

A rose and a letter only clues to dead man's identity

Somewhere in Bloomington's Rose Hill Cemetery, a troubled young man who was passing through town in 1893 is buried.

The story's beginnings can be found in various front-page newspaper accounts.

The man apparently arrived in Bloomington before Sept. 23 and rented a room at Gus Holtzman's house on East Third Street.

According to the *Saturday Courier*, the man claimed to be in the piano and organ business. The following Monday, when he was told he could no longer stay at the Holtzman's, his replied he didn't have any money to pay the bill.

On Tuesday, Lee Robertson found the man seated against a haystack on the property of General Hunter. The stranger was dead, having



Looking back

By Rose McIlveen

ended his life by taking a product called "Rough on Rats."

At the Carother's undertaking establishment on the south side of the square, county coroner J.M. Rogers and Marshal George Owens had a look at the man's pockets.

The *Bloomington World* said the only clue to his identity was an envelope addressed to Marcellus Sharp in Salem. It contained a collection of things — "a watch chain, three black dice with white figures, one pair of cuff buttons,

and two collar buttons." Other effects included a tie pin with the letter "S," two \$1 bills and two copper cents.

Another letter (in one of his pockets) addressed to Marcellus Sharp had been re-mailed to Bloomington. There were also two receipts, each for \$1, for a "jewelry spindle." Two envelopes had the printed address of D.H. Baldwin & Co. of Louisville. Still another envelope contained a pressed flower in a folded paper which said, "This rose from A.G., 355 Portland Ave. & Rear., Chicago, Ill."

The *World* published the man's suicide note, which said in part: "There is a sweet kiss in murmur of love and a warning to not get into trouble burning my very soul . . . O, that last sweet kiss is dying on my lips . . . These are my last

lines . . . I know these lines will be published. I die with no hard feelings toward the world." The letter was neither addressed to anyone nor signed.

The mystery about the man further deepened when a telegram arrived in Bloomington from New Albany addressed to M. Sharp. It asked, cryptically, "If you are not dead, answer immediately." It was signed by James Edgerton. A reply was sent to him, but he did not answer.

Enter two men from Salem, one claiming to be Marcellus Sharp. The other claimed to be his grandfather. Their story was related in the *Courier*: "They said that Sharp (the deceased) was there (in Salem) last week and claimed to be a half brother of one of them who said his name was also Marcellus Sharp

although he was called Herschell . . . They said that when at Salem last week the man who is now dead had a wheel of fortune, a lot of jewelry and \$800 in money. He said he was going to the Bloomington fair to run the wheel."

Since the Salem men were not sure they were really related to the dead man, they left town. The man was buried at county expense, no doubt without frills or headstone.

There is little more to relate about the whole affair, except that a Bloomington Fair was in progress at that time, and it included games of chance. The mystery man's wheel of fortune and jewelry were later found at the Faulkner Hotel, where he had left them for safe-keeping.

Who was he and why did he take his life? Perhaps only the lady who gave him the rose really knew.