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Sam Spahn
DePauw University

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The Original Footloose: How President Murlin Pushed Back Against Traditional
DePauw Methodism

Sam Spahn

History 490
Professor Bruggemann
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Dancing and card playing are prohibited at all social functions. Young women, who are invited to dance in the homes of citizens or in a neighboring town, must present letters of permission from their parents to the Dean of Women. The scholarship of the student must be satisfactory, before permission may be given. Students are not permitted to participate in any dances in public halls.¹

Generations of DePauw University students had agreed to follow the strict code of conduct as outlined in the Student Handbook. Students went to class, attended Chapel on a regular basis, worshiped on Sunday mornings, and four years later left the small town of Greencastle, Indiana, DePauw University and its Methodist roots with their diplomas in hand. But the 1920s student brought more than just his or her religion and intelligence. This new generation of students wanted to gain more from college than just a diploma. The college experience was no longer just about classes and professors. “Social life” became part of the student experience at the University. Social life meant interacting with peers and discussing events, people, and places. While the University made it a point to outlaw aspects of social life, like card playing and dancing in any public areas, DePauw students found effective ways to bypass the regulation. In chapter minutes recorded on January 18, 1926, the members of Delta Upsilon Fraternity made clear their own view on “amusements.”² The Delta Upsilon Secretary of the DePauw chapter noted, “It was moved that card playing in the house be limited to Friday nights after 10, until Sunday morning at 12. No gambling is to be allowed.”³ Clearly, students at Delta Upsilon Fraternity played cards on the weekends in direct violation of University policy. These kinds of violations caused tension between the administration and the students. The student of the 1920s was much different than the student from the late 1800s, or even the 1910s.

¹ DePauw University, *DePauw University Student Handbook 1925-1926*. (Greencastle: DePauw University, 1925), 92.4.

² David G. Downey ed., *Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church*. (New York: The Methodist Book Concern, 1924), 69.

³ “*Delta Upsilon Chapter Notes: Secretary Arnold Tilden, January 18, 1926.*” DC 1924, *Archives of DePauw University and Indiana United Methodism, Greencastle, Ind.*, 168.

The development of the radio and automobile revolutionized American culture.⁴ Students found it easier to leave the strict rules of campus to engage in “petting” parties and drink alcoholic beverages.⁵

A surprising change occurred when in 1926, President Lemuel H. Murlin implemented a new amusement policy in the DePauw Student Handbook. His policy stated,

While we are aware that improper amusements are a ‘fruitful source of spiritual decline,’ we also believe that the social and recreational instinct is God-given, and, if properly guided, will strengthen rather than injure the spiritual life. The Church must no longer allow her youth to ‘go into the nearby towns and buy themselves the victuals of social life,’ but, rather, would say, ‘Sit down and eat’ of the clean, wholesome things provided by the Church which seeks to build a social and recreational life that is spiritual and a spiritual life that is social and recreational.⁶

The University no longer wanted students to go out into town with their new automobiles and look for social distractions, such as alcohol, card playing, and gambling. The University was clearly addressing the issues students brought to the University’s attention. The University wanted DePauw students to stay on campus and enjoy what the Church could provide for them, but what could the University provide the student body?

DePauw University’s choice to hire former Boston University President and DePauw alumnus Lemuel H. Murlin signified a need to patch relations between students, administration, alumni, and Methodist ministers. President George R. Grose resigned as President of DePauw University in May of 1924.⁷ This left the University searching for a candidate who would foster a strong spiritual and academic life at DePauw. The 1920s forced DePauw University to analyze the Methodist Discipline and find if its rules still applied to the 1920s DePauw student. Murlin

⁴ Kathleen Morgan Drowne, and Patrick Huber, *The 1920s*. (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 2004), 3.

⁵ Drowne and Huber, *The 1920s*, 4.

⁶ DePauw University, *DePauw University Student Handbook 1925-1926*. (Greencastle: DePauw University, 1925), 43.

⁷ O’Neil, Edwin V, “Committee of Ten Named to Pick Man for Next President of DePauw,” *The DePauw*, June 3, 1924, 1.

heard the cries from students and alumni to modify the rules and and he heard from several of his fellow Methodist ministers to keep the rules in place.

President Murlin and the rest of his administration spent the first years of his presidency (1925-1926) debating the issue of dancing. Torn between letters of discontent from alumni and Methodist ministers to letters of approval from alumni and students, President Murlin needed to decide how exactly his administration would resolve this issue. DePauw University's ties to the Methodist Church made President Murlin's decision about social dancing especially hard. He faced the following questions when considering changing the dancing ban: How would DePauw alumni react? How would Methodist ministers react? How would the students react? Would the student body be responsible with newfound freedoms on campus? Would this be an experimental measure or a full time legislative move? Would adults chaperone experimental dancing? How would the administration decide who could and could not have social dancing as a part of their formal? Would the Methodist community view the lift of the dancing ban as a violation of traditional Methodist values? The answers to these questions revealed how President Murlin's lift of the dancing ban revolutionized DePauw student life and splintered from traditional DePauw Methodist doctrine.

Historiography:

Secondary source material on American youth during the 1920s and the post-World War I economic and academic boom was quite extensive and detailed. Paula Fass' work *The Damned and the Beautiful: American Youth in the 1920s* was a stunning revelation of what the 1920s meant for America's college-aged students.⁸ No longer were students held to their parents' old-fashioned ways. With the proliferation of newspapers and inventions like the radio and the

⁸ Paula S. Fass, *The Damned and the Beautiful: American Youth in the 1920's*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

automobile, 1920's youths created their own popular culture, which demonstrated their need to become a part of something larger than themselves, as reflected in a more permissive and liberal social life. David Levine's *The American College and the Culture of Aspiration, 1915-1940* described how college administrations changed over the course of the early twentieth century. For the first time in United States' history, student enrollment exceeded the expectations of most colleges; therefore, colleges were able to pick and choose which students they accepted. Because of this new socioeconomic dynamic, DePauw University witnessed one of its first demographic shifts. Upper-middle class students were better able to afford college than those from the middle-class or lower-middle classes. They were also better able to afford the luxuries of the time. This explains why students at DePauw were interested in a more varied social life. Donald McCoy's *Coming of Age: the United States During the 1920s and 1930s* studied student life at college during the Roaring Twenties. Not only was the American university a place to learn academically, but also colleges were a place of social interaction between peer groups. Social life began to dominate the student scene of universities across the country. DePauw University felt the impact of the new social dynamic that took over other campuses nationwide.

Sources on DePauw history are limited, but quite rich in information about the social interactions and administrative decisions made throughout the history of the institution. William Sweet and George Manhart, both Professors of history at DePauw University, interpreted DePauw's history as dynamic, revolutionary, and everlasting.⁹ While Manhart's *DePauw Through the Years* focused primarily on the administrative aspect of the University¹⁰, Sweet provided information pertaining to social life and the impact students' decisions had on the administration and the future of the campus. Manhart highlighted administrative decisions on

⁹ William Warren Sweet, *Indiana Asbury-DePauw university, 1837-1937; A Hundred Years of Education in the Middle West* (New York: The Abbingdon Press, 1937).

¹⁰Manhart, George Born, *DePauw Through the Years* (Greencastle, IN: DePauw University, 1962).

admissions, key Methodist ministers, and influential alumni that explained why DePauw University was a revolutionary institution during the early twentieth century and had triumphed through one hundred years as a University in the Midwest. Sweet explored the expansion of the Greek system at DePauw and how this event changed student life and the social scene at DePauw during the twentieth century, especially since most of these organizations had their own homes that allowed private dances and social gatherings.¹¹

American Ingenuity:

The post-World War I economic boom led many young Americans to make vital decisions about their future careers. The invention of the radio, automobile, and other new types of technologies during the early 1920s set off a cultural revolution America had not seen before,¹² as many families throughout the United States began obtaining these items for their homes. This created what Fass analyzed as the “Consumer Culture.”¹³ The American economy was on an upswing during the 1920s when Americans saw industrial production double.¹⁴ Communities did not constrain young adults; rather, the automobile made it much easier for young adults to commute from town to town. For the first time in United States history, the 1920s generation was able to form its own popular culture.¹⁵ With the radio, newspaper, and other forms of advertising, young Americans figured out for themselves what was acceptable in society and what was not.¹⁶ Society for the young adult during the 1920s was vastly different than that of their predecessors, and along with the change in society came the change in education.

¹¹ John J. Baughman, *Our Past, Their Present: Historical Essays on Putnam County, Indiana*. (Greencastle, Ind: Putnam County Museum, 2008), 112.

¹² Drowne and Huber, *The 1920s*, 3.

¹³ Fass, *The Damned*, 43.

¹⁴ Drowne and Huber, *1920s*, 4.

¹⁵ Drowne and Huber, *The 1920s*, 3.

¹⁶ Drowne and Huber, *The 1920s*, 3.

The culture and era of the 1920s fostered a need to express oneself, and that included social forms of dancing that previous generations saw as private and intimate. Fass noted, “*The Ladies Home Journal* urged the ‘legal prohibition’ of jazz dancing. The call for legal action was characteristic of frenzied responses from traditionalists toward dancing as in so many other social arenas in the twenties. Impotent to stop what they saw as social decline, the traditionalists saw the law as the final barrier to chaos and the ultimate instrument of control.”¹⁷ A clear distinction began to form between the late nineteenth century college student and the early twentieth century student. DePauw University was not immune to such disturbances in the social structure of the university. As Fass put it, “In their place [traditional social standards] were undisciplined individualism, self-indulgence, self-expression.”¹⁸ This type of activity and break from tradition would headline the tensions at DePauw University between the old school of thought and the new school of thought.

DePauw University Responds to Post-War Shift:

The relationship between the 1920s DePauw student and the hard-line Methodist discipline intensified and DePauw University brought in former Boston University President Lemuel Murlin to mend the rift. The educational system throughout the United States experienced a shift from theology to the social sciences. David Levine noted, “...the war created a widespread need for skilled intelligence of a special sort, as in the fields of engineering and administration, and the colleges were given the opportunity to demonstrate their usefulness to society.”¹⁹ DePauw University experienced this same shift when the curriculum of the

¹⁷ Fass, *The Damned*, 22-23.

¹⁸ Fass, *The Damned*, 47.

¹⁹ David O. Levine, *The American College and the Culture of Aspiration, 1915-1940* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), 23.

University added many more social sciences, sciences and mathematics in the early 1920s.²⁰

This proved that DePauw University recognized the country's need for skilled workers in fields other than theology. Yes, DePauw University would remain a heavily Methodist university throughout the early 1900s, but a shift of tide had occurred and would affect DePauw's student life as stirrings came from the student body protesting the dancing ban. This pointed to another reason tension between the traditional DePauw Methodism and the students of the 1920s.

Students were not as engaged in religious life as their predecessors. Many of the lectures given on DePauw's campus had a religious flavor intended to bring the campus together, as evidenced throughout President Murlin's Diary in 1925.²¹ Much to the surprise of the DePauw administration, student attendance was quite low at religious lectures. In a report to the President from a meeting of the Student Affairs council, "Discussion of reasons for small attendance at series of lectures—1. Too many lecturers on same subject—Christian ministry for example. 2. Students not interested in lectures of any kind. 3. Students tired of being preached to."²² These comments pointed to a new dynamic on campus: Students were tired of the administration preaching to them about Christian ministry. They wanted to explore different ideas. There was the new sentiment of the 1920s, which saw energetic young Americans throw off the shackles of their predecessors and involve themselves in sciences other than theology.

Students of the 1920s were looking for ways to increase their social and economic mobility with a college education. At the beginning of the 1920s, six hundred thousand individuals were enrolled in college, but by 1930, over one million two hundred thousand

²⁰ Manhart, *DePauw Through the Years*, 290.

²¹ "President Lemuel H. Murlin: 1925 Daily Reminder." DC 107, *Archives of DePauw University and Indiana United Methodism, Greencastle, Ind.*

²² "Student Affairs Secretary Report. Tuesday, November 17th, 1925." DC 114 1925-26: Folder 15, *Archives of DePauw University and Indiana United Methodism, Greencastle, Ind.*

accepted admission into the university.²³ With the large influx of students entering college, university admissions were better able choose which students entered their rolls. David Levine pointed to the fact that “New admission procedures were instituted to select those young people whose backgrounds suggested they should appropriately assume positions of leadership in American society after graduation.”²⁴ For the first time in United States history, colleges had the opportunity to deny or admit any student that applied to the university and not worry about admissions numbers. This allowed for the universities to become much more selective about their student body.

Because of this explosion of students and faculty, surrounding Midwestern colleges began to recognize DePauw University as a University that chose their students based on socioeconomic status.²⁵ Levine noted, “DePauw shared in a trend noted among well-known liberal arts colleges of the day: the higher the prestige of the institution, the greater the proportion of upper middle-class students, and the greater their interest in fields that promised economic and social mobility.”²⁶ Not only did DePauw notice that prestige brought students that were willing to move in social and economic mobility, but these students were able to pay DePauw’s tuition. Levine stated, “Between the two world wars, DePauw recruited the children of the upper middle class, more and more often hailing from the suburban areas, and more and more able and willing to pay the rapidly increasing cost of private higher education.”²⁷ DePauw University fees, including incidental fees and room and board, cost one hundred eighty-eight dollars and fifty cents in 1919.²⁸ By the 1925-1926 academic year, DePauw students were paying

²³ Drowne and Huber, *The 1920s*, 32.

²⁴ Levine, *The American College*, 136.

²⁵ Levine, *The American College*, 136.

²⁶ Levine, *The American College*, 118.

²⁷ Levine, *The American College*, 144.

²⁸ DePauw University, *DePauw University Catalogue 1919-1920* (Greencastle, IN: DePauw University, 1919), 41.

two hundred sixty-seven dollars and fifty cents. This was an increase of nearly seventy percent in five years. It was clear that DePauw raised its costs in order to construct more housing units to house the nearly eight hundred students that DePauw added to its overall population between 1920 and 1928. Along with upper middle-class money, came upper-middle class thoughts on money, religion, and societal structure. This would come to haunt many of the conservative, Methodist traditionalists of DePauw.

The American college student during the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century posed a conundrum for administrations across the United States. Students began to be more engrossed with material property and not their academic well-being.²⁹ While Horowitz's analysis of the American college focused primarily on the male figure, he did offer informative insight on the male figure and social structures in the American college during the 1920s. According to Horowitz, the twentieth century saw a code of conduct among men that colleges had not seen before.³⁰ While administrators scratched their heads wondering how to deal with this new dynamic, another phenomenon took place. According to Horowitz, "As administrators shifted from confrontation to accommodation, they officially recognized student organizations."³¹ President Murlin and his administration offered student organizations a voice in student life and in the organization of campus politics. This allowed students to feel as if they had more control over the events that took place on campus and gave them new freedoms for which they longed.

Previous generations of DePauw administrators, staff, and alumni viewed DePauw as a traditional, Methodist university rooted in the ideologies of religious conservatism and tradition.

²⁹ Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, *Campus life: Undergraduate Cultures from the Eighteenth Century to the Present* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1987), 34.

³⁰ Horowitz, *Campus Life*, 34.

³¹ Horowitz, *Campus Life*, 119.

Following the social trends of the '20s, future DePauw students and alumni would not see DePauw in the same light. During the middle 1920s, upper-middle class students saw items like the automobile and radio as belonging to their generation.³² This signified that the young American was able to travel and move around, while previous generations had to stay in one locale. Students could listen to radio broadcasts from across the country, and with the advent of the automobile, they could drive to where that broadcast was taking place. The fascination with the Ford automobile was quite extraordinary among DePauw's administration. Henry B. Longden, acting President of DePauw University in 1924, stated, "I also congratulate you [President Murlin] on being able to master the operation of a Ford. There is nothing like it. I never cease to be grateful to Mr. Ford for making it possible for me to have a machine standing before the door the year round, always ready to take me anywhere I want to go—and what is more, bring me back."³³ It is not known how many students owned automobiles, but some students must have enjoyed the privileges because of DePauw University's strict rules against the automobile. The DePauw Student Handbook for the academic year 1926-1927 stated, "No student nor groups are permitted to own or operate automobiles except for the first five days and the last five days of the College year."³⁴ This policy was most likely to prevent students from joyriding and causing trouble for the surrounding community of Greencastle, but it did nothing to ease the growing rift between the DePauw traditionalists and students during the 1920s.³⁵ The issue of dancing became such a problem that no part of the faculty or Board of Trustees wanted to handle it. In a letter to President Murlin, DePauw alumnus Julian D. Hogate stated, "I have

³² Drowne and Huber, *The 1920s*, 5.

³³ "Letter from Henry B. Longden to President Lemuel Murlin, July 29, 1925." DC 114 1925-26: Folder 15, *Archives of DePauw University and Indiana United Methodism, Greencastle, Ind.*

³⁴ DePauw University, *DePauw Student Handbook*, 48-49.

³⁵ "Letter from Henry B. Longden to President Lemuel Murlin, July 29, 1925." DC 114 1925-26: Folder 15, *Archives of DePauw University and Indiana United Methodism, Greencastle, Ind.*

taken some trouble to trace this dancing business and I find that members of the faculty pass the buck to the trustees and the trustees pass it back to the faculty and thus no progress is made.

There are many good people, entirely ignorant of conditions, who raise their hands in horror over dancing. They do not know that they are seeking to perpetuate a worse system.”³⁶ Upper-middle class students came from homes that allowed social dancing and much more relaxed social values than what DePauw’s administration previously experienced.³⁷ This division worsened just as President Murlin, DePauw University’s twelfth President (1925-1928), entered the hostile situation looking for ways to mend the rift.

When assuming the Presidency at DePauw University at age of sixty-three, Lemuel Murlin was the oldest President the DePauw University Board of Trustees had ever elected.³⁸ Murlin’s inaugural address given on June 9, 1925 indicated several of the social and academic initiatives Murlin hoped to complete by the end of his tenure as President. Murlin stated, “First: A very frequent and earnest exhortation is to ‘Keep in DePauw a warm religious life.’ If a group of self-styled ‘intellectuals’ insist that religion is a dying interest among people whose opinions are worth while, they should see the repiles from the sons and daughters of DePauw, and from the fathers and mothers who now have sons and daughters in DePauw.”³⁹ Clearly, President Murlin believed that DePauw University had deep religious ties to past generations and he felt it was his duty to make sure those traditions stayed at DePauw University.

President Murlin understood there was a need to bring students and faculty closer together. In minutes taken at a faculty meeting on October 6, 1925, Secretary W. M. Blanchard

³⁶ “*Letter from Julian D. Hogate to President Lemuel Murlin, November 7, 1925.*” DC 114 1925-26: Folder 15, *Archives of DePauw University and Indiana United Methodism, Greencastle, Ind.*

³⁷ DePauw University Archives, *President Murlin*, http://www.depauw.edu/library/archives/news_exhibits/presidents/murlin.asp.

³⁸ DePauw University Archives, *President Murlin*, http://www.depauw.edu/library/archives/news_exhibits/presidents/murlin.asp.

³⁹ “*DePauw University: Its Opportunity and Duty: Inaugural Address by President Lemuel H. Murlin Tuesday, June 9, 1925.*” DC 110: Folder 7, *Archives of DePauw University and Indiana United Methodism, Greencastle, Ind.*, 26.

recorded Murlin stating, "...the need of cultivating a closer relationship between the students and faculty."⁴⁰ By stating this, Murlin understood that DePauw faculty and DePauw students had a fractured relationship. Murlin needed to find a way to make sure he secured the bond between faculty and students while maintaining the Methodist oath he recited at his inauguration on June 9, 1925. Murlin's resume from Boston University revealed an orthodox innovator willing to guide the University through a dark tunnel toward the future.

What the Students Want:

The DePauw, the student newspaper, expressed its opinion when it began to release articles about other universities allowing their students to dance on campus.⁴¹ The title of an article read in large block letters, "DANCING IS NOW PERMISSABLE AT OHIO WESLEYAN."⁴² Students at DePauw knew that other small, religious institutions allowed this form of social expression. In a letter to the *The DePauw*, a student wrote,

Where several hundred young men and women are gathered together at any educational institution there will be dancing. It is tolerated by the parents of these young people, and they will continue to dance when they go away to school. The question most colleges and universities have to decide is whether they will refuse to have anything to do with such amusements or whether they will supervise the dances, provide the chaperones, limit the hours, regulate the conduct and in other ways place them on the same level with other permitted college activities.⁴³

This article indicated that students were able to dance in their homes and wanted to bring that form of expression to DePauw. This student offered the administration an idea about social dancing: allow dancing and supervise the students. Students used their resources to make sure the administration and the community understood the position of most of the student body. It

⁴⁰ "Minutes of Faculty Meetings DePauw University September 1916 to June 1927." Vol. 140, *Archives of DePauw University and Indiana United Methodism, Greencastle, Ind.*

⁴¹ O'Neil, Edwin V., "Dancing is Now Permissible at Ohio Wesleyan," *The DePauw*, March 25, 1924, 1.

⁴² O'Neil, Edwin V., "Dancing is Now Permissible at Ohio Wesleyan," *The DePauw*, March 25, 1924, 1.

⁴³ Lloyd, Mark H., "One Student' Opinion About Dancing," *The DePauw*, September 12, 1925, 1.

was clear that students wanted to dance, as it seemed a natural occurrence for most of them. Nor were they alone in their feelings. Recent graduates of DePauw University discussed the issue of dancing with President Murlin through a series of letters that reached the President's desk in 1925. In a letter to President Murlin on November 10, 1925, Elmer G. Sulzer wrote,

While I was in college (I graduated last year), I felt the pressure of too many boarding school rules to the detriment of the spirit of the student. With this condition I can't see what would possess an administration to create the automobile rule, which merely gave the students another opportunity to become law breakers. I feel, however, that its mistake has been adequately felt by everyone and I would like to see its complete abolishment. There is no reason why it can't be abolished as quickly as it was created.^{44 45}

I would also like to register a complaint in the attitude of the administration in giving undue attention to the complaints of ministers. They represent only a part of the DePauw's alumni and should be treated only as a part. The rules forbidding dancing and card playing are simply foolish, antiquated, and ridiculous. By means of them DePauw is made the butt of many jests and as an alumnus I hate to see it done. I want to be proud that I graduated from DePauw, a rather questionable honor at present. Morals can not be created by legislation and the subrosa dancing and card playing that continually goes on at DePauw proves that. Why make the students criminals of offenses which are not criminal but approved in the best society? The student body by an overwhelming vote last year proved that they wanted dancing. The administration is the discipline enforcing machinery of the University and they have the power to enforce dancing.⁴⁶

Sulzer made it quite clear that he felt University was not responding to student outcries against the ban on social dancing. Sulzer called out previous administrations for giving Methodist ministers heavier influence in campus politics than students and alumni. Sulzer also made it clear that his was the voice of a new generation that felt the need for a more progressive campus life. With biting criticism, Sulzer said DePauw was becoming the laughing stock of the community because of their old-fashioned rules and ended his critique:

⁴⁴ "Letter from Elmer G. Sulzer to President Lemuel Murlin, November 10, 1925." DC 114 1925-26: Folder 15, Archives of DePauw University and Indiana United Methodism, Greencastle, Ind., 1.

⁴⁵ Depauw University, *Depauw University Student Handbook 1925-1926*. (Greencastle: Depauw University, 1925),43

⁴⁶ "Letter from Elmer G. Sulzer to President Lemuel Murlin, November 10, 1925." DC 114 1925-26: Folder 15, Archives of DePauw University and Indiana United Methodism, Greencastle, Ind., 1.

⁴⁶ "Letter from Elmer G. Sulzer to President Lemuel Murlin, November 10, 1925." DC 114 1925-26: Folder 15, Archives of DePauw University and Indiana United Methodism, Greencastle, Ind., 2.

I pledged \$100 a few years ago when the endowment campaign was made and I expected to see a modern DePauw develop. I naturally feel bad then, to find DePauw more antique than ever and instead of repealing the already repulsive rules to find an unwarranted addition. You will find that each year more and more upperclassman, the most valuable of them, leave DePauw disgusted.⁴⁷

Sulzer believed that lack of progress made his diploma “questionable,” which called into question the legitimacy of the institution. He emphasized the need to move forward.

In a letter back to Sulzer, Murlin wrote,

Moreover, I have had some of the most active of these men here on the campus, meeting the students, and to the surprise of the ministers, they find the students quite reasonable, and to the surprise of the students they find the ministers quite reasonable. We are beginning a mutual understanding of co-operation, and I think the problems before us will be solved quite satisfactorily. It needs a little time and patience and plenty of sweet oil to work out these problems, but I have every confidence that a happy and satisfactorily result will finally be reached.⁴⁸

With the news of ministers and students understanding each other and beginning to find common ground on the issue of dancing, it is important to understand what role President Murlin had in all of these deliberations. From this letter, it appears that President Murlin played an active role in bringing Methodist ministers to campus to discuss the act of dancing and gauge student opinion of the situation.

The unfortunate consequence of this traditional ban was that students went off campus to look for enjoyment, which the University could not chaperone. Whether it was in Greencastle or in Fort Wayne, the need for students to leave campus to experience the 1920s college life became a common occurrence among Greek organizations. In fact, word got back to Vice President Longden that a group of DePauw University students did not conduct themselves appropriately while off campus. A passerby of the event noted, “They had plenty of booze. Some of them were too drunk, men and women, to leave their cars, to which they resorted for

⁴⁸ “*Letter from President Lemuel Murlin to Elmer G. Sulzer, November 16, 1925.*” DC 114 1925-26: Folder 15, *Archives of DePauw University and Indiana United Methodism, Greencastle, Ind.*, 1.

drink, which surely did not do them any good, but which they resorted to frequently.”⁴⁹ When the hotel that provided the space for DePauw students denied that the hotel would have allowed such an event, the University investigated the event and decided that the man that reported these events was not credible.⁵⁰ Regardless if this man was a credible source or not, he witnessed young adults acting inappropriately while off campus. Fraternity members who drank to the point of slurred speech was no longer just a problem for the Greencastle community, this type of drunken behavior ventured into Terre Haute, Fort Wayne, and Indianapolis. That gave the administration even more reason to find a solution. Students were drinking and dancing off campus, and that posed a threat to their security and the reputation of the University.

Pressures Mount for Murlin:

In an effort to reach a reasonable solution, President Murlin sought input from everyone in the DePauw community. In a letter sent to him on subject of dancing, Doctor Julian Hogate, a DePauw alumnus, stated, “...boys and girls left DePauw with Christian faith shattered.”⁵¹ Hogate continued, “My suggestion is that the university have it in the gym, one evening each week for supervised dancing. Start early. Let the young folks dance their ‘fool legs off’ and then have the rule that any student who dances elsewhere during the college year or while college is in session be expelled. Let that rule stand no matter who the student is.”⁵² Hogate recognized the need to create a new policy towards amusements, and in Hogate’s opinion, these rules should be exact and applied equally to males and females on DePauw’s campus. President Murlin understood the severity of the issue when he wrote back to Dr. Hogate,

⁴⁹ “Letter from Rufus A. Morrison to Vice President Longden, February 6, 1926.” DC 114 1925-26: Folder 13, *Archives of DePauw University and Indiana United Methodism, Greencastle, Ind.*

⁵⁰ “Letter from Rufus A. Morrison to Vice President Longden, February 6, 1926.” DC 114 1925-26: Folder 13, *Archives of DePauw University and Indiana United Methodism, Greencastle, Ind.*

⁵¹ “Letter from Julian D. Hogate to President Lemuel Murlin, November 7, 1925.” DC 114 1925-26: Folder 15, *Archives of DePauw University and Indiana United Methodism, Greencastle, Ind.*, 1.

⁵² “Letter from Julian D. Hogate to President Lemuel Murlin, November 7, 1925.” DC 114 1925-26: Folder 15, *Archives of DePauw University and Indiana United Methodism, Greencastle, Ind.*, 2.

After having formulated a program with reference to this entire subject, it will then, of course, have to be agreed to by the Student Council and the Faculty. There is no 'passing the buck' now. All who are interested in the problem, pro and con, are facing it fairly and squarely, and with mutual confidence and goodwill, even though we may differ somewhat on details.⁵³

President Murlin indicated with this quote that he would follow the proper channels in order to find an answer to the dancing question. He understood that every group on campus would have to have input if his policy were to succeed. He made sure that alumni knew that the University was looking at this issue fairly and everyone had voice that wanted to have a voice.

It is evident from his diaries and his memorandums to the University and to his fellow bishops around the state of Indiana, President Murlin met with several DePauw college students in order to better gauge the campus climate.⁵⁴ To better understand exactly what the needs of DePauw University were, President Murlin made sure he contacted students, faculty, staff, and alumni. An alumnus himself, President Murlin understood the traditions of DePauw University, but he needed to figure out what to do with those students that did not agree with them. In keeping to the tradition of Frances J. McConnell, President of DePauw University from 1909-1912, who advocated "more or less" for increased social life at DePauw University⁵⁵, Murlin continued to use the administration's power as an advocate of change.

Through his personal diaries, Murlin showed affection toward those that walked across DePauw's campus as evidenced by his many meetings with student representatives and faculty members.⁵⁶ He made it a point to attend basketball and football games, and debates to encourage

⁵³ "Letter from Julian D. Hogate to President Lemuel Murlin, November 7, 1925." DC 114 1925-26: Folder 15, *Archives of DePauw University and Indiana United Methodism, Greencastle, Ind.*, 2.

⁵⁴"President Lemuel H. Murlin 1925, 1926, 1927, *Daily Reminder*." DC 107, *Archives of DePauw University and Indiana United Methodism, Greencastle, Ind.*

⁵⁵ DePauw University, President Francis J. McConnell, http://www.depauw.edu/library/archives/news_exhibits/presidents/mcconnell.asp.

⁵⁶ "President Lemuel H. Murlin: 1925 *Daily Reminder*." DC 107, *Archives of DePauw University and Indiana United Methodism, Greencastle, Ind.* 2-100.

students to get involved on campus and interact with their peers.⁵⁷ Murlin wanted to revolutionize the way students on campus interacted with each other. He wanted students to engage outside of the classroom, and felt it necessary to split the University between the classroom and extra curricular activities. Even before taking the oath as the twelfth President of the University, he took it upon himself to better understand the Greek culture at DePauw. On March 3, 1925, Murlin recalled eating at Phi Kappa Psi fraternity, during which the members of the house introduced themselves to the President and discussed several social issues that plagued the university, such as the ban on social dancing.⁵⁸ On many occasions, President Murlin set up appointments to interview students about what kinds of academic and social changes needed to occur across campus.⁵⁹ It was quite clear that Murlin was willing and able to meet with students to engage in discussions about the campus. While President Murlin understood the pulse of DePauw's campus, he had several letters from ministers around the state that denounced the introduction of dancing to DePauw.

The Methodist Church kept a strict code against social amusements, such as dancing and card playing. In the Methodist Book of Discipline in 1925, it stated,

Improper amusements and excessive indulgence in innocent amusements are serious barriers to the beginning of religious life and fruitful causes of spiritual decline. Some amusements in common are positively demoralizing and furnish the first easy steps to the total loss of character. We therefore look with deep concern on the great increase of amusements and on the general prevalence of harmful amusements, and lift up a solemn note of warning and entreaty, particularly against attendance upon immoral, questionable and misleading theatrical or motion picture performances; against dancing; and against such games of chance as are frequently associated with gambling; all of which have

⁵⁷ "President Lemuel H. Murlin: 1925 Daily Reminder." DC 107, *Archives of DePauw University and Indiana United Methodism, Greencastle, Ind.* 2-100.

⁵⁸ "President Lemuel H. Murlin: 1925 Daily Reminder." DC 107, *Archives of DePauw University and Indiana United Methodism, Greencastle, Ind.* 2-100.

⁵⁹ "President Lemuel H. Murlin: 1925 Daily Reminder." DC 107, *Archives of DePauw University and Indiana United Methodism, Greencastle, Ind.* 2-100.

been found to be antagonistic to vital piety, formative of worldliness, and especially pernicious to youth.⁶⁰

Methodists feared that social amusements led to social decline and social stagnation, which left society with an empty hole that only religion could fill. Being one of the most well known Methodist institutions in the country, DePauw University faced an uphill battle to overturn an old-fashioned rule during a progressive era in DePauw University history. The Church and the University aligned and made sure to compliment one another when ushering students from young adults, into skillful, capable young men and women entering American society. President Murlin did not find lifting the dancing ban easy.

While most students favored lifting the ban,⁶¹ several Methodist church members felt social dancing would be a complete degradation of religious morality among the student body.⁶² In a letter to President Murlin, William T. Arnold, Superintendent of the Muncie District of the North Indiana Conference Methodist Episcopal Church, called on the faculty to take a stand,

The Muncie District Central Meeting with forty-three pastors and many laymen representing sixteen thousand two hundred and fourteen members vigorously protests against the introduction of mixed dancing in DePauw University, and very earnestly urges the faculty to take a stand against it.⁶³

Shortly after the beginning of the Fall Semester in 1925, other Methodist ministers began sending President Murlin mail concerning the lift of the ban on social dancing. In a letter to President Murlin, Earl D. Imler noted,

“Report has reached us concerning the proposal to inaugurate supervised dancing as a part of the social life at DePauw. As an alumnus of Old DePauw, as a

⁶⁰ DePauw University, *DePauw University Student Handbook 1925-1926*. (Greencastle: DePauw University, 1925), 92.4.

⁶¹ DePauw University Archives, *President Murlin*, http://www.depauw.edu/library/archives/news_exhibits/presidents/murlin.asp.

⁶² “Letter from E.D. Imler to President Lemuel H. Murlin.” DC 114 1925-26: Folder 15, *Archives of DePauw University and Indiana United Methodism, Greencastle, Ind.*

⁶³ “Letter from William T. Arnold to President Lemuel Murlin, September 11, 1925.” DC 114 1925-26: Folder 15, *Archives of DePauw University and Indiana United Methodism, Greencastle, Ind.*

member of the North Indiana Conference and as a pastor to families whose children have gone to DePauw's campus this week I desire to offer my humble protest against such a course of action. While it may be desired by a considerable element of the student body I believe that such proposal is contrary to the tradition of the University, not in keeping with the spirit of Methodism and will prove to be highly disagreeable to the majority of the DePauw constituency in our state."⁶⁴

This type of sentiment came from all over the state of Indiana. From Goshen, Muncie, to Richmond, several Methodist churches were outraged at the possibility that the beacon of Methodist education would even consider the possibility of allowing such a devilish activity. To be fair to President Murlin, many among the Methodist faith did notice that the General Conference of Methodists might have given their consent to social amusements in their conference meeting in 1924.⁶⁵ E.E. Trippeer mentioned the conference and the assumption of consent when he stated in a letter to President Murlin, "I understand there is some thought of permitting dancing in DePauw. There is a notion abroad that the Methodist Church in her last general conference let down the bars on this question, which was not the intent at all."⁶⁶ It appeared some confusion existed among the faithful as Trippeer had to clear up the interpretation of the last meeting. It appeared that some Methodist ministers thought President Murlin had misinterpreted the 1924 conference. Methodists around the state knew what Murlin faced and they knew the student body had become much more liberal than in years previous. Their hope was to eliminate any possibility of religious deterioration, but President Murlin needed not to only appease Methodists, but more importantly, he needed to appease the student body that pushed heavily against the ban on social dancing.

⁶⁴ "Letter from Earl D. Imler to President Lemuel Murlin, September 11, 1925." DC 114 1925-26: Folder 15, Archives of DePauw University and Indiana United Methodism, Greencastle, Ind.

⁶⁵ "Letter from E.E. Trippeer to President Lemuel Murlin, September 11, 1925." DC 114 1925-26: Folder 15, Archives of DePauw University and Indiana United Methodism, Greencastle, Ind.

⁶⁶ "Letter from E.E. Trippeer to President Lemuel Murlin, September 11, 1925." DC 114 1925-26: Folder 15, Archives of DePauw University and Indiana United Methodism, Greencastle, Ind.

Ministers from across the state seemed to fear that dancing would create a loss of religious faith. While looking at the evidence, one would have to ask, what was there to fear or lose with the introduction of dancing? Clearly, allowing dancing at a religious institution created impurity among the faithful. The act of dancing would push students toward a life of religious decline and social impurity. After reading an article in *The DePauw*, Minister Frank H. Winter declared,

I think I have had experience enough in school work to convince me that the dance is not wrong per se, because of its lack of supervision, but in my humble opinion, because of the proximity of the bodies of the opposite sexes in the dance. Your argument for your own department is quite sufficient for all. I admit that young people do not differentiate clearly between the passion of mating and the state of natural love that beats strongly, especially in the hearts of the female sex. But, as maturity ripens, sex consciousness develops to the extent that, the passions must be aroused in normal beings, which passions are pure and holy when properly legalized by the law of man and God.⁶⁷

Although this letter reached Murlin's office after his decision to allow chaperoned dancing at DePauw, Winter's opinion heightened some of the issues Methodists had with the decision to allow dancing. Winter believed the positioning of the bodies was the biggest concern. Dancing was much more than the act of moving one's body back and forth, he believed that students could perceive this as a sexual act. But this was assuming that all young adults thought in the same way as Winter. Members of an older more conservative generation feared dancing would create social decline. This would in turn create a society free from religious morals, which would create a kind of social anarchy. This fear among Methodists around the state formed a constituency that wanted President Murlin to make a decision in favor of the church and not the student body.

⁶⁷ "Letter from Frank H. Winters to President Lemuel Murlin, March 6, 1926." DC 114 1925-26: Folder 15, *Archives of DePauw University and Indiana United Methodism, Greencastle, Ind.*

As part of his decision making process, Murlin made sure to contact other presidents of Midwestern universities concerning the issue of dancing. Was dancing common across campuses? If so, how did other administrations handle the situation? Ohio Wesleyan University, the same University *The DePauw* mentioned as allowing social dancing, wrote a letter to President Murlin in response to a letter Murlin sent to them. John W. Hoffman, the President of Ohio Wesleyan University in 1925, stated,

I am enclosing one of our rule books which I believe will be helpful to you in getting our procedure on the social activities on our campus. The student and faculty committee regulate and direct the social life of our young people. We have had but one year's experience with dancing as a legitimate function and really do not feel as though we can pass correct judgment on it. So far it has been satisfactory except that our monthly varsity dances are held in the town hall. Of course they are always properly chaperoned by faculty guests who have been approved by the Dean of Women.⁶⁸

It is important to note that university administrations did not simply lift the ban and allow students to dance wherever they wanted, whenever they pleased. As expressed in Hoffman's letter to Murlin, the students and faculty controlled the setting of dancing.⁶⁹ This allowed students and faculty to have a say in what kind of dancing took place and where it took place. Students and faculty had responsibility for the social life of the students. Who better to regulate student festivities than students and faculty? The Ohio Wesleyan plan gave President Murlin an idea of what other administrations were doing.

Charles Frederick Wishart, President of the College of Wooster, also commented,

Our policy has been to have no college dances as such although we have not forbidden dances in private homes. This year the Dean of Women with the consent of the faculty, has allowed some of the old fashioned square dances so called, such as Henry Ford has been advocating. These have been permitted at perhaps a half dozen social functions. This, however, is not yet a matter of fixed

⁶⁸ "Letter from John W. Hoffman to President Murlin, September 17, 1925." DC 114 1925-26: Folder 15, *Archives of DePauw University and Indiana United Methodism, Greencastle, Ind.* 1.

⁶⁹ "Letter from John W. Hoffman to President Murlin, September 17, 1925." DC 114 1925-26: Folder 15, *Archives of DePauw University and Indiana United Methodism, Greencastle, Ind.* 1.

policy but is somewhat experimental and no definite policy will be determined until I am at home again.⁷⁰

Henry Ford (the inventor of the first automobile and assembly line) had spoken in favor of some sort of dancing⁷¹, especially square dancing. Square dancing allowed for a systematic way for people to dance on a gymnasium floor. This type of dancing did not allow for the inappropriate movement of bodies that unrestricted dancing favored. Administrations were looking for a way to allow dancing and yet have some control over it.

While members of the Methodist Church, such as E.E. Trippeer and Earl Imler, accused DePauw University of making a poor decision by introducing dancing into the university, alumnus Will A. Cavin expressed the opposite opinion. In the opening of his letter to President Murlin, Cavin stated,

...while I was talking with one of the best Methodist District Superintendents, or Presiding Elders as we used to call them, of Indiana, to hear him say; 'Although I do not believe in dancing as a social practice any more than I ever did, I do believe that we have come to the point where it would be better to allow well-controlled dancing at DePauw than to continue as conditions are at present. Up to this year I have not been in favor of permitting dancing in DePauw, but I have now arrived at the point where I believe the ministers of the State will have to give in for the betterment of the college and all interests concerned.' Now that is the way they feel about it all over the State, Dr. Murlin. I am not saying that all of them feel that way, but a large percentage of the deeper thinking men have this conviction and I do not believe you could do a better thing than to allow well organized dancing at DePauw beginning next semester.⁷²

While many ministers around the state did not believe in dancing, they did understand that the problem it presented needed resolution. In a letter sent in response to Cavin's letter, Murlin wrote, "I thank you very much for yours of November 20. If you will give me the names and

⁷⁰ "Letter from Charles Wishart to President Murlin, February 4, 1926" DC 114 1925-26: Folder 15, *Archives of DePauw University and Indiana United Methodism, Greencastle, Ind.*

⁷¹ "Letter from Charles Wishart to President Murlin, February 4, 1926" DC 114 1925-26: Folder 15, *Archives of DePauw University and Indiana United Methodism, Greencastle, Ind.*

⁷² "Letter from Will A. Cavin to President Lemuel Murlin, November 20, 1925." DC 114 1925-26: Folder 15, *Archives of DePauw University and Indiana United Methodism, Greencastle, Ind.*, 1

addresses of the ministers and laymen you mentioned, who talked as you quoted, and if they will write me, it will help very much. I have indicated on every occasion that my views are practically yours.”⁷³ Murlin had the evidence he needed to prove that other members of the Methodist Church were willing to lift the ban on dancing with certain restrictions. Like Cavin noted, dancing needed to be in a controlled environment, much like Hoffman provided for his students at Ohio Wesleyan University.

Pressures from both sides mounted in 1926 as President Murlin came closer to a decision. In a letter sent to Dean of Students, Edwin Post, on January 31, 1926, Murlin stated, “I am quite sure we must come to some action on the dance question soon—and the sooner better. I suggest that No. 3 [supervised dancing] is the best of all the plans suggested...The Betas are asking that they may permit dancing as a part of their formal party 13th February. I am in favor of doing this and then in favor of the general rule at as early a date as possible.”⁷⁴ Murlin made it very clear, “They are not to be called ‘dances;’ they are ‘parties.’ But we are permitting that dancing may be one of the items on the program for the party, under the usual rules governing parties.”⁷⁵ Murlin agreed to allow students to initiate chaperoned dancing at their parties as long as they registered their party and followed proper risk management policies that the University had in place. Only with the consent of the administration and under the watchful eye of chaperones could students dance among themselves.

Murlin’s Decision Shakes Methodism:

⁷³ “Letter from President Lemuel Murlin to Will A. Cavin, November 20, 1925.” DC 114 1925-26: Folder 15, *Archives of DePauw University and Indiana United Methodism, Greencastle, Ind.*

⁷⁴ “Letter from President Lemuel Murlin to Dr. Post, January 31, 1926.” DC 114 1925-26: Folder 15, *Archives of DePauw University and Indiana United Methodism, Greencastle, Ind.*

⁷⁵ “Letter from President Lemuel Murlin to Miss Alvord, January 30, 1926.” *Archives of DePauw University and Indiana United Methodism, Greencastle, Ind.*

Members of the Methodist Church were quick to take offense with Murlin's decision. By DePauw agreeing to allow young adults to dance, even while supervised, the administration violated Methodist principle. This was one of the first times the university went against the teachings of the Church. Those strongly aligned with the traditional values of the Methodist Church made themselves heard,

In my judgment you have made a serious mistake and my guess is that within eighteen months you yourself will have fears lest you have made a mistake. The position of the 1924 Discipline is a forward step: you have taken a backward step. In the years to come Christianity will advance far beyond the 1924 Discipline. Your position will be seen to be as truly a backward step as would the return of human slavery or the American saloon.⁷⁶

Not only was this minister upset with Merlin's decision, he equated the act of dancing to the return of slavery. His comparison between Murlin's decision and human slavery was a hefty claim. Murlin's decision shook the foundations of ministers around the state; many of whom saw the beacon of Methodist education deteriorating under Murlin's watch. They viewed Murlin's lift of the dancing ban as an outright defiance of the Methodist Discipline, which they argued was a backward step for DePauw University, and a departure from traditional DePauw Methodism.

While the 1925-1926 handbook made it illegal for students to dance at any function, the 1926-1927 handbook declared chaperoned dancing fully admissible.⁷⁷ While DePauw University made an effort to point out that amusement could lead to decline in spiritual character, it also made sure to say that certain amusements were a part of the college student's life.

While we are aware that improper amusements are a 'fruitful source of spiritual decline,' we also believe that the social and recreational instinct is God-given, and, if properly guided, will strengthen rather than injure the spiritual life. The Church must no longer allow her youth to 'go into the nearby towns and buy themselves

⁷⁶ "Letter from G. W. Myers to President Lemuel Murlin, March 11, 1926." DC 114 1925-26: Folder 15, *Archives of DePauw University and Indiana United Methodism, Greencastle, Ind.*

⁷⁷ DePauw University, *DePauw University Student Handbook 1926-1927*, 43.

the victuals of social life,' but, rather, would say, 'Sit down and eat' of the clean, wholesome things provided by the Church which seeks to build a social and recreational life that is spiritual and a spiritual life that is social and recreational.⁷⁸

Murlin created one of the first splinters between the Methodist Discipline and DePauw University. This was certainly the feeling of several ministers from the state of Indiana and several alumni who made it their duty to write President Murlin about his decision. Regardless of the negative attention Murlin received from his Methodist brothers, he felt it was necessary to allow students to dance at social gatherings under the eye of a chaperone. This move on the part of the Murlin administration was quite intelligent and well sold to the DePauw faculty. Instead of having the students of DePauw University head out into town to party and dance without the supervision of the University, why not allow students to have dancing as a part of their social functions on campus and allow the Church to guide them in a religious way? Murlin did not want the DePauw student to not have the Church watching over the student; therefore, by lifting the ban, students no longer needed to go off campus in order to dance. Instead, the University made it possible for students to gather among themselves and enjoy music, while having the Church chaperone. This revolutionary measure rattled the Methodist community surrounding DePauw University, but it needed to be done in light of the rapidly changing social, spiritual, and financial dynamics that marked the 1920's.

DePauw's Greek Organizations Respond:

The 1920s college student used student organizations in order to escape the watchful eye of a strict, and sometimes harsh, faculty. Faculty members of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries considered grades and religion the issues a student should worry about.⁷⁹ With the arrival of the 1920s college student, previous college student traditions crumbled under

⁷⁸ DePauw University, *DePauw University Student Handbook 1926-1927*, 43.

⁷⁹ Horowitz, *Campus Life*, 33.

the weight of modern expectations. The fraternity and sorority system allowed for a separation between the students and faculty.⁸⁰ According to Horowitz, college fraternities were known for drinking, smoking, card playing, and “petting” parties during the Roaring Twenties.⁸¹ The American fraternity system exploded during that decade for those very reasons. “Fraternities grew in numbers and wealth. It has been estimated that by 1929 slightly under 4,000 chapters owned property worth \$90 million.”⁸² DePauw University’s Greek system contributed to this explosion of Greek organizations during the 1920s, with over twenty chapters that represented most of DePauw’s student body.⁸³

In President Murlin’s Inaugural address, he indicated his affection toward the Greek system. Murlin stated, “Fraternities can be a most helpful factor in college life if those who are in control of them are determine to make them so. They should occupy the same relation in the college community that families do in the community at large.”⁸⁴ It was clear that President Murlin held DePauw’s Greek system to a high standard, and he, as well as several DePauw presidents before him, expected the students of DePauw to become involved on campus and in the Greencastle community. Involvement in the community expanded DePauw’s influence within the community. Murlin’s lifting the ban on dancing brought students back to campus and the Greencastle Community. Students no longer had to pay for travel costs, hotel rooms, or extra dinners any longer. Adding dancing to social functions at DePauw brought fraternity and sorority members back to DePauw and Greencastle.

⁸⁰ Horowitz, *Campus Life*, 34.

⁸¹ Horowitz, *Campus Life*, 35.

⁸² Horowitz, *Campus Life*, 35.

⁸³ Manhart, *DePauw Through the Years*, 199.

⁸⁴ “*DePauw University: Its Opportunity and Duty: Inaugural Address by President Lemuel H. Murlin Tuesday, June 9, 1925.*” DC 110: Folder 7, *Archives of DePauw University and Indiana United Methodism, Greencastle, Ind.*, 26.

When the University gave its permission to allow chaperoned dancing at DePauw, Beta Theta Pi was the first to ask the administration to grant permission to include dancing. The minutes from the Student Affairs meeting noted, “The Delta chapter of Beta Theta Pi hereby petitions for permission to dance at its formal party to be held February 13, 1926. We do not believe in clandestine dancing and will use our influence to prevent it.”⁸⁵ The administration granted Beta the opportunity to have this party.⁸⁶ With this being the first party that had chaperoned dancing, the administration had quite an interest in analyzing the events of the party. William W. Carson reported,

One difficulty in giving these parties heretofore has been for the young men to provide something interesting to fill in the time between the close of dinner and the close of the party. At this party permission had been secured for those who cared to do so to dance. I should say that about three fourths of those present indulged in this diversion. Those who did not find interest in dancing watched those who did. As chaperones, Mrs. Carson and I are of the opinion that the party was brightened and made more entertaining for all because of this permission. We saw nothing to criticize in the manner of dancing except that it does not appear to be as graceful as the old fashioned style.⁸⁷

Contrary to traditional Methodist thought, the report of the party did not include descriptions of scandalous sex, females dressed risqué, or men falling down drunk. In fact, these students exhibited behavior worthy of admiration from the administration; President Merlin was so pleased with the results that he granted Alpha Tau Omega and the Men’s Hall Association petition to allow dancing at their social gathering.⁸⁸ A few days later, the administration granted Delta Upsilon, Kappa Tau Kappa, Kappa Kappa Gamma, Alpha Chi Omega, Delta Kappa

⁸⁵ “Minutes from Student Affairs Committee, February 5, 1926.” DC 114 1925-26: Folder 15, *Archives of DePauw University and Indiana United Methodism, Greencastle, Ind.*

⁸⁶ “Minutes from Student Affairs Committee, February 5, 1926.” DC 114 1925-26: Folder 15, *Archives of DePauw University and Indiana United Methodism, Greencastle, Ind.*

⁸⁷ “Letter from William W. Carson to President Lemuel Murlin, February 17, 1926.” DC 114 1925-26: Folder 15, *Archives of DePauw University and Indiana United Methodism, Greencastle, Ind.*

⁸⁸ “Minutes from Student Affairs Committee, March 2, 1926.” DC 114 1925-26: Folder 15, *Archives of DePauw University and Indiana United Methodism, Greencastle, Ind.*

Epsilon, Sigma Delta Chi, and Phi Gamma Delta permission to have dancing at their parties.⁸⁹ DePauw was lively as dancing exploded onto the social scene among Greek organizations.

Keeping with his agreement to only permit these dances to take place on campus, President Murlin did not permit fraternities to leave campus. In minutes taken during a special meeting presided by President Murlin a secretary wrote, “Petition from Lambda Chi fraternity to be permitted to hold their formal party at the Hotel on the National Road near Cloverdale and dance there was declined. The Committee recommended that the President inform the Lambda Chis that they did not approve of any organization holding parties out of town in public places.”⁹⁰ The administration kept to its decision to not allow fraternities, or any organization for that matter, to hold social functions with dancing outside of campus. The administration applied this policy firmly and evenly. In Student Affairs minutes from May 11, 1926, the Committee stated, “Petition of Theta Kappa Nu for permission to give a formal dinner party on Saturday, May 22nd, at the Grant Hotel, was declined, on the ground that it was not the policy of the Committee to permit parties out of town.”⁹¹ This measure was a built in fail-safe for the University. Murlin’s administration allowed organizations to have chaperoned dancing as long as the dance stayed on campus. This reaffirmed Murlin’s belief that the University could provide a safe, warm religious guidance for students as they participated in chaperoned dancing. The University did not want to control every student at DePauw University; rather, the University was out to protect students’ religious spirit.

⁸⁹ “Minutes from Student Affairs Committee, March 9, 1926.” DC 114 1925-26: Folder 15, *Archives of DePauw University and Indiana United Methodism, Greencastle, Ind.*

⁹⁰ “Minutes from Student Affairs Committee, February 11, 1926.” DC 114 1925-26: Folder 15, *Archives of DePauw University and Indiana United Methodism, Greencastle, Ind.*

⁹¹ “Minutes from Student Affairs Committee, May 11, 1926.” DC 114 1925-26: Folder 15, *Archives of DePauw University and Indiana United Methodism, Greencastle, Ind.*

In one of his last letters to his fellow ministers on the act of dancing, President Murlin made it quite clear that he made the best decision for the student body as a whole, and that the Church should follow in the same footsteps. In a letter to an opposing pastor, Murlin stated,

I firmly believe that it will make for a more ethical and moral life, as well as for a better religious attitude than is possible under our present condition, which conditions have existed for a long time, and seem to be growing worse. I also believe that if all churches would join in a program to seek to keep in touch with the young people of the community, they will go a long way in helping the young people in the hard condition they have to face, and is what the Amusement Chapter in our Book of Discipline aims at, and that is one of the most important functions of all churches today. I am trying to place the social activities of DePauw University where Methodism places them, namely, up to the intelligence, conscience, and final decisions of the individual himself. That is the only way we can develop real Christian character, and that is the great purpose of churches and colleges.⁹²

Clearly, Murlin had strong faith that the students of DePauw University had the moral strength to be responsible when it came the amusement of dancing. Murlin believed that if the Church wanted to foster a strong relationship with their younger members, they should pay attention to the decision made by DePauw University in regards to dancing. In Murlin's opinion, helping younger students in their quest for this type of amusement would only guide students in a positive direction. In a final attempt to quiet his critics, Murlin stated, "In all my conference with these young people, I have heard no impolite, inconsiderate, hasty, nor unkind thing said about those who hold your viewpoint. I do not think one of them is capable of saying such words as you put into their mouths."⁹³ Murlin was obviously frustrated with the preconceived notions of his fellow brothers of the Methodist Church. He made sure that his fellow pastors understood that the students at

⁹² *The DePauw* "Murlin Writes Letter to Pastor Who Denounces Dance Policy: DePauw University, Office of the President, February 26, 1926." DC 114 1925-26: Folder 15, *Archives of DePauw University and Indiana United Methodism, Greencastle, Ind.*

⁹³ *The DePauw* "Murlin Writes Letter to Pastor Who Denounces Dance Policy: DePauw University, Office of the President, February 26, 1926." DC 114 1925-26: Folder 15, *Archives of DePauw University and Indiana United Methodism, Greencastle, Ind.*

DePauw University were not evil deviants that did not follow the Book of Discipline. Students at DePauw needed the guidance of the Methodist Church; he did not shy away from guiding these young souls. Murlin did not turn his back on his students; rather, he tried to guide these students in a positive direction under religious supervision.

Conclusion:

The post-War era saw increases in college enrollments that would affect the social dynamics of several schools across the United States. DePauw University gained over eight hundred students over the course of the 1920s, which caused the University to expand its faculty and its buildings. With the expansion of the University, DePauw experienced a dynamic shift in students coming from the upper-middle class, willing to pay the increase in fees.⁹⁴ The college students of the 1920s differed from those of their parents' generation because of the radio, automobile, and other inventions that made life easier and more exciting. For the first time in the history of the United States, a generation of people was able to break from their parent's generation and create their own culture.⁹⁵ This new, Jazz era, card playing, dancing, college student stepped onto DePauw's campus and revolutionized DePauw student life activity.

President Lemuel Murlin's decision to allow dancing on campus affected those at DePauw before, during, and after the 1920s. Many Methodist ministers were of the opinion that President Murlin's decision was a mistake and a direct violation of the Methodist faith. While his decision did not affect DePauw University alumni directly, they still felt his decision impacted the history of the University and would forever change campus life at DePauw University. DePauw Alumnus Julian Hogate stated to President Murlin that if he allowed

⁹⁴ Levine, *The American College*, 144.

⁹⁵ Drowne and Huber, *The 1920s*, 3.

dancing at DePauw he would have, "...a student body that will revere you beyond measure."⁹⁶ DePauw alumni understood that most of the student body hailed President Murlin as champion of their cause.

President Murlin's measure deviated from Methodist tradition, which angered many ministers in the state of Indiana. While Murlin felt this decision was in the best interest of the students, several ministers believed this action would lead students to a life of immoral behavior. Nonetheless, Murlin decided to rewrite DePauw's Student Handbook and allowed DePauw students the ability to swing and jive at parties. With the ban on dancing lifted, students were able to apply for dancing permission and carry on in a responsible way. This kept the student from leaving campus and carrying on in careless ways. Murlin's decision to lift the ban on dancing allowed students to create a different type of social atmosphere. For the first time, students could express themselves freely at parties.

Despite what many of the Methodist ministers around the state predicted, students at DePauw University did not fall into an abyss of spiritual decline. In fact, parties that included chaperoned dancing added a new dynamic to the DePauw social scene. Students no longer experienced the awkward after dinner hour. Instead, they filled that time moving freely across the dance floor. DePauw had not lost its religious atmosphere as many ministers feared. President Murlin's decision allowed students to grow culturally, and be guided spiritually, as they encountered this new cultural phenomenon. Instead of allowing students to continue inappropriate behavior off campus, Murlin beckoned them back with open arms. Why allow students to engage in what the University considered inappropriate behavior when the University could help guide students in a religious manner? Murlin's answer was to implement a policy that

⁹⁶ "Letter from Julian D. Hogate to President Lemuel Murlin, November 7, 1925." DC 114 1925-26: Folder 15, Archives of DePauw University and Indiana United Methodism, Greencastle, Ind.

would excite students to stay on campus, and that was exactly what his policy did. Greek organizations lined up to register parties that included dancing, and the administration disallowed those wanting to leave campus.

President Murlin's landmark decision to lift the ban on dancing was a fracture in the relations between DePauw University and Methodism. Methodist ministers from around the state viewed Murlin's decision as a mistake that would come back to haunt him in the future. Murlin did in fact re-write DePauw University's handbook on dancing, which did not line up entirely with the views of the Methodist Church. Murlin's decision sided with the views of most of the student body, but he did not make this decision to get on the good side of the student body; rather, his decision was made in the best interest of the University as a whole. He did more than just lift the traditional ban on dancing. Rather, he guided students in a positive direction than allow students free expression in a safe environment rather than face temptations outside of campus. Murlin defended his position and rightfully so. He believed that he made a decision that would protect the student body and ease the tensions between the student body, faculty, and administration. Murlin decision would forever revolutionize social life at DePauw University.

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