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History of Indiana University: From College to University (1833-1838)

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CHAPTER V
FROM COLLEGE TO UNIVERSITY
(1833-1838)

The new professors—two factions in Bloomington—Mrs. Elliott’s diplomacy—cholera—effort to make Indiana College a labor institute—growth of the College—funds—Indiana College becomes Indiana University.

The story of the Indiana College as thus far told on Foundation Days has been brought down to the close of the “faculty war” in 1832. It begins today with the reorganization of the faculty.

Dr. Wylie was continued as president at a salary of $1,300, and Beaumont Parks was elected to the chair of languages and Ebenezer N. Elliott to that of mathematics and natural philosophy, each at $750 per year. Both were taken from Indiana schools, Parks from the head of a classical school at Madison and Elliott from the head of a like school at Aurora. The former was Connecticut born, and was educated at Dartmouth; the latter was a South Carolinian, but came to the Kentucky side of the Ohio valley in boyhood and was educated at the Miami University.

The Greek and Latin professor is remembered as much for his eccentricities as for his learning. He was seldom or never without his “quid in his mouth and was always begging for tobacco.” He did all sorts of unexpected and astounding things. In the middle of a recitation, without a word of warning, he would spring to his feet with the announcement that he must go home and kill a chicken for dinner; and off he would go, not to return till the next day. Happily the tribe of eccentrics has about disappeared from the western college—a fact that would seem to indicate that there must have been a deal of simulated eccentricity among the college men of old.

Professor Elliott moved in the usual orbit, except that he was endowed with an inordinate egotism. He still survives [1893], or did a few months ago; and I think you will agree with me, when you have heard his own account of some of his achievements while a professor in the Indiana College, that he is in his old age—whatever he may have been when a younger man—most delightfully self-conscious of the importance of his own acts.

Thus far the history of the institution had had in it more of disappointment and failure than of success and triumph. Nevertheless, it had met with its successes; and, in spite of all its drawbacks, past and to come, it was destined in a very few years to attract the general attention of the country and draw students to its classes from all over the West and South.

It is not to be supposed that the new faculty entered upon their duties in the belief that the evil days were past and that there was to be no more war. Too many battlefields were still in sight, and too many old soldiers who had fought for or against the College on these fields survived, for that. A generation—yes, two generations—must step down and out before there could be a perfect peace. The old politicians and the old ecclesiastics must all give place to the new before the Indiana College battles were to be no more. Still, it is a reasonable conclusion that the “faculty fight,” which was the theme of the last Foundation Day’s paper, was not an unmitigated evil. It had its one compensation at least, for while the internecine strife went on the foreign enemy stood aloof observing the strictest neutrality. After the domestic broil was over the attacks from the outside came with such lessened vigor as to indicate a permanent weakening in the ranks of the enemy. Battles were still to be fought in defense of the State College, but the issue was never again to be so doubtful as it had been in the past.

When the new professors came, in the fall of 1832, they found the people of Bloomington in a state of angry discontent. They had very generally taken sides in the faculty controversy, and although Hall and Harney were gone, leaving Dr. Wylie as the only one of the original combatants to occupy the field, the two factions were not
ready to cease the warfare. The population of the town did not exceed six hundred; but six hundred soldiers, it must be conceded, can fight a stout battle. Theirs, it must be remembered, was a very combative age. Everybody in those days was ready to fight with tongue, pen, fist, or sword, on the slightest provocation. If you will take the pains to examine the old court dockets of any of our counties, you can see from the great plenty of slander cases and assault and battery cases how very pugnacious the Indiana people were.

The people of Bloomington were no worse and no better than were their neighbors in this respect. When the faculty contest began, they joined in with a will. But when the principals in that unhappy affair ceased their strivings, their valorous adherents were hardly ready to cease theirs; and so the warfare continued, between the Hall and Harney faction on the one side, and the Wylie faction on the other.

The people of Bloomington were a social people in those days, and in this way they were much like their neighbors, for sociability was a characteristic of the times. The people of the towns were much in the habit of meeting around the hearthstone and of eating and drinking and making merry. But here in Bloomington the suppers were Hall and Harney suppers, or else Wylie suppers. An adherent of one faction was seldom or never a guest with the other. Indeed, Professor Elliott says in so many words that, when he arrived, so bitter was the feeling between the two factions, "no individual of the one party visited, or even spoke to one of the other party."

This state of affairs must have been intolerable to the new professors; and one of them at least, according to his charmingly gossipy story, determined to put an end to this social thralldom for his own and his family's benefit, as well as for the benefit of the College. He exclaims:

It was fortunate for me and for the College that my wife (whom I had just married) had been reared in the best society of Kentucky, and that Bloomington was somewhat numerously settled by Kentucky, and that the governor of the state, Noah Noble, was a Kentuckian, a neighbor and a playmate in childhood, of my wife's. This gave us an entrée to all the society of which Bloomington could boast. A succession of entertainments followed [his coming, which was just sixty years ago the fourteenth of last month—in the fall of 1832] and many shrewd speculations were indulged in as to which party the new professors and their families would attach themselves. I had brought with me two young ladies, nieces of my wife.

The townsmen representing both factions had done the handsome thing by the new members of the faculty, and it now became their duty to pay their debts. "Mrs. Wylie," continues the chronicler, "led off by inviting the Doctor's friends only. Mrs. Professor Parks followed by inviting the same, and both entirely ignored his enemies."

It was now the turn of the mathematician and his wife, and there was much discussion between the two. After the lapse of sixty years, the matter seems trivial enough to us, but as a result of that discussion it was determined, writes our chronicler, "to ignore both parties and invite all, and make the resuscitation of the College the paramount object." And so all were invited—Hall and Harney retainers and Wylie retainers—and all came; so that the mathematician's parlor (to use his own language) was "crowded by both parties, but on opposite sides of the room, glaring at each other and wondering what next."

Well, what next? Let us have the story to the end without break or comment.

My wife had marshaled her forces, her two attractive young ladies, her nieces, some Kentucky students, and as auxiliaries her Kentucky friends in town. The object was to mingle these heterogeneous factions and transform them into a homogeneous whole. Much as I had admired her before [they had recently been married], she that night excelled in entertaining anything I had thought possible. She and the young ladies were everywhere, had a word or repartee for all, calling to her from one side to help her to discuss some topic with one from the opposite side... before supper was announced, they were pretty thoroughly mixed up. These tactics were followed up by a judicious round of visits and invitations to call... This was the deathblow to partyism; and from that time the institution started on a new career of prosperity, so that when our trustees returned, after a two years' absence, they found the College, to which they had—as they thought—bidden an eternal farewell, flourishing, the new building finished, the chapel complete with rostrum and orchestra, a fine brass band, two society Halls, and (best of all) a large increase of students.

As a bit of local coloring the story as told by Professor Elliott could not be overlooked, but the results of his and his worthy wife's diplo-

*This refers to the early 1830s.
nacy were hardly as great as he would have us believe. The finished building, the completed chapel and rostrum and orchestra, and the brass band and society halls and increase of students were due to causes other than that supper. In a word, the supper did not save the College; nevertheless the social life of Bloomington, and of all those connected with the College, too, for that matter, was no doubt greatly benefited by it. It was the beginning of better things, and by reason thereof deserves to be remembered. Still, the revolution it set in motion was not instantaneous, for as late as 1838 the Hall and Harney and the Wylie factions were still making themselves felt as factions in the social life of Bloomington.

Let us turn now to matters of a graver nature.

The year after this institution had been made a possibility by the constitution of the new state of Indiana, a new disease which was in a very few years to prove a scourge to mankind the world over began to attract the attention of the medical profession of the civilized world. The year after the institution passed by legislative enactment from the Indiana Seminary into the Indiana College, that fell disease passed beyond the confines of its Asiatic home and entered Europe. In 1831 it touched the coast of England, and on June 9, 1832, cholera for the first time found a foothold in the New World. This was at Quebec; and in thirty days it was claiming its victims in Chicago! On June 24 it broke out in New York, whence it swept like an ocean storm to Philadelphia, Washington, Baltimore, and to other towns on the Atlantic side of the Alleghanies. In September it runs like lightning up and down the Ohio. Cincinnati, Lawrenceburg, Madison, Louisville, Evansville—all are stricken, and the mortality is great and men fear and tremble.

As the cry of anguish goes up from the people of the river towns, “See!” exclaim they of the interior places, “it clings to the water ways!” and they regain their courage.

With the coming of the October frosts the scourge suddenly disappeared, and it was devoutly hoped that it would never return. In the long winter evenings that followed, the people around their firesides recalled the horrors of the visitation and the striking incidents of its year. Not the least of these was the fact that the winter of 1831-1832 was the coldest that the people of Indiana had ever known; that the following spring was extremely cold and backward, and the summer noted for the absence of sultry weather. There are those yet living [1893] who remember the extraordinary fact that in the harvest field that year laborers were compelled to keep in motion to keep comfortably warm.

And it is, moreover, on record that the floods in the Ohio valley reached a higher level that spring than had ever before been known—higher by eight feet than the great flood of 1826, and higher by nearly six feet than the still greater of 1815. As the people sat around their firesides of the long winter evenings and talked of frost and flood, of summer cold and stalking cholera, they wrapped themselves in the mantle of their own fears and waited forebodingly for the worst. And the worst for Indiana was yet to come.

On April 27, 1833, the Indianapolis papers announce that the “frightful disease” has again made its appearance in Cincinnati.

Once more does this pestilence stalk at noonday up and down the Ohio, smiting with death the inhabitants as it goes. It menaces the interior places as it had not done before, and finally leaving the river basin it flies like a destroying angel southward, through the bluegrass towns and on down into the Tennessee country.

All this was going on in May and June, and toward the last of the latter month the alarm began to spread to the Indiana towns; and on June 26 it reached Bloomington. In Indianapolis June 26 was observed “as a day of special fasting and prayer,” and a public meeting was called to consider the situation.

In Bloomington they neither prayed and fasted nor called a public meeting, so far as I can learn, but waited—and hoped that the pestilence would pass them by.
On June 29, the Indianapolis Journal assures its readers that all is still well—that while there are sporadic cases occurring in various places, cholera "is not yet prevailing as an epidemic."

On July 6, the editor exclaims, "Indiana is thus far most mercifully spared!" But in a postscript—for editors wrote postscripts to their editorials and even news items in those days—he says, "We understand that the cholera has broken out with great virulence in Salem." And so it had. Eight days before the editor seems to have heard of it, it had "assumed a malignant form" in that unhappy town, according to what is now known. And now the pestilence was abroad in Indiana's interior places, and "terror and consternation," to use the language of another, everywhere prevailed.

Two centers of attack were made, one in the eastern part of the state and the other in the southern. At Greensburg, a small village of a few hundred inhabitants, 30 deaths occurred in a few hours. Out of a population of 1,500 in New Castle, 16 fell victims. The mortality was less at Richmond. In the south, the severest sufferer was Salem. Here the mortality was appalling. In the town 95 died and 46 in the country round about, 141 in all. From Salem it marched to Paoli; it is now heard of at Bedford, and thence it passed on to Bloomington.

On Saturday morning, August 10, as certain ten-o'clock churchgoers passed the residence of Mr. George Johnson, on the southwest corner of the square, on the lot now occupied by the First National Bank, Anika, the colored family servant, was seen gathering fuel to start the dinner fire. At two o'clock, the same churchgoers, and other persons, were giving her a hasty burial. Between the hours of 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. she had been stricken and had died of cholera, and her very hurried funeral testifies to the extreme alarm that had possession of the town.

The same afternoon a student by the name of Huntington, from Indianapolis, was attacked and died during the night. He was buried early the next morning, the faculty and most of the students attending the funeral. Mr. William McCollough, a prominent citizen, died about the same time, and others followed in quick succession.

All was now alarm and confusion. A few families fled the town, one in particular seeking safety at Ellett's tavern on the road to Gosport. When the students reached the place, the landlord and his wife were both found in the agonies of death from the dread disease.

All College work now ceased, and the great majority of the students left at once for their homes. Says the venerable Judge Roache, who was here as a student at the time, "Those who were able to secure conveyances or horses went in that way, but my recollection is that the great majority could not secure any sort of conveyance, and is their wild hurry to escape from the pestilence left town on foot." On their leaving Dr. Wylie admonished them to pursue their homeward journeys leisurely and cheerfully. Three Indianapolis students, Judge Roache remembers—Hugh O'Neal, who afterwards became somewhat celebrated as a lawyer, David Beaty, and a young man by the name of Pogue, who belonged to the family of that name reported to have been the first to settle on the after-site of Indianapolis—made the journey as far as Martinsville afoot. As they passed a residence a mile north of town, they were observing President Wylie's residence a mile north of town, they were observing President Wylie's admonition to pursue their homeward way cheerfully, by shouting "Good-by cholera! Good-by cholera!" Shortly before reaching Martinsville they were amazed at finding that the pestilence was hard on their track. Young Pogue was stricken down and died in that town. No other deaths of students are remembered. Quite a number of citizens of the town and of the country round about died, but the pestilence soon abated.

A vacation of two weeks was announced at the time the students left, but we learn from the Indiana Democrat of August 31 that the president of the College, toward the close of the month, gave notice that work would be resumed in the institution on the first of September. The announcement contained the cheering intelligence that the plague had run its course in Bloomington, and that general good health once more prevailed.

Commencement day came that year on the last Wednesday in September. Two-thirds of August had been lost, but there was no postponing of the day of commencement on account thereof. It is remembered, however—and it shows the severe notions that college men entertained in those days concerning fidelity to what they considered their trust—that the time was made up the following collegiate year by a shortening of the fall vacation by three weeks.

Commencement was held that year in the new chapel, and three
names were added to the roll of Alma Mater's alumni. Says Dr. Elliott:

The commencement of 1833 that year was held in the new chapel, and the orchestra was composed of two flutes, one of them cracked. Imagine the discord. Dr. Wylie whispers to a professor, "What makes more noise than a pig in a gate?" Reply, "I give it up." The Doctor, turning his thumb towards the orchestra, says, "Two of them!" This orchestra led to the formation of the first band in the College. It was organized by Professor Elliott and Mr. Seward, the blacksmith, and met weekly for instruction and practice in the recitation room of the former, who was its president until he returned to the South.

So many episodes that touch upon the history of the College and of the times during this period beckon to one for attention that it becomes difficult to make a satisfactory selection. There is one, however, that was so peculiarly the product of the age, and came with such threatening to the life of the College and yet, comet-like, passed it by with so little harm, that I feel justified in selecting it to complete this paper.

In the early period of the state's history men fairly deified labor. The most desirable quality a man or woman could possess was the power and the will to perform manual labor. The young man who stood at the head as a railmaker, or a woodchopper, or the like, was in general hard to turn down in the esteem of the fathers and mothers who had marriageable daughters. And so the young woman who could spin her eighteen or twenty cuts a day, and weave the fall web of jeans, and dip the winter candles, and the like, was quite sure of not being overlooked by the able-bodied railmaker or woodchopper. The supreme mission of men here in the West in those days was to subdue the forest and surmount the physical conditions that obstructed their way; and this they could do, and only do, by the exercise of physical prowess. Hence they enthroned labor and made it the chief thing.

For this cause the man who was disabled to such an extent that he could not engage in manual labor—who was lame, too fat, too feeble, had the pithistic or had fits or was too lazy to work—well, they usually made schoolmasters out of these, and thus got what good they could out of them.
the Indiana legislature of 1835 the senator from Switzerland county [John Dumont] had introduced a bill to reorganize Indiana University (he means College) into a manual labor institution. It made provision for purchasing a large farm, erecting expensive buildings, purchasing all kinds of agricultural implements and machinery, stocking it with all kinds of stock, making it obligatory on the students to work certain hours each day on the farm and all day Saturday, and appointing as superintendent at a high salary the laziest man in Monroe county.

This was the time of mud roads and corduroy turnpikes, and communication with Indianapolis was like angels' visits, and the bill had passed its first two readings before we heard of it. Our board of trustees were scattered all over the state and the faculty were left to their own resources. Professor Elliott was instructed to go to Indianapolis at his own expense and work to get the bill defeated. He adopted the tactics of "a still hunt"—approached the senators one by one—showed them that the provisions of the bill would absorb all their funds, drive off all the students, and close the doors of the College. He received their pledges to vote against it, until he secured three-fourths of the Senate before the bill was ordered to its third reading. The Senate had been very polite to Professor Elliott and had given him a seat in their chamber opposite to Senator Dumont's. It had been agreed to let Dumont make his speech, and then without reply to take the vote. As no reply was made, Dumont was confident that it would carry unanimously. When the Senators began to vote "No!" "No!" "No!" he looked around the Senate with alarm and astonishment, until his eye fell upon Dr. Elliott. He crossed the chamber and, seating himself beside him, said: "Ah, Professor! you are a pretty long-headed fellow. I see what you have been doing. You have beaten us this time, but I hope to see the day when there will be a professor of agriculture in every college in our country."

But we need read no further from the manuscript of this charming old octogenarian. Whether the defeat of the Dumont measure was altogether due to the "fine Italian hand" of the mathematics professor, I think may be doubted; but that the absurd measure was defeated, and that Professor Elliott aided materially in the defeat, and all at his own expense, there cannot be a doubt. Had the bill passed, the end no doubt would have been the wrecking of Indiana College.

Let us now pass on to the collegiate and legislative year of 1837-1838. In this year the corporate life of the Indiana College ends and that of the Indiana University begins. The five years intervening between 1833 and 1838 abound in matter interesting enough to the historical prowler, but no event of them all affords so good an ending place for these papers as the change from College to University.

During the intervening years the president of the College was brought to trial before the board on what appears at this distance to have been a trumped-up charge of an abuse of trust in the matter of buying books for the library, but he was triumphantly acquitted. After that, an effort was made to bring the matter before the General Assembly of the state, but that proved a failure also.

Notwithstanding the occurrence of many things to harass and annoy, the institution gathered strength and the attendance of students increased. Professors during these intervening years resigned and went to other fields of labor, and thus it began to be made plain that the people of the state were beginning to be impressed with the idea that the College was in some way necessary to the welfare of the state. I do not know whether it would have been possible to carry through the legislature a measure appropriating money to the institution or not, but I hardly think it would. And this for the one reason, if for none other, that the general opinion was that the institution, if not abundantly, was at least sufficiently endowed. It was only a few years before this time, as we have seen on a former occasion, that a legislative committee had in a report shown that the endowment of the institution could be made to amount up to $100,000 in a very few years; and the committee expressed the opinion, in the utmost confidence of its correctness, that a $100,000 endowment would be ample for all the purposes of a university such as was contemplated by the provisions in the constitution of 1816.

Well, the funds available as a source of income amounted to between $60,000 and $70,000, and there was remaining and unsold something over 10,000 acres of land, which when sold would, it was reasonably hoped, bring the endowment up to the $100,000 mark. What more could any college want? An appropriation would have been impossible. No member of the General Assembly ever proposed it by bill or otherwise, so far as I can learn. Yet there were men in the state who saw clearly enough the necessity for it. Governor Ray, as we have heretofore seen, recommended it; and Governor Noble, in his
annual message to the General Assembly in 1837–1838, renewed the recommendation.

And how much better it would have been had the recommendations been heeded! What was needed at that time above all things was for the people of Indiana to know that the Indiana College was not an institution the administration of whose affairs it was the duty and privilege of the state through its legislature merely to over-haul annually and approve or condemn, but that it was a ward of the state—an institution of the state which had to be supported by the state. Had that lesson been learned in that period, how different the condition of the institution would be from what it is! And that lesson would have been learned, I have no doubt, had Indiana College been less efficient than it then was.

It has already been stated that after the faculty fight of 1832 the politicians ceased measurably their attacks upon the College and its management.

But in their place came an army of ecclesiastics, backed up by a great church organization, and the war went on against the Indiana College. There is not time now to give any account of that controversy. I can only say that the battle was fought out with a ferocious courage that was common to the men of that day, and that the Indiana College came out of the contest with great loss. Students fell off and professors resigned, and something had to be done.

In December, 1837, Governor Noble, in his annual message, after paying a high tribute of praise to the thoroughness and effectiveness of the academic work which the College had already done, declared "this a propitious time for carrying into effect the provision of the constitution of Indiana with regard to the establishment of a State University," and concluded by recommending that the College have bestowed on it that distinction together with the necessary endowment.

This was at the commencement of the session in December. Bills were presented in both branches of the Assembly and on February 13, 1838, the Senate bill was concurred in by the House. By a vote of the General Assembly of the state, the Indiana College was thus transformed into the Indiana University.

Mr. Roosevelt in his charming history, The Winning of the West, tells us of two Kentucky hunters of the early day who lived alone in the wilderness, far from any settlement. They held to opposing religious creeds, and in spite of their common danger they argued, quarreled, and separated. The one kept the old camp, while the other took up his abode in a hollow tree, but within shouting distance. Every day on arising they cried "Good morning!" but not another word would they speak to each other the whole day long. And this habit, the author tells us, they kept up for many months during which they saw no other faces.

To us who live in this liberal year of grace, Mr. Roosevelt's story seems incredible. And so I suppose the story of the assaults made from time to time upon this institution—as Seminary, College, and University—by religionists, or rather in the name of religion, seems likewise incredible to many.

On past Foundation Day occasions attempts have been made to tell the story in sufficient detail to give you a fair idea of the trials through which the institution passed from that May Day in 1824, when it received its first instalment of students, on down till after the

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1 Delivered in the Old College chapel, as the annual Foundation Day address, January 19, 1894, by Judge Banta.