

Illuminating the square in the 1920s

"For great buildings, miles of paved streets, many large industries, and commercial activities, this town ranks with those of 50,000 population," wrote *Weekly Star* editor, H J Feltus, in September 1924.

"Many visitors would think so," he continued, "did not the center of the business district 'spill the beans' . . . ?"

"**THE "CENTER"** Feltus referred to was the courthouse square, which had gotten downright seedy looking. He explained that more than half of the buildings around the square had been there for 40 to 50 years.

"Some of them have been camouflaged nicely and others a little bit . . ." wrote Feltus.

Another reason why the downtown looked down at the heels was the mortality rate among the once-attractive limestone lampposts topped with three-globed clusters of lights. The trouble was, motorists had a lamentable habit of running up over the curbs and knocking down the stone posts.

The possibility of a Model T or Model A Ford knocking down a stone post seems incredible. But, reported Feltus in the *Star* on March 6,

Looking back

By Rose H. McIlveen

1925, of the original 120 posts that had been installed, only 34 were still in place.

HIS ARTICLE included a list of statistics to prove his point. The ornamental posts had been installed on the main thoroughfare of Walnut, College, Fifth and Sixth, extending to Washington, Fourth, Morton and Seventh streets. Apparently the reckless drivers congregated on College Avenue between Sixth and Seventh streets. Of the 12 original lamp posts in that block only one remained.

Determined to do some cosmetic surgery on the business district, the Chamber of Commerce formed a committee to study the problem. The list of members read like a Who's Who of Bloomington businessmen. They were:

C. A. Barnhill, Roy O. Pike, Charles Wylie, James Jordan, Ben Becovitz, Charles Waldron, Roy Feltus, Charles Shaw, Dr. Rodney Smith, Allen Buskirk, Mort Whitaker, Noble Campbell, James Souders, William Graham, Ernest Marxson, Joe Kadison, Dr. G. F. Holland and Will I. Fee.

With tongue in cheek, one property owner stated flatly that only a hefty fine would correct the driving habits of some Bloomingtonians. He added, "When such an ordinance is passed and the police instructed to hold the guilty party's car until the \$100 is paid, then I will favor the new system."

A **CITY COUNCIL** committee chaired by Will Karsell tackled the problems of the out-of-town owners of the buildings around the square. Reported Feltus, the absentee landlords were opposed to being taxed for the new light posts. The cost of the new lampposts — to be installed on the square and one block in each direction — was a staggering \$15,000!

Another downtown innovation in 1925 was the first-ever installation of four stop lights. Called

(Back page, col. 6, this sec.)