

# IU janitor could tell tales as a veteran of several wars

Whoever had the responsibility for hiring janitorial help at Indiana University long ago seemed to have a knack for choosing colorful characters for the job. First there was "Uncle Tommy" Spicer, who had been born in England and immigrated to the United States.

Spicer was soft-hearted and lenient when it came to rules that affected the students. Attendance at chapel was mandatory for students, and it was Spicer's duty to ring the bell to warn them that the service was about to start.

Several students, who were enrolled in the university during its years at Seminary Square, remembered that if the janitor saw some students straggling to chapel from some distance away, he would ring the bell longer to give them time to slip into the chapel. The doors were locked after the bell stopped ringing.

Spicer was also involved up to his eyebrows with the students who called themselves the "Moss-killers." They were the ones who bored holes in the ceiling of the office of a female teacher at IU and watched her clandestine rendezvous with IU President Lemuel



## LOOKING BACK

By Rose McIlveen

Moss. After Moss' abrupt resignation, Spicer posed for a photograph with the "Moss-killers."

Another colorful janitor at the university was interviewed by a reporter for the *Bloomington Telephone* in early August of 1904. His name was Albert Laschinsky. The newspaper introduced him as the most prominent person around Kirkwood Hall, which was built on the new campus after the university was moved to Dunn's Woods.

Explained the *Telephone*: "He is a man with a history much more interesting than a person would suppose upon first seeing Mr. Laschinsky. He is a veteran of three wars — wars that were wars indeed — fought out to a finish over in the Fatherland."

In the article there is an indication that the

Kirkwood Hall janitor was not particularly literate, but what he lacked in book learning, he made up for in experience.

"The old hard-working janitor can not tell you a great deal about the wars of Europe, but he can point out to you on the map of northern Europe some bloody spots. It is not a matter of book record to him, it is actual experiences, he has spilt his blood on many spots of old Europe and carries a slug of lead in his back, an ugly knot on his right thigh and a trimmed finger that reminds one that he has undoubtedly seen worse days."

Laschinsky enumerated the battles for the reporter.

"In 1864 I fought for nine months in the Prussian-Denmark war. Two years later I went into the Prussian-Austrian battles for half a year, and I served Prussia in the war against France in '71 for nearly a year."

When asked about the darkest days in his life, Laschinsky seemed to fade away from the interviewer. His hand strayed to his right thigh that had a goosebump scar "as large as a quail egg." He came close to losing a finger on his right hand while battling the Danes.

Laschinsky tried to explain: "If I could better speak English I would like to tell you how it all happened, but there are so many thing that I forget the English for you'll have to bring around a fellow who knows a little German so I can make you understand."

The janitor was born in Danzig, Prussia. By the time he was draft age, he was caught up in the wars. When it looked as if there was going to be still a fourth one, Laschinsky immigrated to the United States. That was in 1873. He settled in Ohio, but later moved to Bloomington.

The *Telephone* reporter concluded his article with this comment: "Rain or shine, hot or freezing, the veteran of three bloody wars is always at his post at Kirkwood Hall, as regular and as constant as the most faithful old guard in the emperor's army."

NOTE: The wars that Laschinsky fought in were in 1864, when Prussia and Austria fought with Denmark over Schleswig-Holstein; 1866, when Prussia defeated Austria and annexed Hanover; and 1870-71, when the Northern German Confederation overwhelmed France.

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