

July 23, 1937.

As I recall early days at the Illinois Industrial University, very little attention was paid to Athletics in the Fall of 1869.

The prevailing sentiment, amounting almost to obligation, was that the boys should work on University grounds or in its machine shop as many hours each day as could be spared from studies, drills, lectures and Chapel. 15¢ per hour was the common fee received. Especial emphasis was placed on the dignity of labor, and play was hardly worthy of consideration.

However, after supper on pleasant days groups of boys gathered on the drill grounds and indulged in such sports as jumping, scrub races, turning hand springs, etc., and a few even dared to do somersaults on the turf. Primitive ball playing was a favorite amusement. Rival captains determined which should have first choice of players by the hand over hand on a bat. The alternate choosing of players unlimited in numbers followed. Only two bases were required and one must run from home plate to pitcher's box and return. The comparatively soft ball was caught without a glove. Pitching meant a toss or underhand throw. There was no curved pitching. It would have been declared impossible.

We knew nothing whatever about Football, Golf or Tennis. Boxing and Wrestling were absolutely taboo.

In the Spring of 1870 the University erected on the angle between Main Building and Library Wing a substantial frame work with horizontal bar, Trapeze and a pair of



swinging rings. It stood in the open and without protection mats beneath. It was at once very popular and might be said to mark the beginning of athletics for us.

No instructors were provided, but some among the students volunteered to help the beginners. It was stipulated that the apparatus should not be used till after study hours in P.M.

One case of disobedience came near being fatal. The room on first floor above basement overlooking our Gymnasium was occupied by the ladies who had recently been admitted to University privileges for first time. It was said that from desire to show his prowess, Willis Reiss attempted the giant swing on horizontal bar and losing his hold landed head first on the ground.

For lady students no gymnasium privileges had been provided; but rumor had it that the walls of their room bore high marks of feminine heels with names of the perpetrators affixed. Curiosity of a couple of the boys prompted them to investigate and they chose the Chapel hour when room would be vacated. Unwittingly prolonging their interesting research till Chapel Service had finished, the boys chose, rather than being caught in the room, to jump from a window to the ground about fifteen feet. One of them, (Watson Pickereel) paid the price of his escapade with a broken leg.

Returning to the University in the Fall of 1871, we were delighted to find a real Gymnasium located on the floor above the machine shop which also was used as Armory and Drill Hall. There was plenty of room, a quite complete apparatus and a competent instructor in charge. Classes were formed and regular hours designated for instructions.



At the end of each term an exhibition performance was staged which was quite commendable.

Battalion Drill over, the College Band led to the Armory and played in the balcony for a free for all dance. A handkerchief tied on an arm transformed a boy into a lady partner and a jolly good time followed.

I do not remember that any intercollegiate Athletic contests were staged during my four years at the University, ending in 1874.

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