

Hershey was an absent-minded professor

"But freshman, softly in your ear
I'd whisper, This man you'll not fear
For he's the best good-tempered man
That you could find in all this land."

Indiana University *Arbutus*.

After his retirement from medical practice in 1971, the late Dr. Philip Todd Holland sat down to write his recollections about his life and years in Bloomington. Among the "characters" he remembered was Professor Amos Shartle Hershey, who taught history and political science.

Hershey, who was part of the Pennsylvania chocolate family, came to Indiana University with a couple of PhDs from Harvard University and the University of Heidelberg. Thomas Clark, who wrote a history of IU, said Hershey was easily one of the most brilliant professors on the faculty during his tenure.

In his memoir, Holland recalled the most famous of the local lore about the professor. Holland described Hershey as "a very lovable man and very much liked in the community, but he was the perfect example of the absent-minded professor. The most often-told story one involved a pair of pants.

Continued Holland, "One of them was to the effect that his wife was calling all over



Looking back

By Rose McIlveen

campus one morning, 'Have you seen Amos this morning, does he look all right and did you notice anything different about him?'

Mrs. Hershey was obliged to call several people before she found one who had actually seen the professor that morning and that he looked all right to the informant. As it turned out, she had reason to be concerned.

Holland explained, "It turned out that he had not put on a pair of pants that she laid out for him to put on that day, but had, on his own, bought a pair of pants from the clothing store the day before and wore those!"

Such was Hershey's depth of concentration that he was frequently not aware of what he was doing. A couple of stories from Holland's memoir prove the point of absent-mindedness, as well.

Wrote Holland, "One of the women who served as a secretary for him told the story on him that while he was giving a lengthy dictation to her, her handbag was on the desk, and without interrupting the dictation at all he proceeded to give her all the dictation of material that he wanted her to type and just quietly and methodically while he was doing this, opened her handbag and laid out all the articles in the handbag on the desk, counted the change in the change purse and made note of all the items and returned them carefully to the handbag and closed it apparently not realizing what he was doing at all as he was so concentrated on what he was dictating."

His concentration powers sometimes inspired practical jokes. Holland related that his father, IU President William Lowe Bryan and Hershey were having lunch together. Hershey was sitting between the other two.

Holland explained what happened next. "They were conversing before the start of the luncheon and Amos took his spoon and quickly ate all the soup in the soup plate and put the spoon down and went on talking with the two men."

One of them winked at the other and exchanged his full soup bowl for Hershey's

empty one. When the professor looked down and saw the full bowl, he picked up his spoon and proceeded to eat that one, too.

Continued Holland, "Then the other one engaged him in conversation, and they repeated the process. By the time he had finished the third bowl of soup the luncheon came on, and he (Hershey) said, 'I don't know if I want any lunch. That soup was remarkably filling.'

After Hershey's wife accidentally ran over her husband's leg with the car and broke it, he told Holland's father (who was also a doctor), "You know, Frank, I told her to back the car out of the garage, and I just forgot to take my leg out of the way after I had opened the door."

According to Clark, Hershey was the first IU professor to gain an international reputation. Though he had the ability to detach himself when concentration was needed, he could be very down to earth when the situation called for it.

The author of *The Essentials of International Public Law*, Hershey went to Paris in December of 1918 with President Woodrow Wilson's peace commission as an expert adviser.

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