

Math class 'scrap' led to student walkout in 1894

The article began, "For some time trouble has been brewing between the senior high school class and the teachers of the high school." Does that sound like the 1960s or later? Well, it wasn't.

Some of the readers of the Nov. 27, 1894, edition of the *Bloomington Evening World* were no doubt startled to learn that the seniors had left the school building in a body in protest. Their unhappiness did not stem from any world issue. Instead, it had to do with their mathematics class.

Explained the *World*: "The first-year class during the early part of term were required to return in the afternoon to recite algebra. They petitioned the superintendent and principal to let them have all their recitations in the morning so that



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they would not be compelled to return in the afternoon."

Apparently, the superintendent was in favor of their request and took it to the school board. It was obvious that he felt strongly about the issue, because he volunteered to take charge of the senior geometry so that another teacher could "hear the algebra recitations in the morning."

Instead of taking the superinten-

dent's suggestion, the school board hired an Indiana University student, J.J. Mitchell, to teach the seniors. As the *World* put it, "The seniors were not satisfied with the way the work was being conducted, and after presenting numerous petitions . . . they bolted."

There were those members of the class who had second thoughts immediately and felt an apology was in order. A committee was formed to meet with the administration to learn what the conditions would be for their return. The answer was that they would be obliged to apologize to all involved, including Mitchell, or they would not be recognized in any of their classes.

Such an ultimatum naturally called for a senior class meeting. The *World* informed its readers that

the students met at the home of Miss Alice Worley on South Walnut Street.

It was obvious that they had a hard time coming to an agreement. "Some desired to obey the wishes, but others strongly opposed the proposition."

A *World* reporter took himself to the home of the superintendent and interviewed him. The man's comments were unusual for the time. "He (the superintendent) said that while he was never in favor of the class opposing their instructors in any way, that he thought it would be preposterous to ask them to make the apologies which had been demanded of them for the simple assertion of their rights, as students, to have the best instructors that could be given them."

Added the reporter, "The matter is by no means settled, and today waits further developments of what may be a very interesting 'scrap.'" It should be noted that "scraps," student demonstrations or pranks, were by no means a new thing. IU students had been doing them for years, but high school students were another matter.

The "strike" did not last as long as some expected it to, least of all the *World* reporter. Only two days later he wrote, "The recent high school troubles have been smoothed over by the members of the 'bolting' class signing an apology to the trustees and Prof. Beck and Mr. Mitchell."

The statement came from a joint

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