

1905

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Recommended Citation

"What Shall the Union Club House Be?" Mich. Alumnus 12 (1905):123-7.

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WHAT SHALL THE UNION CLUB HOUSE BE?

In the October issue of *THE ALUMNUS*, Mr. William N. Brown raises the question, whether, if the Memorial Committee should depart from its original plan to erect such a memorial building as was at first contemplated, and incorporate into its scheme some of the features proposed for the Union club house, it would be wise to include any sort of restaurant department. From the beginning, the board of directors of the Union have adhered steadfastly to the opinion that a restaurant department is necessary to the complete success of its proposed club house and to the full realization of all the beneficial possibilities of the Union itself. This belief is strengthened by the unvarying testimony from our sister universities and colleges like Harvard, Pennsylvania, Chicago and Dartmouth, where the experiment has been tried and its success already demonstrated.

The question may be considered in the light of two possible courses: First, the continued entire independence of the Memorial and the Union movements; and, second, the possible future combination of the two.

I. There are few who would deny that should the Union build its own club house independently of the Memorial

Committee, that house ought to contain adequate accommodations for at least such restaurant service as is afforded at the ordinary city club, except that the regular menus would have to be of a simpler and less expensive variety. It is not that eating is the *most* important thing in social life or the main function and purpose of a club, but men must eat, and if they have a club house no good reason can be suggested why they should not have the privilege of eating in it and of extending its hospitalities to private and official guests, and of having occasional dinners or banquets, large or small. The fact that such service is furnished at almost every city social club operating its own club house, and more particularly at or in conjunction with practically every university or college club like that proposed for our Union, indicates the well-nigh universal recognition of the importance of the restaurant feature to the complete success of clubs of this sort. As President Eliot said at the dedicatory exercises of the Harvard Union club house, "After all, eating and drinking together are the principal means of human intercourse."

Dr. Frank H. Dixon, one of our own graduates, now a prominent

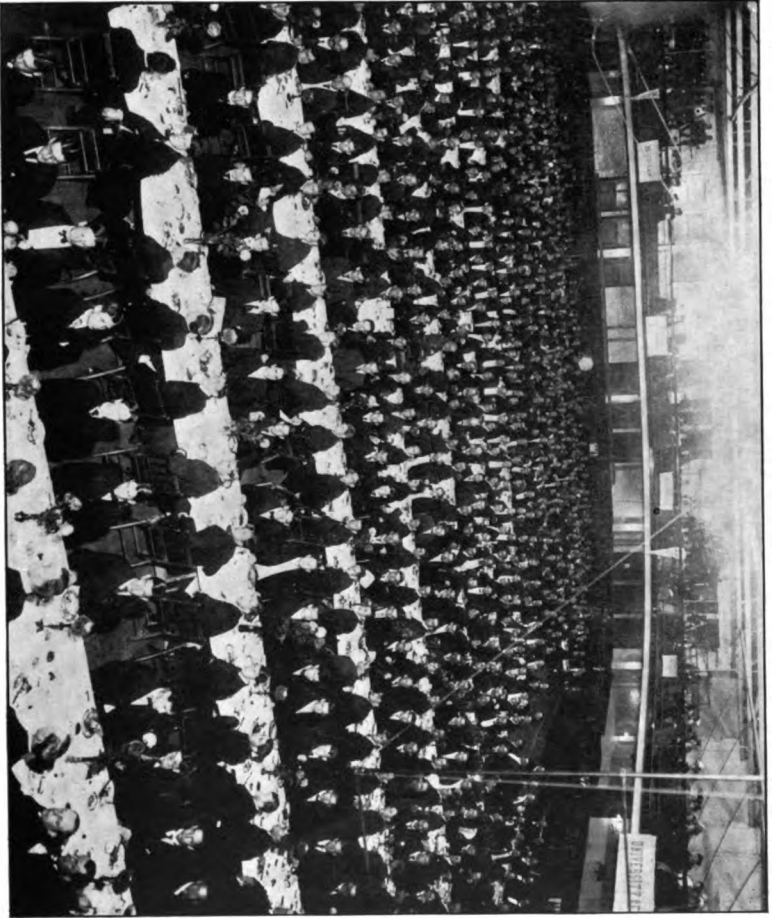
member of the Dartmouth college faculty, in his letter in the November ALUMNUS (page 85), after commenting upon the success and importance of the grill-room in the Dartmouth College club, referring to the restaurant feature, says, "Its very evident importance as an aid to the development of social unity should lead to its incorporation in any club house scheme." At the University of Chicago, Reynolds Club, which is organized along lines similar to those of our Union, has a beautiful building containing the accommodations usually found in club houses, and the University Commons, or dining hall, is just across the corridor from the club living rooms and under the same roof. Prof. C. E. Merriam, who is a faculty member of the executive council of the club, writes that his observation leads him to believe that "certainly there should be a café or similar service in close connection with such a club." And like opinions are entertained at Pennsylvania.

But there is very little difference of opinion as to the *desirability* of the restaurant and bedroom departments. The only objections seriously urged are based upon what some people seem to fear, is the *impracticability* of the scheme. It is said that the restaurant would not pay financially. It is true, of course, that in the majority of city clubs, the restaurant is not self-sustaining, but the restaurant is nevertheless maintained as absolutely essential to the success of the other departments of the club. No one at all familiar with such clubs doubts for a moment that if the dining service were abandoned the membership would fall off and the club would suffer material loss in total and net income. Therefore the club pays its restaurant losses out of its membership dues, just as, in case of similar loss, the Union would have to resort to its membership dues. But there is good reason for thinking that under

the peculiar conditions prevailing here the café would be self-sustaining from the start.

The experience at Dartmouth, where conditions are, in many respects like those existing here, is instructive and encouraging. As Dr. Dixon shows in the letter above referred to, "the Dartmouth grill-room has been a financial success from the start and is patronized steadily by undergraduates and alumni." We have here the same comparatively "isolated and small country town," the same lack of hotel and restaurant accommodations, but a very much larger body of students and undergraduates to patronize our club. To be sure the Harvard restaurant has been run at a loss, but that seems to be giving us, at Michigan, more concern than it does the Harvard authorities, for as is stated in the last annual reports of the officers of the Harvard Union, they propose to enlarge rather than abandon or restrict their restaurant. Besides, as their officers point out, the loss at Harvard is due in part to mistakes in management, which are being corrected there, and which could be entirely avoided here, and in part to the fact that the Harvard Union has to compete with the numerous clubs, cafés and restaurants of Cambridge and Boston. No such competition exists here. But whether their restaurant makes money or loses, the Harvard authorities propose to continue it permanently and with increased facilities, as is stated in their official reports published in the *Harvard Graduates magazine*.

No one who is familiar with present day student life here, can doubt that the Union restaurant would receive large and steady patronage. One has only to stroll along State street any evening and note the enormous consumption of "hot-dogs," "red hots" and soda drinks and other death-dealing concoctions dear to the student palate, to realize that a grill-room in an



THE SECOND ANNUAL BANQUET OF THE MICHIGAN UNION
WATERMAN GYMNASIUM, NOVEMBER 17, 1905

attractive club, serving wholesome and palatable refreshments, would not only do a big business, but would also be an effective agency in conserving the digestion of future generations of Michigan students. Oliver Wendell Holmes says that whether "life is worth living, depends upon the liver." The "livers" of Michigan students are at present menaced by the "hot-dog" and its ilk.

Mr. Brown makes an elaborate effort to show that the club restaurant would not receive much patronage from alumni and bases his argument largely upon the fact that only about 1,000 alumni have registered annually at the alumni rooms during the last few years. This is wholly inconclusive. In the first place, it is a matter of common observation that only a practically negligible percentage of our graduates who do return to Ann Arbor take the trouble to register at the alumni offices. During the last few years the writer has seen here in Ann Arbor hundreds of alumni who are personal friends or acquaintances and not one in ten of them has registered. There are several loyal alumni on our Board of Regents, and these men are here during several days in every month, and yet their names seldom appear on the alumni book. During the week of the Union banquet and the Wisconsin game last month, there were probably from 8,000 to 10,000 visitors in town. Of these at least 3,000, and probably many more, were alumni, and yet an examination of the register shows that not more than 75 of these visited the alumni rooms during those days. To be sure most of the visitors stayed in Ann Arbor only a few hours, but that in hundreds of cases at least, was due largely to the very fact that there is no acceptable place in Ann Arbor where they could stay. To be sure, also, even in a large club house, only a portion of these visitors could be entertained, but if that club house

were equipped with a few bedrooms (say six to twelve) and large, inexpensively furnished dormitories for emergency use, as described in the April (1905) ALUMNUS, a hundred or more could be accommodated overnight, several hundreds could (by means of extra preparations) be served to meals, and many others given a comfortable place as headquarters. And thus a great and generally longed-for service could be rendered to alumni at a handsome profit to the club.

Finally, in further answer to the argument that the club would receive little alumni patronage, it is absolutely certain that if we had here a club house with restaurant and bedrooms, the number of alumni visits to Ann Arbor would be measured in multiples of the present number, which the register shows to be at least 1,000, but which in reality is several times that figure. It were superfluous to dwell further upon this argument. Everyone here knows that we are in dire need of such accommodations, that the social life of students and faculty is seriously curtailed by that lack, that the University is embarrassed because it cannot make its official guests comfortable, and that it loses greatly in the moral support and potential financial support of alumni, whose interest in the University, though not lost, is not developed to its utmost, because, for lack of a decent place to stay, they have not often revisited it. Ask yourself if you have not frequently refrained from returning here because you did not know where you could "put up" comfortably. Ask the alumnus, who in an enthusiasm for the "old days" has come here to revisit the scenes of his college life and has had to endure the atrocities of our hotels, a mile in point of distance and thousands of miles in point of atmosphere, tradition and surroundings, from the place which means Michigan and Alma Mater to him? Would he

like a club house, a home, where he could be within the atmosphere of the University, and have the decencies and comforts of life and pay for them, a fair price, without inconveniencing his friends or fraternity associates?

II. In addition to the objections made to a restaurant in any Michigan club house scheme, some arguments of a different nature have been advanced against including that feature in any building to be erected by the Memorial and the Union conjointly. Thus, it has been urged that it is inconsistent with, and abhorrent to, the idea of a memorial to the dead to provide in it a place where the living may eat. But inasmuch as it has never been intended that the proposed memorial should be a mausoleum or mark the graves of our dead, this objection seems to be without much force. At Harvard, where tradition and reverence for all that is good and distinguished in the past are certainly vital influences, it has not been considered in any sense inappropriate to devote their entire beautiful memorial building to a students' dining hall. However the sensibilities of those who feel otherwise are certainly entitled to respectful consideration.

Again, the possible, or as some think, the probable financial loss which a restaurant might bring would be especially objectionable in the joint project, if it should fall upon the University. If that contingency were the inevitable result, the objection would be fatal. But not only is that result not necessary, but it can be absolutely avoided. Here, too, the experience at Dartmouth is helpful. As Dr. Dixon shows, there the restaurant or regular dining room, though operated in the same building, is in charge of a distinct organization which takes upon itself all the responsibility of management, thus entirely exempting the club and the college from trouble, care and financial loss. The same plan

could be followed here. But it is worth repeating, that there is no financial loss at Dartmouth.

Finally, it is said that it would be inexpedient, from the point of view of the University, to have any sort of restaurant upon the campus, or in any degree under the financial management of the Regents. This is, of course, a question for the Regents themselves to answer, and one which they are abundantly able to dispose of with wisdom. But the objection thus indicated has always seemed to the writer unanswerable and fatal. But it would seem to lie with equal force against the maintenance of any of the usual city clubroom features under the same conditions. The objection can and would be urged with just as much reason against bowling alleys or billiard rooms as against a restaurant. It would not be very difficult to imagine how enemies of the University, if it has any, or other state institutions and special interests might make a cunning use of the fact of control by the Regents of any real club house with the aid of state funds, a use detrimental to university appropriations. It would seem that this danger could be obviated only by having the building on university ground, but *off the campus*, under the general control and supervision of the Regents, but not financially maintained or operated by them.

Discussion of the scope of a club house erected by the Memorial Committee and the Union conjointly, would at present seem to be academic rather than practical, for there are no surface indications that the merger will ever take place. Early last year suggestions were made by the Memorial Committee that an attempt to consolidate the two movements be made. The Union gladly acquiescing in this, a joint meeting of committees from the two bodies was had. At that meeting general discussion took place, but no definite propositions were

made; but from what the Memorial Committee said it could *not* accept or consent to, it seemed clear that at that time no merger could be effected, except by the abandonment by the Union of most of those features which it deemed characteristic of and essential to its purposes. Subsequently the Union suggested in writing and orally that the two organizations might unite on the basis of a building to be known as Memorial Hall, to contain all of the features desired by both bodies, this to include for the Union, the usual club equipment, *but with no bar, and with the sale or use of all liquors prohibited.* In such a building there might be a distinct memorial room, memorial windows, tablets, portraits, busts, inscriptions, etc. This proposition was definitely rejected by the Memorial Committee and that committee has never made any counter or other proposition to us.

The Union's proposition was definitely renewed by the writer to two members of the Memorial Committee early last summer, but met with no favor. The Union is still ready and willing (1) to unite on the above basis, (2) to consider any counter proposal, or (3) to agree that each organization shall in friendly spirit go its own way and try to work out its own ends for the common good of the University. The Union suggestion about bedrooms has been misunderstood. We propose, at the most, to have, say, six to ten bedrooms, and to utilize the otherwise waste space in our attic, which waste exists in the top story of almost every large building, by converting it into plainly furnished dormitories, with cots or simple iron bedsteads, which at commencement time, and on other special occasions, may be rented out to alumni. The writer knows of several large clubs which have done this very thing, and have thereby rendered greatly appreciated service to their

members and added very considerable profits to the club treasury. Here where the demand for such accommodation is very much larger, the service and the profit would be correspondingly greater. It would seem a pity when such facilities could be added at comparatively little extra initial expense, to fail to provide them. But in case of possible merger with the Memorial, if the Memorial Committee objected to such provisions, the matter could doubtless be satisfactorily arranged.

There would seem to be room, nay, a demand for both a memorial and a club house, but a combination, in which any of the vital objects of either are not provided for, would be seriously detrimental to both, and would entail loss upon the University. As the Memorial Committee has raised all of the money which it originally asked for (see its early records and subscription blanks) and as the Union is equally a University movement, there is no reason why, after waiting nearly two years in order not to impede the work of the Memorial committee, it should not now make its own appeal in its own way for its own purposes. And this is what it has now definitely decided to do. This is in no way antagonistic to the Memorial, whose complete success is already assured. Believing profoundly that it stands for a great and growing need of the University, without the satisfying of which, the University cannot do its full duty to its students, or most effectively obtain the intelligent interest and support of its alumni, the Union now places its cause before you, and asks the aid of "Michigan men everywhere." Will you put your shoulder to the wheel and in adding to your privileges as an alumnus, also give a helping hand to Michigan, your Alma Mater?

HENRY M. BATES, '90.