

Former IU professor recalls Bloomington as a 'corner'

Through the years, Indiana University has had its detractors. An early variety of criticism was that the school was in the middle of nowhere.

J. Borden, a student, wrote to his mother in 1843 that "In common language it (IU) is about 100 miles from every other place, and 200 to where anybody lives." An Indianapolis newspaper editor put his criticism differently, saying that the university could not get and keep good professors because it was in the middle of nowhere.

Among the teachers at IU who came and went was a man by the name of Rufus Byram Richardson, who was hired to teach Greek. He was educated at Yale College and its Theological Seminary.

Theophilus Wylie's *History of Indiana University* contains a short biographical sketch of Richardson. He was born on April 18, 1845, in Westford, Mass., and tutored at Yale after graduation.

IU hired him in 1880.

His tenure at the university lasted only two years. He was offered a professorship at Dartmouth College and departed for the East,



LOOKING BACK

By Rose McIlveen

where he came from.

Like Baynard R. Hall, (IU's first professor) Richardson could not resist the temptation to suggest that he had been slumming in the Midwest. His thoughts on the subject were printed in a New York newspaper.

Since by 1883 trains arrived in Bloomington, so did newspapers. Or perhaps an IU alumnus cut it out and sent it along for the amusement of readers in the university community.

It is, however, likely that they were not amused. Richardson's recollections of and opinions about his former Hoosier neighbors were reprinted in part in the *Bloomington Telephone* on Sept. 15, 1883.

It began, "The main reason why this institution (IU) is so little known is to be found in

this location. Bloomington is in the heart of southern Indiana, a region which may be emphatically called a corner, and things that are done there are 'done in a corner.'"

Richardson suggested that Hoosiers were not really Midwesterners, but rather Southerners. ("It is not a part of the great West, but a detached portion of the south.") He went on to say that the vast majority of Hoosiers were really transplanted Kentuckians and South Carolinians.

There is certainly some truth in Richardson's statement in that the southern half of the state was certainly settled by pioneers who came from the South. He neglected to mention (or just plain didn't know) that the legislators tried to get the university as centrally located as possible.

The truth of the matter is, that in 1820, when the location of the state school was determined, with the exception of Salisbury, Brookville, Lawrenceburg, Vevay, Madison, Charlestown, Corydon, Troy, Darlington, Blackford, New Harmony and Vincennes, all hovering near the state lines. The vast majority of the state was unsettled.

It is obvious that Richardson thought he had lived in Podunk. "Since the time (when the school was founded) the great tide of emigration from the East has flown past it, always to the north, creating Indianapolis, Fort Wayne, Lafayette and Terre Haute."

Southern Indiana farmers came in for their share of ridicule. "These farmers farm just as their fathers and grandfathers did in Kentucky and the Carolinas. Hay is seen in ricks instead of barns; the pigs run loose in the streets of the towns."

If the insults hadn't gone deep enough, Richardson went on to allege that "It taxed all the energies of the great War Governor of Indiana to save the region from the Knights of the Golden Circle."

"As it was, it sent many sturdy fighters into the Confederate ranks, and in case of the successful establishment of the Confederacy, would ultimately have gone over to it by a principle stronger than that which inclined West Virginia and East Tennessee to the Union."

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