

Student's letter described IU life during the 1840s

Glimpses of Bloomington in the 1840s are few and far between. City residents may have thought William Pitt Murray was joking when he described the area during his days as an Indiana University student in 1848-49. His description was in a letter printed in the *Bloomington Courier* on Dec. 6, 1898.

To begin with, what he wrote was probably largely true. The town was depicted as "a country village of a Hoosier type, without sidewalks or graded streets — mud, mud everywhere. Its homes and business houses of the most primitive kind."



Looking back

By Rose McIlveen

Murray's description of IU was probably a surprise to the board of trustees. "The old State University building, built without regard either to ancient or modern architecture or convenience."

He arrived on the stagecoach, be-

cause there was no other way, except walking. In fact, Murray added, "The village off the highways and lines of travel — even more inaccessible than New York or San Francisco, if you desired to travel pleasantly."

Upon arriving in Bloomington, Murray and another student began scouting around for a place to board. (They thought the Orchard House's price of \$1.50 a week "an extravagant price and tried their luck elsewhere.")

Near the college buildings, Murray and his friends found a place with "the Misses Henderson." He

described their new quarters as "a good clean room, good feather beds; a bright, new rag carpet on the floor; an old time fireplace with excellent table board, with now and then a wild turkey or a venison steak; wood furnished in sled lengths, which we had to cut into fire wood lengths and carry up to our room — all for one dollar and twenty-five cents a week."

Although Murray didn't look down his nose at Bloomington society, he did include a brief description of men's attire — jeans and cowhide boots. As for amusement, the town's social life was largely of

the church activities variety.

There were exceptions. Murray wrote that occasionally there were lectures on phrenology (sizing a person up by reading the bumps on his head). Another type of social event was probably more enthusiastically attended. When one of Murray's professors announced in class, "Gentlemen, I will be at home tomorrow evening," that meant that among the guests would be a dozen or more village girls.

The former student added, "We had fun as a matter of course, and

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