

**Began at Bloomington**

# Beecher in Indiana

First-hand accounts of early Bloomington and Monroe County are hard to come by, and it is a researcher's coup to find such an account in an unexpected place.

An early visitor to Bloomington was one of the most famous preachers of the second half of the 19th century, the Rev. Henry Ward Beecher. So legendary did the man become in his own time that he was memorialized in the little limerick that several generations of school children memorized:

*"The Reverend Henry Ward Beecher  
Called a hen a most elegant creature.*

*The hen, pleased with that  
Laid an egg in his hat,  
And thus did the hen reward  
Beecher."*

Only brief mention is made in Indiana histories of the years that Beecher spent in Indiana, let alone the fact that he spoke on the little Indiana University campus. Born in New England and the son of a noted theologian and orator, Beecher at-

## Looking Back

By Rose H. McIlveen

tended Amhurst College and took his theological training at the Lane Theological Seminary of which his father was the president.

Beecher's path from the seminary near Cincinnati to IU for a speaking engagement led him from a pastorate at a Presbyterian church in Lawrenceburg to a post at the Second Presbyterian Church in Indianapolis, where he moved in 1839. Those were formative years for his ultimately famous and spell-binding oratory style. His first sermons at Lawrenceburg were, by his own admission, awkward, but by the time he moved to Indianapolis, his style had begun to show the promise that was

later to command as much as \$1,500 for a speaking engagement.

The occasion of Beecher's visit to Bloomington was an invitation from the Philomathean Society, a literary organization that had the advantage of providing the students with training in public speaking, debate, essay writing and parliamentary law.

Since the New Albany and Salem Railroad wasn't even on the drafting board yet, in September of 1845, when Beecher came to Bloomington, he was obliged to employ horse power to bring him down from Indianapolis.

We are indebted to Jane Elsmere's book, *Henry Ward Beecher, The Indiana Years, 1837-1847*, for an account of his ride to Bloomington. Beecher wrote later: "We saw few houses or yards which were not in bad condition . . . All the slops from cooking, washing, etc., need not go down before the door; pigs need not range and litter and root up the yard. It is just as easy to have neatness in a log cabin as in a brick mansion . . . We are quite sure that we have found out