

# Mathematical prodigy studied by IU

In the fall of 1899, a Hoosier youth from Milford, arrived in Bloomington. Arthur Griffith blended in with Indiana University students in every important respect except one. He wasn't in town to study at the university. On the contrary, the university was studying him.

GRIFFITH, a Kosciusko County farm boy, was reputed to be a mathematical prodigy. Inspired by the young man's fame, which was apparently limited to Indiana and Illinois, the Bloomington Telephone heralded his arrival in town with a front-page story in the Nov. 10, 1899, edition.

Assuring the readers that Griffith was neither a freak nor a fraud, the

## Looking back

By Rose McIlveen

article recounted the young man's background. He was, according to his mother, counting as soon as he could talk. "She would give him pebbles to count to keep him quiet."

Our next glimpse of Griffith through his mother's eyes was before his sixth birthday, when he was tallying the 42,671 grains of corn he fed to

the chickens on the family farm and the 3,675 sticks of wood as another chopped them. In school he was an indifferent student in all subjects except math.

While in Bloomington Griffith publically demonstrated his ability to conduct rapid mental calculation. Reported the 1900 IU *Arbutus*: "The audience was astounded at the ease with which he added, subtracted, multiplied and divided numbers containing in some cases, as many as nine figures. And that was all without paper and pencil."

HOW FAST was fast for young Griffith? The *Arbutus* explained that  
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