

# Harney, Wylie clash at IU in mid 1800s

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Presbyterian faculty member. The young Miami graduate was awarded a starting salary of \$250 per year, raised to \$400 some six months later.

Woodburn's book, *History of Indiana University: 1820-1902*, contains an artless portrait of Harney. It is the picture of a square-jawed, middle-aged man with a receding hairline.

OF HARNEY'S character, Woodburn wrote, "John H. Harney, young and inexperienced as he was, already shadowed those qualities and characteristics that were to make him an exacting man, a combative man, a patient man, a strong man, an invincible man... men feared the erect, precise, nervous, heavy-jawed, firmly stepping, neatly dressed, military-looking Harney."

Both Harney and Barnard Hall, the first professor hired at the seminary, had endorsed Andrew Wylie for the presidency of the fledgling school. But soon after the latter had taken over the presidency, Hall and Wylie began to disagree about teaching methods. Too, it was said that Hall had aspired to the presidency.

There was also the issue of who was running the seminary. As the rift between Hall and Wylie widened, Harney made the unfortunate mistake of siding with Hall.

After a series of incidents, the differences between Wylie, on the one side, and Hall and Harney, on the other side, couldn't be mended. For example, a Pennsylvania student, siding with Wylie, borrowed some of the president's writing paper, faked his handwriting and wrote an anonymous letter criticizing Hall. The professor found it in his pocket copy of Virgil. Shortly thereafter Hall resigned, but he continued teaching for another year at the trustees' request.

Then there was the initially trivial matter of when a particular student was supposed to speak on an annual program. Wylie decided in what order the students would speak and had quite forgotten that Samuel Givens had requested to speak either first or last. Since Wylie had forgotten the request, Givens didn't show up for the program and was later called on the carpet for not doing so.

GIVENS GOT DOWNRIGHT impertinent with the president. In the confrontation Hall and Harney favored leniency, while Wylie thought sterner measures should be taken. When word got around that Wylie was going to bring up the matter in Saturday chapel meeting on the campus, both "town" and "gown" started taking sides. On that particular morning the president invited one of his favorite students to walk to chapel with him. It was later charged that Wylie had brought a "bodyguard" with him.

At the chapel meeting Harney fiddled with a pen knife, whittling away on a stick and snapping the knife open and shut while Wylie was speaking. The professor also stropped the open blade across his boot.

Noting that Harney was playing with his knife, the president digressed from his topic. There are two versions of what Wylie said, either one inflammatory. Version one: "What! Does he mean to stab me in the back while I explain to you his late conduct with me?" Version two: "I see a knife behind me here, but I hope it is for no evil purpose."

HALL SIDED with Harney and told the president so in front of the students. Wylie requested that Hall tone down his remarks, but the professor continued to criticize the president. In exasperation Wylie dismissed chapel.

The trustees had an unscheduled meeting and advised that everyone involved calm down long enough for reconciliation to set in. They didn't reckon on the stubbornness of either Wylie or Harney.

Bloomingtonians got into the argument, too. The town friends of Wylie wouldn't have any social doings with Harney's friends and vice versa.

One more incident occurred between July and September of 1832. When Wylie and Harney, coming from opposite directions, both tried to cross a little log bridge over a stream near the campus, the president bumped the professor off the bridge.

"I MADE UP MY MIND," President Wylie told his cousin, Professor Theophilus Wylie, "that I would push him off, if I could."

The trustees first went on record as believing that both parties were in the wrong. The board was faced with not only a campus divided, but Bloomington divided as well.

In the end, the trustees were forced to choose between the two men. Still, they were unable to come to an agreement until what Woodburn calls the "humblest" member of the board was supposed to have said:

"I AM NOT A LAWYER, nor a doctor, nor a preacher, and I know next to nothing about public business; but if I had two good hands employed on my farm and they should quarrel and fight, I would do my best to have them make it up; but if after a fair trial I found they would not have peace, I would consider which one I could get on the better without, and would dismiss him at once."

Harney was fired. The deciding factor was that the university was suffering from the squabble. It was a part of what Woodburn called the "faculty war."

Harney, who had the distinction of being the second professor hired by the seminary, was also the first one fired.