movement. He had started to realize the truth embedded in the saying that "getting there was half the fun," wherever "there" happened to be.

Other than the mandate for extensive contacts with all Hoosier banks, the job description for the field secretary remained remarkably vague. The IBA was slowly and hesitantly moving toward some form of collective action in an industry that had a tradition of fierce independence. Just about all IBA members agreed that something needed to be done about the poor health of the state's banking system, but that unanimity dissolved once discussion started about exactly what steps might be taken. A major fear was too much government regulation.

Due to his academic training at Indiana and Wisconsin, Wells was ahead of the curve in thinking that banks were more akin to public utilities rather than traditional producers of consumer goods and services. During his two semesters of doctoral study, he observed the social benefits of academic research aligned with and serving state government in Progressive politics in Wisconsin. But he also knew that Indiana differed from Wisconsin in important ways.

Wells did not appear to be worried about the uncertainties of the task. Self-direction and hard work had never worn him down. There was a big mountain of banks to investigate, and it would take sound judgment and excellent people skills to extract sensitive, proprietary information from them. Changes in bank policies would have to wait until empirical data were gathered, summarized, and digested.

Armed with a suitcase, a car, and a new mustache, Wells attacked the field secretary assignment with vigor. He planned his route with military precision, canvassing each bank in a county before moving on to the next. The affable young man would meet the bank officers and employees, explain to them his purpose, and then proceed to examine their account books and records. Keeping good notes, Wells would return to IBA headquarters in Indianapolis periodically to deposit his data and confer with staff.

In the process of visiting every one of Indiana's 92 counties, Wells got an education in geographical variation and demographic diversity. Banks and their inhabitants were the main quarry. A collateral benefit was to become further acquainted with the beauty of the state's

countryside. When he filled up his belly as well as his automobile gas tank, or when he stopped for the night in cities and hamlets, he encountered many species of Hoosier humanity. Other businessmen, on the road in connection to their job, encountered a similar flood of sense impressions and quotidian human presence. But Wells did more than passively encounter the passing scene. He reveled in it, learned from it, and profited from his investment in people from all walks of life.

“Hoosier Highways”

As he traveled around the state on IBA business, Wells returned to Bloomington periodically. He kept IU in his thoughts, and his good friend Biddle wrote frequently about campus happenings. The bookstore manager took a keen interest in mentoring Wells by plotting his chances at IU, responding to queries from professors about his activities, and sharing news about Sigma Nu.³⁶ Both men were intent on finding some position for Wells at the university.

After nine months of employment by the IBA, Wells wrote Biddle a long letter in April 1929, stating his desire to return to the university and outlining a tentative strategy. A major concern was the prospect of an opening in economics and if “the vacancy were filled by a certain type of man, no vacancy would again be available in my field in a life time probably.” Nevertheless, he decided “that Bloomington offers certain compensations which would more than offset the advantages in prestige and salary that might be gained from another institution,” adding “you well know what I consider those compensations to be.” He sketched a strategy to delicately lobby the two most powerful men at IU, President William Lowe Bryan and Board of Trustees member Ora Wildermuth. He wrote, “I will from time to time as it appears expedient follow up my little prior contact that I made with Bryan” and that “it runs in my mind also that Wildermuth has some very active Bank connections and if such is the case I will invent an excuse to have a conference with him before long in Gary.”³⁷

In February 1930, at the urging of editor McDaniel, Wells started a monthly news column, entitled “Hoosier Highways,” for *The Hoosier Banker*. Underlining the corporate nature of his contribution, the byline was simply the “Field Secretary” and the editorial style used the plural first person “We.” So readers who did not know Wells was the field secretary had no way of finding out from the text.

Wells penned his monthly pieces with an open, friendly voice, describing his travels over the previous four weeks. Each of these dispatches

from the field was highly specific, containing the names of the banks visited and of the town or region, plus the names of bank officers or other staff that met with him. Chatty and humorous in style, the author successfully conveyed a wealth of information, observations, and advice to the Hoosier banking fraternity. Wells began his inaugural column on an autobiographical note:

It is appropriate that the first account of a trip to appear in this feature should be an account of a trip to Boone County. It is our home county. Here nearly fourteen years ago we began to learn the intricacies of the Burroughs Posting machine. After that first day's experience, we were not at all sure that a banker's life was as desirable as it had seemed from the outside. Our first impression did not last and since that time we have had some sort of active bank connection with banks and bankers nearly all of the time. We are glad we had the chance on the first day for it gave us the opportunity for work that has ever since proved to be a happy selection.³⁸

After detailing his visits to Boone county financial institutions in a series of short notes, Wells talked of his visit to Bloomington to make arrangements for an IBA "Short Course" on banking: "It is a drive we always like to make. It is one of the most beautiful in the state." Calling first on Citizens Trust Company, the field secretary admitted that, "while a student in Bloomington, we carried our unprofitable account there." After calling on two other banks, lack of time precluded a visit to the Bloomington National Bank, "where we as undergraduate carried several treasurer accounts—great banks in Bloomington." After this verbal love-fest, he made a gentle criticism: "It seems peculiar, however, that with such progressive and sound banks they do not organize a clearing house and secure for themselves to the benefits of co-operation through the use of service charges and reciprocal credit information." He reminded readers that the other "Monon Student Towns," where DePauw, Wabash, and Purdue were located, were "100 per cent on both of these projects."³⁹

In his March column, Wells mentioned the great success of the IBA "Short Course" recently held in Bloomington, where "Dean Rawles was able to add a perfectly bewildering array of luncheons, dinners, teas and smokers that the hospitable town and campus wished to give in honor of the bankers." This month's travels took him to the western part of the state. Passing through Jamestown, Wells stopped at the Citizens State Bank, the site of his first job, and visited his father, "who has always been our instructor in the science of banking." Spending several days making calls at various western Indiana banks, one night Wells found himself in Covington. "After the Ford was comfortably stabled at its customary curbstone box stall," he recounted,

we walked to the Wabash river— watched the sun, as a beautiful red ball of fire, sink behind the river and day dreamed of the days of long ago when the Indians used the river for their canoes, and then its later part in pioneer commerce, when on its bosom each year it bore a burden of whiskey and molasses on the way to New Orleans and the world. And also of the man who made it famous and immortal, Paul Dresser, of his tragic life and of his brother Theodore's biography of him.⁴⁰

The Field Secretary was developing a distinctive style for “Hoosier Highways.” The main thrust was to communicate news about various Indiana banks through human-interest stories. Written in a style not dissimilar to a society-page column, these telegraphic comments were short and to the point. Leavened with observations on the passing scenery, cultural associations, and food and lodging, Wells was exemplifying the banker as a man of civility and taste, competent to be entrusted not only with money but also with civic leadership.

Serving the State

After two years of working for the bankers' association, Wells managed to obtain a faculty position at his *alma mater*. Starting on the lowest rung of the academic ladder and without a doctorate, he became an instructor in economics at IU in 1930, and retained a part-time connection with the IBA. Although he loved teaching, his interest and experience in banking soon led to a key role in the reform of Indiana's regulation of banks and other financial institutions. In spring 1931, Wells was chosen as secretary and research director of the state-sponsored Study Commission for Indiana Financial Institutions.

Receiving permission to set up the study commission's research enterprise in the basement of the IU library, he hired three students and two secretaries, all on a part-time basis.⁴¹ Their charge was to investigate “the history of the development of financial institutions in the state, their numbers, their regulation, their causes of failure, and possible remedies.”⁴² The research shop under the control of one of IU's youngest faculty members attracted campus attention due to its novelty. Although David Starr Jordan had received outside funds for biological research many years ago, never before had the university housed a social science research project performing sponsored or contract research.⁴³

Wells, as the Study Commission's factotum, and the chairman, Walter S. Greenough of the Fletcher Savings and Loan Company in Indianapolis, saw eye to eye on many things, and were in agreement that the study's recommendations, based on exhaustive research, needed to be implemented as state regulations. After eighteen months of arduous work, the

Study Commission's report was done. Printed on December 31, 1932, the 174-page document was full of dense text bristling with statistical tables, and contained "a history of Indiana banking, an overview of current banking regulations, and a diagnosis of problems in Indiana's banking industry." It opened with a long excerpt from Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis' opinion in *New State Ice Company v. Liebmann* that was a call for bold experimentation to meet changing social and economic needs. This call for Progressive action provided a key motif.⁴⁴

The report echoed Wells' master's thesis in depicting banks as akin to public utilities. Competition between banks and internal management problems, rather than economic conditions per se, contributed to the growing problem of bank failures, the report argued. The proposed solution was to replace the old state Banking Department with a new Department of Financial Institutions, to "function flexibly and freely throughout the years to come in the direction of modern trends of control by the public of financial institutions."⁴⁵ Wells envisioned a powerful board to oversee the Department of Financial Institutions, with direct representation from the industries involved but removed from the political patronage system.⁴⁶

The report contained several specific policy reforms, including restriction of bank charters to prevent "over-banking" in a community; increased supervision of financial institutions with more bank examiners; confirming the double liability of shareholders; recommending against state bank guaranty (i.e., deposit insurance) and branch banking; encouraging Federal Reserve membership among Indiana banks; and simplified bank statements.⁴⁷ Although the report was criticized in some quarters, few people plowed through the highly technical analysis. Wells and his expert staff had put together a comprehensive reform package that promised to address the needs of the Hoosier banking industry and restore depositor's confidence. The overall message was clear to citizens of the state: experts had proffered their professional opinion. Now, it was up to the Governor and General Assembly to implement the report's recommendations.

Governor Paul V. McNutt, former dean of the IU Law School, was swept into office in November 1932, along with an overwhelming majority in the Indiana General Assembly. The bank reform legislation passed easily in March 1933, and Wells was persuaded to implement the new regulations by taking on the position as chief bank examiner for the reorganized Department of Financial Institutions for the State of Indiana. In addition, he was named supervisor of the Department's Division of Research and Statistics and served as Secretary for the Commission

for Financial Institutions. IU President Bryan willingly gave a leave of absence to faculty member Wells, who was promoted to Assistant Professor, to fulfill these positions. Wells spent the next two years as a highly visible public servant in the administration of state government.

Return to Campus

In 1935, Wells returned to campus as Dean of the School of Business Administration, and, in two more years, became President, completing his meteoric rise to the top administrative position at the university from which he had graduated only eleven years before. A confirmed bachelor with a large body and small ego, Wells embarked on the presidency with relish and great vigor, and single-minded dedication. He remembered,

in some mysterious fashion, I seemed to have a total vision of what I hoped the university could become in my time. With this to guide me, *all* my activities were undertaken with the thought and expectation that they would be of benefit to the institution as it moved toward what I believed to be its manifest goals.⁴⁸

As he shouldered the responsibilities of public service, he found freedom in serving as an agent of the state. “My personal ambitions,” Wells explained, “became ambitions for the university’s greatness, for the realization of the university’s full potential, including the wish that every student...could enjoy as exciting and stimulating an experience as I had had.”⁴⁹

Grounded in Character

In 1938, at the outset of his presidency, *Time* magazine profiled the “roly-poly ‘Hermie’ Wells” and the “youngest president of a State university.” The story mentioned his work drafting new state banking legislation but claimed “the campus knows him best as a jolly, convivial gourmet, and a Rabelaisian storyteller.”⁵⁰ Over the course of his twenty-five years in office, Wells put to rest the hyperbole with a sterling record of solid accomplishment as he led IU into the front ranks of American research universities. A true servant-leader, he released any private striving, and turned toward an unremitting desire to improve the university. His remarkable character provided the chief tool. As one contemporary observer put it:

A most unusual combination of characteristics, an ichor cool or warm as the situation demands, has furthered Dr. Well’s [*sic*] efforts. An extreme friendliness, peculiar to Hoosiers; a deep interest in and liking for other people; an insight into the minds and hearts of individuals; a sincere desire to be helpful, all these aided by a razor-keen mind, these have made him loved as well as successful.⁵¹

Energetic, shrewd, and charming, he had a vision of what the university could become, and the uncommon good sense to take advantage of the opportunities that came his way.⁵²

Faculty Development

Although in this era it was not uncommon for university presidents to be involved in faculty selection and retention, Wells took an unusually proactive approach. He firmly believed that the institution was only as strong as its faculty. Having successfully negotiated the retirement of longtime heads and other faculty members when the university's retirement system went into effect in 1937, he identified faculty hiring as his number one priority.

Although he had great appreciation for scholarship, artistic creation, and scientific innovation, Wells realized that he was not a specialist outside his own area of banking and institutional finance. To become educated in other fields, he consulted regularly with senior faculty, and especially with the Graduate School Dean, Fernandus Payne, who had held the post since 1925 and also served as head of the Department of Zoology. Payne, a Hoosier native who obtained his PhD in genetics in the famed Columbia laboratory of Thomas Hunt Morgan, was a shrewd judge of scholarly horseflesh. He had cultivated wide contacts, especially in the sciences, in his long service at Indiana.

Wells and Payne had embarked on an ambitious plan to replenish faculty ranks with younger, research-oriented people. They relied on *American Men of Science* as a ready biographical reference to identify promising talent. As a general rule, they wanted candidates for department head to rate a peer-reviewed "star" by their names. Realizing that IU could not attract those in well-established positions with high salaries, their strategy was to seek "promising young men and providing the working conditions and salaries necessary to attract them" and to keep them with generous promotions and salary increases. Payne wrote hundreds of letters and visited more than a dozen universities in his search for new faculty.⁵³ In his first year as president, Wells himself traveled 33,000 miles by automobile, railroad, and airplane to meet prospective faculty at professional meetings, or, better yet, at their home institutions, where he could gauge subtle qualities such as community spirit and local reputation. A total of 190 candidates were interviewed.⁵⁴

For prospective faculty, IU did not have much to offer in financial incentives or research support, and it lacked an intellectual student body, so Wells had to sell his vision of a renaissance of learning at IU. Although

he could do little to increase directly the quality of the student population or set higher faculty salaries, he was able to promise improved facilities for research and scholarship. He was also able to garner small amounts of research funds and money for library acquisitions through reallocation. His enthusiasm for the revitalization of IU was contagious, and new faculty joined the hopeful enterprise. Wells did not neglect, however, the research faculty that were already in residence, and made special effort to encourage the efforts of zoologist Alfred C. Kinsey, folklorist Stith Thompson, and historian R. Carlyle Buley.

Longtime faculty members noted that this policy of providing material incentives to scholarship was a sharp departure from the previous administration. President Bryan often spoke glowingly of the value of scholarship, but it was difficult “to extract the coin of the realm” for support. Upon seeking funds for research, one professor said Bryan replied rhetorically, “On every campus and in every faculty there are a few men eager to advance knowledge. They will do this whether they are supported or not. They are devoted people whom nothing can stop. Why, then, is it necessary to give them assistance?”⁵⁵ This attitude highlighted a pointed difference in administrative philosophies. For Bryan, the university’s main mission was to transmit knowledge to the next generation; for Wells, the research mission was equally important.

Following World War II, the university’s response to unprecedented growth in student numbers was perhaps the most visible challenge, but more consequential was the state of the faculty. President Wells and Dean Payne had led a revolution in faculty reorganization since 1937 with an almost wholesale turnover in personnel. New department leaders were supporting new research-oriented faculty while trying to accommodate the instructional needs of an enlarged student body.⁵⁶

Through vast experience in managing personnel, Wells knew the vital importance of delegation to trusted colleagues and assistants. He was especially careful to pick academic deans and directors who had drive, vision, and appropriate interpersonal skills. Secure in his leadership role, he was not intimidated by the brains and talent of his administrative subordinates. In fact, he eagerly surrounded himself with gifted persons, who, in this era, were almost nearly all male. Wells had great success in attracting key individuals who built up important areas of the university. Two wartime hires—Henry Hope (fine arts in 1941) and Robert Miller (libraries in 1942)—exemplified his approach of aligning the university’s needs and aspirations with the person’s career ambitions, redounding to mutual benefit. A later example was Wilfred Bain, hired in 1947 as

Dean of the Music School.

Although Wells increasingly delegated his functional role in recruitment to deans and department heads as his presidency continued, he still met many faculty candidates, especially those of eminent reputation. He imbued his administrative staff with his profoundly held conviction "that the first task of the academic administrator is to try to attract and hold the most talented faculty members, encourage them, support them, and then get out of their way and let them go wherever their talent and energy lead them."⁵⁷

As his administration drew to a close, a perceptive faculty observer noted the result of Wells' stated program "to bring to Indiana the best possible men and give them the means and freedom to do their work," saying:

This policy meant not only appointing scholars whose reputation was well established but also younger men who showed promise of future eminence. As a result, Indiana now boasts a staff which can compare favorably with any in the country. There exists among them an atmosphere of intellectual ferment; men are doing important things, adding to knowledge, with the confidence that they will be encouraged, protected, and forwarded. Recently several of the mature scholars who have been appointed told me that it was this milieu of dynamic optimism which induced them to come here rather than any consideration of salary.⁵⁸

As President Jordan did before the turn of the century, Wells was not going to let Indiana's relative lack of wealth deter him from building a superior faculty. A superb advocate for a shared vision of Indiana's renaissance, he used his considerable charm and persuasive powers to attract teacher-scholars. "Not an artist or a natural scientist himself, by sheer power of sympathetic imagination he has, innumerable times, anticipated the needs of specialists in the pursuit of his goal of making the University great," said one appreciative scholar.⁵⁹ With his abundant enthusiasm for inquiry and investigation, he "became a patron to his own faculty, a Maecenas, so to speak, of the humanities and the sciences."⁶⁰

A Model Leader

Wells was Indiana's chief executive during a time of tremendous change in higher education. He took office during the lingering years of economic depression, oversaw the mobilization of IU for World War II, and presided during the beginning of the "Golden Age" of American higher education. His record of achievement in leading IU was studded with noteworthy administrative accomplishments, such as the creation of a world-class music school as the centerpiece of a vibrant

arts and humanities curriculum; lavish support of libraries, laboratories, classrooms, performance venues, residence halls, and dedicated green-space in a greatly expanded campus; the nurture and protection of Alfred C. Kinsey's pioneering sex research; and the extension of the university's global reach with international programs and partnerships. By the time he stepped down from the presidency in 1962, he was a beloved figure on the Indiana campus and an "educator's educator" on the national scene. Profiled again in *Time*, the magazine revised its angle:

For all of his bulk (228 lb. at 5 ft. 7 in.), the nation's youngest (then 35) president of a state university looked like a lightweight. Happily, the pessimists were dead wrong. When he stepped down last week at 60, "Hermie" Wells was known throughout U.S. campuses not only as the man who remade Indiana University but also as just about the best old-pro prexy in the business.⁶¹

Wells enjoyed his executive role, relishing his central role in the university's administration. To his mind, the office of the presidency should not be a place where power is concentrated, but a place of communication and shared leadership. As the 1950s wore on, Wells became resolved to step down after twenty-five years at the helm, partly because he was uncomfortable with his growing authority. He complained privately that the Bloomington Faculty Council, rather than debating and discussing the administration's proposals, simply rubber-stamped them, serenely putting unquestioned faith in President Wells. This "deification," as he put it, ran counter to the open and probing intellectual exchange that lay at the heart of the university. The faculty trusted him to do the right thing, and he was distressed about the power that unquestioning trust brought in its wake.⁶²

After 1962, he filled a new post—University Chancellor—that was created specially for him. He continued to take important leadership and consulting posts, especially on behalf of international education initiatives. He stepped into the role as the university's chief fundraiser, consulted widely on educational issues, and kept up his steady stream of appearances at campus musical events and artistic performances. He persisted in exchanging greetings and meetings with his chosen constituency—the community of IU students, faculty, staff, alumni, and friends—with his trademark generosity and brotherly love.

In 1977, Kentucky historian Thomas D. Clark finished the third volume of a history of IU. The massive four-volume work, commissioned on the occasion of the university's sesquicentennial in 1970, provided

a fresh look at the entire span of IU's existence. The third volume, far fatter than the two previous, began with the start of the Wells administration in 1937 and dealt with developments up to the late 1960s. This ambitious project was hailed as a model university history, and was a welcome revision and supplement to the existing historiography.⁶³ Reviewing Clark's third volume, University of Wisconsin historian Merle Curti noted:

No one, of course, can say what would have been accomplished without the leadership, ability, work, and dedication of President (later Chancellor) Herman B Wells. His contributions cannot be easily summarized. They included his zest and good judgment in rebuilding the faculty by establishing an adequate retirement system and by recruiting distinguished scholars and scientists. He managed against odds to build an ever-expanding modern campus. Common sense, sound judgment, and genuine interest marked his relations with students, faculty, trustees, and alumni. He was astute and wise in his relations with the legislature and with pressure groups determined to restrict academic freedom. He did much to make Indiana proud of its university. Without uprooting the best in its traditions, he did more than any other single person in transforming a parochial campus into a distinguished, cosmopolitan one.⁶⁴

Clark's history presented a positive, sometimes even heroic picture of the Wells administration that accorded with campus sentiment. It was common knowledge among the IU community that Wells, a native Hoosier possessing charm and charisma, had been able to discern untapped potentialities in the university, enlist people in a shared vision, and take pragmatic steps to improve academic quality.

Even though he preferred to look to the future, Wells was not immune to the collective fever of retrospection, and he composed an autobiography during this time. Published in 1980, *Being Lucky* was a bestseller, at least in Indiana. Subtitled *Reflections and Reminiscences*, it was a surprisingly dry account of his life and career. Lacking juicy bits of gossip or an insider's account of *realpolitik* that such books often contain, *Being Lucky* was a literary embodiment of Wells' presidential persona—competent, dignified, and humble. But clues about how to run a big university were masked by humorous anecdote, and the book sometimes read as an extended “thank-you” note to his many colleagues.

In 1992, Wells reached his 90th birthday. Months of planning culminated in a gala birthday party held at the IU Auditorium, with stories, dance, and music performed to honor his life and legacy. The Chancellor was in attendance, sitting in a wheelchair, waving and smiling to the assembled crowd. A collection of short essays by a host of friends and admirers, entitled *Herman Wells Stories*, was published by Indiana

University Press to mark the occasion. The book told familiar stories of his ever-present humanity and revealed qualities of his character that led people to admire and love him.⁶⁵

Wells was slowing down, finally, after decades and decades of service to his *alma mater*. He still went into his Owen Hall office regularly, kept mountains of paperwork moving across his desk, and found time to attend concerts and ball games and to give dinner parties. Relishing his role as the paterfamilias of the great IU clan, Wells reluctantly accepted the inevitable process that turned him into a university icon. But he kept himself accessible to people, and members of the academic community still sought his wise counsel, from students to faculty to administrative officers.

Even as the ranks of his friends and supporters continued to grow, Wells' personal ambit was shrinking. Ears and eyes and legs were not working as they once had. Several mild strokes affected his recall and hampered his elephantine memory. His peripatetic travel habits were gradually being confined to Indiana and then to Bloomington. Still he kept on. In 1996, writer Bill Shaw spent a day in Bloomington following Wells as he performed his daily routine, including visiting friends at IU's Meadowood retirement village and working at his Owen Hall office. The resulting profile, published in the Indianapolis *Star*, provided a perceptive look at the educator in old age:

"I should have died two years ago," Wells grumbles at breakfast. Then those big bushy eyebrows twitch, the blue eyes twinkle and he grins. "Trouble is, I've got too much work yet to do."⁶⁶

The end finally came on March 18, 2000, at home and at peace, after thirty-eight years as University Chancellor. Those left behind wondered what a world without IU's quintessential leader would entail.

Place Matters

As an undergraduate in the 1920s, Wells sensed the ineffable attractions of Bloomington's cultural landscape. Even though his parents were "wise, encouraging, and loving," there were some confining circumstances of his life in Lebanon, and he felt liberated attending college at Indiana.⁶⁷ "From the very beginning I fell in love with Indiana University," he recorded later in his 1980 autobiography *Being Lucky*, adding, "and the romance has continued to this day."⁶⁸ Citing the color and excitement of college life, he was taken by his academic classes, university ceremonies, and extracurricular activities on the beautiful, verdant Indiana campus. There was something special about Bloomington.

ton, and it served to locate his maturing self. Much like his classmate Hoagy Carmichael, a Bloomington native, who said, "I was too young to recognize the feeling for Bloomington that was growing within me. The compulsion to be there, to return there, to take from Bloomington the things it offered."⁶⁹

After his graduation in 1924, Wells managed to visit Bloomington periodically and spent a year pursuing a Master's degree in economics at IU in 1926–27 before settling permanently in 1930 when he joined the faculty. Although he traveled extensively in connection with his work, he anchored himself in Bloomington, living in one of the oldest houses in the area for a quarter-century.

At the outset of his presidency in 1938, Wells expressed his feelings for his adopted hometown as he addressed the local Chamber of Commerce:

I am interested in Bloomington's future because this is my home and I love it, and while I am not a native son of the city or of the community, I hope that circumstances are such that I never have to leave here for residence.⁷⁰

As president, Wells oversaw the acquisition of land contiguous to the university as the campus grew more than tenfold in size, from 137 acres to nearly 1,800. He considered IU to be his home, literally and figuratively, as he paid particular attention to its landscapes, buildings, and cultural atmosphere.⁷¹

Among his crowning achievements was the patient creation of a campus precinct devoted to the arts. The first building of the Wells presidential administration was the IU Auditorium, dedicated in 1941, containing the impressive Hall of Murals housing Thomas Hart Benton's interpretation of Hoosier history painted in 1933 for the Chicago World's Fair. Singlehandedly, Wells engineered the mural's rescue from storage, where the large canvases had been languishing for years. The Auditorium proved to be a splendid venue for performances and lectures, and a boon for the embryonic program in theater and drama. It played a special role in the evolution of the opera program for the IU School of Music. Not only did it provide space for student productions, but also attracted annual visit from the Metropolitan Opera Company of New York city from 1942 through 1961. Previously the company had made annual tours to Chicago, Boston, Cleveland, and Atlanta, but it had never appeared in a small university town.

As impressive as the auditorium was, Wells considered it only the first phase of a grand design. Anchoring the undeveloped eastern bor-

der of campus, it provided a cornerstone for plans to create a Fine Arts Plaza. Early sketches included a Greek-style outdoor amphitheater on the south and a fine arts building on the north, with space in the middle for a monumental fountain.

The Lilly Library, destined to be the finest rare-book library between the coasts, was dedicated in 1960, the same year that construction began on the Fine Arts Building and plans for the fountain were revealed to the public. The Showalter Fountain was dedicated in 1961. Wells was in his element presiding over the outdoor ceremony in the plaza, surrounded by creative artists, generous donors, and curious students. Noting the “remarkable grouping of structures devoted...to the arts,” Wells said:

Indiana University has long been outstanding in the sciences and in the professions. Yet it remembers its ancient foundation upon the classics. Today in dedicating this magnificent Fountain with its central figure of the goddess of love, truth, and beauty, we proudly reaffirm our belief in the importance of the arts and the life of the spirit.⁷²

The IU Art Museum, a work of bold artistry executed by the architectural firm of I. M. Pei, completed the grand design for the Fine Arts Plaza. Dedicated in 1982, the Wells vision for a great university arts district took forty years to reach fruition.

The Fine Arts Plaza was just one example of Wells' efforts, as president and chancellor, to nurture IU's buildings and grounds. Reflecting his belief that the campus itself was a pedagogical agent, generations of citizens and visitors have received instruction about the interplay of natural forces and human creation as the campus evolved to serve the needs of the academic community.⁷³ In 1991, landscape architect Thomas Gaines cited IU's Bloomington campus as among the top five most beautiful and well designed in America.⁷⁴ American historian Allan Nevins, in his 1962 book, *The State Universities and Democracy*, thought that “the creation of an atmosphere, a tradition, a sense of the past” was a difficult but important task for tax-supported institutions, requiring “time, sustained attention to cultural values, and the special beauties of landscape or architecture.” He had the example of Wells at Indiana in mind when he said: “This spiritual grace the state universities cannot quickly acquire, but they have been gaining it.”⁷⁵

Wells had an intuitive, almost preternatural, appreciation of place, the *genius loci* of IU and Bloomington. First entering into dialog with the

ineffable energies that define that place in the 1920s, he became skillfully adept at working with these forces as an institutional leader. Wells was alive to the essential role of university rituals, ceremonies, and customs enacted at Indiana and how they invested meaning to the educational endeavor—meanings that were at once personal and collective.⁷⁶ If he had any secret to his effective leadership, it was being mindful of the multiplicity of the university and always being present as he dealt with its embodiment in members of the academic community as he strove to serve the larger whole.

With this empathic attitude, Wells had simple modesty about his work and his role. Although he took his leadership role quite seriously, his basic orientation was non-exploitive and humble. He belonged to the university, not the other way round. A striking illustration occurred at a 1970 university dinner where Wells' accomplishments were feted. As he accepted the accolades, he was overcome with emotion. "As much as I appreciate your beautiful tributes," he paused and gulped a couple of times to maintain control before continuing in a clear voice, "the university doesn't owe me anything. On the contrary, the obligation goes the other way—for it's given me wonderful work with wonderful colleagues for a whole lifetime."⁷⁷

Spirit, Wells thought, was the essential element for educational achievement. Unquantifiable yet unmistakably real, a university's spirit, co-located in a material place with geographical coordinates, resided in the hearts of those devoted to its welfare. "With the right spirit, the right atmosphere, the right ambience, nearly all things become possible in the learning process, which is the central purpose of a university," Wells wrote.⁷⁸

In an inimitable way, he became not only a symbol or icon of the university, but also a corporeal embodiment or personification of its values and spirit. With his passing, his memory still keeps watch over his beloved *alma mater*, whether in the form of a bronze statue with hand outstretched, greeting visitors to the historic Old Crescent academic halls next to Dunn's Woods, or in the rich annals of university history. In his death, Wells has become identified—and perhaps unified—with the guardian spirit of Indiana University.⁷⁹

Notes

1. Lawrence Durrell, *Justine* (New York: Dutton, 1957), 41.
2. George Shively, *Initiation* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1925), 122.
3. Ivy L. Chamness, "Indiana University—Mother of College Presidents," *Indiana*

- University Alumni Quarterly* 9 (1922): 46–49. See W. Peter Hood, *Educational and Experiential Patterns of College and University Presidents Who Graduated from Indiana University* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University, 1970); Hood, “I.U.—Mother of College Presidents,” *Indiana Alumni Magazine*, (June 1970): 36–39 for a later study. See also Herman C. Hudson, comp. *The Black Faculty at Indiana University Bloomington, 1970–93* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University, 1994) for information on African American IU alumni who served as presidents.
4. In 1867, Indiana University became the first state university in the United States to admit women on the same basis as men.
 5. Miniscule gains were made in racial diversity by 1920, with African Americans accounting for about 1 percent of the student body. Although Marcellus Neal became the first African American graduate in 1895, it was not until 1919 that Frances Marshall became the first black female to obtain a degree.
 6. David Starr Jordan, *Indiana University Alumni Quarterly* 7 (1920): 384–87, on 385.
 7. Bryan’s older brother, Enoch Albert Bryan, class of 1878, was president of Vincennes University and the State College of Washington.
 8. Terman’s only child, Frederick Terman, became Stanford’s famous dean of engineering after World War II.
 9. Chamness, “Mother of College Presidents,” 49.
 10. Joseph Swain, “Forty Years of Indiana,” *Indiana University Alumni Quarterly* 7 (1920): 393–401, on 394.
 11. Sheldon Rothblatt, “A Note on the ‘Integrity’ of the University,” in *Aurora Toreal*, eds. Marco Beretta, Karl Grandin, and Svante Lindqvist (Sagamore Beach: Science History Publications, 2008), 277–97, on 280.
 12. For an instructive discussion on the importance of milieu, see Chapter 2 “Consult the Genius of the Place” in Sheldon Rothblatt, *The Modern University and Its Discontents: The Fate of Newman’s Legacies in Britain and America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 50–105.
 13. Herman B Wells, *Being Lucky* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), 29.
 14. *Ibid.*, 31.
 15. *Ibid.*, 18.
 16. James H. Capshew, “Boone County Days,” unpublished manuscript (July 2010).
 17. Quoted in Gerald R. Sherratt, “The Long Journey,” *The Delta* (Sigma Nu Fraternity) (Spring 1962): 143.
 18. James Elliott oral history interview, June 2, 2005; Wells Biography Project files/ Elliott, James.
 19. The bookstore, founded as a student coop in 1890, had grown into an auxiliary enterprise of the university by 1910. No stranger to the bookstore’s operations, Biddle’s senior thesis (1916) was titled “Indiana University Book Store: A Study of the Local Store and a Comparative Study of Similar Stores in Other Institutions.” See Burton D. Myers, *History of Indiana University, Volume II: The Bryan Administration, 1902–1937* (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1952), 424–35.
 20. Wells, *Being Lucky*, 35.
 21. *Ibid.*
 22. There is controversy about the date when the university first opened its doors. There is no direct documentation, but collateral evidence suggests either 1824 or 1825. Thomas Clark, in his volumes on IU history, goes with the 1825 date. Recent research by the Indiana Historical Bureau corroborates the 1825 date.

23. "Centennial Celebration of the Opening of Indiana University," *Indiana University Alumni Quarterly* 11 (1924): 379–88, quote on 380 [punctuation added].
24. James A. Woodburn, "Since the Beginning: A Retrospect," *Indiana University Alumni Quarterly* 11 (1924): 297–320, on 317.
25. Wells, *Being Lucky*, 42.
26. Douglas V. Austin and David D. Austin, "The Indiana Bankers Association: A Century of Progress and Change," *Hoosier Banker* 81, no. 11 (1997): 6–7, 16.
27. HBW to Forba McDaniel, March 25, 1926 [1927]; McDaniel to HBW, March 26, 1927, April 18, 1927, April 27, 1927; IU Archives/Wells/C75/Box 3/Correspondence McDaniel.
28. H.B. Wells, "Service Charges for Small or So-called Country Banks," M.A. Thesis in Economics, Indiana University, 1927; IU Archives/Wells/C75/Box 9. Quote on 117.
29. Wells, "Service Charges," 87, 88.
30. H.B. Wells, "Service Charges for Small or So-called Country Banks," *Hoosier Banker* 12 (August–September 1927).
31. Robert J. Lampman, ed., *Economists at Wisconsin; 1892–1992* (Madison: University of Wisconsin, Department of Economics, 1993), 35. Over his lifetime, it was estimated that Kiekhofner had around 70,000 students who took his classes.
32. Announcement and picture of HBW in "The Watch Tower," *Hoosier Banker* 13 (July 1928): 13.
33. "The History of Banking in Indiana," *Hoosier Banker* 31 (50th Anniversary Issue, April 1947): 31 ff, quote on 118.
34. *Ibid.*, 116.
35. HBW to Kiekhofner, March 13, 1929; reprinted in Wells, *Being Lucky*, 45.
36. Biddle to HBW, March 2, 1928; *Ibid.*, April 19, 1928; *Ibid.*, May 1, 1929; IU Archives/Wells/C75, Series 1, 1921–69.
37. HBW to Biddle, April 2, 1929; IU Archives/Wells/C75, Series 1, 1921–69.
38. "Hoosier Highways," *Hoosier Banker* 15 (February 1930): 30.
39. *Ibid.*
40. "Hoosier Highways," *Hoosier Banker* 15 (March 1930): 30.
41. Wells, *Being Lucky*, 52.
42. *Ibid.*
43. *Ibid.*
44. Paul Musgrave, "Fractional Reform: Herman Wells and Hoosier Bankers." History Department BA honors thesis, Indiana University, 2004, 42.
45. Study Commission for Indiana Financial Institutions, *Report of the Study Commission for Indiana Financial Institutions* (Indianapolis: Wm. R. Burford Printing Co., 1932), 81; quoted in Musgrave, "Fractional Reform," 46–47.
46. *Ibid.*, 47–48.
47. *Ibid.*, 49–60.
48. Wells, *Being Lucky*, 133.
49. *Ibid.*, 43.
50. *Time*, April 4, 1938; reprinted in Wells, *Being Lucky*, 438.
51. Daisy Woodward Beck, *Once Over Lightly: An Indiana University Story* (Bloomington: n.p., 1961), 45.
52. One definition of "being lucky" put forth by Donald J. Gray, personal communication, April 24, 2008.
53. Fernandus Payne, *Memories and Reflections* (Bloomington: Indiana University,

- 1974), 73–74.
54. Wells, *Being Lucky*, 100–2.
 55. Harold T. Davis, *The Adventures of an Ultra-Crepidarian* (San Antonio: s.n., 1962), 350–51.
 56. Thomas D. Clark, *Indiana University: Midwestern Pioneer*, vol. 3 (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1977), 17.
 57. Wells, *Being Lucky*, 126.
 58. Lander MacClintock, “Wellsian Indiana for 25 Years,” *The Arts and Sciences Review* 40, no. 6 (February 1962): 10–23, quoted on 13, 23.
 59. *Ibid.* MacClintock became a professor of French at Indiana in the 1920s.
 60. Davis, *The Adventures of an Ultra-Crepidarian*, 351. On the IU mathematics faculty, Davis left for Northwestern University as Wells became president, and admired the Wells administration from afar.
 61. *Time*, May 11, 1962; reprinted in Wells, *Being Lucky*, 458–59.
 62. Wells said later: “This deification that has occurred in my case just distressed me to no end. I thought for the good of the university has got to stop.” IU Archives/Wells/Being Lucky files/transcript of taped interview with Edward E. Edwards, Dottie Collins, and Herman B Wells/8/9/74.
 63. Thomas D. Clark, *Indiana University: Midwestern Pioneer*, 4 vols. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1970–77). Containing invaluable information about the university, the volumes remain a monument to historical scholarship, but their focus on narrative flow rather than analytic structure (and the lack of footnotes) has limited their usefulness to later historians.
 64. Merle Curti, review of Thomas D. Clark, *Indiana University: Midwestern Pioneer. Vol. 3, Years of Fulfillment*, *American Historical Review* 83 (1978), 1101.
 65. John Gallman, Rosann Greene, Jim Weigand, and Doug Wilson, eds., *Herman Wells Stories: As Told By His Friends on His 90th Birthday* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992).
 66. Bill Shaw, “A Legend in His Own Time,” *Indianapolis Star* 20 (October 1996): 1, 10.
 67. Wells, *Being Lucky*, 9; Capshew, “Boone County Days.”
 68. Wells, *Being Lucky*, 31.
 69. Hoagy Carmichael, *The Stardust Road* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983; orig. pub. 1946), 13.
 70. HBW, speech, Bloomington Chamber of Commerce, January 31, 1938; IU Archives/Wells/Speech files.
 71. James H. Capshew, “Home Design for Indiana University: Herman B Wells and the Furnishing of the Campus,” *Traces of Indiana and Midwestern History* 14, no. 3 (2002): 28–39.
 72. Herman B Wells speech, dedication of Showalter Fountains, October 22, 1961; IU Archives/Wells/Speech files.
 73. James H. Capshew, “The Campus as a Pedagogical Agent: Herman Wells, Cultural Entrepreneurship, and the Benton Murals,” *Indiana Magazine of History* 105 (2009): 179–97.
 74. Thomas A. Gaines, *The Campus as a Work of Art* (New York: Praeger, 1991).
 75. Allen Nevins, *The State Universities and Democracy* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1962), 104.
 76. See Rothblatt, *The Modern University*, 96–97.
 77. *The Vision of Herman B Wells* (WTIU, 1993).
 78. Wells, *Being Lucky*, 120.

79. On personifying place, Rothblatt suggests: "Pathetic fallacy or not, the ancient practice of attributing personality to structures and precincts is irresistible as a means of explaining the attractions of space. The personal possession of space in the sense of investing it with emotion and significance is a fundamental aspect of culture... The problem is how to bequeath the inheritance, and it is an institutional problem as well as wider one of culture and history." Rothblatt, *The Modern University*, 105.