

Gentry had fun in the legislative 'circus'

Back in 1917, the man representing Monroe and Brown counties in the Indiana General Assembly had a lively sense of humor. His name was Frank Gentry, and he came from the Bloomington family who were for many years in the circus business.

Affable and well-liked, Gentry managed to get himself named to 11 committees in the House. Most important of them were the Ways and Means and Education committees. The latter committee position was particularly important to those interested in the welfare of Indiana University. (The other nine committees were Affairs of the Indiana Reformatory, Railroads, Manufacture and Commerce, Public Morals, Mileage and Accounts, State Medicines, Congressional Apportionment, Soldiers Monument and Public Buildings.)

He was a representative anyone could like, because he wasn't afraid to butt heads with someone over an issue that he cared about. On Jan. 13, the *Evening World* reported that Gentry had introduced a bill calling for free text books for students in incorporated towns and providing for tax levies to meet the costs.

A more controversial issue involved fe-



Looking back

By Rose McIlveen

males. Explained the newspaper, "Representative Frank H. Gentry, who was here to spend Sunday at home, authorizes *The World* to say he is now for Women's Suffrage, and that he will vote for the measure when it comes up for action this week. As Mr. Gentry is assistant floor leader of the House, his influence in favor of the bill will help out materially."

Apparently Gentry was a man who was comfortable with changing his mind and not worried about "losing face." The *Evening World* continued, "At the beginning of the present session of the legislature, Mr. Gentry said he was opposed to the franchise for the women. Last week he sent a telegram to a prominent club woman here asking her to ascertain the desires of Bloomington ladies as to suffrage."

According to the newspaper, Gentry was deluged with telegrams from Bloomington about the bill. He was optimistic about its passage.

The *Evening World* sometimes had some good-natured fun at Gentry's expense. Two examples during that 1917 session of the legislature had to do with diamonds and corsets.

The Jan. 13 edition had a little front page article with the headline "GENTRY'S HUGE DIAMOND." It began, "The big diamond that Frank Gentry, representative from Monroe and Brown counties, wears is the envy of the crowds that flock to the statehouse and someone wondered whether it would be stolen."

The newspaper hastened to assure readers they need not be concerned about Gentry's diamond. "Bless you, Frank Gentry is in the circus business and knows how to protect his jewelry. That diamond is anchored to three copper wires that are wrapped about his body and running down into his shoes. You might pull off one of Mr. Gentry's legs, but you could never pull off that diamond."

Anyone who has ever served in the legis-

lature will testify to the fact that while the body is in session, representatives are besieged by every conceivable kind of lobbyist. That was certainly true of Gentry.

The Jan. 9, 1917, edition of the Bloomington *Evening World* described one of the representative's encounters with some lobbyist with a very specialized cause. As the newspaper explained it, "All kinds of people have importuned Mr. Gentry to support their bills. A few days ago a committee of women who are in favor of the proposed anti-corset bill asked Frank how he was on that proposition, and thinking that the proposed bill was merely a joke said he was for it."

When he realized that the women were in earnest about the bill, he had a different reaction to it, telling one of the women lobbyists: "I am really in favor of your bill, but my wife tells me I must oppose it. The relations between myself and my wife and our children are so cordial that I feel that I must not support any measure that could cause family discord."

The woman to whom he spoke was unaware that Gentry was a confirmed bachelor.

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