

## Edmund Otis Hovey

Trustee (1832-1877), Professor (1834-1877)

“The story of Hovey’s Life from 1832 to his death is the history of the college itself.”

Osborne and Gronert, *Wabash College –The First Hundred Years*

Born in Hanover, New Hampshire and raised in Thetford, Vermont, Edmund Otis Hovey graduated from Dartmouth College in 1828 and from Andover Seminary in 1831. He was ordained a Presbyterian minister on September 21 of that year and married two weeks later. The newly-wedded couple immediately set forth on the arduous journey to Indiana, where Hovey established himself as the only Presbyterian minister in Fountain County, about twenty miles northwest of Crawfordsville.

Hovey was among the group of Presbyterian ministers and laymen who met in James Thomson’s home in Crawfordsville on September 21, 1832, to consider the establishment of a new college. The minutes of that meeting are in Hovey’s hand. The next day he was elected as one of the eight original trustees of *The Wabash Teachers’ Seminary and Manual Labor College* (the name was changed to Wabash College in 1851).

Hovey chose the college’s first professor (his college friend Caleb Mills) and its first two presidents, and he was one of its major fundraisers. He was the first librarian and later served as college treasurer for twenty-six years. He was secretary of the faculty and of the executive committee of the Board of Trustees until his death in 1877.

Although trained for the ministry, Hovey had been interested in science since his late teens. After some initial hesitation, he was persuaded to accept the professorship of chemistry and natural science, and in 1855 he became the first Rose Professor of Chemistry and Geology. He was a serious scientist, giving carefully prepared demonstration lectures in chemistry and amassing a “cabinet” of fossils, minerals and botanical specimens that ultimately contained over 26,000 items and enjoyed a national reputation as one of the most complete collections of its time.

Hovey was revered for his character and intellect. He “was an enthusiastic teacher, taking the greatest pleasure not only in the studious youth, but in a chemical experiment and in a geological specimen... He was an elegant writer, a graceful speaker, an attentive listener, and an entertaining conversationalist... There was a quiet dignity in his manner that restrained boys in the class-room, who elsewhere were rude, and developed in them a politeness that had not been manifested away from his presence.”

Edmund Otis Hovey died on March 10, 1877. He had lived to see his beloved college become a prosperous and well-regarded institution.