

Boy, was it hot, and there was no ice, either

"The climate in Bloomington has four distinct seasons. It features warm, humid summers, moderately cold winters, and abundant precipitation. The average annual rainfall is 43 inches . . . In the hottest month, July, the average low is 63 degrees . . . ; the average high is 87 degrees . . ." Living in Bloomington, Indiana, USA.

The year, 1899, didn't quite fit the climate profile for Monroe County. It was September, and some of the locals were beginning to believe the weather man wasn't paying attention to what he was supposed to be doing — that is to start turning the outdoor thermostat down a few degrees when September was under way.

Grumbled the Bloomington *Morning World*, of Sept. 9, "A good copious rain fell yesterday afternoon, which came in the nature of a blessing. Although there was no great amount of rainfall in Bloomington, what did come will do a great deal of good."

The newspaper proceeded to mention to two most important benefits of the rainfall. First of all, the rain settled the dust of Bloomington streets. It should be remembered that the city actually had a contraption that watered the streets from time to



Looking back

By Rose McIlveen

time when they became particularly dusty. Among those who were grateful for the service were women whose long skirts became dirty when they brushed against the ground.

The other reason was that the rain lowered the temperature to what the news writer regarded as a more normal level for September. He noted, "Early yesterday morning the thermometer threatened to make another century run just for fun. The rain came in good time to prevent this, however, and the highest reading was 93 degrees. At seven o'clock it had dropped to 86 degrees, which was a great relief."

The rainfall was not uniform over the county. Complained the *Morning World*, "Bloomington, as usual, caught a smaller amount of rain than some other spots. It is

reported that a very heavy rain fell at Dolan, and that a heavy shower was received at Ellettsville."

The rain was particularly welcome since it had not been seen for awhile. The newspaper added hopefully, "It is to be hoped sincerely that the long drought is broken, and that the rain visits will be more frequent the remainder of this month."

There may not have been any relationship between the unseasonable temperature and another event in Bloomington. Perhaps it was just a coincidence, after all.

That event was a completely unscheduled strike by the drivers of the wagons of the Home Ice Company. Younger readers may need to be reminded that their turn-of-the-century ancestors relied upon insulated ice boxes to keep meat and milk cool enough that they didn't spoil any sooner than necessary.

The combination of hot weather and no ice for an extended period of time could have been a disaster for the Bloomington housewife. Several iceless days could also have posed a financial threat to meat mar-

ket proprietors.

Explained the *Morning World*, "The drivers had made their regular morning deliveries, and at noon they quit in a body and stated their troubles to Supt. Matson."

What was the problem? The newspaper provided an explanation. "The drivers stated that they objected to the ice being weighed to them at the plant before starting on a deliveries. The company had made it one of its fixed rules to weigh every wagon load of ice coming to the city, and this was the only point of grievance mentioned by the drivers."

The company's answer to the strike was to hire new drivers, rather than give any serious consideration to the drivers' complaint. According to the *Morning World*, "...as a result there was no afternoon deliveries of ice yesterday. This morning there will be an entire new force of drivers, but the company will endeavor to see that no regular patrons are missed."

Under the circumstances, the weather cooperated. In its article about the rainfall, the newspaper concluded, "The weather man has kindly promised 'fair and cooler' for today and Sunday."

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