

'Water boy' was a very dangerous occupation in 1902

When the quarrying of limestone was still in its infancy, working on the job could be very hazardous. The occasions when there were accidents and injuries were often graphically reported in the Bloomington newspapers.

A Bloomington *Telephone* article of April 15, 1902, was particularly poignant, because the victim was a boy. The paper literally "wrote Mack Bougher off" before his fate was known with a headline that said, "Boy's Fatal Accident."

Bougher was a water boy at the National Quarry in the Smithville district. Water boys did exactly what the name of their job says —



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By Rose McIlveen

they supplied water to thirsty workers.

Although the *Telephone* gave his age as 15, there is a possibility that he was slightly younger. The 1900 census listed Bougher as 12. He was the oldest son in a Clear Creek family consisting of three boys and two girls, ranging in age from 14 to 5

years old. Their parents were Jonathan and Margaret Bougher.

The *Telephone* described how the accident happened. "The boy was a water carrier and was bringing water to the men who were operating the derrick. Within a few feet of his destination, the rope suddenly slipped in the pulley and struck the boy across the breast with such force as to hurl him backward about 6 feet, and he fell, striking the back of his head on some timbers."

Co-workers did not have far to go to notify the boy's father. Jonathan Bougher was the blacksmith working for the same stone company.

In 1902, there was no ambulance service. Those suffering an injury were treated at the nearest house or in the doctor's office. Young Bougher was carried unconscious to the house of a "Mr. Fox," who lived near the quarry.

Doctors C.T. Weir and J.E. Luzadder were summoned. They apparently agreed that Mack Bougher's skull was fractured. Frankly, in those days there was little family practitioners could do for a fractured skull except to keep the patient as comfortable as possible and hope for the best.

As of press time the following day, the *Telephone* was making an

effort to sustain suspense. "The boy has not regained consciousness, and indications now are that he cannot recover."

Weir and Luzadder were unwilling to merely "hope for the best." Instead, they called in Dr. L.T. Lowder. The *Telephone* did not reveal what the third physician's opinion was, but the reason for bringing him in on the case was clear enough. "... But it was decided that the boy's condition would not permit of an operation today."

Dr. Lowder wasn't exactly a brain surgeon, but he had studied at IU

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