

# It sure wasn't ladies' night at the Harris Grand

*Burlesque: a stage show featuring slapstick humor and striptease acts. — Random House College Dictionary.*

Louise Goodbody, the Indiana University dean of women, was just doing her job when she warned coeds not to attend a road show play that was supposed to have risqué or suggestive dialog. In November of 1909 she had reported to IU President William Lowe Bryan "That the young women shall not be 'uptown' at night after nine o'clock, unless with a chaperone or an escort."

Goodbody's authority stopped at the boundaries of the campus. Perhaps she was shocked when she read the Feb. 19, 1910, edition of the *Bloomington Daily Telephone*. She learned that some females had the nerve to attend a burlesque at the Harris Grand Theatre. Why would the women want to subject themselves to ribald jokes and scantily-clad females?



## LOOKING BACK

By Rose McIlveen

The show, which had the title of *The Gay Morning Glories*, sounded innocent enough. It is apparent, though, that the women had some idea of what they would see.

The *Telephone* reported that the unnamed women were sitting around a bridge table when the subject came up. "Wouldn't you just love to know who they were?" was the tone of the newspaper article.

Anyway, according to the *Telephone*, the dare among the women had followed a remark by one of them. "I'd like to see one of these 'men only' shows. I don't believe they're half as bad as they are said to be."

Three women planned to go to the production, but one backed out at the last minute. The other two wore "borrowed clothes," including heavy overcoats. They persuaded a boy to buy the tickets and entered the theater only after the lights had been lowered.

Continued the *Telephone*, "When the two had recovered sufficiently from fright to turn their attention to the stage, they received a series of shocks from the antics and remarks of the burlesquers that they will not soon forget in some time to come."

At that point in the article the *Telephone* writer may have indulged in a bit of speculation for dramatic effect. "A racy remark from the stage would set the audience howling with delight, and the girls shrunk up in their overcoats and wanted to cry."

It was the onset of Salome's Dance of the Seven Veils — in which the performer pre-

sumably peeled them off provocatively one at a time — that sent the two women rushing from the theater.

Well, according to the *Telephone*, the women had sworn not to tell anyone about their daring exploit, but in the end couldn't resist confiding in a few close friends. Word gets around.

There was a postscript to the story on Nov. 22 in the form of a sally in the war of words between Bloomington and Bedford. It was a reprint from the *Bedford Democrat*.

"The *Bloomington Telephone* tells of two young society ladies of that city who attired themselves as boys and attended a performance given by a very spicy burlesque company a few days ago. The mystery is why did they disguise themselves as boys? A young woman who would do a thing of that kind could not injure her morals very much by going in her own character."

H-T

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