

## Alma Pater: Herman B Wells and the Rise of Indiana University

BY JAMES H. CAPSHEW

(*Alma Pater*: Latin=bounteous father [Almus Pater]; cf. Alma Mater)

### Introduction

The new century had not lost its shine when Herman B Wells was born in Jamestown, Indiana, in 1902. His father, Joseph Granville Wells, a teacher and farmer, was working all day in the fields on June 7, while his mother, Anna Bernice Wells, labored at home for several hours. When Granville returned home in the evening, his wife and newborn son greeted him. The parents could not have been prouder.

This unique boy had an unusual middle name, the letter "B." Its spelling, without a period, would later give fits to generations of copy editors. By the time Herman Wells reached adulthood he used it regularly, lending a note of distinctiveness and formality to his given name.

From all accounts, his own included, Wells had a normal childhood, growing up in Boone County, first at Jamestown and later at Lebanon, the county seat. He was graduated from Lebanon High School in 1920. His classmates voted him "Funniest" and "Best All-Round Boy."

Young Wells started college at the University of Illinois. As a sophomore in 1921, he transferred to Indiana University and pledged Sigma Nu fraternity. He fell in love with the Hoosier university, with its stately limestone halls set in the wooded campus. He pursued a business degree from the newly opened School of Commerce, specializing in economics, and received his bachelor's degree in 1924, one of 389 students graduating that year.

After graduation, Wells returned home and worked for two years as an assistant cashier at the National Bank of Lebanon, where his father was employed as cashier. Wells then returned to Bloomington and completed a master's degree in economics in 1927. At the urging of his instructors, he began studies toward the Ph.D. in economics at the University of Wisconsin. Wisconsin was at that time considered a progressive state with a close connection between academic knowledge and the formation of government policy. The Wisconsin period came to an end in 1928, however, when after two years of course work and research Wells was called back to serve as the field secretary of the Indiana Bankers Association. In that role he put his academic training into practice, spearheading the reform of the Indiana banking system, which had experienced serious difficulties since the 1921 recession.

During this period Wells got his first taste of college teaching, as an instructor in economics. Appointed to the faculty of Indiana University in 1930, he excelled as a teacher, inspiring students with his characteristic blend of enthusiasm and erudition. Between 1933 and 1935 Wells juggled three full-time jobs: Secretary for the Indiana Commission for Financial Institutions; supervisor of the Division of Research and Statistics, Indiana Department of Financial Institutions; and bank supervisor for the same state agency. His administrative talent was well recognized and in 1935 president William Lowe Bryan appointed Wells dean of the

School of Business Administration. In this new capacity, Wells instituted major curricular reforms and recruited several new faculty members.

In May 1937 president Bryan resigned unexpectedly, and Wells was tapped as acting president. He recounts his selection with modest charm in his autobiography, *Being Lucky*:

*I told Judge Wildermuth [IU Board of Trustees president] that I would undertake the acting presidency if he would promise not to consider me for the position as president. I also recall a great sense of inadequacy in undertaking the office. In other words, I was just plain frightened at the prospect of stepping into the position that William Lowe Bryan had held with great distinction for thirty-five years.<sup>1</sup>*

Wells served for 25 years as president and was universally recognized as the architect of the university's rise to greatness. In essence, he became the *alma pater* of Indiana University, his *alma mater*.

## **Vision for Indiana University**

December 1, 1938, was sunny and unseasonably warm in Bloomington, Indiana. On the main campus of Indiana University, classes were cancelled so students could attend the inauguration of IU's eleventh president, Herman B Wells, taking place in the fieldhouse at 11 a.m. It was a serious ritual, if a bit rusty due to lack of practice. The institution had had only eight presidents after Andrew Wylie's death in 1851 and had enjoyed remarkable constancy with the long tenure of its tenth president, William Lowe Bryan, who served from 1902 to 1937.

The patrician Bryan, who had recently turned 78, introduced Wells with a playful nod to their disparate ages. He said, addressing Wells:

*Thirty-six years ago you and I were beginners. I was beginning what was thought to be a difficult and sometimes dangerous enterprise. You were beginning what is known to be a more difficult and more dangerous enterprise. I began with very little experience and very little idea of what I should have to live through. At the same date you had no experience and no idea of what you would have to live through. I took my risk and somehow lived through it. You took your risk and here you are at 36, eleventh president of Indiana University, and more than that, my son, a man.<sup>2</sup>*

Wells began his inaugural address with a note of gratitude to Bryan, lauding him for leading the university through its greatest period of "growth in physical and intellectual resources" and thanking him personally for his support.

Lest there be any doubt about the new president's priorities, he put them to rest in that speech:

*The University cannot discharge any of its obligations to society unless it is first and foremost an institution dedicated to scholarship and scholarly objectives: a place where students learn the slow and arduous processes of mental discipline by which knowledge is acquired and wisdom won; a place where the frontiers of new truth are pushed back by the research explorer and old truth is subjected to critical analysis until it assumes new significance; a place where reason is exalted over emotion and force.<sup>3</sup>*

Wells went on to enunciate the role of education in a democracy. He harked back to the origins of Indiana University in 1820 and urged that the university provide leadership as an example of democratic governance: "Authority must be derived from reason, not from position."<sup>4</sup>

The inauguration of Wells was noted by the state and national media. *Newsweek* magazine included a story calling attention to his relative youth and highlighting his *joie de vivre*:

*Wells is noted for indefatigability -- and a habit of regarding anything of his own as the best there is. "When he carried a paper route," says his father, "his paper was the best in the world." He now applies that attitude to Indiana University.*<sup>5</sup>

Wells was quoted at the end of the ceremony by the Indianapolis Star: "Well, I'm glad its over - the trouble is, it's just begun!"<sup>6</sup>

## Student Empowerment

Promoting a climate of democracy on campus, Wells embodied empathy in his dealings with all people and quickly developed a reputation among the student body as friendly and fair. One afternoon each week, the president held open office hours in Bryan Hall. Ernie Pyle, a friend of Wells since the 1920s and a renowned journalist, describes the scene in 1940:

*He sees students constantly by appointment, and one afternoon a week anybody can come to see him. They sit in front of the fireplace in his office, and gab out their hearts. Students bring their troubles to Hermie, their love affairs, their financial troubles, the little jams they're in. I doubt there's another university president in America who wins more little confidences from his charges than Hermie Wells does.*<sup>7</sup>

Wells was also a supporter of student governance, and went on record in 1944: "I have long favored student self-government and I shall be glad to do anything in my power to aid in the movement."<sup>8</sup> In that same year, a constitution was approved by the student body, and it received approval from the faculty and the board of trustees.

With quiet determination, Wells worked to end racial segregation in dining services and living accommodations on campus, as well as to eliminate discrimination in intercollegiate athletics. The story of these efforts is recounted in *Being Lucky*. Not so widely known are his personal efforts to befriend African-American students. In 1937 Wells hired John L. Stewart, a young black man working his way toward an undergraduate zoology degree, to serve as a residential houseman at his Woodburn House home. Stewart later described life with Wells:

*I was the general houseman, the janitor, the chauffeur, the fireman, the waiter, the yardman, and occasionally the cook. Duties at times seemingly had no beginning and no ending. My general usefulness took on added significance when I had from time to time to share my opinion in the preparation of some of Acting President Wells' speeches and in some of his considerations on administrative problems pertaining to race relations on campus.*<sup>9</sup>

Stewart went on to a distinguished career as a faculty member and administrator at North Carolina College in Durham, a historically black institution. He was followed by dozens of other young men of nearly all races down to the present day. Working for the Wells household, a

long and distinguished tradition, became a signal honor.<sup>10</sup> At the close of his presidency, Wells received the NAACP Brotherhood Award for 1961-62. The citation reads:

*We consider that we have been partners with you over the years in the task of lessening prejudice and unreason, and that both you and we can feel satisfaction in the result. Both Indiana University and Bloomington are far better places, in terms of race relations, than they were a quarter-century ago. We gladly acknowledge the support, usually quiet and unobtrusive, which you have given to our organization at various critical stages in this struggle; and we are happy to attest the various initiatives of yours to purge official University policy of all discrimination.<sup>11</sup>*

During the 25-year tenure of the Wells presidency, the student population grew from 5,000 to 16,000. As a gesture of solidarity and good will, Wells signed each one of the 62,621 diplomas awarded in those years, putting his mark on every graduate of Indiana University. He explained:

*During the past 25 years I personally signed the diplomas of all graduates. Neither printing press nor mechanical device of any type has been used to multiply my signature. Each diploma has been read as well as signed, one at a time. This has given me a sense of direct identification with each graduate. Many of the names I have recognized, recalling pleasant contacts and mutual experiences during college days. In other cases the names have brought to mind fathers, mothers, or other relatives of my undergraduate era or earlier. But whether I recognized the name or not, in the act of signing I felt some individual participation in the joy and satisfaction of each graduate who had won his degree with conscientious work and application.<sup>12</sup>*

## **Faculty Cultivation**

Soon after he became president, Wells undertook a program to attract the best and brightest faculty members to Indiana, promising "the means and the freedom to do their work." In the year as acting president, he traveled over 33,000 miles by train and automobile to interview 190 prospective faculty members. In the first five years of the Wells administration faculty turnover was remarkable. Out of the Bloomington faculty cohort of approximately 225, a total of 94 were recruited between 1937 and 1942 and 146 professors were either retired or left the university for other reasons. In August 1942 Wells reported to the trustees:

*A university cannot render distinguished service to its constituency without a distinguished faculty; therefore, the selection of faculty personnel is of first importance. During these five years, more time and effort have been spent in examination and selection of faculty than in the performance of any other duty.<sup>13</sup>*

Looking back, a humanities faculty member, Lander MacClintock, hired at IU in 1920, noted one of the hallmarks of "Wellsian Indiana": "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."<sup>14</sup>

One of the first areas Wells concentrated on was the natural sciences. Physics got a new foundation with the hiring of several faculty members in nuclear physics and the construction of one of the first cyclotrons in the United States. The instrument, located in the western wing

of Swain Hall, produced its first beam one evening in April 1941. The excited physicists called President Wells and reached him at his office in Bryan Hall, where he was working late as usual. He brought a bottle over to Swain Hall to offer his congratulations.

The biological sciences got a tremendous boost with the recruitment of Tracy Sonneborn, a brilliant geneticist studying *Paramecia*. He was followed by Herman J. Muller, a famous *Drosophila* geneticist, who received the Nobel Prize in 1946. Subsequently Muller became an outspoken advocate of nuclear safety. Psychology, a department that was founded by Wells' predecessor Bryan, got a new start with the hiring of B.F. Skinner, a young behavioral scientist.

Wells also encouraged senior faculty members in their research. For instance, he supported the work of Stith Thompson, a folklore specialist in the English department since 1921. Wells made a standing offer to exceed any outside offers when other universities tried to lure Thompson away. Thompson was instrumental in setting up the IU folklore program, in addition to serving as dean of the University Graduate School after World War II. In another, perhaps more famous instance, Wells was a staunch supporter of Alfred Kinsey's transition from the study of insects (gall wasps) to the investigation of human sexual behavior. A member of the biology faculty since 1920, Kinsey waited until the start of the Wells administration to undertake his controversial studies. The faculty, old and new alike, felt Wells' contagious enthusiasm for the advancement of the university.

## **Protecting Intellectual Freedom**

One of Wells' bedrock principles was intellectual freedom. He provided faculty with physical space and material resources to conduct teaching and research, but he was equally concerned that they have the liberty to venture into uncharted academic territory. In what became perhaps the most celebrated instance of the protection of academic freedom in the middle years of the 20th century, Wells doggedly took on Alfred Kinsey's detractors, giving the university an enviable reputation as a bastion of free inquiry.

Kinsey, a taxonomist by training and a collector by habit, became a "starred" entry in the 1938 edition of *American Men of Science*, a standard biographical source, for his entomological work on the variation and distribution of gall wasps, an insect about the size of a small ant. The respected biologist was equally adept at teaching, and authored a high school biology textbook in 1926 that took "a new approach to presenting physiology, heredity, ecology, distributive biology, and some of the other sciences."<sup>15</sup> In 1938, he organized the so-called "Marriage Course," which consisted of lectures in the biology, psychology, sociology, and ethics of sex and reproduction. Naturally, students approached him for answers to their question about sexual matters. Disturbed by the lack of scientific information on the topic, Kinsey started to interview students about their sex histories in an attempt to gather more data. The research expanded and he gave up the marriage course in 1940, to the relief of some. Soon the National Research Council was funding the collection and analysis of sex histories in the newly formed IU Institute for Sex Research.

Kinsey set an impossible goal to gather 100,000 histories, but when he and his coworkers collected 11,000 over eight years of research, he decided to publish *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (1948). A few months before publication, Wells sent a memo to the IU Executive

Committee, saying the book was bound to be controversial. He outlined the administration's response:

*It seems to me it is essential that we stand firm in our support of the book and the research. We are not called upon to endorse the findings, but are called upon to stand firm in support of the importance of the project and the right to publish it. Any less than that would be fatal. We would lose the respect and services of our best faculty men and respect of the scholarly world generally.<sup>16</sup>*

In the word of an IU historian: "Wells then expressed the belief that the work would be of fundamental importance and in time would be accepted as such by the public."<sup>17</sup>

The book was a bestseller. In two months, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* sold more than 200,000 copies and was reviewed widely in newspapers and popular magazines as well as the clinical and scientific press. It stimulated a national dialogue on sexual behavior and attitudes, engendering praise for its objective reporting and scientific tone and criticism for reducing sex to statistics and for contributing to moral decay.

Kinsey's research continued, and when the second volume, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female*, appeared in 1953, Wells issued the following statement:

*Indiana University stands today, as it has for 15 years, firmly in support of the scientific research project that has been undertaken and is being carried out by one of its eminent biological scientists, Dr. Alfred C. Kinsey. The University believes that the human race has been able to make progress because individuals have been free to investigate all aspects of life. It further believes that only through scientific knowledge so gained can we find the cures for the emotional and social maladies in our society. . . . I agree in saying that we have large faith in the values of knowledge, little faith in ignorance.<sup>18</sup>*

Kinsey's program of sex research presented an extraordinary challenge to Wells in maintaining his principle of intellectual freedom for the faculty. It also challenged his tact and diplomacy. Biographers of Kinsey, past and present, have pointed out the essential role that Wells played in supporting Kinsey's research and protecting him from attack by zealots who called repeatedly for the professor's resignation.<sup>19</sup> In *Being Lucky*, Wells wrote:

*Looking back over the experience, I am now convinced that the importance we attached to the defense of the Kinsey Institute was not exaggerated. Time has proved that the defense was important, not only for the understanding of sexual activity, but also for the welfare of the university. It reinforced the faculty's sense of freedom to carry on their work without fear of interference, and it established in the public mind that the university had an integrity that could not be bought, pressured, or subverted. I feel that the stand enormously increased the respect people has for the university, even those people who were bitter opponents of the Kinsey project. Over time, for a university's reputation nothing rivals courage, integrity, and impartiality in the protection of its scholars.<sup>20</sup>*

## Growing the Green Campus

Lasting a quarter-century, the Wells administration saw tremendous growth in the student body, an enormous expansion of the physical plant in Bloomington, and an astonishing proliferation of academic and extra-curricular programs. The student body stood at about 5,000 at the time of Wells' inauguration in 1938. During the war, the number of full-time students declined slightly, but the campus was home to Army and Navy accelerated training programs. After the war, student numbers burgeoned with the advent of federal aid to veterans, known as the G.I. Bill. In a single year, enrollment doubled, from 5,000 (in 1945-46) to 10,000 (in 1946-47), causing a three-week delay in the start of classes in 1946.

The postwar needs for housing and classroom space were overwhelming, but Wells used his legendary genius to solve the problem. He imported military-surplus Quonset huts, trailers, and temporary buildings of all sizes and shapes to accommodate the growing campus. He also instructed Alice Nelson, director of the Halls of Residence, to begin a massive dormitory-building program. "The Wells mandate that no qualified student be turned away from the campus was to be carried out in the decade of 1950-60 in one of the most dramatic student housing programs in American academic history."<sup>21</sup> But academic needs for classrooms and laboratories were not neglected. In the 1930s the campus grew beyond the Old Crescent, adding several new structures on Third Street - Myers Hall, the Music Building, and the University School. With the help of federal funds for construction, the infrastructure received necessary upgrades, and the power plant was moved to Tenth Street in 1955. Early in the Wells administration, Woodburn Hall (the new home of the School of Business) and the IU Auditorium were opened, extending the campus eastward along Seventh Street. On the Old Crescent, an addition to the old biology building (since renamed Swain Hall) was completed in 1940, giving new quarters to the physics department and the cyclotron. Biology eventually moved to Jordan Hall in 1955. In 1956, the School of Law building at Third Street and Indiana Avenue transformed the crescent into a circle of academic halls surrounding Dunn's Woods. The Indiana Memorial Union expanded westward in 1957 with bowling alleys, the solarium, and an outdoor terrace; three years later the Biddle Continuation Center on the east was opened, containing a hotel and conference facilities. Plans were laid for a new classroom and office building for the social sciences and humanities, completed in 1959 and named Ballantine Hall. Before Wells left office, the design of new buildings for psychology, geology, and business along Tenth Street was set.

Meanwhile, Wells was acquiring land for future expansion of the university. At the close of the Bryan era, the total campus land area was 137 acres; at the close of the Wells years, it had increased ten-fold. Like his forerunners, Wells was intent on preserving the woodland character of the campus, and he was fiercely protective of trees and green space. He said: "To cut a tree unnecessarily has long been a act of treason against our heritage and the loyalty, love, and effort of our predecessors who have preserved it for us."<sup>22</sup> In his last commencement as president, he told the graduating class of 1962:

*I hope that our alumni will always insist on retention of our precious islands of green and serenity -- our most important physical asset, transcending even classrooms, libraries, and laboratories in their ability to inspire students to dream long dreams of future usefulness and achievement -- dreams that are an important and essential part of undergraduate college experience.<sup>23</sup>*

Wells' interest in the total educational environment was appreciated by students, faculty, and staff who worked on campus daily, as well as guests and townspeople who visited occasionally. Paul Weatherwax, an alumnus, faculty member, and eminent botanist, wrote in 1974:

*Within the memory of alumni and former students, Indiana University has grown to be one of the great educational, cultural, and scientific centers of the world. A unique facet of its many-sided character is its campus with much of its original association of plant and animal life. There are few places in the world where great laboratories, classrooms, libraries, auditoriums, and other such centers of intellectual and artistic creativity are located in an environment which retains its primeval character -- few places were one may so quickly and so completely cast off the tensions and anxieties of this complex modern world in quiet meditation.<sup>24</sup>*

## **Bringing the World to Bloomington**

Wells, named the youngest college president in America in 1938, had traveled extensively around his home state, particularly in his capacity as field secretary of the Indiana Banker's Association, beginning a decade earlier. He visited rural banks in the state's 92 counties and developed ties with bankers and other members of the commercial elite. Those ties, in turn, connected him naturally to local politics and state civic culture and provided him with a firm foundation in his later dealings with the state legislature. As acting president of IU for a year, Wells traveled over 33,000 miles in search of new faculty.

In a time of American isolationism, Indiana University developed an impressive array of international programs, ranging from the teaching of foreign languages to area studies focused on the history and culture of various regions of the world. Through his administrative guidance and support, Wells infused the university with an international outlook. He credits a two-month journey to South America in the summer of 1941, his first overseas, with a dramatic change: "the experience enlarged my perspective in a way that was to have a profound influence on my view of Indiana University's province. All at once I became conscious of the world scene."<sup>25</sup>

World War II provided Wells with further travel opportunities. In 1943-44 he worked for the State Department's Office of Foreign Economic Cooperation in Washington, D.C., shuttling back and forth between Bloomington and the capital city. He served as chairman of the American Council on Education in 1944-45, the top elected position in national education circles, and was the organization's delegate to the San Francisco Conference that set up the United Nations. After the war, in 1946, he spent three months in Greece, observing the democratic elections as member of a tri-partite United States/France/Great Britain commission.

Wells journeyed to Europe again as the cultural affairs advisor to the military government in Germany, spending six months on leave from IU to work for General Lucius Clay in 1947-48. Part of the Marshall Plan to rebuild war-torn Europe, he was in charge of the educational system, religious affairs, publishing, youth activities, and women's affairs, among other elements of German cultural life. He also played an essential role in establishing the Free University of Berlin.

But Wells was needed at home, to oversee the enormous expansion of Indiana University. After the German sojourn, he declined other offers of international service for a time, with a couple of important exceptions. The first was serving as a member of the U.S. delegation to the Twelfth Session of the United Nations General Assembly in 1957, followed by a trip to the U.S.S.R. in the summer of 1958 to establish scholarly exchange programs with U.S. universities.

As he made the transition from president to chancellor, Wells served as the executive director of the Education and World Affairs foundation for six years, starting in 1962. In a comparative study of international programs at six universities, Wells was quoted: Through the years, Indiana University has tried to preach the gospel that to be a university of the first rank in this day and age, it must keep its eye on Birdseye [a small village in Southern Indiana] and on Bangkok, and, of course, on Bloomington. Birdseye is our constituency, but there is more than one Birdseye.<sup>26</sup>

Wells translated his concern with the world scene by supporting international programs across the board. He was instrumental in setting up technical assistance programs in education in other regions, most notably in Thailand and Pakistan, in which IU faculty gave curricular and administrative aid to foreign universities. Expanding foreign language options for IU students was a top priority, and the university became known for the study of exotic languages in their cultural context. Wells also was a genial host to foreign students, which numbered almost 1,000 in 1962 (out of a student population of 16,000).

Over the course of his long career, Wells traveled several million miles, combining educational business with recreation and cultural exploration. The total count of countries he visited stands well over 100. Wells explained in *Being Lucky*: "I have always had itchy feet and I hope to keep traveling as long as I live."<sup>27</sup>

## **Developing Culture on Campus**

Although Wells maintained the university's focus on research and advanced training, he also made a profound commitment to cultivate the arts. A firm believer in the arts as an essential component of liberal education, he sought to increase students' exposure to the visual and performing arts. Offerings in music, fine arts, and theater and drama expanded greatly as IU became more than a training ground for arts educators. With the help of a faculty drawn from the non-academic world of performance, talented students could develop their artistic creativity and perfect their own presentation skills.

A few months after his inauguration as president, Wells was described in *Reader's Digest* as "the dynamo of Indiana culture, the man who is striving to bring culture to the crossroads." The reporter went on to say:

*The most unusual thing about him is his belief that a modern state university should not be a stay-at-home; that it should go out and aggressively carry its message to all the people. Through forums, music, drama, movies, radio, he is pushing the influence of Indiana University to the farthest corners of the state. As a result, housewives, steel workers, farmers, with no thought of diplomas, are getting a cultural education at home. "I'll not be satisfied," Wells says, "till we have a symphony orchestra in every county, singing societies and art classes for all who want them, a little theater group in every town hall."<sup>28</sup>*

The opening of the Indiana University Auditorium in 1941 launched a splendid venue for performances and lectures, with space for the embryonic program in theatre and drama. In the great entry foyer, Thomas Hart Benton installed the murals he had painted for the 1933 World's Fair in Chicago, representing "The Cultural and Industrial History of Indiana." In the early years of his presidency, Wells had rescued the paintings from their storage site, a cow barn on the state fairgrounds, and acquired them for Indiana University. In 1942, the Metropolitan Opera Company of New York City inaugurated its annual performances at the Auditorium, which continued until 1961. Previously, the company had made annual tours to Chicago, Boston, Cleveland, and Atlanta, but had never appeared in a small university town. On the occasion of one of the performances, Wells noted:

*The visit of the world's greatest opera organization and your presence here are a part of a plan and of an objective of Indiana University. Both are steps in the program of the university to make the whole state of Indiana its campus, and to that ever-widening campus to bring the best in music and the finest in artistic expression. There are larger universities in America. There are older universities in America. There are none, however, more typical of the American ideal of educational opportunity for all youth and cultural leadership for all citizens.<sup>29</sup>*

Under the guidance of Dean Wilfred Bain from 1947 to 1972, the School of Music was making tremendous strides. One of the early initiatives was the Opera Workshop, which blossomed into a full-scale student program, starting with the annual presentation of Wagner's *Parsifal* in 1948 and expanding to the production of seven operas in the academic year 1957-58.

One of Wells' dreams was to create a sector of the campus devoted to the arts and humanities. The dedication in 1960 of the Lilly Library, adjacent to the Auditorium, the finest rare book and manuscript repository between the coasts, occasioned these remarks by Wells:

*In America we have never sought to construct a capital of culture. Instead, we have attempted to distribute across our land the rich fruit of man's mental effort in the same way as we share among all of our people the wealth of our farms and factories.<sup>30</sup>*

The Fine Arts Plaza was rounded out with the installation of the Showalter Fountain in 1961 and the completion of the School of Fine Arts in 1962. Since that time, Wells was involved as a supporter, financial as well as moral, for the IU Art Museum, which opened in 1982.

## **Educational Statesmanship**

Shrewd, charming, and energetic, Wells was prepared to leverage the impressive achievements of the Bryan era as a springboard for the university's great leap forward. He had high expectations for all those concerned with the welfare of IU, including himself. Relentless in his quest to make the university better, he was remarkably successful in enlisting supporters to the cause. His vision of Indiana as a great university was pragmatic rather than utopian. He knew that academic quality depended on creating conditions in which students and faculty could learn and grow to their full potential. People were his passion, and he cultivated contacts with all members of the university community. A faculty colleague noted:

*The administrative climate at Indiana is strongly imbued, I think, by the image of the President. . . . No matter how frequent disagreements between faculty and*

*administrative personnel at Indiana may be (and often it is not a question of conflict between right and wrong but of perspective -- each justified from different angles), one rarely has the sensation of running up against a wall. One rather has the feeling: if I do not get through today, I may get through next week or next month or next semester. There is nothing frozen about positions at Indiana; above all, there is an abundance of personal good will, of anti-stiffness, of fluidity that is particularly encouraging to junior members of the faculty (often frustrated at other outstanding institutions) and that is conducive to imaginative ventures into non-traditional areas (witness the extraordinary stature of Indiana in interdepartmental programs). The President certainly has much to do with this. Narrowness, inflexibility, picayunishness are completely foreign to him. Among his admirable traits, none is more so than what seems to be his total inability to take personal offense.<sup>31</sup>*

Wells possessed the instincts of a natural executive, always planning for the long haul but taking care of business day to day. His philosophy was simple, as he noted in *Being Lucky*:

*Remind yourself daily that general administration must be the servant, never the master, of the academic community. It is not an end unto itself and exists only to further the academic enterprise. It follows, therefore, that generally the least administration possible is the best.<sup>32</sup>*

Wells kept his keen eye on the horizon. For example, in March 1951, he published a seven-page article on the work of Alfred Kinsey and the Institute for Sex Research. The furor over the 1948 volume *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* was over, and the equally controversial volume on females was two years in the future. In a letter to Kinsey, Wells gave his rationale for the article: "I was not prompted by any upsurge of reaction but by the belief that in public relations the offensive and precautionary measures are the most effective."<sup>33</sup>

In the official presidential portrait, taken in the 1950s, Wells is the jovial man ringing an old-fashioned school bell, representing his vocation as a teacher as well as linking him to his family history. At his right sits a Tibetan beggar's bowl, symbolizing his job garnering material resources for the university. His left hand rests on a large globe, signifying what he liked to call his "parish" or the arena in which the university operates. Indiana University is located in Bloomington, Indiana, but its network of people and programs encompasses the world. Finally, Wells is standing in front of an open window with trees in full leaf in the background, connoting his interest in the natural environment of education.

Wells was a legendary fundraiser. All through his presidency he also held the post of president of the Indiana University Foundation, which was begun in 1936. When he became University Chancellor he retained his position as head of the foundation and worked tirelessly to gather funds for the university. On the occasion of the 150th Birthday Fund, kicked off in 1970, he said:

*All of us in the educational field are especially conscious of the essential impetus philanthropy has supplied in assisting our institutions to become centers for the performing and creative arts; in sustaining scientific, medical, and similar research; in backing innovative programs that opened new vistas for scholars and ultimately for the public; in providing enabling scholarships and fellowships; and in giving men with uncommon ideas an opportunity to test them and often to discover new truths.<sup>34</sup>*

At his retirement in 1962, Time magazine reported: "Economist Wells proved to be a master at charming cash out of state legislators, and he used the funds to buy academic quality."<sup>35</sup> He loved to quote an old Chinese proverb: "If you are planning for a year ahead . . . sow rice. For ten years . . . plant trees. For a hundred years . . . educate people."<sup>36</sup>

Herman B Wells built an institution, and in the process, become one himself. Since his student days in the 1920s, he devoted his long life to serving his alma mater, transforming his personal ambition into an altruistic concern with higher education in his native state. Forgoing a traditional family, Wells cultivated personal relationships with a wide variety of students, faculty, alumni, and friends, making them a part of the great IU clan. His humanistic charisma and empathetic character were combined with talents for institutional finance to ensure the future of Indiana University. As president and then chancellor, he came to personify the ideals of education, the values of teaching and scholarship, and the spirit of Indiana.

*I dedicate this essay to the memory of Ray K. Maesaka, D.D.S. (1933-2000), who with his huge Hawaiian heart was a loyal houseman and devoted colleague of Herman B Wells and was an exemplary scholar-teacher and generous benefactor to his alma mater, Indiana University.*

*-- James H. Capshew*

- 1** Herman B Wells, *Being Lucky* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), 94-95.
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