

# Creosote plant posed many dangers in early 1900s

*"Creosote — An oily liquid having a burning taste and a penetrating odor, obtained by the distillation of wood tar and used as a preservative and antiseptic."* — Random House College Dictionary.

In the 1990s, the old creosote plant would not have been in operation in Bloomington, even under a grandfather clause. But in the years shortly after the turn of the century environmental hazards were not given much consideration.

The Indiana Creosoting Company was in a logical place — near the yards of the Monon Railroad in the southwest part of town. After all, creosote was used to treat railroad ties to give them a longer life.

Milton L. Dickason, age 25, the



## Looking back

By Rose McIlveen

nephew of one of the owners, had been given the job as foreman. According to the Bloomington *Evening World* of Nov. 7, 1907, the contents of an enormous tank of hot creosote were being drained into underground tanks for the winter months.

Dickason had climbed up a metal ladder and was using a metal mea-

suring device when the creosote exploded. The newspaper described what happened. "He was hurled a distance of 50 feet and landed on the first switch track that leads from the main track of the Monon into the plant."

Continued the *Evening World*, "Unconscious, bruised and bleeding, he was picked up and carried into the company's office. Doctors Holland, Klein and C.E. Harris were summoned to give him first aid and found that his injuries were mainly orthopedic, though serious enough.

Meanwhile, the Bloomington Fire Department went to the scene. The *Evening World* reported that the fire was so hot that it was not possible for the firefighters to get within

20 feet of the destroyed tank.

Explained the newspaper, "The top of the tank was completely blown away, and it seemed to part entirely down the middle, making the wreckage complete. The smoke was plainly visible from the city."

Railroad workers who were staying in boardinghouses nearby reported that the explosion was not loud and did not shake any of the buildings. For a time, however, there was the danger of the fire spreading.

The *Evening World* described how the fire department obtained water. "The Fire Department made a run down the south pike with the fire engine and connected the plug in the creek that runs through the

Dick Wylie place and threw a stream of water onto the tank."

There was one part of the *Evening World* account which must have given the owners of the plant some anxious moments until they had the truth. "Although Mr. Durham (the manager) says he does not think Mr. Dickason struck a match, it was believed at the plant that the injured man must have done so, or the explosion would likely have not taken place."

The loss of the 160,000-gallon tank was placed at \$10,000, but the owners were expected to rebuild it.

The next day, the *Evening World* reported that at the Bloomington

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