

# Teacher fired when 'in a fatal moment he took to preaching'

People who browse through the Bloomington newspapers from the turn of the century can find occasional reminders that the "good old days" weren't all that good. There was a perfect example of that in the *Evening World* on Feb. 12, 1903.

Today, news about the firing of a man from his job would not be displayed prominently unless he were extremely prominent at the state or national level. But a person named E.T. Ferguson got the front-page treatment in an unflattering article that may have damaged his chances of finding another job, at least locally.

And what was Ferguson's error? According to the *Evening World*, the man made the fatal error of expressing his opinion about religion. As the newspaper put it, "One day



## Looking back

By Rose McIlveen

last fall, in the pulpit of Simpson Chapel, he 'talked right out in meeting' and gave his pure, unadulterated opinion of the New Testament. He did not preach 'Christ and Him Crucified,' on the contrary, he gave his hearers to understand that he did not believe any such doctrine."

Today, such a free thinker would probably not have been given time in the pulpit of a traditional church, but then, perhaps his hearers hadn't expected him to utter "here-

sy," either.

It should be explained that Ferguson was a teacher, his most recent post in February of 1903 being the King's School near Wayport. Although he was a former resident of Indian Creek Township, it is likely that he was boarding with a family in the Wayport area.

Those folks didn't take kindly to the idea of a teacher expressing unorthodox views. As the *Evening World* put it, "All would have still been well if Mr. Ferguson had confined himself strictly to the duty of 'teaching the young . . . , ' but in a fatal moment he took to preaching."

There was certainly a reaction to his utterances in the congregation at Simpson Chapel that night. The newspaper put it colorfully. "Those

who were present uplifted their hands in holy horror, and the sermon upset the neighborhood for some time after."

There is the barest suggestion that it took some time for the outraged residents of that area to remove such a "heretic" from their midst and particularly out of the hearing of their children. The problem was finding an excuse to get rid of him.

The *Evening World* reported that a reason had been found. "Finally matters came to a head by charges being preferred against Mr. Ferguson for immorality and neglect of duty. On the latter charge it was shown that he failed to make the reports required of him by law as a teacher in the public schools."

If, indeed, he did neglect his pa-

perwork, there may have been a reason that made sense to him, at least. It seems that he was a regular contributor of poetry he had written to the newspaper.

Anyway, his case was reviewed by the county superintendent of schools, who called in several witnesses and then decided to suspend Ferguson's teaching license. Explained the *Evening World*. "From this decision there is no appeal, so Mr. F. can now devote his whole time to preaching whenever he can get a hearing."

The article in the newspaper was not wholly without sympathy for his license-less state. The reporter commented, "It is said that Ferguson is really a smart fellow, but he has switched off on the wrong track."