

# A healthful community valued in Andrew Wylie's years

Scholars who are searching for the history of Bloomington's earliest years fortunately have other resources besides the bare bones records in the county clerk's office. Tidbits of information can be found in letters written during that period.

Among the lines of letters in the newly-published book, *Affectionately Yours: The Andrew Wylie Family Letters*, can be found little glimpses of what life was like for those who were living in the period 1828 to 1859. The book is a publication of the Wylie House Museum in Bloomington.

When Baynard Rush Hall, the Indiana Seminary's first professor, was trying to persuade Andrew Wylie, a Pennsylvanian, to consider the presidency of the seminary, Hall acknowledged the infancy of the town of Bloomington, but went on to say, "But it is widely different in appearance from new towns generally; the work of improvement in all respects is rapidly advancing; — and in regard to healthfulness abundant evidence may be furnished that it is by far superior to



## LOOKING BACK

By Rose McIlveen

most places in the West, and equal to any whether in the East or West."

As proof of the small town's healthfulness, Hall explained that in the three years he had been preaching to a small congregation he had buried only one adult. In fact, noted the professor, since his arrival there had been no more than six or seven deaths.

Hall, who was anxious for Wylie to take the post of seminary president, knew that a healthful climate was an important consideration. In those days Americans died from common ailments easily treated today.

David Maxwell, a Bloomington physician and the one person who could be considered "the father of Indiana University," also made a point to assure Wylie about conditions in

Bloomington.

On May 7, 1828, Maxwell wrote, "I have now resided in Indiana for 16 years, and I unhesitatingly declare, that Bloomington is as healthful a situation as any in our state, or in any of the Western states. On this subject I ought to judge correctly, having practiced medicine as a profession both before, and since I came to Indiana."

In another letter (on June 5) Maxwell had a word or two to say about the citizens of Bloomington. "The society of Bloomington is civil and polite, neither chargeable with 'rudeness' nor entitled to the appellation 'refined.' It is however evident that our society is yearly becoming more refined."

Maxwell described the morality of the local citizens and estimated that the majority of them were "professional Christians" of various denominations — "Presbyterian, Cumberland Presbyterian, Methodist, Baptist, Covenanters and New-light or Christian orders."

Several years after his arrival to settle in

Bloomington, Andrew Wylie wrote (June 24, 1835), "It is here, as yet, a time of general health: though we have had almost incessant rains and tremendous floods since within a few days after you left us till this week which has been fair." It should be noted that the summer brought the prospect of cholera, a disease dreaded by the population of that day.

In writing to his son, Samuel, who was living in Louisville, President Wylie advised that cleanliness achieved by washing was good, but sweating was even better.

When Elizabeth Wylie wrote to her brother (who was living in Richmond) in February of 1847, she explained how busy she was because of an illness in the family. "I never in all my life put through such a miserable winter. ... Mother has the shakes off and on, yet would be well if it were not for them dare not expose herself in the least and has not been outside the yard since the 1st day of Oct., excepting a ride or two in the Buggy."

Yes, a healthful climate was a vital consideration to early Bloomingtonians.

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