

Tardy boys tell tale about first iron horse in town

It was in the 1850s that the New Albany and Salem Railroad began inching its way northward toward Monroe County. Carter Perring, who was born in Perry Township near Clear Creek in 1840, shared his memories about the railroad with newsman Forest M. "Pop" Hall.

The interview happened during a visit by Perring to Bloomington in 1922 and is described in the *Evening World* of Sept. 2, 1922.

"I remember well the first railroad engine we ever saw. Some of us boys who were going to school at the old Carter school house heard that there would be a real 'engine' run over the track just completed to Clear Creek that day," said Perring.

During the noon recess Perring and Barton Shields, James Patton and Garret Rhorer left the school yard to have a look at the "monster."

Continued Perring, "Sure enough, there it was. The men were eating their dinner, and the great steam engine (a wood burner with big, barrel-like smokestacks) seemed to be just sleeping."



LOOKING BACK

By Rose McIlveen

The boys recognized the railroad employee, Ed Gregory, who doubled then as fireman, engineer and conductor. While the workmen were finishing their lunch, the boys sat on the ground looking up at the very first railroad engine they had ever seen.

After lunch, Gregory climbed into the cab of the engine. Perring described what happened next.

"He blew a sharp blast on the shrill whistle, and it nearly frightened we boys out of our boots. I thought the thing was blowing up. Some of the boys ran."

Presumably the engine backed up, since Clear Creek was as far as the track had been laid to that point in time. Its reversal was impressive.

"Then it began to hiss and screech in a ter-

rrible manner, liking itself to a bad heavy horse as it moved."

Needless to say, the boys were late in returning to school and expected to get into trouble with the teacher. Perry said he and the other truants were bursting to tell their classmates about what they saw, but had to wait until recess.

The expected punishment for tardiness did not materialize.

He recalled, "Miss Edmonia Carter, my aunt, was the teacher, and instead of punishing us for our tardy return, was rather lenient when she heard our tale about the railroad engine."

In fact, Miss Carter may have been farsighted, pedagogically speaking, in taking her pupils on a field trip to the site of the tracks.

Perring told Pop Hall that the engine was named "Bloomington" and was used to pull the first train into town.

He described it. "The train was, to us, a thing of wonder and beauty, consisting of the engine and four fine passenger coaches — today it would be considered a play engine beside the great steel trains. The coaches were

about the size of a caboose."

The arrival of the first train into Bloomington was described by Perring. It was celebrated by speakers on the public square, band music and practically all of the population of town.

Perring had some kindly memories of the engineer. "Ed Gregory lost one of his legs in an accident, then was a conductor on the railroad, later working up to master mechanic, but was again a conductor in his last years before his death."

The railroad became part of Perring's working life, too, since his uncle was employed in the building of it. Perring later became the railroad agent in Bloomington.

Hall's opportunity to interview Perring came about because of a railroad strike. Perring and one of his daughters, Mrs. Inez Smith, had been visiting in the East and stopped off in Bloomington to see some old friends. They were intending to leave for their home in California when the strike began.

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