

Hat was comforting for first woman admitted to IU

"'Miss Morrison, you will have to come to fill the breach' . . . To fill the breach became a serious question with me. What if no young woman should step forward to enter those hitherto unnecessarily closed doors?"

Sarah Parke Morrison, in the Aug. 25, 1911, edition of the *Bloomington Weekly Courier*

Indiana University historians have largely assumed that when Sarah Parke Morrison was admitted as the first female student in 1867, she had no qualms about entering. Not so, according to her own account of those years in Bloomington.



Looking back

By Rose McIlveen

ton. The *Weekly Courier* reprinted her recollections which first appeared in the *Salem Republican*.

The article hints that it was her father's idea, rather than the other way around. Describing that moment in time, she wrote, "One day Father, who was president of the

Board of the State University and soon to go to Bloomington to commencement, said to me that he thought the time was about ripe for the admission of women, and that if I would prepare an appeal to that effect he would present it, and to show his interest would give me \$5."

Morrison, who accompanied her father to Bloomington, was sitting in "Mrs. Wylie's parlor" when the board's decision was brought to her by Professor Richard Dale Owen. (The Mrs. Wylie was probably the wife of Professor Theophilus Wylie.)

That her petition to the board may have been hypothetical, rather than practical, is revealed in her account. "For my part, I was rather tired of going to school, was never in robust health and was devoting myself to writing and reform work. But the ghost would not go down — no woman, after men had declared the doors open?"

Morrison's next problem was very rusty Greek. In fact, she was appalled when she looked at the catalog. "So much Greek, and I had forgotten even the alphabet. It would take two years' hard study. I did not know how hard, to make

that up."

That posed a dilemma for Morrison. As she put it, "They did not have courses of electives then, but the old-fashioned Gradgrind of ancient languages . . . And if one could slip along, it must not be the elective woman who must show for the credit of her sex that her brain was fully as capable as that of the male. That woman must come up to the mark, must be careful to establish no precedent injurious to her interests."

In other words, despite the fact
see Looking back, page C2