

IT took ten years to do it, but the Oklahoma Memorial Union Building is now complete.

Every room of the present unit (the original plan contemplated the addition of a wing eventually) now has its permanent interior finish. For the first time, no University classes are being held in the Union. Every inch of space is now devoted to student and alumni and faculty service.

The \$400,000 plant meets almost every kind of non-classroom need of the student body, and also is used extensively by alumni and faculty. That the Union is appreciated by those it serves is shown plainly by the fact that every bit of space in the building is used, and used almost constantly. Every few days the Union management has to turn down requests for office space for campus organizations and activities, and even has to turn down many requests for meeting space for campus groups.

In spite of the depression and other serious difficulties, the Stadium-Union bond issue which financed the construction of Memorial-Stadium and the Union has been in default only once, and the original schedule of bond and interest payments was soon resumed.

Unless some totally unforeseen event interferes, the present financial program will retire the last cent of indebtedness on the Stadium and the Union on April 1, 1943, only five years from now.

The early days of the Union were stormy ones. Here's the way things went during the school year 1928-29 when the building was erected:

September 18—A group of students protested the University's collection of a Union fee, although it had been approved previously by a student vote.

November 22—Union building was opened for student use.

January 1—Union departments showed heavy loss for first month's operation.

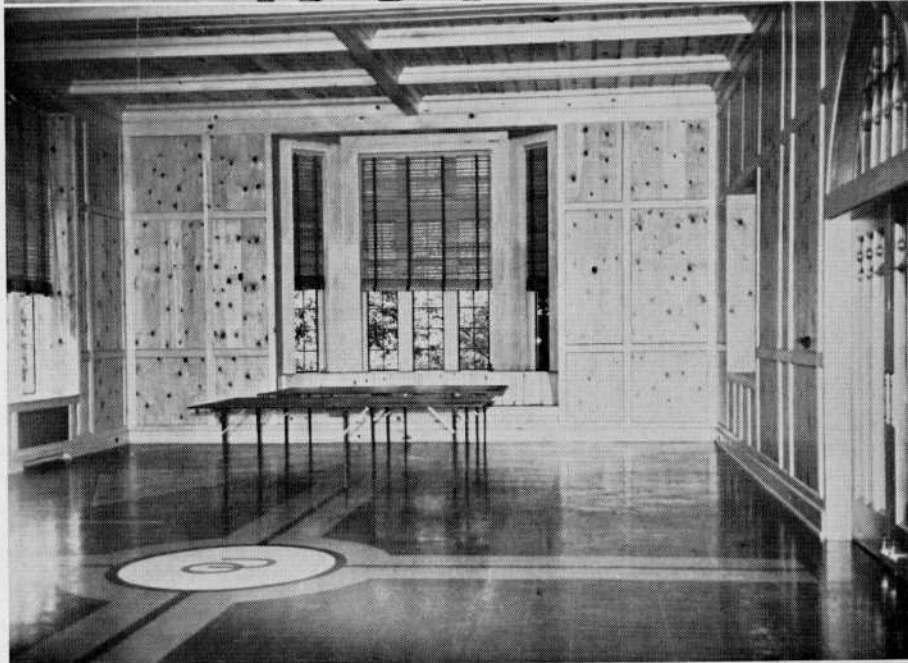
January 10—Formal opening of building held.

January 10—B. S. Graham, who had been director of the Stadium-Union campaign, resigned as manager of the Union.

January 19—Suit filed in district court by students to prevent collection of Union fee by University.

January 31—Manager of billiard room arrested by city officers on charge of

Above, the new office of Ted Beaird, '21, Union manager and alumni secretary. Center, the new pine-paneled recreation room of the Union; and below, the new group meeting room which seats 70 persons and is constantly in demand.



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operating pool tables without city license.

February 1—County assessor announced effort would be made to collect ad valorem taxes on the Union building.

One by one the troubles were ironed out. The small groups of students protesting the Union fee lost their suit in district court, but appealed. In 1933 the State Supreme Court, by unanimous decision, upheld the right of the Board of Regents to collect the fee. The ruling stated: "The requirement that each student pay a \$2.50 Student-Union fee each semester is not prohibited by any constitutional or statutory provision, and is within the implied power of the University Board of Regents."

Management of the Union was taken over after Mr. Graham's resignation by Frank Cleckler, '21, who in 1928 had been made executive secretary of the University of Oklahoma Association. He worked out the administrative problems of operating a cafeteria, a ballroom, a billiard and bowling room, a news stand, and other student services.

The building had been only partially completed in 1928 because of insufficient funds. The main lounge was left with bare concrete and tile walls. The south wing of the main floor had to be left unfinished, and temporary wallboard partitions were put up so that the space could be used for University classrooms. Even so, the use of the Union increased steadily, and by 1936 a careful check of the number of persons entering the Union in one day showed more than 6,000 entrances. A check now would undoubtedly show a great many more.

AT one time in the depths of the depression, Mr. Cleckler faced default of bond payments. It had been expected originally that football receipts and payments on the approximately \$650,000 in Stadium-Union Fund pledges would meet a large portion of the bond retirements, but revenue from both of these sources almost stopped for a time. A bond payment went into default and Mr. Cleckler faced the fact that any bondholder who wanted to could go into court and throw the Stadium-Union project into receivership. Alumni and Stadium-Union officials held worried sessions and finally worked out an agreement with the bondholders for a part-payment schedule which satisfied them. Later when financial condition of the Stadium-Union fund improved, the original schedule of bond retirements was resumed.

Another near crisis was faced by Mr. Cleckler in 1931 when the State Legislature decided to investigate the Union. Gambling in the pool room, and general

unfair competition with Norman business houses was charged against the Union.

High point of the investigation, so far as public attention was concerned, came when a student witness put on the stand to testify about gambling in the Union stated that he had heard another student in the pool room say, "I'll bet you a dime I'll put the nine ball in the side pocket."

Walter Harrison writing in the *Oklahoma City Times* razzed the investigation for disclosing such a "sink of iniquity."

He commented further:

All of this howl about the Student-Union Building at Norman is witless.

Judging from the statements of the merchants in Norman, the Student-Union is responsible for the price of cotton, the limited proration in the Oklahoma City oil field and the price of bread. There is no other cause for depression in and around Norman except the Student-Union with its cafeteria, its billiard hall, its book exchange where students can get text books at cost.

The Student-Union is the poor boy's fraternity house.

It is accepted as a worthy and necessary part of the well established University throughout the land. Some colleges call it the commons, others a club, still others a union—but its objects and furnishings are the same everywhere. They kick about its being established on land that belongs to the University. Why shouldn't it be? It is as much a building devoted to the service of the student body as chemistry hall, and is used a much greater portion of every working day and night and Sunday too.

Long may the Student-Union wave.

After hearing thirty witnesses and studying much documentary evidence, the Senate investigating committee reported that it found no irregularities in the Union, and that the finances had been handled in a judicious manner.

"The proof further shows," the committee reported, "that Mr. Raymond Tolbert and numerous others of the alumni have given a great deal of their time and means in attempting to carry out the enterprise and that they diligently worked without hire or expense.

"The committee after hearing the testimony of various students as well as the president of the University is of the opinion that the Union is serving a most useful purpose and has answered a great need of the school, not only in furnishing a general center of supplies for the student body, but also in serving as a general melting pot for the fraternity and non-fraternity groups, thus serving to promote a more democratic atmosphere."

In recent years the Union has been generally accepted as an essential and important institution on the campus, and its use has increased steadily.

The completion of the physical plant has proceeded step by step. The Me-

morial Tower was placed on the building in the school year 1935-36 as a WPA project at a total cost of about \$30,000.

The barn-like space originally intended for the main lounge was finished as a fine oak paneled lounge with comfortable and beautiful furnishings in the winter of 1937-38, and as part of the same project, the old alumni and Union office space was converted into two dining rooms, the Woodruff Room and the English Room, and the offices on the west side of the south wing of the main floor were finished. This project, also done with WPA help, cost about \$27,000, including the furnishing of the lounge.

THE final step in completion of the building was taken this summer when the large room across the south end of the main floor was made into an attractive recreation room, and the east side of the south wing was completed. This space is devoted to offices for T. M. Beard, '21, alumni executive secretary and Union manager; Mrs. Mary Turnbull, in charge of the Teachers Placement Bureau; and an attractive paneled meeting room with space for seating seventy persons.

This final project was completed in September, and involved a total expenditure of about \$15,000 including WPA help.

The completion of the physical plant and furnishings was not accomplished easily. Mr. Cleckler worked out financing of the tower project after a long struggle. When Mr. Beard became Union manager in 1936, with Homer Heck, '35ex, as assistant manager, he started at once to seek money to complete the lounge.

Eventually he was able to borrow enough money from alumni, faculty members and friends of the University to put up the sponsor's share of a WPA project. Notes were given, to be retired from receipts of the Stadium-Union Fund.

The last project was carried out on a similar basis, and the financial details are working out satisfactorily.

Mr. Beard and Mr. Heck, although devoting much of their time to completion of the building, have also put great emphasis on a program of increased service to the student body. When the lounge was completed, Miss Margaret Anne Gessner, a graduate of Knox College with special training at Northwestern University in the field of recreation work, was appointed director of activities in the Union, and she has sponsored musical concerts, art exhibitions, free dansants, and many other social and cultural programs that have been enjoyed by

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thousands of students. Students are given a large share of the responsibility in planning Union activities, and, generally speaking, are given just about what they want.

A large variety of general magazines is provided in the lounge room for use of students. Convenient tables for games, and ping pong equipment are found in the new recreation room. It is quite accurate to say that the Union has developed into a "poor boy's" club in the sense that it provides excellent recreation facilities for all. At the same time, the facilities are used also by well-to-do students.

Another phase of the Union program is that the personnel officials of the University have been brought into a central location on the second floor of the Union. For the first time, the offices of the dean of men, the women's counselor, the Y. M. C. A., the Y. W. C. A., the NYA Employment Office, the general University employment office, and the various sub-offices connected with these have been brought together in one place. Instead of a student having to chase clear across the campus several times in order to find just the right person to see about some problem, he can find the right person on a single floor of the Union.

In recent years, the dean of men and women's counselor have become more and more "service agents" who assist students instead of acting as disciplinary officers. Problems of discipline are handled by the student conduct committee. Thus the moving of their offices from the Administration Building and the Women's Building is an appropriate step in the Union's program of consolidating the agencies that serve the student body.

These are new phases of the Union's usefulness. The older services—cafeteria, news stand, billiard room, dining room, ballroom and so on are well known to most alumni.

Completion of the Union Building is the realization of a dream dating as far back as 1916, but the World War nipped that effort. When the large frame building used by the Y. M. C. A. burned in 1922, a group of students and University officials decided to try for a Union instead of trying to rebuild the Y. M. C. A. That same year, Ben G. Owen, then head of athletics, started a campaign for a stadium, but this first effort was unsuccessful. It was decided that a joint campaign would be held to raise \$1,000,000, of which \$650,000 would be for a stadium and \$350,000 for a union.

Frank Buttram, Oklahoma City, was national chairman of the campaign, J. S. Buchanan, as president of the University, was associate chairman. R. W. Hutto,

Norman, was treasurer, and is still treasurer of the Stadium-Union fund. B. S. Graham, now of Oklahoma City, was director of the campaign.

Members of the Stadium-Union Board of Trustees—men who have devoted much time and effort to the financial affairs of the Union—are as follows: Neil R. Johnson, Norman, president; Dr. W. B. Bizzell, Norman, vice president; R. W. Hutto, Norman, treasurer; Frank S. Cleckler, Muskogee, secretary; Emil R. Kraetli, Dr. E. D. Meacham, Ben G. Owen, Dr. V. E. Monnett, and R. H. Cloyd, all of Norman; E. R. Newby, Tom F. Carey, Raymond A. Tolbert, and B. S. Graham, all of Oklahoma City; Chester H. Westfall, Ponca City; Robert H. Wood, Tulsa, and A. N. Boatman, Okmulgee.

What of the future? The situation is that the completed first unit of the Union is already overcrowded. There are many legitimate demands for space that can not be met. If the present trend continues, it seems inevitable that the construction of the wing, which was a part of the original plan, will have to be seriously considered.

Additional space for a cafeteria which would be separate from a fountain service room is badly needed. The present combination cafeteria and fountain room does such a steady business all day and into the evening that it is difficult even to keep the place properly swept and cleaned. More space is needed for offices of campus organizations. A small auditorium suitable for concerts, plays, lectures and forum meetings is a definite need. More small dining rooms are needed for faculty and student lunches and dinners.

Most of the leading Unions in the nation now provide workshops in which students can develop hobbies such as woodworking, photography, leather and metal work, and other constructive uses of leisure time. These would be facilities suitable for use of the amateur and hobbyist, instead of the professional type of equipment used in the various schools and colleges for professional instruction. Many educators have come to believe that development of constructive methods of using leisure time is just about as important for young people as classroom instruction, insofar as insuring happy lives is concerned.

These are things to work toward in the future. Meanwhile, alumni can join with students rejoicing that the present unit of the Union has been completed down to the last bit of plaster and the last nail. The Union is performing a big job on the O. U. campus, and performing it well.

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