

IU students have been tricksters since classes began

There is no reason to believe that Indiana University's early student scholars were all models of decorum and piety. On the other hand, five of the first professors were ministers of the gospel.

Was it hard for the ordained to overlook the pranks of students who came from communities where pranks and chivarees were accepted behavior? Perhaps, but in some cases it must have been hard to accept "boys will be boys." The five were Barnard Hall, Ebenezer Elliott, Augustus Ruter, Theophilus Wylie and Matthew Campbell.

The two main Indiana University historians took different approaches to relating the behavior of students. James Albert Woodburn, a professor, was restrained in his chapter entitled "College Life About 1850."

"Some of the college pranks of the day may be of some interest to readers, though they may not claim a rightful place in any serious history as a topic of dignity and profit. The bell-clapper was stolen so there could be no morning summons to chapel. It is from this period that has come down to us the familiar story of the rooster that was put in the desk that stood on the chapel rostrum. so that when President Ryors opened the lid of the



LOOKING BACK

By Rose McIlveen

desk for the Bible, out jumped the rooster, and with a crow and a cackle ran about the room, to the undoing of the devotional service."

On the other hand, Thomas Clark, who wrote a history of the university from a 20th century standpoint, naturally didn't feel the same Victorian-era restraint. He was at liberty to do his research in the University Archives where could be found minutes of trustees' meetings and faculty reports about disciplining sessions.

In 1871, the faculty had to take time out from their research and lesson plans to have a chat with W.F. McDonald. Clark explained that the student "was charged with having disturbed worship by clambering over the windowsill. He explained that he was anxious to hear the lecture, and he had committed this unseemly act on an impulse." The faculty put him on three month's probation.

Another chapel disturber was Joseph

Jencks, who disrupted chapel by answering the roll call by replying in a Latin sentence. Commented Clark, "This case was difficult for faculty members to handle because of the emphasis the university put on the classics. Nevertheless, they rapped the boy's knuckles in a public censure."

On another occasion during Sunday chapel, a mixture of town and country boys attended and were noisy. Added Clark, "University students added to this vexation by loud and unnecessarily long clapping after even the dullest speaker had finished."

Clark described the problems professors faced in the classroom. "Classroom procedures in most of the courses were rigidly set by the faculty. Students stood when called upon and recited verbatim from the text. Any deviation, snickering, argumentation, or mumbling resulted in a low grade, accumulation of demerits, and sometimes a tongue-lashing from the professor. The faculty approached the classroom with funeral seriousness ... any slight to their dignity was quickly resented."

There was another occasion when the faculty took up four days questioning J.W. Jefferson and faculty member Hermann B. Boisen over the translation of a Latin sentence in

class. Boisen had insisted that the student leave the room, and the student had called the professor "old man."

Though the students did act in a childish fashion at times, Clark did not overlook the failings of the faculty. He wrote, "Faculty minutes reveal how jealous the early professor were of their prerogatives and dignity. Some of the charges they made against students reveal clearly the boring nature of their classroom procedures."

Clark continued, "Every day a student was enrolled in the university he came under the tyranny of the professorial record books. He began the day by answering the roll call in chapel, he had to answer three more times that day in class, and on special occasions he was asked to give an account of himself."

Professors kept a merit check on deportment, and in 1853 the Board of Trustees adopted a resolution that deportment reports should be sent to parents at the end of each term."

It is probable that their parents were more philosophical about pranks than the professors.

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