

## Influenced IU's early growth

# Water shortages once often

The village of Bloomington, the seat of the University, is pleasantly situated on the Louisville, New Albany and Chicago Railroad in an elevated and well-watered limestone region.

That best-foot-forward claim appeared in the IU catalogue of 1867. Monroe County has the reputation of being well-watered during the spring and fall monsoons, but the claim of the catalogue was really more hopeful than accurate.

**IN FACT, THE CHRONIC** water shortages experienced by the city of Bloomington had a profound effect on the growth of the state university, threatened its existence in Bloomington and added weight to the argument that it should be moved, for example, to Indianapolis.

Well water was quite sufficient for the little Indiana Seminary of 1825. Bloomington was only a village, and though the threat of cholera or typhoid fever polluted well water was a fact of

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## Looking Back

*By Rose H. McIlveen*

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life for early Monroe Countians, it was not really a cause for alarm. Too, the Saturday night bath of the good old days didn't put too much demand upon the available water supply.

**THE PROBLEM WAS,** the county's population kept doubling from 1830 until it began to level off in the 1860s. IU did its share of attracting new residents. The McCalla family, for example, came to Monroe County for the specific purpose of providing its children with a college education.

By the 1880s, the city and the university were seriously concerned about both the water shortages and the hazards of well water. In July of 1892, Jesse W. Starr, a contractor, was said to have gotten a new Bloomington waterworks underway. He boasted that when it was done, the city would have one of the best water systems in the West.

**MEANWHILE, ON THE CAMPUS,** there was a well in front of Wylie Hall. To insure a supply of drinking water, the well was deepened several feet. However, the students were concerned about some of the other uses for water. According to the *Indiana Student* of Nov. 28, 1893, the revoking of Starr's city waterworks building franchise had caused gloom among the students.

... the students' dreams of bubbling fountains on the campus and hot and cold baths in

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