

## GETTING TO KNOW ELSIE SWEENEY...

We have all probably heard of Elsie Sweeney. We talk about the Endowment Fund of Miss Elsie I Sweeney of the Epsilon Chapter, Columbus, Indiana, where she was a charter member, every year in the fall. That endowment allows children the opportunity to hear live orchestra performances at no cost. But do any of us really know what an important benefactor she was to the arts?

Miss Elsie Sweeney was the daughter of the Reverend Z. T. Sweeney and Linnie Irwin Sweeney. She was born in 1888 in Columbus, Indiana and lived her entire life there, devoting her considerable talents to furthering the cultural life of her community, her state, and her nation. She received a degree in music and a Phi Beta Kappa key at Smith College, where she began the study of piano and continued with Josef Lhevinne of Berlin and Ernest Hutcheson of New York City. Thereafter she was a performing musician throughout her life, practicing daily no matter how busy her schedule.

Miss Sweeney first visited Indiana University on Foundation Day, January 20, 1911, at the invitation of the national president of Phi Beta Kappa, Professor Edwin A. Grosvenor of Amherst College, when he came to install the Indiana University chapter of Phi Beta Kappa.

Later, from the mid-40s on, she became closely associated with the IU School of Music: she entertained musicians and members of the staff, attended concerts, occasionally performed (she gave a recital in Recital Hall only a few years before her death), funded a scholarship to attract an outstanding student, and continually encouraged Music School students, whom she called “her children.” When Indiana University began to plan for a musical arts center, she not only contributed generously herself but prompted members of her family and the Irwin-Sweeney-Miller Foundation to participate, making the initial sizable gift which sparked the whole program. An Elsie I. Sweeney Memorial Scholarship Fund was established by individuals and organizations, particularly Psi Iota Xi, to attract talented young performing musicians to the Music School each year.

Twice Elsie Sweeney brought the Music School to the attention of the highest officer of the State, when she commissioned Walter Kaufmann to compose an opera, “A Hoosier Tale,” in celebration of the State’s Sesquicentennial anniversary, and when she called the governor to insist that he approve IU’s request for permission to build the Musical Arts Center.

Honored in various ways—by being named to state and national boards of music organizations and by being elected to the Indiana Academy, for instance—she was recognized on the centennial anniversary of the admission of women to the University by the award of an honorary Doctor of Music degree at the Founders Day ceremony in 1967. She helped to make a difference at Indiana University.

On April 13th, 1970, Governor Edgar D Whitcomb officially proclaimed the day “Elsie I Sweeney Day”, in appreciation of her philanthropic and cultural work with Psi Iota Xi Sorority.

Elsie died in 1972.