

In 1833, Cornelius Perring, an English emigrant and principal of the Monroe County Female Seminary, wrote to some of his relatives on the other side of the Atlantic, "Money is scarce in this State, at present, but the people are looking forward to their State Bank which is to make it plentiful enough."

The Perrings may have been surprised to find that frontier settlers were expert at bartering for their



Looking back

By Rose McIlveen

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necessities, but the exchange was not only common-place, it was a way of life. It was routine for Monroe Countians to produce more than they needed, so that items could be traded for goods and services provided by the local merchants. It is likely, in fact, that the majority of business was conducted by bartering.

Most of the Bloomington merchants assured the readers via advertising that exchange of goods was acceptable. Storekeeper John Campbell, who later distinguished himself in the Union Army during the Civil War, informed potential customers, "All kinds of country produce taken in exchange for goods at fair prices." His place of business carried "A handsome assortment of spring and summer goods."

F. And H. Thurston, owners of a dry goods and hardware store in New Albany, were more specific about what they were willing to take in trade. Their ad in the *Bloomington Post* in 1836 listed flaxseed, flax and tow linen, feathers, beeswax and ginseng as acceptable.

John S. Barnes, one of the earliest Bloomington merchants, in addition to being a general store owner, was a veritable dealer in agricultural products. His ad in the *Post* said, "I wish to purchase 1,000 bushels of good clean wheat for which I will pay Cash, Salt or goods." Presumably he sent the wheat to one of