

Bloomington's young ladies of the 1830s

In 1836, Indiana University junior, Richard H. Holman wrote in his diary, "Some one has remarked that you might as well attempt to find your way in the Ocean without chart or compass, as to fathom the numerous windings of a woman's heart."

It is fortunate that Holman, who came from Dearborn County, chose to test the validity of the statement about women. Through his eyes and reflected in his diary entries we get a few glimpses of young ladies of Bloomington in the 1830s.

Looking Back

By Rose H. McIlveen —

IT SHOULD BE REMEMBERED that at the time Holman wrote, the Monroe County Female Seminary was providing local young ladies with considerably more than homespun skills. The *Counties of Morgan, Monroe and Brown, Indiana* indicates that in the school year 1836-37, there were 37 girls enrolled in the seminary. The history also proudly states, "the influence exerted by the presence of such facilities (IU and the seminary) for education gave Bloomington a literary and social caste at that time probably possessed by no other town in the State."

Holman's first reference to a female (apart from his landlady) was, "I visited Miss Louisa Howe. Spent an hour very pleasantly in her society. Engaged her to walk with me down to see Mrs. Thos. Wilson, an old sweet heart of mine . . ."

THE YOUNG LADY and her elder sister, Elizabeth, were the daughters of Joshua and Lucinda Howe, emigres from Maryland. He was an established Bloomington merchant in the 1830s, and it is likely that he sent both of his daughters to the female seminary.

That Holman had decidedly different feeling about the sisters is evident in another diary entry, "The Misses Howe . . . have for a long period stood at the head of the Belles of the village. E. is getting old, and unless Watts soon marries her . . . she will pass the Rubicon — she will be, awful fact!!! an old maid. She is a piece of affectation and nonsense — plays delightfully on the piano, and sings most melodiously."