

IU officials questioned play's suitability for women

The word was out. Indiana University officials had unofficially circulated their disapproval of a play to be presented at the Harris Grand Theater.

The year was 1910, and the name of the road show play was *The Girl from Rector's*.

In a Feb. 20 front-page article, the *Bloomington Daily Telephone* observed that "University authorities" had quietly circulated their disapproval through sororities and "girl organizations."

The unofficial ultimatum apparently had the effect of breaking up some planned theater parties and individual dates.

Meanwhile, according to the newspaper, a group of males, who called themselves the "Great American Association of Those Who Hate Peace," were urging their female friends to attend, anyway.

A *Telephone* reporter contacted Robert Harris, owner/manager of the Harris Grand,



LOOKING BACK

By Rose McIlveen

for his reaction to all of the to-do about the play.

The newspaper article said that "Manager Harris vouches for the play and says the company will be one of the best that has ever been in Bloomington. The 'naughty stories' he says are the work of an enterprising press agent."

Did the *Telephone* have a theater critic on staff? It is not clear from the article that appeared on Jan. 21, because it had no byline. It is obvious that the writer had attended the play and took the approach that the pre-play publicity had been much ado about nothing.

Apparently, the playbill included a footnote by the author, giving a gloriously self-

serving rationale for writing the play in the first place. "Based on the strange theory that married men often lead double lives, and that the saint of the rural home may be the Lothario of the city, the author hesitated to introduce this comedy to a community where he believed, in his innocence, that married men who lead double lives were practically unknown, but as many recent law suits have tended to prove the contrary, the management has now decided to produce this play, in the hope that it will serve as a warning to American husbands and strengthen the hands of matrons and maids who are battling for the purity of American homes."

After quoting that breathtaking sentence, the *Telephone* writer proceeded to take the play apart.

"As a play *The Girl from Rector's* as given in Bloomington last night, was a failure." There was some speculation that the script had been revised to tone it down for the Bloomington

audience.

Continued the newspaper, "If there was a revision, the revision ruined the play, and if there was no revision, the play is tiresome, a bore and without excuse and is simply running upon the clever press work of advance agents."

The *Telephone* noted that there was a "good sized" audience that included some students, apparently all male.

Concluded the article:

"The action of the University authorities in asking the young lady students to not attend the play, cut the audience down considerably. As far as could be learned there was not a co-ed in attendance, although the young men from the University were much in evidence from the parquet to the gallery. The students in the gallery gave an Indiana song as a curtain raiser for the play."

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