

Civil War took its toll on Monroe County

By 1861, Monroe Countians were well aware of the horror of the war with the South. Although the local newspapers for the war period are strangely missing, there are some writings that indicate what life was like on the homefront.

Theophilus Wylie, a professor at Indiana University, experienced the war in the cruelest way — through the loss of his son. In his diary for Nov. 10, 1861, Wylie wrote: "Heard last Monday, Nov. 4 of the death of our dear Richard, at a place about ten miles south of Otterville (Florence). On Friday night of the death of his friend and companion Samuel W. Dodds at St. Louis. We are stricken, smitten of God and afflicted."

Prior to Richard Wylie's death there had been entries in the diary that indicated people in Monroe County were uneasy. The professor



LOOKING BACK

By Rose McIlveen

commented in his diary: "Alarmed yesterday by hearing that three St Boats containing 18th 22nd and 24th Regiments had been taken near Lexington, Mo., by Price. Report contracted last night by telegraph."

It is possible that the bits and pieces of bona fide news and the rumors all mixed together caused considerable uneasiness on the home front. Relieved to hear from his son, Wylie wrote in his diary on Sept. 8, "Letter from Dick informed us that the 18th part of the 22nd and 24th had gone to Boonville. They may have gone thence by boat to Lexington and that they

might be taken is probable."

Still other entries reflected a deep depression. Wylie was a religious man, but he was sometimes plagued by melancholy. The Thanksgiving entry for that year reads, "Thanksgiving day — a dull, dark, dusky, drizzly, dreary day, as to weather. A gloomy day to me as to feeling. War ranging on our borders, soldiers killed on the field, and dying in the camp. Thanksgiving seems almost out of place."

Wylie faced another disappointment. On Dec. 1 he wrote: "Yesterday about 8 o'clock received a telegram from Syracuse, Mo., signed W.S. Charles, informing me that the remains of our own Richard would arrive either Saturday or Monday. Yesterday was spent in making preparations, but the body did not come. It is expected tomorrow, and our wounded hearts will again bleed."

The Wylies were not the only university family to receive bad news. Theodore Read, son of former Professor Daniel Read, had been on the faculty.

After graduation he had received an appointment as prosecuting attorney for a district in Indiana. From that position he had risen rapidly. Before settling down to a private law practice, Read had accepted an appointment by President Pierce in the General Land Office in Washington.

At the beginning of the war, Theodore Read was quick to enlist. Near the end of the war he had risen to the rank of adjutant general in the Army of the James River. Wounded twice, at Chancellorsville and at Cold Harbor, he was shot through the body on April 6, 1865, during a battle in Virginia while he and his men were trying to slow Gen. Lee's retreat.

The news of Read's death did not reach Bloomington until April 30. Wylie noted it in his diary on that date. "Received a letter from Prof. Read announcing the death of his son, General Theodore Read."

A tribute to the young young officer appeared in the *Cincinnati Gazette* of May 3, 1865. It indirectly paid tribute to his Bloomington upbringing.

The editorial said, in part: "Prompt in action, eloquent in language, cultivated in literary taste, with a moral and physical courage which never quailed, and with a power of dispatching business which rendered him invaluable in the Adjutant General's Department, he was withal wholly free from vice—more free from all vicious or wrong habits, as a prominent General with whom he long served declared, than any young man he ever knew."

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