

# Preventing cholera topic of concern in 1867 newspapers

The most casual glimpse at the Bloomington *Progress* in the spring and summer of 1867 shows that newspapers then were vastly different from what we are accustomed to seeing today. One similarity, however, was an occasional sense of responsibility to readers.

A case in point was a series of small notices that appeared in the *Progress* in the spring and summer of 1867. On May 23 an editorial called the public's attention to a potential problem — that of another cholera epidemic.

Warned the newspaper, "Cholera has made its appearance in many localities in the Mississippi Valley, and nothing but the extreme cold weather has prevented it from making more rapid strides over the country." It is possible that there may have been some Bloomingtonians with either short memories or



## Looking back

By Rose McIlveen

no idea what the threat of a cholera epidemic could mean.

In 1867 there were plenty of people here who could still remember what happened in 1833. Prior to the weekend of Aug. 10-11, the cholera epidemic had been creeping northward from the Ohio River communities, but was still as far away as Bedford.

In his *History of Indiana University 1820-1902*, James Woodburn wrote that three people in Bloomington died within a 48-hour period and others followed shortly thereafter.

ter.

Indiana University President Andrew Wylie gave the students an unscheduled two-week vacation that may have saved some of their lives. Even so, several of the students were lost before it was safe for them to return to Bloomington. Two years later, Wylie warned his wife in a letter to stay in the East (where she was visiting relatives) until after the frost, which was supposed to kill the cholera bacteria.

By 1867, when the *Progress* was warning local readers about medical history repeating itself here, it was evident that more was known about prevention, at least.

Advised the newspaper, "Do not delay until the pestilence is knocking at your doors, but anticipate its coming. Experience has demonstrated that properly enforced sanitary measures will effectually pre-

vent the visitation of this dreaded plague . . . Many of the 'necessary' out-houses are built without vaults, and their locations are even now unmistakably denoted by the loathsome effluvia they emit."

The *Progress* recommended the liberal use of lime and the hauling away of all garbage. Lest any of the readers begrudge the price of the preventive measures, the newspaper concluded, "Five dollars worth of lime will prove a much more satisfactory investment than a mahogany coffin." On June 27, the *Progress* suggested that the atmosphere of a sick room could be purified with a solution of chloride of lime in cold water.

If the readers of that newspaper hadn't taken its warnings seriously, the *Progress* certainly got attention on July 18 with a reprint from the *Louisville Journal*. "On Wednesday last, two cases of Asiatic cholera oc-

curred at No. 210 Hancock street, between Jefferson and Green, in the Raunsner family . . . In each case, death ensued in less than 12 hours after the first symptoms."

Added the *Progress*, "If the citizens of Bloomington desire to escape the scourge, they should exercise care and vigilance in sanitary matters. The work of cleansing should begin now, and continue during the sickly season that is fast approaching."

Meanwhile, producers of patent medicine saw an opportunity to capitalize on the fear of cholera. An advertisement for Hostetter's Stomach Bitters claimed that it was "a safeguard against epidemics," among other things.

Fortunately, cholera did not pay a visit to Bloomington in that summer of 1867. Could the *Progress* take credit for that? Maybe.