

Moving the university from Seminary Square

Looking back, from page A1

The university weathered several organized efforts to have it moved to Indianapolis or elsewhere. In 1840 the trustees took note of yet another such threat. They commented in their minutes that some of the local citizens had transplanted themselves to Bloomington from elsewhere expressly because of the advantages of being near a university and that its removal would cause them financial hardship. Furthermore, said the trustees, the original reasons for putting the state university in Bloomington — healthful climate and central location — still applied.

The university did, after all, have to move, but not out of town. In 1883, a bolt of lightning started a smoldering fire in the campus Science Building, and before it was discovered, it was beyond the capabilities of Bloomington's fire brigade.

Then the trustees had to do a lot of soul searching about the old campus site. By the 1880s, the problem of being hemmed in by houses and businesses had become more

serious consideration. David Banta, president of the trustees, made it known that the board was thinking of moving the university, and the land offers came pouring into his hands.

The seven proposals were: (1) the Howe and McCalla land across the street from the old campus so that the university could remain there; (2) the McLean property on the southwest edge of town; (3) the Blair property roughly where Dyer School is located; (4) Hight/Laberteaux land on the north side of town; (5) Allen/McNary property east of town; (6) Hunter family land on the north side of town; and (7) Dunn's Woods at the east edge of Bloomington.

It has been written that Banta favored the Dunn's Woods acreage and pressured some of his fellow trustees to vote in favor of it. When the vote was taken on Sept. 28, 1883, it was three for the old site and five for Dunn's Woods. In later years some of the students grumbled that the university was "halfway to Brown County," but the move marked the graduation of the school to a new era of growth and service to the state.