

Amzi Atwater, local pastor-professor, left his mark on Bloomington and IU

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Amzi Atwater: 'Local character'

In the early 1900s an elderly man with a hawk-like profile, beard and odd-looking flattop skull cap could be seen strolling up Kirkwood Avenue toward the square. A "local character," he left his mark on Bloomington and Indiana University.

AMZI ATWATER was an adopted Hoosier. Born in Mantua, Portage County, Ohio, in 1839, he first attended the Eclectic Institute (now Hiram College).

However, having developed an interest in the ministry, he transferred to Northwestern Christian University (now Butler University). A puzzling aspect of Atwater's early academic career is that he didn't seem to stay put in one place very long.

Leaving Indianapolis before graduation, he taught at Royalton, Ohio, in 1858, and Bruceville, Ind., in 1860. (Teachers didn't need a bachelor's degree in those days.)

Four years later he was on the move again — this time to enroll at IU as a junior. But by the end of that school year he had left Bloomington to serve in the Union Army.

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Re-entering IU, Atwater finally finished requirements for his bachelor's and master's degrees. His major in Latin and Greek tied in with his theological training.

THE DEATH OF Professor James Woodburn during Atwater's senior year left a faculty vacancy he was asked to fill. Woodburn had been head of the Preparatory Department, forerunner of Bloomington High School. Prep students had to be given enough Latin, Greek and math for college entrance.

Atwater's pro tempore title was changed to "Permanent Principal of the Preparatory Department" after his graduation. The Board of Trustees also gave him the bonus of being named adjunct (assistant) professor of Latin and Greek.

Considering the size of IU today, it is difficult to imagine that in 1870 there were only 10 faculty members to teach some 300 students. Some of their names read like a Who's Who among University buildings — Daniel Kirkwood, Elisha Ballantine, T.A. Wylie and Richard Owen.

Atwater's "first" alma mater, Hiram College, lured him away from IU by offering him a full professorship. With an eye to continuing his other career, the ministry, he also served as pastor of the Disciples Church at Mentor, Ohio. But when IU trustees gave him the same title, he returned to Bloomington.

HIS BIOGRAPHY in *Indiana University Trustees and Officers* mentions that he also ministered to churches in Franklin, Sullivan, Ravenna, Ohio, and Bridgeport, Conn. The dates are not given.

Considered a "character" by his IU students, he took a considerable amount of ridicule. One student, W.D.W. Browning, was asked by Atwater in class to put a Latin inscription on the blackboard. Instead, he drew a funny picture of the professor, complete with his name so there was no question about who it was. Humorless, Atwater bawled him out in a dignified, scholarly

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