

# David Starr Jordan's first impressions of area

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some parts of Bloomington, served as sidewalks.

**JORDAN'S IMPRESSIONS** of the square give us an opportunity to see it in those days through his perception. "... all Monroe County, after the fashion of the rural South, aiming to spend Saturday afternoon at the county seat. Thus in summer the entire space about the courthouse fence would be bordered with rinds of the watermelon, a delicious fruit much enjoyed by the whites and still more by the colored population."

IU was still on the Seminary Square property at South College and Second Street. Jordan related that a brook ran across the "main" street, and college-bound pedestrians were obliged to cross a single-log bridge. He also recalled that it was on the little bridge that IU's first president had a confrontation with a dissenting professor.

Jordan described Brown County as "The most backward part of the state..." In a chapter describing famous speakers' visits to the university, Jordan recalled the occasion when A. Bronson Alcott came for a lecture.

"**AS A MATTER** of fact, his visit was chiefly remembered because of his cold reception of Indiana hospitality. In accordance with the prevailing Southern custom, his hostess had spread a groaning table — roast turkey, scalloped oysters,

chicken pie, and boiled ham, flanked by all manner of toothsome jellies, pickles, preserves, to be followed by ice cream and melting layer cakes. To the horrified dismay of Mrs. xxx and her clever daughters, Alcott curtly declined it all, explaining that he ate next to nothing and but little of that."

Jordan, whose interests were not confined to the natural sciences, had little patience with the spoils system in the raw. He described an occasion in 1888 when there was an opportunity to appoint a naturalist for the first time to the staff at Yellowstone Park.

Jordan had suggested one of his advanced zoology students, but then Congressman Columbus C. Matson insisted that it was his prerogative to hand-pick the appointee. The congressman's first choice was obliged to decline the opportunity because he was "in the Monroe County jail to expiate the social error of larceny."

**JORDAN RELATED** that the morning Matson's second choice got the word that he had been appointed, he was "trying to ride a serious, remonstrant horse through the door of a Martinsville saloon!"

Jordan's presidency at IU ended in 1891, when he resigned to accept the presidency of Stanford University. Arriving back in Bloomington from a speaking engagement in Illinois, Jordan was persuaded to move to California by Leland Stanford and wife, who had arrived in town by car and were staying at the National Hotel.