

Student antics caused consternation for faculty

During the 1800s professors at Indiana University may have wondered if they were teaching young adults or children. Though some of the antics of students may have prompted the teachers to smile behind closed doors, other behavioral problems had an entirely different effect.

The faculty disciplinary committee was obliged to deal with S.E. Maxwell on more than one occasion. The first one — mentioned in Thomas D. Clark's history of IU — was the time that Maxwell scattered beans and birdshot around the chapel room.

Clark did not specify what Maxwell's punishment was, but he did mention the young man's next exploit. Maxwell took his dog to chapel and refused to remove it. The faculty was not amused.

Sunday chapel at the university were open to the public. On one occasion, at least,



LOOKING BACK

By Rose McIlveen

some of the country boys disrupted the service, and university students engaged in "loud and unnecessarily long clapping."

Students cut the rope to the chapel bell, which summoned them to the mandatory services. On another occasion, they removed the clapper, which made it necessary for Uncle Tommy Spicer, the janitor, to strike it with something.

It was Woodburn who wrote about a more serious series of incidents, leading to the expulsion of Thomas J. Spitler. According

to the professor, the faculty became very annoyed with Spitler and James Wilkins, the other student involved.

Spitler insisted that Wilkins had slandered him. The latter seemed quite indifferent to Spitler's accusations.

Woodburn described what happened. "It appears that Spitler went to Wilkins' room and demanded to know whether Wilkins had said certain things about Spitler."

What were the offensive remarks? That is not clear. What was clear was that Wilkins had no intention of fighting over it.

Woodburn resumed the story. "The next day Spitler sent a written challenge to Wilkins, offering to fight him in any way or with any weapons Wilkins might choose, Spitler to be allowed to fix the time and place for the fight."

Wilkins' continued silence enraged

Spitler, who insisted that he would have satisfaction. His challenge sounded very much like a call for a duel, and that did concern the faculty.

Continued Woodburn, "Spitler pulls off his coat, and pulls out a knife, and calls Wilkins a liar and a villain and offers to fight with knives..."

Wilkins didn't have one on him and protected his head with his arm. It was apparent that he took a beating from Spitler.

The faculty verdict has survived. "Therefore, in the name of the faculty I pronounce Thomas J. Spitler peremptorily dismissed from Indiana University from and after this date, March 15, 1855."

Spitler's academic career was over, at least at Indiana University.

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