

From IU to U.S. secretary of state

When John W. Foster, an Indiana University student in the 1850s, was writing to a friend in New Harmony, he (Foster) praised the Bloomington area for its natural beauty and recreational advantages. Not so the local families.

In a letter dated Dec. 14, 1851, the young student wrote: "... the only thing that this town is wanting is pretty misses, for if it has any, I have not seen them yet, but my hopes are high. None will compare with the belles of Evansville or even those of your town."

Being a proper Victorian, Foster was not looking for a future wife among the little girls of Bloomington, but she was there, nevertheless. Even as the student was writing to his friend, young Mary McFerson, an approxi-



Looking back

By Rose
McIlveen

5-23-1987

mately 8, was living in the household of her mother, Eliza, who was the principal of the Monroe County Female Seminary. Others in the McFerson household were Mary's brothers, Theodore and Alexander, and four adult females ranging in age from 30 to 21, presumably teachers or students at the seminary.

The Histories of Morgan, Monroe and Brown Counties, Indiana contains quite a bit of information about the school, its course of study, costs and enrollments. McFerson took over the running of

the seminary in 1849, succeeding Cornelius Pering. Prior to her administration, nearly 700 females had completed the course of study. The *Bloomington News Letter* of July 1855, commented: "Our readers will find a notice in another place of the examination and commencement exercises of the Monroe County (Mrs. McFerson's) Female Seminary, to take place next week. The name of Mrs. McFerson, the excellent principal of this school, is a praise in our midst. By untiring efforts for seven or eight years she has made the seminary what it is, the pride and ornament of this place, and has won a higher and wider reputation as an educator than any lady in Indiana. We hope there will be a large attendance at the examination and commence-

see Look back, Back page