

William W. Borden and the Borden Collection

N. GARY LANE

Department of Geology, Indiana University
Bloomington, Indiana 47405

William W. Borden (1823-1906) played an important role in the early geological and educational development of southern Indiana. He gathered together a large collection of minerals, ores, fossils and archeological items, as well as a large library, all of which were dispersed after his death.

Borden was born of a pioneer Indiana family. His father, John Borden, first came to Indiana from Rhode Island in 1816 and purchased land in Clark County (1). He returned in 1817 and established the village of New Providence, named after the capitol of his home state. Two years later his wife, Comfort, came to Indiana but their infant son, Thomas, remained in Rhode Island. One or two other small children may have been left behind as well (2). Comfort died in 1820, 18 months after arriving in Indiana (3). John Borden married Lydia Bellows in 1822. He was engaged in farming, blacksmithing and built a small brick inn along the New Albany-Salem road through New Providence. Their eldest son, William W., was born the next year, and a younger son, John, was born in 1825, 6 months after his father had died at age 36 or 38.

Lydia Borden was left a 27-year-old widow with a two-year-old son and an unborn child. She took over the inn that her husband had established and ran it until her death (4). She never married again. She made sure that both of her sons had an excellent education for the time. William W. attended the local New Providence school, then the Washington County Seminary at Salem, leaving that school at age 12. Four years later, at age 16, he entered Indiana University as a sophomore in 1839 and was a senior three years later, although he never graduated from the university (5). John Borden entered Indiana University as a sophomore in 1841, age 16, and was still a sophomore the next year, in 1842. There is no record of him as a student at I.U. in 1843, although he did write a letter to his mother from Bloomington in that year. He ultimately entered and graduated from Harvard Law School, so he may have been reading law in Bloomington before moving to Cambridge. At the time the two Borden attended Indiana University there were four faculty members and about 40 students per year class.

The first evidence of William W. Borden's interest in geology occurred in 1844, when he was 21 years old and made his first trip to Rhode Island to visit his father's relatives and his half-brother, Thomas. He records that he collected rocks and fossils on that trip (6).

For 15 years, from 1841, his last year at Indiana University, until 1856 when he married, William Borden lived as a bachelor in New Providence where he farmed the family acres and managed his mother's property (7). Their tax bill for 1843 applied to 1133 acres and 37 lots in New Providence. His mother, Lydia Borden, died in 1851 at age 54. During this time William Borden became increasingly interested in geology and fossils. He records that a Dr. Reid of Salem, Indiana sparked his interest in fossil crinoids in 1862. In 1871 and 1872 he exchanged fossils with Jams Hall of Albany, New York, with O. W. Corey of Crawfordsville, Charles Dyer and Paul Mohr of Cincinnati and R. P. Whitfield of New York (6).

In 1873 Borden was appointed an assistant State Geologist, with duties to prepare geological reports and maps for six south-central Indiana counties—Clark, Floyd, Jefferson, Scott, Jennings, and Ripley. These reports were published in 1874 and 1876. Borden was especially interested to learn about iron ore deposits, represented by ironstone

(iron carbonate) in the shales of a unit that he named, the New Providence Shale. Iron furnaces were never established in the area (8). Borden's reports were distinguished especially by the quality of geologic maps that he produced. On these maps he drew lines demarcating the boundaries between different geologic rock units. This is the same procedure used on all modern geologic maps but most of the early county reports of the Indiana Geologic Survey included maps where different rocks types were only vaguely indicated and lines marking the boundaries of occurrence of different rock types were never delimited.

As Borden became increasingly interested in and proficient in geology his personal life surely went awry. He had married Lizzie F. Shaw in April 1856. They had no children, nor was Borden to have children by two later wives. After 19 years of marriage, in 1875 they had a fight on a train and on the street in New Albany that was reported in the local paper and in July Lizzie Borden filed for divorce, which was granted later that year. She married J. C. Dunn in 1876. Borden continued his geological interests and prepared exhibits of Clark and Floyd counties agricultural and geological specimens for the national Centennial in Philadelphia.

At age 55, after over 30 years of life on the family property in New Providence, Borden left for the silver mines of Leadville, Colorado in 1878. He went at the urging of his younger brother, John, who had become a successful Chicago lawyer and co-investor with Marshall Field and Horace Tabor in Colorado silver mines. Borden associated with his brother, Field and Tabor in the Borden, Tabor Co., and made a great deal of money in a short period of time. The company owned several very successful mines, including the Chrysolite, Little Pittsburg, and New Discovery mines. Borden's nephew, William, was an expert assayer for the company and largely responsible for its success. The fact that both uncle and nephew had the same name was responsible for some confusion as to the importance of Borden's role in the company (9). Borden stayed in Leadville less than one year and returned to New Providence with his wealth intact (10).

Shortly after returning to Indiana he married Idumea (incorrectly spelled Indumea in some sources) Harrod of Canton, Indiana. She was 20 years old, Borden was 56. Idumea's father was the local doctor in Canton and had a large collection of fossil crinoids, especially ones he obtained from the Ramp Creek Formation near Canton. The young Mrs. Borden died tragically two years after they were married when she was thrown from a buggy in 1881 when a horse was frightened by lightning (2). Three years later Borden married again, on Nov. 13, 1884, to Emma Dunbar, who was 18 at the time. In the same year he founded the Borden Institute, a private high school, in New Providence. A Normal School has been established the previous year in New Providence, April 2, 1883 and incorporated Jan. 10, 1884 (11,12). The institute was essentially a high school, the primary purpose of which was to train students as elementary school teachers. There were no public, tax-supported high schools in Indiana at this time. The normal school was converted to the Borden Institute with Borden's offer to construct a building for the school. He became known as Professor Borden even though he did no teaching at the institute and held no degree. The new building for the institute was dedicated July 4, 1885. Room and board at the institute was \$2.50 per week and tuition was \$8.00 per ten week term. The curriculum included a two-year teacher's course, a three-year scientific course, a law course and a one-year business course. Borden built a student dormitory and a home next to the institute.

With his newly acquired wealth Borden began to acquire large fossil and archeological collections. To house these collections he built a two story museum addition onto the front of the old brick inn that his father had built and that the Widow Borden had tended for so many years (Figure 1). In 1885 he bought a fossil collection from



FIGURE 1. Interior of the Borden Museum before the collections and library were dispersed. Photograph probably taken prior to 1932, and recently discovered in the attic of the Indiana State Museum. (Photo courtesy of Ronald L. Richards, Indiana State Museum.)

James Knapp of Louisville, Kentucky. He purchased Dr. Harrod's crinoid collection in 1888. He bought a lot of Pleistocene bones from Big Bone Lick, Kentucky from Dr. C. C. Graham in 1889 and an archeological collection from a Dr. Lavette in 1889. In 1897 he purchased a collection of southwestern U.S. archaeological materials and in 1898 a Tennessee mound-builders collection from G. L. Barnes of Chattanooga (6). All of these specimens were arranged for display in his private museum in New Providence. While this was going on Borden has arranged to have the name of the village of New Providence changed to Borden, in honor of his father who had founded the settlement. This was officially changed by the U.S. Postal Service on Jan. 9, 1891 (13).

In addition to geological and archaeological specimens Borden put together a large library that was used, in part, by the institute's students. He travelled to Europe to obtain books for the library, which included some notable rare volumes (11). Beginning in 1893 Borden employed an outstanding teacher at the institute, H. A. Buerk, who later was associated with the New Albany school system for many years. Borden closed the institute for one year in 1900 to allow Buerk to catalog his extensive museum collections. This catalog was published in 1901 (6). Some copies of the catalog included a short, very incomplete, autobiography of Borden. In 1901 Borden purchased crinoids and other fossils from G. K. Greene, a private collector in New Albany. In this same year he installed an electric generator in Borden for street and house lighting. The institute was closed again from 1903 to 1905 and in December, 1906, William W. Borden died. Shortly thereafter Buerk resigned as head of the institute, resulting in its final closure. At the time of his death Borden was 83, his wife was 40. Four months after Borden's death, his widow Emma married George W. Robb.

Borden left a complicated, holograph will that was not entirely clear as to his intentions. His widow contested the will in 1907 and the will was declared null and void, with the estate going entirely to his widow (15). There clearly was strong feeling regarding the disposition of the estate (16). William Nelson, one of the appointed trustees of the estate, explained to Frank Springer, a wealthy collector who was undoubtedly interested in purchasing the Borden fossil collection, as follows: "April 1, 1907. The Museum was left to Mrs. Borden during her life time, then to go to the people of Borden under the care of numerous trustees, among whom are the heads of various institutions of learning of the State of Indiana. The will was drawn by the Professor's own hand, and contains several obscure points as well as many things impossible of fulfillment, as the head of Indiana University is to be a trustee when there is no such university in Indiana.

For the purpose of clearing up these points, Mrs. Borden has bought suit against the trustees named, of whom I am one, and the end may be that she be given absolute control instead of a life estate in the Museum. This, I sincerely trust, will be the case, for the people of Borden have so acted during the Professor's lifetime as to be unworthy of any such attention." (16).

Mrs. Robb retained the institute, land and building, the museum, library and some collections for 23 years after Borden's death. All of the invertebrate fossils and crinoids were donated to the Field Museum of Natural History in 1923 (17). Standiford (11), writing shortly after the transaction took place, says that an "offer" was made to Mrs. Robb by the museum, but the collection was clearly presented to the Field Museum as a gift. In 1929 she presented the Borden Institute building and adjoining acreage to the local school corporation. Three years later, in 1932, she died at age 65. The library and collections were left to her husband, George Robb. The museum building was left to her brother, James W. Dunbar, who donated the building to the school corporation in 1933. In that same year George Robb began selling off the collection and library that Mrs. Robb had retained so carefully and so long after William Borden's death. The library and archeological collections were purchased in June, 1933 by Eli Lilly and the Indiana State Library. Lilly was an ardent amateur archeologist and had a large collection of specimens, of which the Borden materials became a part. This large collection ultimately was donated to Indiana University where it now forms part of the Black Archeological Laboratory collections (18). The laboratory is named after Mr. Black, Mr. Lilly's longtime associate and colleague. Some archeological specimens were donated to the Children's Museum by Thomas A. Hendricks, the attorney who negotiated the sale for the Lilly and the State Library (19).

The library was dispersed in several ways. The Indiana State Historical Society purchased an Audubon elephant folio of the Birds of America, which is on display in the foyer of their library. Several rare books, an early Chaucer for instance, were sold separately to dealers, presumably to recover part of the purchase price. The state library retained certain materials relating to the early history of Indiana. Many school texts and other books used largely in the operation of the institute were disposed of through several used book dealers. The state library retains a file of original holograph materials relating to the Borden family in Indiana (20). The whereabouts of rock, mineral, and ore specimens collected by Borden, especially in the Leadville district of Colorado, remains unknown. In addition, the original collection included war relics, guns, china, and supposedly Daniel Boone's shot-pouch (11). George Robb disposed of all Borden collections, there being none remaining in the museum building in Borden, Indiana. The building is maintained by the local historical society.

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15. New Albany Ledger, April 24, 1907, p. 4. Borden will declared void by Judge H. C. Montgomery, Clark County Circuit Court. "None of the individuals named as trustees were willing to assume the conditions attaching to the trust."
16. Frank Springer correspondence. Springer Room, U.S. National Museum, Washington, D.C. Letters to Springer from William Nelson and James W. Dunbar, dated March 30, 1907 and April 1, 1907.
17. Field Museum of Natural History. Invertebrate Paleontology catalog. Aug. 14, 1923, Accession No. 2029, Catalogue Nos. 19025-19900, Dr. Harrod crinoid collection and 700 lots of fossils from Mrs. George W. Robb.
18. Pers. Comm. James M. Kellar, Director, Glenn A. Black Lab., Indiana University, Dec. 11, 1981.
19. Childrens Museum, Indianapolis, catalog indicates that specimen were loaned and given to the museum in 1934 by Thomas A. Hendricks. These included archeological

items as well as several lots of fossil fish teeth and a mastodon jaw. Of these only the fish teeth could be certainly identified.

20. Indiana State Library, Indiana Room, Borden file. Listing of original library, 50 legal size sheets with about 20-22 books per sheet. Purchased by Thomas A. Hendricks, June, 1933, Purchase price: \$JR,GRJ.JV. Collection was held in storage from 1933 to 1939, catalogued in 1939 and 1940, duplicates then sold off. Four volume Audubon folio sold to Smith Memorial Library of Indiana Historical Society for \$4,000. Note in file indicates that a Shakespeare 2nd folio, 1632 and a Chaucer Blackletter Bonham, 1542 were purchased by "Hitz" and sold to "Scribner". Note dated Feb. 1949. John Borden's diary from Newport, RI to Indiana, November, 1816 not in collection and its current location is unknown.