

# Education long a concern in Monroe

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Most of the earliest Monroe Countians were busy felling trees to clear the land for their homesteads and farms. But equally important to them was the education of their children.

IN 1818, THE YEAR the county was born, children attended school in the brand new log courthouse. The name of their first teacher is not known, but it was probably a man by the name of Addison Smith. (He may have been related to Thomas Smith, who bought land here in 1816.)

There was room in the crude log courthouse for a class, because the first county officers, such as the clerk, operated out of their homes. But as the population grew, the courthouse was needed for government business. Use of the building had to be strictly temporary, and in the summer of 1819 a separate log schoolhouse was erected where the old seminary building used to stand.

LIKE THOSE WHO HAD to deal with recent periods of the baby boom and the population explosion, early Monroe Countians concerned with education had a hard time keeping up with the school population. Settlers were pouring into the area at an accelerating rate.

Only two years after the first schoolhouse was built, another one was needed. It was located on the east side of the village.

A fancier building was erected in 1823. It was made of brick instead of logs. Small classes for the younger children were taught in private homes, churches, and the second stories of business buildings. By the 1840s the school population had leveled off a little bit.

In those early classes it wasn't possible to cater to the niceties of grading. All ages were put together and only the fundamentals were taught.

THOSE EARLY SCHOOLS were not free schools as we know them today. There was no such thing as a tax base for them. Whatever tax money was available was used for government, not education. They were operated on a subscription basis with each family paying according to its ability.

By the 1840s the philosophy of the citizens of the state — or at least the state legislators — had begun to swing toward tax-supported "free" schools. In 1849, a referendum was held in Monroe County to gauge the sentiment of the voters on the subject. The disastrous results were as follows:

Townships	FOR FREE SCHOOLS	AGAINST FREE SCHOOLS
Bean Blossom	59	112
Benton	44	42

Bloomington	128	307
Clear Creek	76	85
Indian Creek	40	101
Marion	16	35
Richland	59	128
Perry	127	20
Salt Creek	39	60
Van Buren	43	113
Washington	36	38
<b>Total</b>	<b>667</b>	<b>1,040</b>

MAJORITY AGAINST — 373

PARENTS AND EDUCATORS who believed that free schools were best for all of the children must have been frustrated. They were to wait some years before Monroe Countians would consent to comply with the new school laws of the state.

Finally, at the end of the Civil War, the county switched to a free school system. Once the residents tried it, they liked it.

Even before the 1830s, parents had begun to think about higher education for their daughters as well as their sons. The new Indiana College (now Indiana University) was for men only. Professor Cornelius Pering did establish a sort of female institution.