

First woman at IU was expected to be seen, not heard

When Sarah Parke Morrison was admitted as the first female to attend Indiana University, resuscitating her Latin and Greek — subjects required of all students then — was her first hurdle. According to her recollections printed in the Bloomington *Weekly Courier* on Aug. 25, 1911, she reviewed her Greek, at least, while taking long walks with Professor Cyrus M. Dodd.

It should be noted that in addition to Dodd, the human part of the university in the 1860s consisted of President Cyrus Nutt, Professors Theophilus Wylie, Elisha Ballantine and Richard Owen and, of course, 300 young male students.

IU education in the classroom was made up of two traditional elements — declamation (or speaking and debate) and essay writing. The attitude of most of Morrison's fellow students and some of her pro-



Looking back

By Rose McIlveen

fessors was that in the classroom she should be seen and not heard.

In one of her classes, Morrison chose to write an essay first, because she was not all that confident about her ability to get up in front of the class and give a speech. She described what happened next. "And the professor in accordance with my cowardice, said as I passed his desk last, 'You, Miss Morrison, will have an essay, I suppose?'"

His condescension struck a nerve with her, and she gave him the reply she had carefully resolved upon

to use when she was patronized by the male of the university. It was simply, "Why?" Perhaps taken aback, the professor answered, "As you wish, only I thought you might prefer to have an essay again."

It was neither the first nor the last time she was to assert her equality with fellow students. Professor Ballantine said, "I suppose you will have declamation, but I tell you frankly, I don't like it."

On another occasion in Professor Owen's class the exercise was debate. One of the students said to her, "We know, of course, Miss Morrison, you can declaim and so forth, but I never heard of a lady debating." Her reply, again, was "Why?"

Professor Owen was known for his favorable views about the advancement of women, but when it

came to what happened in his classroom, he, too, skirted the issue. Morrison recalled, "There was no question asked me in his class. He divided us alphabetically, I suppose, into opposing ranks. I do not recall that the question for debate was given then, or ever, for as far as I knew, it never came off."

Nor was Morrison safe from the resentment of her fellow students. "Mr. Dunn, whom I had noticed as a rather superior young gentleman, astonished me by making some rather slighting remark. For the one time I lost my temper, but higher power preserved me from losing my tongue. It probably was intended as a test."

A large part of Morrison's indignation at the hostile atmosphere in which she studied stemmed from the fact that she had not come to the university fresh out of second-

ary school. She had been educated at the Salem (Indiana) and Mount Holyoke (Massachusetts) seminaries before entering IU.

Despite the occasional verbal jabs, in 1869 Morrison had earned her bachelor of arts degree. There was only one more exercise before she became the first female graduate of IU — the commencement ceremonies during which each graduate was expected to deliver an oration.

It was no light thing — that of being the only female to speak. Remembering it, Morrison wrote, "To have a performance at commencement that would pass a general critical public was, indeed, an undertaking for me."

Next week: Morrison's graduation