

Kirkwood left rich legacy

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Special to the H-T

Hoosiers who entrusted their young minds to the equally young Indiana University between the 1850's and the 1880's were treated to some of the University's most colorful as well as scholarly faculty members.

UNLIKE SOME OF HIS colleagues, Daniel Kirkwood was never dubbed eccentric. Apart from his distinguished academic career, Kirkwood's distinctiveness grew out of a tendency to usually wear a black silk top hat and to carry a cane.

Born in Maryland in 1814, he was educated in and taught at academies in Pennsylvania before he was named President of Delaware College in Newark. In 1856, IU lured him west to fill the post of professor of mathematics. Actually astronomy was his first love. But at IU he had the tedious task of droning elementary algebra and geometry into the heads of hopeful degree candidates.

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AN INDULGENT TEACHER, in 1866 Kirkwood quizzed a Civil War veteran for a graduation candidate list. Wrote the professor: "I asked him two questions. He couldn't answer either one of them. I didn't ask him any more. I knew he couldn't answer them". Kirkwood voted to pass him for graduation, knowing he had compelling non-academic attributes.

Students wandering into his classroom between classes would find his blackboards covered with formulas related to astronomy. When Saturday lectures were held, Kirkwood got a chance to talk about his

astronomical specialty, meteors and comets.

A MAN OF FEW WORDS, his classroom rhetoric was strictly limited to the subject matter. Instructions were given in gestures easily understood by the students.

In his math classes he was known to be lenient and indulgent with his students. They remembered that they could get by at times with obvious superficial scholarship.

David Starr Jordan, a contemporary of Kirkwood's wrote: "Kirkwood was a mathematical astronomer of learning and penetration, a man of noble personal character also, as simple-hearted as a child and possessed of the most perfect courtesy . . .

. . . It seemed to me a pity that one of the most erudite of mathematical astronomers in our country should spend his life teaching elementary geometry and algebra. Subsequently, when I became head of the institution, I arranged that Dr. Kirkwood should have a

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