

Controversy led to teacher strike in 1907

By ROSE H. McILVEEN

Special to the H-T

In later years it was called the great schoolteacher strike of 1907. One of those old cases where everyone involved was partly right, it started early in the year when a parent was concerned about his daughter's grade in algebra.

THAT MAY SOUND ordinary enough, but it wasn't, because the girl's father happened to be president of the school board. Howard H. Clark, in his fifth year as principal, backed the teacher, and the lines were drawn in a controversy that lasted several months and ultimately shut down Bloomington High School.

Actually the case had some political overtones, since the school board president was considered by many to be the Republican Party kingmaker. About that time the Bloomington Telephone began printing some editorials in which the high school teachers were depicted as touchy and too critical of the students' work.

Meanwhile the state legislature was taking a look at Greek letter clubs in the secondary schools. A study conducted by the BHS teachers tended to show that members of Greek letter organizations on the average

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made lower grades and needed more discipline.

WHILE THE TEACHERS' report was in the hands of the school board one of its members, Indiana University Professor William A. Rawles, felt that parents should see it, and he said so. However, he was overruled, and only a part of the report was released.

No longer a case of a little local professional infighting, the controversy came to the attention of the State Department of Public Instruction, which demanded a copy of the report forthwith. After School Superintendent William H. Sanders had complied, a summary of its findings appeared in an Indianapolis newspaper.

As a result, an out-of-town committee was appointed to check out our high school to see if some of the allega-

tions of the report were justified. Actually, it was complimentary of both teachers and administration.

At that point Clark, the principal, was propelled into the midst of the controversy because he and board member Rawles thought the whole report should be made available for the public to read. They were overruled at the school board meeting.

ON HIS RETURN to the high school Clark called a meeting of the teachers to let them know that the report would not be publicized. All except one of them promptly resigned and their reasons were stated in an article in the *Evening World*. Included in the reasons was the impasse over the algebra grade.

At an emergency school board meeting a few days later its members voted to hire new teachers. Stirred up and confused about all of the issues, parents turned out in droves at a meeting held in the First Christian Church. Bloomington hardware store owner W.J. Von Behren was elected chairman. Among the speakers were IU professors R.J. Aley and Ernest Lindley, both of who later served as president of the University.

Petitions to reinstate the teachers were circulated and presented to the school board. As a result the presi-

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