

Janitor was controversial ^{early} figure at IU

He was known as "Uncle Tommy" to generations of Indiana University students, and he was every bit as much a fixture of the old campus as "Father Andrew" Wylie, first president, and the eccentric faculty member, Amzi Atwater.

There are hints in both Thomas Clark's *Indiana University*,

Midwest Pioneer and James Woodburn's *History of Indiana University* that

Thomas Spicer, the school janitor, was a con-

Looking back

By Rose McIlveen

troversial figure in the life of the young institution. Most certainly he was a father-confessor to some students and a willing conspirator with others, who occasionally ran afoul of the school's strict sectarian rules.

Spicer's duties at the university included keeping the wood stoves going with firewood, lighting the gas lamps after they had been installed in the buildings and ringing the fire bell for morning chapel sessions. Roll call was taken, and unexplained absences were not excused. "Uncle Tommy" was known to ring the bell longer than necessary when he could spot one of the students, particularly a girl, struggling to get to the chapel before the doors were locked.

DETAILS OF SPICER'S early life are non-existent, except that he was born in England about the time of the War of 1812. Oddly enough, what little is known of the man is due to his involvement in an incident that shook the university to its foundations.

Spicer was married and lived with his wife and children in two or three rooms on the lower floor of the IU building that housed all of the departments, including the Preparatory School. On one occasion the applesauce and cookies Mrs. Spicer had prepared and put on the window sill to cool, mysteriously disappeared. It is not known whether