

Whittenberger Auditorium recalls influential student

"He will live in our memory as a college boy who played the part of a man." William Lowe Bryan, *Bloomington Evening World*, Sept. 27, 1910

The subject of Bryan's praise was John F. Whittenberger, for whom the auditorium in the Indiana Memorial Union is named. Although his Indiana University education was unfinished, he left behind a great deal more than pleasant memories.

Whittenberger, who grew up in Peru, Ind., entered IU in April of 1904, but his pursuit of a degree in history was interrupted by periods of full-time employment. The *Evening World* reported that he was principal of a ward school at Peru and was expecting to resume that position in the fall of 1910.

Apparently Whittenberger was



Looking back

By Rose McIlveen

enrolled in IU classes during the summer of that year when he contracted typhoid fever. The disease is caused by salmonella typhosa that lives in contaminated water or milk.

According to the *Evening World*, the young man was more or less all right when he went home for the weekend. "Whittenberger was in school during the summer until the last Friday of the first half of the summer term when he left for his

home, expecting to return the following Monday. He took sick shortly after arriving at his home and had been in an unconscious state since Aug. 10."

The young man from Peru was not the only IU student who became ill with typhoid fever that year. Alongside the obituary for Whittenberger in the *Indiana Daily Student* of Sept. 27 was another announcing the death of a Wabash College student who took summer classes at IU and died on Aug. 13. Explained the newspaper, "While he was at Bloomington he was forced to give up his studies on account of typhoid fever and go to his home in Indianapolis, where he died after a short illness."

In those days there was very little doctors could do for typhoid fever

patients. In short, they either lived or died.

Whittenberger is not remembered for having died young of typhoid fever. He had been involved in campus life, having been elected president of the freshman class, and he was a member of the Young Men's Christian Association and the Wrangler Club (originally a literary and debating society that had its own house on East Kirkwood Avenue).

Whittenberger's special contribution to IU was as founder and first president of the Indiana Union, an association of male students and faculty. Its purpose was to promote the interests of IU and its students.

The Union was given space in the Student Building. The Indiana Memorial Union building hadn't been

built then. On the first floor was a lounge and a billiard and pool room, and there was a reading room on the second floor.

IU President Bryan was so enthusiastic about the Union that he told its members on the day it was organized, "There is nothing which the young men in this room cannot do. The world gets out of the way for the man who knows where he's going."

The death of Whittenberger so shocked and saddened his fellow students that some activities came to a halt. The *Daily Student* of Sept. 27 announced that the YMCA meeting had been postponed "indefinitely," the student assembly was canceled and the Union's rooms in the Student Building were temporarily closed.