

# Democratic newspaper prints exposé before election

There was a time when Bloomington had rival newspapers that were at other's throats, politically speaking, especially around election time. The year 1906 was no exception.

A big headline in the Democratic Party-inclined *Evening World* of Oct. 5, 1906, announced that that newspaper had caught the "Ring" (Republican Party in power) with taking a bribe. The *Evening World* editor could smell blood, and printed a melodramatic appeal to county voters.

According to the newspaper, Walter J. Higert, had aspired to open a saloon in Bloomington. On Sept. 5, 1905, he had applied to the Board of Commissioners for a license to sell "intoxicating liquors."

The *Evening World* quoted from Higert's affidavit (which had been sworn to in Putnam County on Oct. 2, 1906). "... that said Board did not immediately act thereon (regarding his petition), and late in the forenoon on said day, one John Q. Caveness came to him and demanded the sum of \$25 and stated to this affiant that if he did not pay said sum of money to him (Caveness) his license would not be granted."



## LOOKING BACK

By Rose McIlveen

Higert apparently paid. The newspaper printed a copy of the check Higert made out to Caveness on Sept. 5, 1905. It had been drawn on the Citizens Loan and Trust Company and subsequently endorsed by Caveness.

Shortly thereafter, according to Higert, the license was issued to him. Lest anyone think the payment was for some other reason, Higert also asserted that he had owed no money to Caveness.

The *Evening World* was shamelessly dramatic in its depiction of the bank check evidence and the implications surrounding it. ("Stand up for Monroe County! Corruption and graft on every hand. The tax rate soaring higher and higher. The Ring in the saddle. Give the people a chance.")

The newspaper continued the attack the next day. "The Ring leaders are having con-

nipation fits since the publication of the check in the *World-Courier* ... The Ring is on the run, and the voters will see that they are kept on the run until after November 6th."

At the Nov. 6 election only one Republican candidate on the local ticket survived - Joseph Campbell, who ran for county clerk. The Democratic editor exploded with uninhibited joy on Nov. 7. "Glory to God in the highest. Peace on earth, good will to men. The avenging angel smote the enemies of honest government a solar plexus blow, and the Ring went down to inglorious defeat and humiliation."

Naturally, the *Evening World* claimed credit for the Republican defeat. In the middle of its rejoicing over the Democratic victory, the newspaper editor expressed one report. It began with a short jingle.

"Of all sad things  
We chance to know  
The saddest is this:  
It won't be Joe."

The "Joe" referred to was the Honorable J.E. Henley, an incumbent Republican representative to the Indiana General Assembly. The *Evening World* attributed Hen-

ley's defeat to nomination and endorsement by "the Ring."

The editors of the two rival newspapers (the other was the *Telephone*) may have had a friendly rivalry before the election, but it would have been difficult for it to survive the swaggering of the *Evening World*. "Poor old Ring editor, we feel sorry for you in this the hour of your greatest grief, yet the squalls of conscience you suffer should be to you a lesson that hereafter you should tell the truth ... Peace to Bradfute's (the *Telephone* editor) troubled conscience (if he has any conscience) and may the giver of all good direct his thoughts to purer heights."

Several thoughts remain: any party that stays in power too long should be concerned about complaisance and arrogance; despite the *Evening World's* taking credit for the local Democratic victory, the election statistics indicate that statewide there was a swing to the Democratic Party; and what was former liquor license holder Higert doing in Putnam County when he had a Monroe County license?

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