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Back to College Class: "Gems from IWU History"

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Gems from IWU's History
Back to College for Homecoming, October 8, 2010
by Meg Miner

I'm grateful to be asked to speak here today! Knowing the span of experiences you all have with IWU's history I hope I'll be sharing some new information with you from what I've uncovered while researching questions for others in my five years as your archivist.

And because librarians are all about sharing how to conduct research, I will be showing you some of the ways I've found these things as well as ways that you can learn more on your own.

Much has been written on IWU's history, and it is to those published works that I often turn to for help. [show those books] It's only slightly nerve-wracking to know some of the people who have written these books are here today.

Other records created through our history are invaluable to me, too: the *Argus*, *Wesleyana*, and other pubs are a big part of this, but *Alumni Bulletins*, Commencement programs and the University's course catalogs, believe it or not, are too.

So we'll look at several of these kinds of things and then at a table of mysteries I've brought. After that I hope to hear some of the things you found memorable from your own time at IWU!

[for third slide] Since this is a "Back to School" session, we're going to frame this first part as a pop quiz. Audience participation is required!

Blago slide: just seeing if you're on your toes! Of course Joe Fifer's life is well documented in our printed histories. And Blagojevich has spoken publicly about his family's more recent history of immigration.

The print version of the source linked here has always been available. Historians have used this and other print sources extensively. If you visit the archives you can use them, too. But within the last year all 19th Century student and alumni news periodicals have been made searchable online from anywhere. And it is these sources more than the compiled histories that may be new to you today. What I have found interesting is the ease of finding more information on student life at IWU from the students' perspectives. This example shows Fifer's thoughts about his relationship to the school.

Bonus: what might we turn up if IWU adds another governor's name to her alumni list? I'm sure there's plenty here on Bill Brady! And who knows, maybe he's related to Joe? Here's one photo we have: http://collections.carli.illinois.edu/u/iwu_histph,876

Grad requirement slide:

I actually just learned of the swimming requirement from an alumna during an oral history interview. That's a more recent requirement. Did any of you have that? I haven't been able to document details on this yet.

[Addendum: during the talk, the alumni present helped establish an end date of 1966; the beginning date seems to be in the late 1930s.]

However, the oration requirement is well documented in our commencement programs and in reports from our news sources. Men faced this requirement from our earliest days; the first issue of the *Alumni Journal* in 1870 provides the text of E.R. Moore's oration on the topic "The Problem of the Future," and the first woman's speech is that of Kate Ross's from 1874. She was the first woman to enroll at Wesleyan and reflected on the University's decision four years earlier in a speech titled "Moving On."

The requirement wasn't consistent through our early days but the last time it is listed in our commencement programs was in 1919.

Basketball:

Darrah wrote to the inventor of the sport but men didn't play at first. According to this account women were the first to play in B-N because the sport was considered "a sissy game." The men started playing five years later—that was after it became popular a popular sport—and they took it outdoors. Presumably, this made it more masculine! Now, if you were in my undergraduate research instruction class this would be the time for me to say we need to dig a little more and corroborate this statement. The authors haven't cited their sources!

[Addendum: an alumna suggested the writer might have been Melba Kirkpatrick's husband.]

I was curious about when women's organized sports did finally start. Intercollegiate competition was finally allowed in 1927 but that sport was debate!

We can show there were intramural teams here starting in 1909 and have a photo of the team that year

<http://history.alliancelibrarysystem.com/IllinoisWomen/files/iw/gif2/Iwlrg219.gif>

<http://history.alliancelibrarysystem.com/IllinoisWomen/files/iw/jpg1/Iw000220.jpg>

[digitized from the 1909 Wesleyana for a shared IL Women in Education project]

but it wasn't until 1971 that women's basketball went intercollegiate. The newspapers do have stories on the discussion about women's intercollegiate sport.

[Dec 1926 article says likely won't have intercollegiate sports for women anytime soon

http://collections.carli.illinois.edu/u?iwu_argus,21903]

Nov 1927 debate only form http://collections.carli.illinois.edu/u?iwu_argus,21423

Here's the 1971 article establishing start date

http://collections.carli.illinois.edu/u?iwu_argus,9708

Bonus question: Which sport gets bragging rights as our first intercollegiate effort? Watson (82-83) says intercollegiate sports began in June 1869 with base ball game.

Myers says football varsity team formed in 1890; shown at http://collections.carli.illinois.edu/u?iwu_histph,444

Lincoln:

I brought the faculty minutes with me. This predates our student publications so we don't have their commentary this. But can you imagine that happening today? They'd probably get extra credit!

Oldest building:

Orig built in 1910, with funding from many people including famed library contributor Andrew Carnegie. This structure served as the Science Hall. Renovation due to Hazel Buck Ewing, who asked that it honor Dr. Stevenson. She wasn't the sole contributor; other funds were raised locally and a major contribution came from a federal grant "Health Profession's Educational Assistance Act" designed to encourage schools to expand nursing programs.

First female faculty:

Actually, the first in 1874 was Jennie Willing who was an Elocution and Literature instructor. Women scientists weren't hired until 1919, in Biology and Chemistry. Incidentally, there have been fewer than 50 female science faculty since then with only six becoming full professors in that time. One of my hard working student assistants compiled those numbers from course catalogs in response to a question a few years ago.

First observatory:

The first observatory on our campus was installed in 1894. AC Behr's remarks provide details on the type of telescope installed and its significance.

Interest in observatories on campus predates this, of course, as scientific studies were long a part of our curriculum. Astronomy is listed in our very first catalog, and physics became its own department in 1876.

One news item in the first Alumni Journal (June 1870, p. 29) we have reports on developments in Chicago. In addition to giving us insights into life on campus, student and alumni publications, then and now, report on life outside of campus that people at IWU would find interesting. http://collections.carli.illinois.edu/u?iwu_argus,30963

First women students:

Probably a lot of you know we admitted women in 1870, but a vote actually did take place in 1851 when it was determined to be "inexpedient" to admit women. (Watson 37 and 199 footnote 4 says this is in Trustees proceedings.) Watson also tells us the faculty brought the idea to the BOT twice in 1870 but it hasn't been clear why it that vote took place then or why it succeeded then. A recent column in the Bloomington Pantagraph made a connection click for me: Susan B. Anthony spoke in Bloomington in

March 1870. Our faculty resolution is dated March 16, 1870. Frankly, that's a bit too much of a coincidence for me. [physical exhibit]

And just over 100 years after Susan B. Anthony's visit to the area an ironic headline offers a bit of a laugh. Can anyone shed light on this issue? [No one could.]

Record book:

This 1995 article was a fun little tidbit that I found early on here. We have many claims to fame but who knew city planning would lead to one of them?

Tuition substitute:

This is one of my favorites. Early on I found this reel of film. Thinking it was a record of a President speaking, which we don't have much of from our earlier time, I had the film recreated on a DVD for viewing and sharing. At the time, I hadn't heard about the tuition exchange program and was excited to find corroboration in documents, too. A teachable moment from this is the conflict between what was handwritten on the box [Nov. 1928] versus the content of the film, which was obviously incorrect. The documents establish the chain of events leading up to this film and then the media outcomes afterwards.

[take film canister, Alumni Bulletin; link to Argus and film]

Mysteries:

The Lackland uniform: Leonard Lackland, member of the Class of 1894 and also a Trustee here for 48 years. Curiously, I did find a 1930 band photo with people wearing similar looking uniforms. The donor said the family legend is that Leonard wore this on campus in 1889, though.

[Addendum: an alum commented afterwards that he had known the Lacklands and that the small size of the uniform was appropriate since he had been a small man. I had wondered if it was a uniform from when Lackland was younger. The alum also commented that Leonard had encouraged him to attend IWU.]

A chisel and a Fifer Medallion I know nothing about.

We have two 1896 news articles, one from campus and one from the city, that say two Chinese students were planning to attend IWU. This was AFTER the Japanese Law students in 1890. But maybe we can say the Chinese students would be the first international undergraduates? Both mention the father (Sia Sek Ong) and he seems to be a faculty member in the papers, but the mystery is there is no mention of the father in our lists of faculty or of students by that name ever taking classes at IWU. Quite curious! Note also Vice President Stevenson's involvement.

There are more photos that need identification than just the ones on our website, but there are plenty there to start with.

And then of course, there are your stories that are a mystery to me. Anyone have any to share?