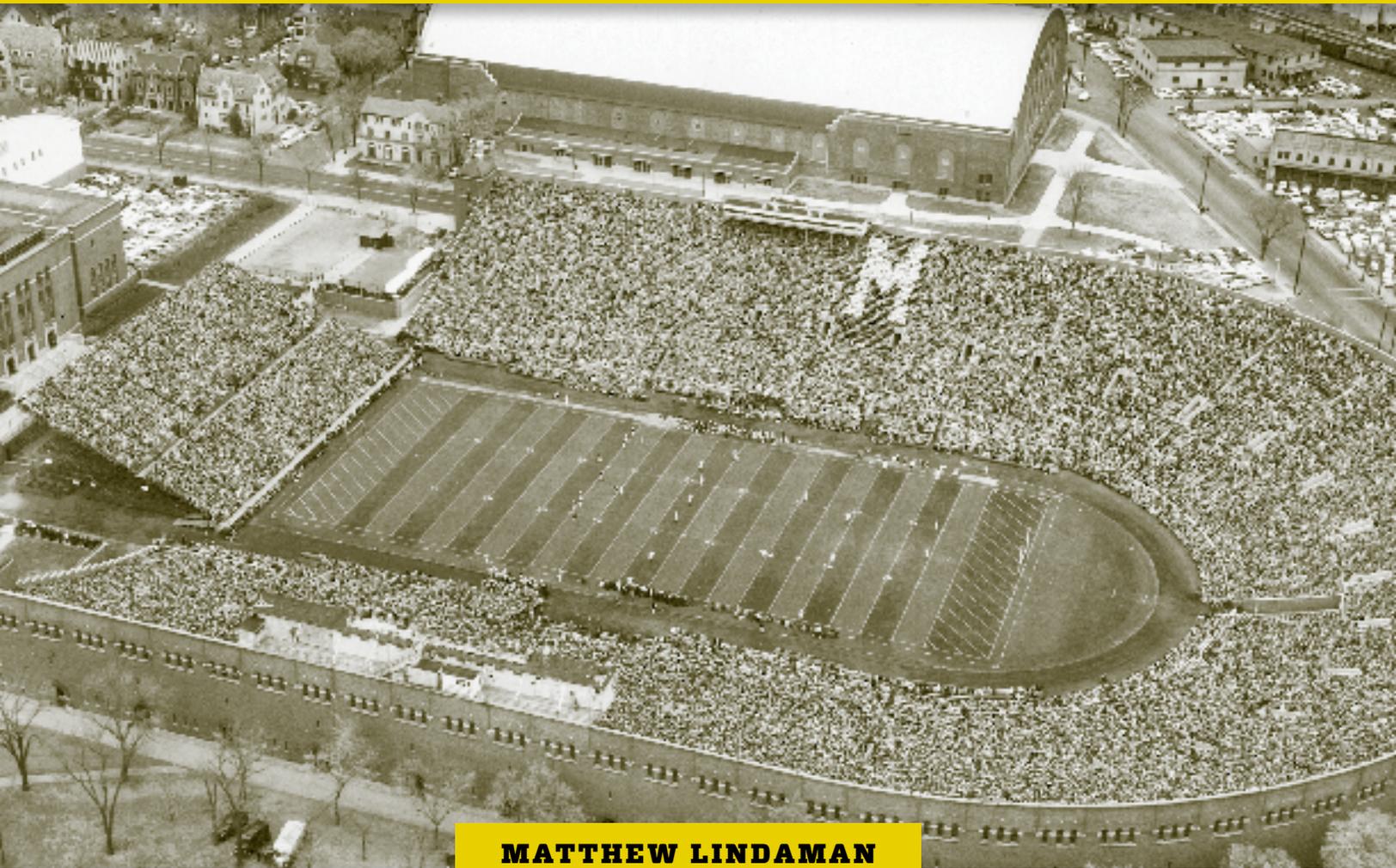


# UP! UP! STADIUM

**PLANNING and BUILDING a WAR MEMORIAL**



**MATTHEW LINDAMAN**

**O**n **September 12, 2009**, the sights, sounds, and traditions of football Saturday returned to the Minneapolis campus of the University of Minnesota after 28 years at the Hubert H. Humphrey Metrodome, across the Mississippi River near the Mill City's downtown. A sold-out crowd watched the home team beat the Air Force Academy Falcons in the Gophers' new, open-air TCF Bank Stadium. It was a triumphant homecoming: From 1924 to 1981, the university's football teams had played at their own Memorial Stadium, fondly called the Brickhouse, a facility born out of several major trends in athletics and education.

Minnesota's stadium joined similar memorials constructed just after World War I on midwestern campuses including the universities of Nebraska in Lincoln, Kansas in Lawrence, Illinois in Champaign, and Ohio State in Columbus.<sup>1</sup> Alarming reports of recruits' poor fitness levels during the war spurred athletic boosters to seize the opportunity to expand physical education on campus. At many institutions, the football stadium became the center of larger physical-fitness plants and physical-education programs. Part of the rationale was to provide ongoing preparedness for a future war.

The new memorial stadiums served an additional purpose at institutions that looked longingly at elite East Coast universities and their tradition of alumni support. The fundraising needed to build these arenas provided an excellent opportunity to focus school spirit while solidifying alumni associations as powerful contributors. Such was certainly the case at the University of Minnesota. As President Lotus D. Coffman noted in 1923, "We will be able to get from the legislature those things which will make the university a laboratory of the mind, but we must look to the alumni to make the institution a laboratory of the spirit."<sup>2</sup>

**A**s the bells tolled on November 11, 1918, signaling the end of the war, Minnesotans, like many in America and the world, faced the challenge of how best to commemorate the Great War. Governor J. A. A. Burnquist appointed a War Memorial Commission to select an appropriate project. Officials at the university, working with the alumni association, wasted little time before lobbying for a proposed memorial mall leading to a new memorial auditorium. In a January 1919 letter to the university's president, M. L. Burton, architecture professor James H. Forsythe waxed eloquent: "In making a study of the Mall as a Minnesota Memorial, I have had somewhat in mind the magnificent forecourt of the Louvre in Paris and have therefore studied the plans as to make a solid façade on both sides of the Mall leading up to the Auditorium." One month later, President Burton posted a day letter to former Minnesota Lieutenant Governor A. E. Rice in Hot Springs, Arkansas, asking him to

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telegraph a favorable vote as a member of the War Memorial Commission. Within weeks, however, Burton found himself on the defensive.<sup>3</sup>

The idea of locating the state war memorial on campus drew criticisms from two directions. Many critics accused Burton and the university of requesting memorial money from the state biennium fund. Denying this charge, Burton wrote to Governor Burnquist, "The plan for the 'Minnesota Memorial Mall' to be located upon the University campus is not a university proposition. It was first put forward by the Board of Directors of the Alumni Association. The Board of Regents has nothing whatsoever to do with its initiation."<sup>4</sup>

In addition, the location of any future memorial turned into a battle of civic pride, with St. Paul boosters lobbying for the state capitol area as its setting. Both sides marshaled plenty of support. The Bolo Club, a state veterans' organization, backed the capitol location. C. F. McDonald, a newspaper editor from St. Cloud and a Civil War veteran, argued, "As a veteran of 1861–65, we protest against an immense auditorium on university grounds and a 'bell tower' being a 'fitting memorial' for Minnesota's soldiers. Will the legislature appropriate \$1,500,000 or \$2,000,000 for this purpose when a 'fitting memorial' can be erected at the State capitol for one-third or one-fourth this amount?" Others cited a fear that the memorial would be "swallowed up in the state institution and become, in time, a University building and nothing more."<sup>5</sup>

St. Paul boosters effectively took the steam out of the university's proposal, tabling the project for more than two years. The civic rivalry, however, lingered. A newspaper clipping in the university archives chastised the capital city's position.

The St. Paul Pioneer Press editorializing in its news columns in true small town style declares that there is "growing indignation over the attempt of Minneapolis to annex the proposed \$1,500,000 State Memorial Fund" [and] promises . . . "strong protests against allowing

Minneapolis to commercialize and monopolize the War Memorial Plan will be sent to the Governor from all parts of the State". . . The Capitol is a noble building set down among shacks and shanties—a lily in the mire. . . . The saloon has so long controlled St. Paul that it has left its debasing mark everywhere. Shacks still persist in the business center. Ancient frame ruins spoil every vista. The Capitol grounds furnish about the worst imaginable site in all of Minnesota for the proposed Memorial.<sup>6</sup>

**W**hile plans for the memorial were put on temporary hold, the idea of using university institutions to promote physical fitness gained currency. Many coaches and athletic directors, nationwide, had served in the armed forces between 1917 and 1919. With more than one million American male draftees in military camps, Secretary of War Newton Baker, along with urban reformer Raymond Fosdick, sought a panacea for the flourishing vices of alcohol and prostitution. As early as April 1917, President Woodrow Wilson had approved Baker's

*56<sup>th</sup> Engineers training on the University of Minnesota's St. Paul campus; postcard, 1918.*

plan to organize the Commission on Training Camp Activities. Fosdick was installed as commission chairman, and he appointed football coaching legend Walter Camp as athletic director for the navy. Joseph E. Raycroft, a professor of physical education at Princeton University, received a similar post for the army. Camp and Raycroft appointed athletic directors for each individual camp. The abundance of current and former athletes, along with coaches, made theirs an easy job.<sup>7</sup>

The camps, both in America and, later, in Europe, organized athletic contests, with boxing and football emerging as favorites. This service sports program, in turn, produced a cadre of faculty members who would return to their collegiate institutions to help organize and promote athletics and fitness programs. A "sports for all" philosophy invaded campuses from coast to coast, with national preparedness, patriotism, and citizenship serving as buzzwords in the athletic crusade.<sup>8</sup>

Historians have long been aware of the impact that World War I had upon America's political and economic institutions.<sup>9</sup> University athletic boosters, too, used the experience of war as a springboard to advance their agenda, which dovetailed nicely with other institutional goals: activist alumni associations, civic engagement,

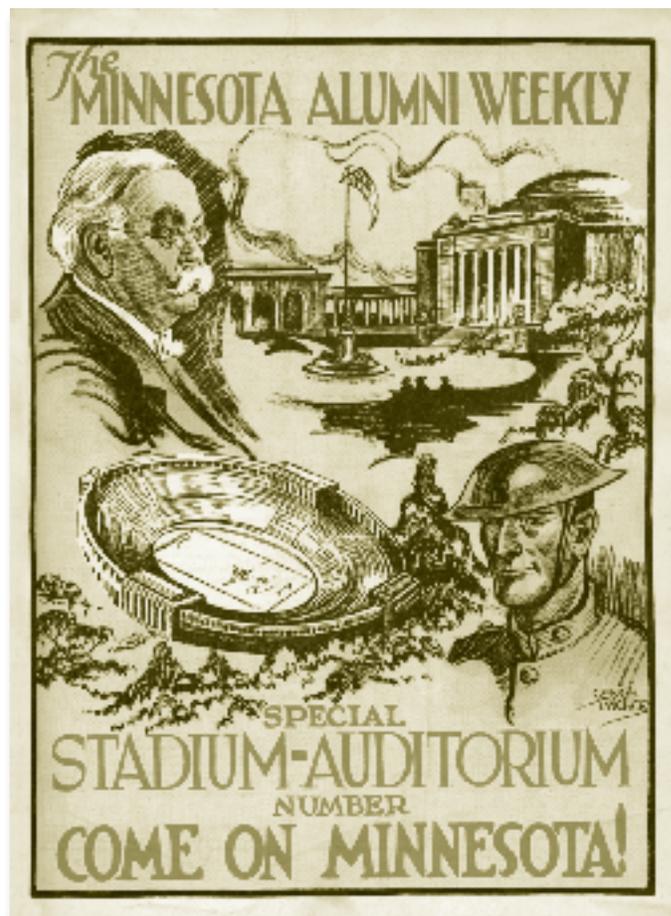


and functional memorials in the form of giant football stadiums. These themes come together in an article in the campus newspaper, the *Minnesota Daily*, headlined “Why the Memorial Campaign.”

College spirit and unity are the most priceless qualities in college life. Nowhere do they find expression, and nowhere do they take such deep root as the athletic field. Americans cannot forget the sorry showing of their young men when called into World War. One-half of the American boys . . . were found physically unfit to defend their country. Such an outlay as proposed offers outdoor opportunity for outdoor exercise by practically the entire student body in open air, summer and winter. In addition, the university needs the stadium because of its alumni. From the remotest borderland, eastern college alumni set out in the autumn for “the game.” The future of the university will more and more require mobilization of her sons and daughters. Nothing but football will bring the necessary massing of our forces. Nothing but athletics will bring all interests into cohesion.<sup>10</sup>

The inauguration of university president Lotus D. Coffman in May 1921, an occasion that brought influential alumni to campus, revitalized the war-memorial campaign. This time, the focus was on erecting a multi-purpose stadium to be used for football games, convocations, and class gatherings. Alumnus Charles F. Keyes proposed launching a two-million-dollar campaign, combining the original idea of an auditorium with the new idea of a stadium. The auditorium would be named in honor of former university president Dr. Cyrus Northrop, while the stadium would honor Minnesota’s servicemen who had given their lives in the war. The economy in 1921, however, was less than ideal, thus delaying implementation of the campaign until 1922. In the meantime, the organizational structure was put in place.<sup>11</sup>

An article from the May 1921 *Minnesota Alumni Weekly* shows the alumni association eager to increase its assistance to “Alma Mater.” The story highlighted Harvard’s 15-million-dollar endowment and pointed out that more than 36 percent of the buildings on the University of Michigan campus came from alumni gifts. It continued: “Minnesota has always felt it was a youthful institution, that the time when it could look to its graduates for enrichment and assistance would come eventually, but that it has not yet arrived.” It was now time for the alumni association to move to a new level, and the proposed building campaign served as the perfect rallying



Front cover, *Minnesota Alumni Weekly*, April 17, 1923

point. Charles G. Ireys, president of the General Alumni Association, stated, “Many other large universities have corporations . . . to which those bent on helping the institution by gifts during their lifetime or bequests after death can make their donation.”

To facilitate the campaign and avoid accusations of seeking state funding, the alumni association formed a new entity: the Greater University Corporation. This corporation would receive all gifts granted to the memorial fund, and all checks or payments of pledges would be made to it. As soon as the projects were completed, the corporation would donate the buildings to the university. A General Campaign Committee, composed of 100 members and representing every county in the state, served as the backbone of operations. Lyman Pierce, class of '92 and member of a San Francisco fundraising-consulting firm, was brought in to direct the drive. Thomas F. Wallace, class of '93, served as corporation president, Ireys was vice-president, and E. B. Pierce, secretary of the General Alumni Association, assumed the same role in the corporation.<sup>12</sup>

The campaign was organized to unfold in two care-

fully choreographed stages. Fundraising among the students and faculty was scheduled for a week in late October and early November 1922, culminating in the homecoming game against Ohio State University. The following spring, all alumni and friends of the University of Minnesota, nationwide, were targeted. Cognizant of the importance of civic connections, the corporation appointed John S. Pillsbury chairman of the Minneapolis element of the campaign and Dr. Egil Boeckmann chair for St. Paul. While these leaders worked the Twin Cities, the American Legion drummed up support across the state, hoping to push the stadium idea over the top. “The American Legion, thru both the University Post and the state organization, stands ready to do everything in its power to successfully put across the plan to erect a memorial to Minnesota’s soldiers dead,” noted Sigurd Swenson, commander of the university post.<sup>13</sup>

October 30, 1922, served as the official kick-off for the week-long campus drive. By mid-October, however, the campus was already abuzz with activity. In an address reprinted throughout the campaign, President Coffman underscored the importance of building spirit.

The soul of an institution consists of the tradition, the standards, the ideals, the spirit of good fellowship and camaraderie that characterize both the everyday and the ongoing life of the institution. These may be memorialized in pictures, in buildings, in an auditorium, in a stadium. Let us build now so that future generations of students when they sit in the stadium or in the auditorium may feel something of that spirit which makes Minnesota not merely a great but a true University.<sup>14</sup>

**T**o help generate school spirit before the campaign began, 50 “Four-Minute Men” were selected from the student body to address the various colleges, clubs, sororities, and fraternities. The concept was borrowed from World War I, when George Creel of the Committee of Public Information commissioned men across the country to deliver succinct, patriotic, four-minute speeches at public gatherings. Adding extra incentive, the *Minnesota Daily* printed

*Campus drive, 1922: Medical College unit (storks!) in a student parade on Northrop Field, the pre-stadium site of football games.*

**“Let us build now so that future generations of students when they sit in the stadium or in the auditorium may feel something of that spirit which makes Minnesota not merely a great but a true University.”**

reports and updates from recent stadium campaigns at the University of Kansas and University of Illinois.<sup>15</sup>

The campus drive tapped into many other techniques and symbols familiar to those involved with the recent war. The campaign hierarchy featured division commanders, each responsible for six captains, who in turn directed five lieutenants. Over the course of the campaign, the university’s armory served as headquarters for 1,500 volunteers who held luncheon meetings before moving to the business of tallying donation results. These luncheons were modeled along lines made famous in the Liberty Loan campaigns, when a meal served as the focal point of war-loan fundraising. In addition, a World War I “75” cannon used by Minnesota’s famous 151<sup>st</sup> Field Artillery was brought to the parade grounds, where it stood ready to roar for every \$25,000 pledged—even though, as the *Minnesota Daily* reported, “some of the artillery officers of the Military department are dubious as to what the terrible concussion of the gun will do.” All turned out well, hence the popular campaign slogan: “Boom, boom, stadioom.” Finally, the drive tapped senti-



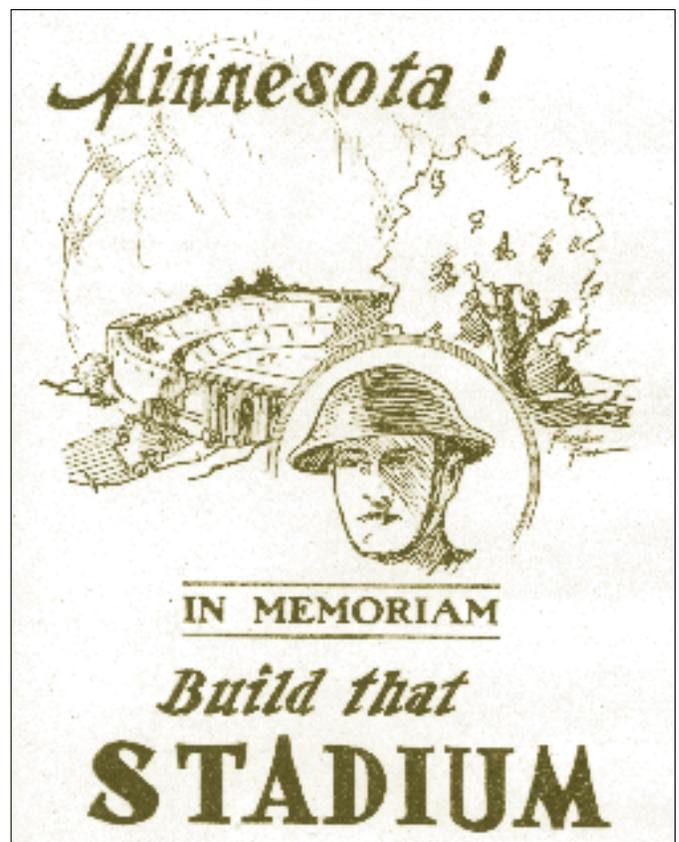
ments of loyalty, much like the patriotism campaigns on the home front.<sup>16</sup>

Accounts indicate that the campus campaign was a successful and joyous occasion. The students, faculty, and employees of the university subscribed \$665,000 toward the auditorium-stadium fund. Throughout, confident and brash enthusiasm prevailed. Just before the campaign began, William Jennings Bryan had cancelled his trip to the university, where he was to expound his views on the evolution debate. Bryan, however, remained on the minds of those on campus. In the midst of the fevered campaign, student leader Rex Kitts shouted, "If we don't pull this thing over . . . then Bryan was right. We aren't descended from the apes. We're *still* a bunch of monkeys." A *Minnesota Daily* article noted, "The Minnesota co-ed is taking pennies from her allowance, and putting them in little savings banks. She has given up candy, gum, chocolate goos, in fact all eating to excess—all for the Stadium." The list of sacrifices continued: "She has given up her fur coat, her new party dress, even her hope chest, so she might be 100 percent loyal to Minnesota." In the same issue, editor Roy Wilkins underscored the importance of generating spirit on an urban campus: "Minnesota has smashed to pieces the old contention that urban universities have no spirit. . . . It has always been here, but the thing that has brought it to life, that has made it a pulsing, dynamic current in Minnesota life, is the Stadium-Auditorium campaign."<sup>17</sup>

Referring to similar perceptions, Dean Royal R. Shumway later reflected:

Whatever criticism may be made of the stadium drive it certainly demonstrated the ability of the whole student body to act as a unit. We have long been accustomed to accept as a matter of course the disintegrating factors that are at work among us. We have almost convinced ourselves that the varied interests and purposes of the different colleges of the University, the location of the institution and the lack of dormitory facilities rendered impossible the creation of any spirit of unity. Underneath the seeming variation in attitude and purpose there is yet a vital spirit of unity which waits only for some demand of real sacrifice to call it forth.<sup>18</sup>

**T**o draw Minneapolis and its donors to the second phase of the stadium-auditorium project, campaign leaders organized a parade on April 20, 1923, an event that the alumni magazine described as "the most



Poster for the 1922 campus fundraising campaign

pretentious thing of its kind ever staged at Minnesota." More than 5,000 undergraduates assembled on campus and marched across the river, up Hennepin Avenue to Ninth Street, across Ninth to Nicollet Avenue, and then on to Bridge Square. President Coffman led the parade, followed by the football team, the entire cadet corps, the university band, and the Third Infantry band and bugle corps from Fort Snelling. The West Hotel served as headquarters, while the Minneapolis Auditorium hosted a mass rally in the evening. Adding to the aura of festivity, eight Western Conference football coaches (precursor to the Big Ten) joined in to show their support: Fielding H. Yost of Michigan; Amos Alonzo Stagg, Chicago; John J. Ryan, Wisconsin; Robert C. Zuppke, Illinois; William A. Ingram, Indiana; Howard Jones, Iowa; Glenn Thistlethwaite, Northwestern; and Minnesota's own William Spaulding. The rally was a success: Minneapolis leaders pledged \$161,862 on the first day of the campaign alone. John S. Pillsbury led the way, pledging \$20,000.<sup>19</sup>

The growing alumni involvement was not lost on many contemporaries. University of Minnesota alum Joseph M. Artman, a member of the theology department at the University of Chicago, aired his opinion in a letter to President Coffman: "I have been much concerned for some time for

the colleges and universities of our country from the point of view of athletic development. . . . I feel that our colleges, in allowing our alumni practically to own the stadiums and bowls, are opening the way for insidious control of the universities in the most unwholesome fashion.” Confessing, “I have been looked upon by a number as an extremist and a knocker,” Artman concluded, “I frankly feel that our colleges and universities instead of controlling athletics are allowing athletics to control them.”<sup>20</sup>

Artman’s concerns were not isolated. Another letter to Coffman came from W. V. Morgenstern of the *Chicago Examiner*. Wishing to write an overview of the challenges faced by the presidents of Western Conference universities, Morgenstern asked for “your estimate of the values and evils of the existing order, and your opinion as to whether or not modification or abolition of athletics is necessary to prevent the overshadowing of the academic work of the colleges.” Coffman’s response is not included in the university’s archives; his actions, however, indicate his support of increasing both alumni involvement and campus athletic programs, though both would come with increased scrutiny.<sup>21</sup>

Compared to other universities’ postwar memorial stadium campaigns, it appears that Minnesota’s collection of pledges ran relatively smoothly, allowing for timely construction. The University of Nebraska archives, for example, are full of letters threatening lawsuits against those delinquent on their pledges. Likewise, the University of Illinois had to mount a great advertising push to keep pledge payments on schedule. Sources in Minnesota do not yield such drama. In April 1924 the Four-Minute Men once again organized a “high-voltage campaign” to gain pledges from the current freshmen class. The rallying cry: “Up! Up! Stadium.”<sup>22</sup>

Work on the facility began in April 1924 and continued throughout the summer months, with the goal of completing the project for the autumn 1924 season. The James Leck Company served as general contractor to carry out architect Fred A. Mann’s plan for the 50,000-seat, U-shaped stadium. On June 17, as part of the graduation celebration, the university held a cornerstone-laying ceremony. An olive sprig from Olympia, Greece, was placed in a copper box in the cornerstone. A week before the ceremony, Dr. Richard Burton of the English department reflected upon the symbol.

A sprig of olive out of Greece, that sprouted beside the Temple of Jupiter is to be planted again as the cornerstone is laid of the stadium of a great American univer-



President Lotus B. Coffman signing diplomas, about 1924

sity. It is a symbol of honorable emulation in the open field. It stands for that brotherhood of brawn whose brain is kept clean and clear by manly sport, whose soul is heard in the mighty, swelling cry that goes up from the seats as the goal is neared and attained. Athens of The Violet Crown, or Minneapolis on the banks of the Father of Waters—what matters it?<sup>23</sup>

**W**hile laborers toiled on construction, bookkeepers monitored the progress of pledge payments. In mid-June the *Minnesota Daily* sounded a note of optimism, reporting that 78 percent of the scheduled pledges had been received. Of this amount, alumni and friends had made good on 86 percent of their pledge payments, while faculty checked in at 83 percent. Not surprisingly, cash-strapped, if not somewhat idealistic, students were behind on their payments—only 50 percent were on schedule. Ireys, the Greater University Corporation vice-president, saw these figures in a positive light, noting that everything was on track for the stadium to be completed by October 25. He also presented some updated figures: By June 1924, pledges totaled \$527,935.94, of which \$410,482.90 had been collected. Total costs for the stadium were estimated at \$700,000.<sup>24</sup>

Completed 40 days ahead of schedule, the stadium was first used on October 2 for a convocation of the incoming freshmen class. The first game was played on October 14, with the Minnesota Gophers defeating the University of North Dakota Flickertails, 14 to 0. Two weeks later, the university built upon its new homecoming spirit, hosting Fielding Yost’s Michigan squad in a battle for the Little Brown Jug. (Michigan won, blanking

the Gophers 13 to 0.) Reports indicate that the weekend drew record crowds of alumni to campus. The Gophers' biggest game that year, however, was played in November, when Minnesota hosted the University of Illinois, led by the "Galloping Ghost" Harold "Red" Grange. The stadium's formal dedication was slated to take place between halves, when, as the *Minnesota Daily* gushed, "the smashing Gopher gridiron juggernaut will endeavor to distinguish the dedication by a victory over a Grange-inspired Illinois football machine." Surprising many, the team lived up to the hype, defeating the Illini 20 to 7. Headlines reverberated throughout the press in the following week, including the *Minnesota Daily's* "Gophers Surprise Nation by Miracle Win."<sup>25</sup>

At the halftime ceremony, Wallace, president of the Greater University Corporation, formally presented the stadium to Fred B. Snyder, president of the university's Board of Regents. Wallace noted, "As a soldier's memorial it is fitting that it should be dedicated by a soldier's creed and I do now dedicate this stadium as an everlasting memorial to courage, to comradeship, to sacrifice. And, as evidence thereof." In accepting, Snyder reflected, "It is a princely gift, costing \$700,000. . . . The spirit which prompted its erection and the good will manifested by the contributors adds to our debt of gratitude." With the stadium erected and dedicated, the Greater University Corporation turned to the Northrop Memorial Auditorium project, a task completed five years later in 1929.<sup>26</sup>

**M**innesota's Memorial Stadium hosted Gopher football contests for the next five-and-a-half decades. During the late 1920s, Bronko Nagurski led the Golden Gopher program to a new level of fame, playing to All-American status on both offense and defense.<sup>27</sup> The 1930s are often referred to as the golden age of Gopher football, as the university captured three national titles. During the 1950s, future athletic director Paul Giel garnered numerous national honors, including finishing runner-up in the Heisman Trophy voting in 1953. Giel was at the helm in 1981 when it was decided that the university would move its football contests across the river to the newly constructed Hubert H. Humphrey Metrodome, a shift initiated by Minneapolis civic leaders who hoped to enhance the area and draw the university closer to downtown. The university's original goal of bringing Minneapolis civic leaders to its grounds was thus reversed, resulting in the long absence of football from campus.

The idea of domed stadiums dated back to the early



Poster commissioned by the Greater University Corporation, resulting in "about \$1,500 being received every day"; *Minnesota Alumni Weekly*, February 21, 1924.

1950s, when Walter O'Malley, the owner of the Brooklyn Dodgers, proposed one to replace outdated Ebbets Field. Rebuffed by New York City's construction coordinator, O'Malley moved the team to California, taking the blueprints with him. By 1964 his dream of a domed baseball stadium became a reality elsewhere, as the Houston Astros moved into their Astrodome. This precedent was no doubt on the mind of Minneapolis architect Robert Cerny, who by the late 1960s was dreaming of a similar venue for the Twin Cities. In 1973 the Greater Minneapolis Chamber of Commerce Stadium Task Force and the St. Paul Chamber of Commerce Stadium Study Task Force were formed.<sup>28</sup>

A political football game ensued. Proposals soon followed Cerny's futuristic vision, including talk of a domed Metropolitan Stadium in Bloomington or at the state fairgrounds in St. Paul. The feasibility of constructing a dome over Memorial Stadium was investigated. Noting that the facility covered 11 acres, a pamphlet published by the Amateur Sportsmen's Club of Minnesota argued, "Due to weather, design, and present purpose, this prime campus space is used for only a fraction of the potential times and does not meet the needs of students, faculty, and staff for year-round lifetime sports activities." The club recommended a complete redesign of the space: "The key to full use of the renovated space is encapsulation of the entire Stadium." The pamphlet pointed to recent air-supported roof projects undertaken by the University of Northern Iowa in Cedar Falls and Pontiac Stadium in Pontiac, Michigan.<sup>29</sup>

The domed-stadium movement, combined with the politics of urban development, would greatly affect Memorial Stadium. First, the mere suggestion of adding an air-supported roof to the 1920s facility pointed to its perceived future inadequacies. Then, after more than a decade of political maneuvering that involved multiple municipalities, the state legislature, and a series of Minnesota governors, the decision to build a domed stadium in downtown Minneapolis offered the university an alternate venue for home football games. Construction started in December 1979 and the Metrodome was completed in April 1982.<sup>30</sup> It became the new home of the Minnesota Twins and Vikings—and the University of Minnesota’s football team, numbering the days of Memorial Stadium.

Between 1982 and 1995, as Memorial Stadium was in its death throes, numerous advocates lobbied to preserve the beloved Brickhouse. In 1988 the university’s Board of Regents reached the controversial decision to tear down the campus edifice, launching a series of protests, proposals, and counter-proposals that delayed demolition until the summer of 1992. Eventually, however, the wrecking ball had its day. *Minnesota Daily* reporter Mary Mussell reflected, “The early afternoon sun was mellow Monday as a construction crane gently lowered the first stone

*Memorial Stadium, 1930s: the golden decade of Gopher football.*

***“As a soldier’s memorial it is fitting that it should be dedicated by a soldier’s creed and I do now dedicate this stadium as an everlasting memorial to courage, to comradeship, to sacrifice. And, as evidence thereof.”***

panel from Memorial Stadium to rest, like a casket being let down reverently into the ground.” The title of a follow-up article by Arthur Kane was not so reverent—“Bricks Fly at Memorial.”<sup>31</sup> To date, Memorial Stadium is the only post-World War I stadium no longer standing.

Football returned to the Minneapolis campus in 2009 through a \$288.5-million-dollar project that brought together community and state support, university backing, and corporate sponsorship. While the latter was new to the athletic scene, the former partners were familiar players in the campaign to locate football on campus. Honoring its legacy, the new TCF Bank Stadium includes an 18-foot-high curved wall, known as the Veteran’s Tribute, honoring all of the state’s veterans of past, present, and future conflicts. ☐

