

Herman B Wells, IU chancellor, dies

Former president of school guided it through growth

By REX W. HUPPKE
Associated Press

BLOOMINGTON, Ind. — Herman B Wells, the popular Indiana University president and chancellor who led the school through spectacular growth, died Saturday of heart complications. He was 97.

"Chancellor Wells was, quite simply, a great man, one of the exceptional figures in higher education this century. If it were not for his vision, his leadership, his passion and his hard work, IU would not be the university that it is today," IU President Myles Brand said in a statement released yesterday.

Wells, a Jamestown native who graduated from IU in 1924, was named its acting president for the 1937-38 school year at the age of 35. He was appointed IU's 12th president in 1938 and served until 1962. He also served as interim president briefly in 1968.

Gov. Frank O'Bannon considered him a friend.

"In each person's lifetime, there are but a handful of folks who are of such inspiration and leadership that we wear their imprint in our very being," O'Bannon said through a spokesman. "Herman Wells was one of those. He was indeed an Indiana treasure."

WELLS OVERSAW the growth of IU from a pre-World War II campus of about 9,000 students to a major Midwestern institution that had grown to more than 20,000 students by the 1960s. IU now has more than 90,000 students on eight campuses.

"A place like a university has its own momentum," Wells said in a 1988 interview with The Indianapolis News. "The president is the servant, not the mother, of the institution."

But Kenneth Gros-Louis, IU vice president and chancellor of the Bloomington campus, said yesterday that Wells' spirit pervades the university.

"There will be very few people at

IU who won't say that the character and atmosphere of the institution wasn't a reflection of his personality," Gros-Louis said.

He said Wells was always ahead of his time. During the 1950s, for example, Wells introduced courses that studied different parts of the world, despite an isolationist attitude that prevailed in America at that time.

"He knew it was going to be a global world," Gros-Louis said.

Wells, who had served as chancellor since he stepped down as president, led Indiana through a time of major change on campus and within the country as a whole.

IN THE 1940s and '50s, he stood by IU Professor Dr. Alfred Kinsey, who shocked the world when his books on human sexuality provided the first publication of scientific data on sexual activity.

Kinsey founded the Kinsey Institute For Research in Sex, Gender and Reproduction on IU's Bloomington campus in 1947. The center is still a frequent target for critics nearly 50 years later.

On the matter, Wells told The Indianapolis News in 1988: "Either you have academic freedom or you don't. There is no compromise. Without it, you don't have a university. You have a trade school."

Wells ended segregation at tables in the Indiana Memorial Union and helped integrate Big Ten athletics. He quietly urged basketball coach Branch McCracken to recruit Bill Garrett, who in 1948 became the first black to play a varsity sport in the conference.

"He was a great advocate of social justice," said Dorothy Collins, 87, who worked as a research and editorial associate of Wells for 23 years. "He did it in a quiet way, without going out and being an activist about it," she said. "He corrected a number of things in a quiet way."

Intensely interested in international affairs, Wells was appointed a special adviser on liberated areas for the U.S. State Department and was a member of the allied missions for observation of Greek elections at the end of World War II.

In 1957, President Dwight Eisenhower appointed Wells a delegate to the 12th General Assembly of the United Nations.

Wells served on numerous national education boards, including a term as chairman of the board of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. He was also the first president of the National Education Association's department of higher education.

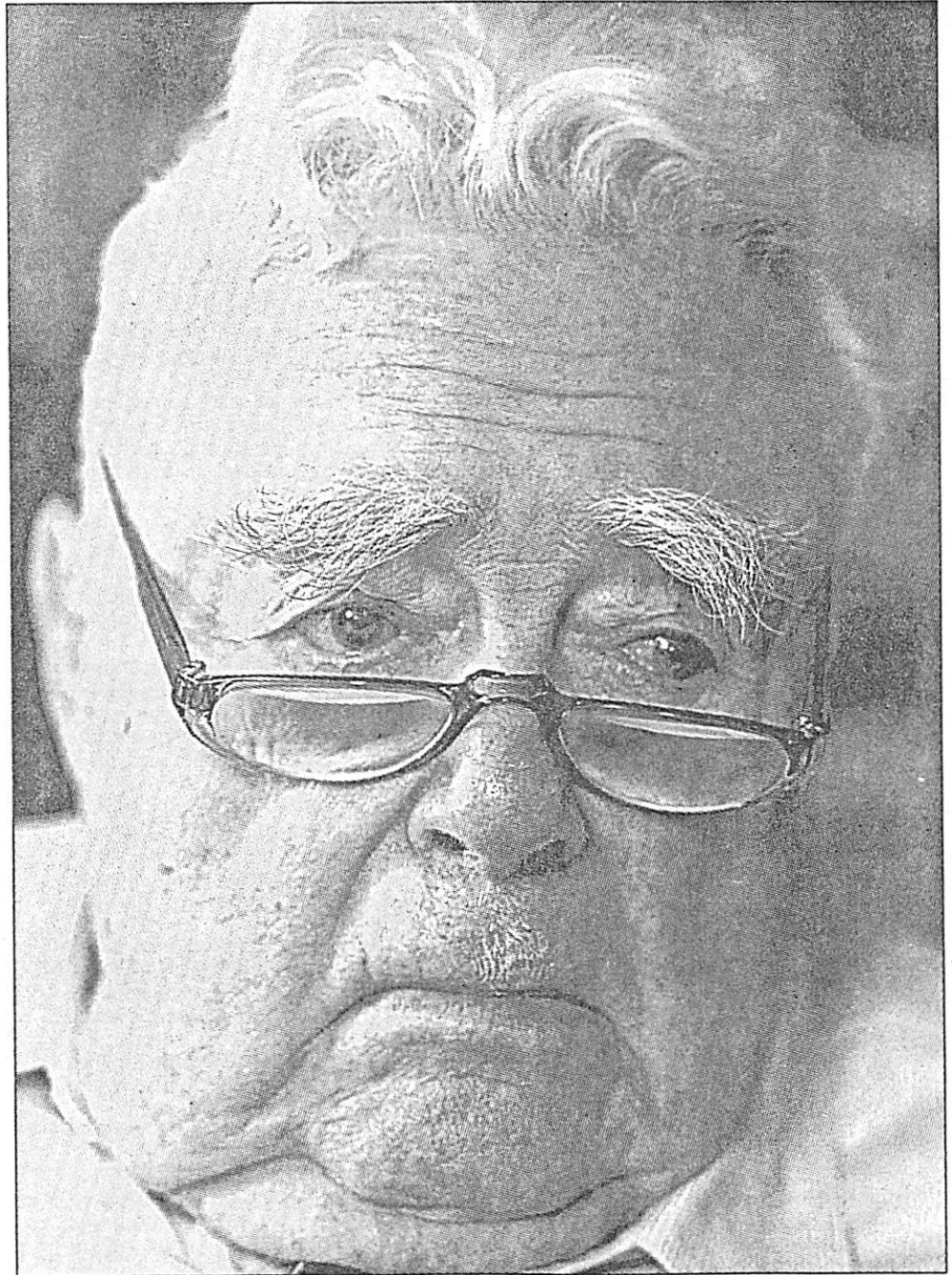
IN 1997, he was honored with his sixth Sagamore of the Wabash, the state's highest honor.

On Dec. 11, 1998, O'Bannon honored Wells as a "Hoosier Millennium Treasure" during Indiana's 182nd birthday celebration.

More than 70 years after graduating from IU, Wells still lived across the street from campus. He was a constant presence at campus events, including plays, opera, graduation and athletics. At basketball games in Assembly Hall, the chancellor sat in his wheelchair directly across from the Indiana bench.

Even into his 90s, Wells dressed up as "Santa Wells" at Christmas time each year to visit various student groups and deliver baskets filled with apples, nuts and candy.

Known for his self-deprecating humor, one of the chancellor's favorite stories on such visits was that he would get up each morning and read the local newspapers "just to make sure I'm still alive."



1996 ASSOCIATED PRESS PHOTO

Among his many accomplishments, former Indiana University President Herman B Wells helped integrate Big Ten athletics.