

# Explosion of 1898 rocked Stinesville

Stinesville had seen its share of tragedies, but the explosion of 1898 must have been the worst. Reported the *Bloomington Telephone* in its Sept. 6 issue, "The horrible accident near Stinesville Friday afternoon, because of a dynamite explosion, has been in no way exaggerated . . ."

The confusion and shock of the aftermath did cause the erroneous report of one man's death, but that may have been understandable. One survivor was critically injured and the other, a 14-year-old water boy by the name of Willie Lyford, was, for a time, literally speechless from shock.

Under construction or repair was the Ellettsville/Mt. Tabor Road, and several men were (the *Telephone* article related) "hurrying to get stone, as the quarry work was somewhat behind, and some of the men who had been working on the road were assisting at the quarry."

Apparently the men had reached a point where it was necessary to blast loose additional stone. John Williams, the foreman, and Edward Watts had just returned to the quarry from the place where the dynamite



## Looking back

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and percussion caps were stored. It was said that Williams had 11 sticks of dynamite.

The subsequent explosion attracted the attention of workers in the vicinity, but for the moment, the carnage itself was more important than the cause. Three of the men — Williams, John Grubbs and John Wampler — were killed outright. Watts lived long enough to say, "Boys, for God's sake get a doctor. I want to live." A fifth, Milton Hite, was horribly injured, and Lyford, the water boy, was struck dumb, blood oozing from his eyes, ears and nose.

The quarry was two and a half miles from Stinesville, and the office of Dr. W. Rice Holtzman, who was no stranger to the physical hazards of the stone  
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