

An ancient scenario: Students don't like the food

When the Indiana Seminary opened its doors for the first class of students in 1824, it was obliged to find rooms to rent in local homes. In 1838, the college built its own boarding house, which was described by a member of the Ketcham family who entered the Seminary that had become Indiana University.

He wrote in part, it is "a substantial two-story brick building fronting on First street. On the first floor was a large dining-room with student rooms on the north side and east end. The second floor was divided by a wide hallway the full length of this building. On either side of the hallway were student rooms."

James A. Woodburn, an IU professor and historian, noted that meals in the boarding house in 1848 cost between 50 and 60 cents a week. He also wrote, "I have myself been told that in the years just after the panic of 1837 eggs were peddled in Bloomington at three cents a dozen, good butter at six and eight cents a pound, and fine chickens at seventy-five cents a dozen."

In the 1840s IU President Andrew Wylie told the Legislature that \$1.50 per week was half the amount charged out in town, and fur-



LOOKING BACK

By Rose McIlveen

thermore, the food was better. That may have been debated by a student, who wrote, "Hash — This excellent article of diet is extensively used at some of the boarding houses of this place. It is a good thing for three or four hundred meals, but as a constant diet it isn't so good."

Was there ever an educational institution where its students didn't complain about food at one time or another? Not likely. By the time the university had been in business for 88 years, food was still a subject for discussion.

The article on the front page of the March 14, 1912, *Bloomington Weekly Courier* began as a serious news item. The long headline said, "COLLEGE OFFICIALS WILL INSPECT BOARDING CLUBS. Boarding House Food is Liable to Assume a New Complexion. POOR FOOD VANQUISHED? Days of Miracles May

Return After the Official Inspection."

There followed the text of the official announcement of the school. "NOTICE. The University will make an inspection of boarding places approved of for student patronage during the Spring Term. Managers of boarding places who wish to be considered in this connection should report by telephone the name and street number of such boarding places to the University office not later than March 16. —Committee on student health. March 11, 1912."

If the readers of the *Weekly Courier* were expecting any more substantial news or accounts of the student attitudes about food or its cost, they were bound to be disappointed. The rest of the article was strictly tongue-in-cheek.

Commented the newspaper, "The time is drawing near when the soft-soled sleuths will descend upon the cooks and determine the exact chemical composition of the hash with which they are accustomed to tickle the palates of their unwary charges."

Does that mean that land-ladies were still serving the hash so sarcastically described by an earlier student. Perhaps. Hash could hide

many mystery ingredients.

Asserted the reporter, "A period of improved health is accordingly forecasted by the weather bureau and indigestion will be a memory of the past. Boardinghouses' pies will take on the complexion of those that mother used to make and peace will be upon the land."

No more would students trudge off to eight o'clock classes "oppressed by the weight of indigestible food." The students' eyes would change from dull to bright.

Warming to his subject, the reporter suggested that "There will be white-robed angels of cleanliness in every kitchen." Boarding-house land-ladies would put the Gold Dust Twins (a cleaning agent) to work in their kitchens.

Perhaps the most scathing remark in the article was the following. "...the family cat will no longer partake in the mess of pottage before it reaches the boarders."

If there was any drastic improvement in boardinghouse food, the *Weekly Courier* did not report it.

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