

Library at Indiana University had rocky road to stability

In 1824, when the first class of students entered the Indiana Seminary, there was no library there as we know it. The first students had been told what Greek and Latin books to bring for their studies, and they also had use of books belonging to the first professor, Baynard Rush Hall.

And so it was, in the summer before his arrival in Bloomington to take over the presidency of the seminary, Andrew Wylie made trips to Philadelphia and New York City to beg for books and scientific apparatus for the new school. In his *History of Indiana University*, James A. Woodburn related that Wylie was reluctant to solicit donations of books in Philadelphia because of "the frequency of such applications there." In other words, other colleges had already begged for books and money there.

Wylie had better luck in New York. While he didn't drum up any money for the scientific apparatus, but was able to report that he had obtained "Two hundred and thirty five volumes so assorted as to embrace history,



LOOKING BACK

By Rose McIlveen

geography, belles letters, and treatises on chemistry, and mental and moral philosophy."

That was in 1829. A footnote in Woodburn's history notes, "A report read in the (Indiana) Senate on Jan. 3, 1833, says 175 volumes in the library. What became of the others?"

The university's library received a boost in 1836 from a collection of books donated by Board of Trustees President Jonathan Nichols. Another IU historian, Thomas Clark, describes the books as "from the library of William Maclure, which had been purchased in Europe and included classic works in French, Greek, and Latin."

President Wylie may have wished that he

had never heard of the university library, since his purchase of a classical Thesaurus for \$300 was seriously questioned by the trustees. Their suggestion was that it be sold in favor of cheaper books.

Clark reports in his history that in 1843 the university produced "an impressive catalog of its library holdings." They were listed in 20 different categories and included under "psychology," Sir Walter Scott's *Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft*, the *Metaphysical Works of Immanuel Kant* and two volumes of *Phrenology, or the Doctrine of Mental Phenomena* by J.G. Spurzheim.

The historian added that "There is some considerable evidence to indicate that the library existed as much for ornamentation as for use. It was open only on Saturdays, it contained no tables or chairs and books could be used only under the most protective rules."

Perhaps the person responsible for the library had reason to be concerned about the security of books. Clark also recounts that one of the trustees borrowed Volume I of James

Shirley's six-volume set of *Dramatic Works and Poems*. It was never returned, despite the fact that President Wylie demanded that the board make the delinquent trustee pay for a whole new set.

Whatever the fancy catalog may have said about the university's collection became tragically irrelevant on April 9, 1854, when the building housing the library burned under mysterious circumstances. The library was lost in the fire.

The collection was painstakingly reconstructed and housed in a new building, which was struck by lightning during the night. At dawn, when the fire was discovered, it was too late to save the building and its contents. IU had lost 12,000 volumes and 3,000 pamphlets at a cost of \$30,000.

Not every book was lost. Woodburn relates the story of a book published in 1835. It had been loaned out to the Rev. John Pering before the 1854 fire, and he misplaced it in his home. He finally returned the book on Dec. 5, 1883, eight months after the second fire.

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