

# Student uproar at IU reached far and wide

"No well-regulated institution can exist and prosper without having trouble, and the Indiana University is no exception." Bloomington Telephone, May 21, 1881.

In its earliest years, Indiana University suffered greatly from what historians have called the "faculty war." Having survived that difficulty intact, IU had only to weather the years of shoe-string budgets and a disastrous fire before the point in time when behavior of the students became a problem.

There was a traditional rivalry between the seniors and lower classes, each successive year bringing with it some incident. And 1881 was no exception.

That year the seniors-elect had all turned up at the campus (where Seminary Square is now located) in straw hats. An underclassman had reached through one of the open first-floor classroom windows and snatched a hat.

As the *Telephone* described the incident, "In the classroom the alarm was given, but Professor (Newkirk) refused to excuse them, so out the windows like so many sheep, seventeen of the class made their way."

IU President Lemuel Moss responded somewhat harshly. Five of the seniors-elect



## Looking back

By Rose McIlveen

received a letter from him. "My Dear Sir — Your conduct in Prof. Newkirk's room last Saturday the 7th inst., is deemed by the faculty an act of insubordination and an incitement to insubordinate in others. By a unanimous vote of the faculty I am directed to say to you that you are hereby suspended from the University until the 1st day of September next ... The infliction of such punishment is a very painful duty ..."

Five other students were summoned before the president and received "five demerits on deportment." At a senior-elect class meeting it was decided that they would write an appeal to the faculty to the effect that all 10 students should receive the same treatment. As the *Telephone* put it, "This paper the faculty refused to consider. A paper giving reasons for the above re-

quest met the same fate."

Professor Newkirk met with the class and offered to intercede, but to no avail. Seventeen students decided to withdraw from the university in protest. (That was a very serious matter, since the class enrollment was only 36.)

It is not to be supposed that the escalating incident could be hidden from interested parties outside the university, particularly the news media. The *Louisville Commercial* had a comment or two. "Today has been an exciting one in the history of the Indiana University, and the cloud about the size of a man's hand, reported a week ago, concerning the Senior-elect display, has enlarged and now threatens the welfare of the institution. All week past it has been evident that trouble was brewing, and when the faculty held a four-hour session last Friday, these evidences were more than verified ..."

That ripples of the controversy had reached Indianapolis, at least, was evident in a letter which President Moss wrote to the *Journal* and reprinted in the *Telephone* of May 27. He assured readers that the university had not suffered in "scholarship,

deportment or discipline. The management is still safe in the hands of the authorities, and has not been surrendered to the students, nor to the wiser people outside whose lively interest is not biased by any knowledge of its internal affairs."

Moss went on to explain that what the seniors-elect had engaged in was "not .. for innocent fun," and that the punishment of the five suspended students had been subjected to "mild and necessary discipline." He said the faculty were not frightened by any of the students' threats.

The president concluded with, "After being excused for two days to give them time to calm themselves, fourteen members of the Junior class (the seniors-elect) responded to their names, and all classes in the University are doing their work quietly and satisfactorily. The difficulty will do us good and not harm. It will aid in settling the question as to whether faculty or students are the rightful ruling body in the institution."

President Moss may have believed those words when he wrote them, but it was a group of students who precipitated his hasty resignation in 1884.

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