

# 'Think of the mud'

## Monroe County streets gave travelers sticky problems

In this day and age of taken-for-granted paved streets and roads, it is hard for us to imagine what it must have been like for our Monroe County ancestors, who didn't enjoy the same luxury.

HOWEVER, THERE ARE a few contemporary glimpses of the effects of weather on the city's unpaved streets. Judge David Banta, an early IU student and later a faculty member, gave the date as 1820, when the last of the native forest trees were cleared from the public square. But for many years to come anyone wishing to do business in the courthouse had a choice of tramping up clouds of dust or wading through the sticky clay created by rain or snow.

In his history of Indiana University, Theophilus Wylie wrote of periods of time when the weather made everything come to a standstill in Bloomington and other parts of the state. Wrote Wylie, "It sometimes happened, in the beginning of winter, that the clay roads leading to it (Bloomington) were rendered impassable

### Looking back

By Rose McIlveen

by the rain and frost, and sometimes for two weeks there would be no communication between Bloomington, and we might say, the outside world. The tri-weekly Louisville and Indianapolis mail, established by Messrs. John and Samuel Orchard, would be stopped for that length of time."

IT IS NO SMALL wonder, then, that early Bloomingtonians chose their shoes or boots for their serviceability, rather than their fashion. Baynard Hall, IU's first professor, described

the footwear of local physician David Wylie as follows: "Shoes he wore, it is true — but one a coarse cow-hide laced boot, the other a calf-skin Jefferson. . . . And this latter was well blacked, though not shiney; but the cow-hide had been too stiff, stubborn, and greasy, to receive its portion."

The season of the year and subsequent condition of the roads — no real consequence today — often dictated when it was feasible to start on a journey of some distance. Hall described the escorting of some local female students back to their homes in Lafayette. One of his friends said, "But Mr. Carleton (Hall), only think of the mud."

IU historian Thomas Clark describes the condition of the old campus at the foot of College Avenue as primitive. No campus grounds staff existed in the early days of the seminary. The dirt excavated for building foundations was left

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