

Editor defends state school and surrounding 'village'

"The claims of this institution to the attention of the friends of Science, Literature, and Religion, in this and the neighboring States, are, it is believed, peculiarly worthy of their regard" said the *Bloomington Post* on Jan. 8, 1836.

The "institution" referred to in the *Post* article was, of course, the Indiana College. (It was not until 1838 that the school was renamed Indiana University by the Indiana General Assembly.) The tone of the article is somewhat defensive.

It was probably written by the editor, Mr. Gabe, who had dual motives for publishing it in his newspaper. He seemed to have a sincere affection for the young school. On the other hand, from the financial standpoint, the well-being of the school promised growth for Bloomington and its businesses.

Gabe referred to Bloomington as a pleasantly "flourishing village about 50 miles south of Indianapolis on the road leading from the latter place to Leavenworth on the Ohio river ..." The village, according to the *Post* editor, showed promise for another reason. There was a new stagecoach route linking Bloomington to Leavenworth and Indianapolis.

One of Gabe's most telling points in his article was how he viewed local people. "The



LOOKING BACK

By Rose McIlveen

state of society is sufficiently removed from the rudeness of vulgar manners, on the one hand; and from silly affectations and showy emptiness, on the other."

Having given the natives his endorsement, Gabe went on to praise the college, itself. According to the editor, one of the advantages of the Indiana College was that "The course prescribed for actual study is so arranged that every step facilitates the progress of the student whose attention is concentrated upon one and but one main object at a time."

One of the Indiana College's approaches to education that appealed to Gabe was its approach to discipline. Although the college officials felt that they stood in place of the students' parents while their offspring were in Bloomington, the students were not hemmed in by a "multiplicity of vexatious rules." Continued Gabe, "Appeals are constantly made,

not in a formal lifeless manner, but after the diversified and pains-taking method of a parent in his own family, to the honor of the students, their sense of duty, of propriety, of decorum, of interest."

That was a tall order for raw-boned frontier boys who were obliged to learn Latin and Greek and read the classics in the original, but Gabe believed the Indiana College way conditioned the boys to "judge in themselves what is right, and to practice accordingly."

From time to time there had been charges that the college officials were attempting to shove the tenets of a particular religious denomination down the throats of the students. That charge no doubt stemmed from the fact that attendance at chapel services was mandatory and that early college officials were ordained ministers.

Not so, wrote Gabe. He asserted, "On religious subjects every thing of the nature of a narrow sectarian bigotry is carefully excluded. The student is expected to think, judge and choose for himself Such is the course proscribed in the charter of the Institution: a course which all concerned in its government are firmly resolved never to abandon."

Gabe did not believe that the subjects taught in an institution of higher learning

need to be in conflict with each other. "Science, Literature and Religion, it is honestly believed, may be made to grow and thrive together, without the unseemly appendages which the spirit of party has often connected with them. (The following sentence was in italics) "The experiment has never yet been made in any country — at least fairly and fully."

Gabe warned his readers against forces that might threaten the health of the Indiana College. Here is his concern:

"The means are everywhere in operation by which the spirit of party zeal, in matters affecting the great interests of education, seeks to send its all-pervading influences to the very bottom of society — through every fibre — till the whole mass becomes saturated with it. This spirit is not as honest as it is plausible, nor as generous as it is powerful."

Gabe was concerned that sectarianism, however well-intentioned, would ruin the objectivity of the education being given to Indiana youth at the Indiana College. He added that "Piety, enlightened and exalted by Science and Literature, is both a safeguard and an ornament to our dearest interests ..."

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