

The evils of dancing at IU in 1913

Late in October 1913 representatives of the sororities on the Indiana University campus were at work on a special project, a policy that was designed to help ensure the safety of coeds. Today's readers of the "Unanimous action taken by the Pan-Hellenic Council of Young Women" may smile at the document's contents, for it dealt with rules on dancing at social events.

Although the policy itself says a great deal about the morals of that period, of equal interest is the reason why the young women felt compelled to write the policy in the first place. What had prompted their concern was the assault of one of their own behind Maxwell Hall in the summer of 1913.

The policy — as described in



Looking back

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the Bloomington *Telephone* of Nov. 4, 1913 — attempted to limit body contact during dances. It said: "That the only attitude approved on the dancing floor shall be the position with the arm extended, rather than the so-called modern position." Nor was that the only restriction on dancing. The policy continued: "To avoid all misunderstanding, the following dances are stated as approved: Waltz, two-step, Boston (without the low dip), the hesitation waltz and one-step, without

the dip." (English society matrons of the early 1800s were reluctant to allow their debutante daughters to dance the then new Viennese Waltz, because males actually put their hands on the waists of their female partners, a "shocking familiarity.")

Unfortunately, the new Panhellenic policy had the effect of locking the barn door after the horse had been stolen as far as far as young Helen Murphy of Mitchell was concerned. A 1913 graduate of the high school in Mitchell, she was in Bloomington for the purpose of taking classes at the university.

The evening she was assaulted, she was attending a dance in the Student Building with her roommate, Mabel Collier. Helen had accepted Thomas Stineburg's in-

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