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## What is the Michigan Union?

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## WHAT IS THE MICHIGAN UNION?

The fundamental idea upon which the University of Michigan Union is formed is the invention or conception of no one individual or group of individuals. The inevitable product of inherent and universal human traits and aspirations, developed and intensified by local conditions, the Union is based upon an idea; it is compelled by forces which are imperative, persistent and irresistible, which will not

be denied, but which must ultimately result in some realization of the hopes and plans of practically all of Michigan's constituency. This idea found expression in somewhat definite form in plans proposed at least eight years ago; while as a hope or aspiration more or less vaguely expressed the idea is of much earlier origin and has been shared by hundreds of alumni and students. So widespread and deep

is the want which the Union was formed to fill, that by the fall of 1903 it was in condition to find life and expression almost spontaneously in some form of organization. Mr. Emory Thomason, then managing editor of the *Michigan Daily*, was one of those who had definite conceptions of what that organization should be, and plans for bringing it about. On Dec. 5, 1903, the *Michigan Daily* printed interviews with President Angell and others in which some of the advantages of a Union were set forth. A few weeks later the spark necessary to transmute these hopes and this enthusiasm into effective life was furnished by Michiganua, a senior society, in the shape of a call for a meeting of representatives of all University organizations, to consider ways and means of attaining the desired end. Pursuant to that call, representatives of student organizations and members of the faculty met and formed a "Committee for the organization of a Union." This committee after much deliberation adopted the plan reported by a sub-committee contemplating the incorporation under the laws of this state of a "Union" for students, alumni, faculty and regents, the building of an adequate club-house for the "Union," and as formally inaugurating the movement and contributing to the accomplishment of its general purposes, the giving of a great dinner on Nov. 11, 1903, to be the first of a series of Michigan dinners. The first of these purposes has been realized in the incorporation of the University of Michigan Union, with President Angell, other members of the faculties and students as incorporators. The list also includes several alumni. The dinner was given at the appointed date, and the eleven hundred men who were fortunate enough to be present must always remember it as far surpassing all other Michigan banquets in point of the number of persons present and in the unbounded Michigan enthusiasm and loyalty displayed.

Why was it that that dinner of Nov. 11, 1904, outclassed all prior Michigan gatherings of a similar nature in the respects indicated? Unquestionably because it afforded to what has been called the "Michigan body" its first opportunity to express itself unitedly and understandingly in favor of an idea and a plan which seem to practically our entire constituency to be Michigan's great need, paramount to all others. The significance of a sentiment and of a hope which can produce such an unprecedented demonstration is well worth pondering. The other purpose, the building of a house for the Union, yet remains to be achieved.

So much for the origin and history of the Union. But *what is the Union? For what does it stand, and what does it hope to accomplish?* As its name indicates it is an organization, a union for all Michigan men, graduates, faculty and regents. Its avowed objects are to promote university spirit, and to increase social intercourse and acquaintance with each other's work among the members of the different departments and other University organizations. As a means to these ends, and to some extent as an end in itself, it is proposed, as soon as funds can be secured, to erect a great building, call it club-house, hall or what you will, to be a home for the Union and headquarters in Ann Arbor for all Michigan men. It is intended that this club-house shall include the following features:

1. A large living room where students, the faculty and visiting alumni may meet at any time.
2. Rooms for college organizations, for the Alumni Association, for college publications, and Faculty club-rooms.
3. A large assembly room for meetings, college theatricals, lectures, concerts, etc.
4. A restaurant and café, the training table and banquet rooms.
5. A smoking room and a reading room.

6. A library of the best recent history, biography, science, fiction, belle-lettres, etc.

7. Equipment for bowling, billiards, etc.

8. Bed rooms and a dormitory for distinguished guests and visiting alumni.

In short this building will be a Michigan man's Ann Arbor club or home; it will be the center, and an inspiring center, of all University activity and social life, in the broad and better sense of the term social.

It may be well to call attention here to some things that this building will not be or include.

1. In no sense of the word will it be a hotel. The bed-rooms and dormitories will be for the exclusive use of University guests, such as lecturers and commencement orators and alumni. This will be an incidental feature, and the building will be so designed that that portion of it devoted to these purposes can be easily shut off when not in use from the rest of the house, and thus stop expense.

2. It will not include the objectionable features of city clubs. There will be no bar. The use of intoxicating liquors and all species of gambling will be absolutely prohibited.

3. It will not be a dormitory or lodging-club for students. No rooms will be let for this purpose.

As has been indicated, one of the principal benefits which it is hoped will accrue from this organization is the promotion and increase of a proper university spirit. The advantages to the students as individuals and to the University itself from such increased spirit are too apparent to require mention. The Union should come to be a quasi-official means of communication between faculty and students. It should and doubtless would make its influence felt in the right direction in all questions affecting student life primarily, but also in matters vitally affecting the University

itself, such as the "graft" question, student customs and perhaps the "honor system" at examinations. The Anglo-Saxon community, young or old, has always demonstrated capacity for self-government, and it can hardly be doubted that the students at Michigan could and would do much for themselves, which now remains undone, under such guidance and regulation and with such machinery as the Union would afford. Some of these things can be done to some extent by the Union irrespective of the club-house; but the club-house would be a most important agency in doing them effectively and in accomplishing many other things which are entirely wholesome and commendable. Indeed, the permanence of the Union as an effective working force for the good of university life, is dependent, undoubtedly, upon its ability to secure an adequate home.

For one who realizes that human nature is essentially social, that the social instinct is wholesome and commendable, that it is never more strong and insistent than at the student age, it is difficult to comprehend how anyone can doubt the wisdom of providing an adequate and wholesome outlet, which shall lead this instinct along healthful and inspiring lines, rather than to let it waste itself, or find expression in ways and places deleterious to student welfare in every respect. It is this function which the Union proposes for itself and its club-house. One has only to recall the fact that, though our regents appreciate the desirability of a building including some, at least, of the features of the proposed club-house, they have been unable because of lack of funds to provide any place designed to meet the social wants of the men students, and that in consequence there is no place on or off the campus under university control where men may meet for recreation, relaxation or social intercourse. This means that the students'

orbit must be practically confined to a line passing through his room, his boarding-house, the recitation room and the libraries, when the latter are open. This, perhaps, provides for the primary essentials of a formal education, but it entirely leaves out of account not only the importance of the social elements of education, increasingly recognized elsewhere and which for generations have formed the characteristic English education, but also the part which an adequate social life plays in formal education and in the moral training of young men.

When it is considered, then, that at present the Michigan man student when not at work or eating or sleeping is practically forced to take to the street or to worse places, and that average human nature requires relaxation and companionship, the immense moral value of a place which will give him an attractive, wholesome place to go to for his leisure hours, there to talk or read or otherwise enjoy himself and his friends, is immediately perceived. President Woodrow Wilson, in a recent address, gave admirable expression to this whole idea, when he said in substance that "after all, perhaps, the greatest part of education, mental and moral, is derived from that attrition of mind upon mind which takes place in the companionship of student with student, after recitations are finished."

A glance at other institutions will reveal how keenly all this is recognized and how splendidly provided for at many of our leading universities.

Thus at Harvard, the Harvard Union has come to be recognized and highly valued factor in all university life and has enlisted not only the commendation but also the active support of President Eliot, members of the Corporation and faculties, because it has proved to be the most hopeful and wholesome influence in Harvard student life. While it is true that some defects have developed there in the

working of the plan adopted, defects (which have been grossly exaggerated in some quarters) due in part to peculiar social conditions there, and in part to some mistakes, which we, with the benefit of Harvard's experience, should easily avoid here, yet as is said editorially in the Harvard Graduate Magazine for March, 1905, the Harvard Union "has certainly more than justified its existence, the University is happier, better, and more efficient because of it." And an editorial in the *Harvard Crimson* for April 7, 1905, says "its reasonable hopes and aims the Union has fulfilled with a much more than fair measure of success. It has day by day for four years afforded to unnumbered Harvard men and their guests the privileges of one of the best club-houses in this country, it has provided place for every sort of activity from debating to university receptions and football mass-meetings, it has by smokers and entertainments of all kinds promoted class homogeneity and good fellowship to a considerable degree—but enumeration of its constant and varied services would be difficult. *It is enough to say that increasingly well the Union has filled a great and vital need and has become indispensable.*" As the expediency of the proposed restaurant feature for our club-house has been questioned by a few persons, it is interesting to note that, though at Harvard the restaurant, as was to be expected, has been operated at a loss, a loss which must be met from the endowment or from dues, it is nevertheless the decided conviction of Harvard men that the restaurant is indispensable to the greatest effectiveness of the Union, and that even greater provision and outlay for it should be made in the future. This statement is confirmed by a letter from Edwin Francis Gay, '90, now of the Harvard faculty, who has kindly furnished much material for this article. The importance of the restaurant was rec-

ognized and happily expressed by President Eliot when he said at the dedicatory ceremonies of the Harvard Union: "After all, eating and drinking together are the principal means of human intercourse." As the use of liquors in the Harvard club-house is prohibited, President Eliot's remarks are not open to criticism by even the most captious.

And so we find that at Columbia, Brown, Pennsylvania and at other American and British universities, where there is much less need of the Union idea than there is here, because they were already better equipped with means of social life, organizations similar to our Union have been formed; that they are housed in splendid club-houses and are rendering valuable and highly appreciated services to the university life. At Chicago, President Harper has taken the keenest personal interest in the project and has secured an endowment for the splendid Reynolds Club, as it is called, which, together with the Hutchins' Commons, the Quadrangle Club and the dormitories, serve all of the functions proposed for the Michigan Union. No one who has partaken of the hospitality of those organizations, who has seen how they serve the students and how indispensable they are in such enterprises as entertaining the American Historical, Economic and Political Science Associations as they did last winter, can possibly doubt their great value and their wholly good influence. And the testimony from Chicago is all of one kind, enthusiastically in favor, and in commendation, of the plan. Dr. C. R. Henderson, chaplain of the University, said in a recent letter:

"I can say that the Reynolds Club has brought to our community very great advantages, and that its influence seems to be wholly good, and it certainly brightens and beautifies life for the young men."

Resting as it does upon such uni-

versal traits of human nature, with objects so entirely wholesome and commendable, with its practicability and its great usefulness proven by successful experiments along the same lines at other universities, it would be strange indeed if there were any considerable opposition to, or criticism of the Union project. And it is pleasant to record that, in fact, the plan has the enthusiastic support of practically everyone who is acquainted with its details. It goes without saying that the suggestion has kindled an enthusiasm among students and the younger alumni surpassing anything of the kind ever before displayed with reference to Michigan undertakings. And the same thing may be said, with little if any qualification, as to the faculty and the older alumni who are informed as to the development of the plan. Only the other day, one of the most distinguished members of our faculty, a man whose long familiarity with Michigan affairs, first as student and then as teacher for many years, and whose official position gives weight to his opinions, said: "I think the plan as proposed would satisfy the most imperative of Michigan's present needs. I regard the proposed building as more essential than a new recitation or department building."

It is proper that brief answer be made here to the oft-repeated inquiry: "What is the relation of the Union to the project of the Memorial Committee of the Alumni Association?" The answer is that there is absolutely no relationship. Last fall there was talk of a merger, and the Union suggested that such merger be on the basis of a building embracing the features above enumerated, to be known as the "Memorial Hall," and in which should be put such tablets, memorial windows, portraits and the like as might be desired. The Memorial Committee, however, felt that such a merger would be impossible, partly because it proposed to erect the memorial on

the campus, while for obvious reasons the Union building could not be put there, and partly because it felt that some of the functions of the Union building would, perhaps, be inconsistent with the idea of a memorial. And so the matter was dropped, and as it stands today the projects are entirely distinct, financially and otherwise. But it must not be supposed for a moment that they are in any sense competitive or hostile. On the contrary the friends of the Union have the highest appreciation of the disinterested, self-sacrificing efforts of the distinguished gentlemen and loyal alumni who form the Memorial Committee. They recognize the value and the propriety of the memorial plan, and being themselves loyal Michigan men they hope most heartily that the devoted efforts of the Memorial Committee may be early crowned with

complete success; for then the unselfish labors of these men would be deservedly rewarded in the only way in which they care for reward, the securing of a noble building dedicated to a noble purpose for our common Alma Mater. Animated by these motives the Union has refrained, at least for the present, from entering the subscription field for its own project, that it might not even indirectly jeopardize the success of the Memorial.

Meantime the golden opportunity presents itself to some generous lover of mankind to perpetuate his own name, and to win the lasting gratitude of the students of one of the world's great universities and of the largest body of living alumni in this country, by erecting and endowing a home for the University of Michigan Union.

HENRY M. BATES, '90

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