

# A glimpse of old Bloomington from visitor's eyes

John Barner passed through Bloomington when it was hardly more than a village and unwittingly left us a word photograph of some of its early settlers. A North Carolinian by birth, he grew up in Tennessee and set out on foot to find his uncle in Indiana.

As he was growing up he learned farming and woodworking and managed to sandwich in a little schooling. Although his uncle lived in Fayette County, Indiana, John stopped in Bloomington for a time. His diary has been reprinted in the *Indiana Source Book*, Vol. II, published in 1981 by the Indiana Historical Society.

The year was 1828. After he had left Salem, he "overtook a foot passenger who resided near Bloomington. Barner soon discovered that his fellow traveler was from Salt Creek Hills. Two miles southeast of Bloomington they parted company.

"...I reached that place as the sun was going down and shining on the ball and fish on the courthouse and the store sign of Barnes & Co.," wrote Barner. "Thus after ten days' travel and one rest day, I reached the seat of the State University."

Having encountered John Dunning, he accompanied Dunning to Alexander's woods pasture and cut down a beech tree. They hauled it by ox to wherever they intended to take it.

Meanwhile, Barner hadn't forgotten



## LOOKING BACK

By Rose McIlveen

about his uncle. He wrote that, "I made diligent inquiry for Mr. Alfred Moore, a cousin, who came to Indiana only two or three weeks previous; walked four or five miles the next Saturday evening in the rain and found him at Mr. Moore's on Clear Creek."

Barner got a liberal education in frontier law after he went to work for John Collins and John Teal in the cabinet making business. He was supposed to have half of the proceeds from what he made. He continued, "After making a few pieces and dividing, I finished up a four drawers bureau and Williams, the constable, levied an execution on it for Teal's debt."

Barner was not going to be cheated out of his money. He had the case brought before Esquire Boulden. Jurors William Elliott and "old Mr. Payne" decided that the young man should have his money, after all. The plaintiff (Barner) had taken the precaution of consulting with "the Hon. James Whitcomb." His profit was five dollars.

The days went by. He described them. "I

continued to work in the shop of Collins and Teal, except six or eight I assisted Collins to floor two or three log houses at Harmony for a Mr. Hamilton, who had been at the head of the 'Harmonites,' a Christian community which had been mostly deserted except by the land owners; this place is seven or eight miles from town near the Big or Blue camp grounds, in the neighborhood of the Berry's and Roseberry's."

Barner also had the opportunity to see his first chivaree. The occasion was the marriage of John S. Barnes and Mary W. Owens, "one of the belles of the place." A crowd of young men with all kinds of musical instruments made a loud noise at the bride's house and demanded a "treat." The got it. "The bottle and glasses were brought out to the walk and all drank and then marched off quite orderly."

The temporary resident recorded that he went to the IU commencement in the courthouse. The graduates were George G. Dunn, W. McKee Dunn and Joseph A. Wright.

There was also a political rally before Barner left Bloomington. He wrote that Harbin H. Moore, J.B. Ray, Israel T. Canby and Ratliff Boon spoke in the courthouse.

According to the diarist, the Democrats won "from Governor to coroner."

"I was at Bloomington on the morning of the presidential election, November, 1828. Mr. Boulden and others had the cannon out

and gave the Jackson men and good send off and a loud report," recorded Barner. He described his attendance at several different churches. One evening he hiked across the country with Spear Tipton, and IU student. They stopped at the home of Col. Ketchum and went on to a Methodist camp meeting.

The religious service that left the deepest impression on him was in the M(ethodist) E(piscopal) Church, where he heard a colored man from Kentucky "preach an able sermon, who was trying to raise means to free him from servitude; it was then, I believe, that I first heard or saw Rev. James Armstrong, an eloquent pioneer minister who resided a short distance west of the town."

Another sermon that impressed him was preached by the Rev. Daniel Anderson on a beautiful day in June to a large crowd of people who had gathered for a funeral. Barner had helped to make the coffin.

By September, the young man was ready to move on and left Bloomington with Benjamin F. Draper. They walked 30 miles to a mile south of Mooresville.

Barner married in Indianapolis and settled in Frankfort

He was postmaster, clerk of the circuit court and a member of the Clinton County bar. He died in 1884.

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