

In 1873, shooting of suspect wasn't front-page news

It didn't get much play in the *Bloomington Progress*, considering the magnitude of the event — a law officer badly beaten and his attacker killed during the attack. The account of the fracas appeared in the newspaper for March 12, 1873, and in C. Earl East's book, *Relive It*.

Newspaper readers today would be surprised to find that newspaper editors didn't put local news on the front page in the 1870s. Indeed, the March 12th's front page featured the equivalent of wire service stories — a distasteful execution in China, the Ku Klux Klan in North Carolina and a pitched battle with desperadoes in Kansas.



Looking back

By Rose McIlveen

In fact, the *Progress* readers wouldn't have found out details of the deadly fight until they had read their way to an inside page. Even there, the modest-sized article was sandwiched in between a gossip column and advertisement of what looks suspiciously like a Kentucky lottery.

Anyway, the event all began when John W. Sutherland, Bloomington's marshal, was in the process of arresting Matthew and Lon James, the latter described by the *Progress* as "a well-known railroad and fighting man." He took them to the office of "Squire Cox" on the south side of the square.

The charges against the brothers were "intoxication and breach of the peace." Neither took the charges in a very kindly way and told the marshal so.

"The hitch was that the papers for their arrest were being prepared by Cox," and the James brothers

were not of a mind to wait. According to the *Progress*, "Lon then said, 'Come on Matt,' and the brothers started toward the door."

When the Marshal Sutherland objected to their leaving, Lon, who was over 6 feet tall, struck the law man, propelling him across the room. Matt followed through with a left hook punch that knocked the marshal backward into the woodbox. The newspaper related that Sutherland's legs were hanging over the edge.

In writing about the incident in *Relive It*, East knew something the *Progress* reporter didn't know — that Lon James had a grudge

against the marshal and had threatened to "get him."

In Squire Cox's office, the big burly man had his chance. Continued the *Progress*, "Sutherland was receiving a terrible beating on the head and face." Incredibly, there were bystanders in the room. The newspaper article states, "... no one in the room seemed inclined to take James away."

Considering the odds — two to one — and the fact that he was being beaten on the head and face, Sutherland decided to save his life in the only way he knew how. He had

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