

# Feathered 'menace' prompted July shooting in 1897

July may be the time of year for gardening and picnics, but it certainly wasn't a good month in 1897 for Bloomingtonians living on North Lincoln Street. They were looking for solutions to a particular problem that other sections of the town didn't have.

When *The* (Bloomington) *World* called its readers attention to the problem on July 27, the residents of that area had been uncomfortable for about a week. The trouble was birds — too many birds.

*The World* described the problem. "Early in the evening thousands of swallows and martins congregate in the vicinity and take possession of the fine inviting shade trees and keep up such a chattering racket that the inhabitants have about lost their wits and a portion of their religion." According to the news paper, so numerous were the birds that they turned "daylight into darkness."

Being self-reliant, the North Lincoln Street residents had tried various methods of ridding



## LOOKING BACK

By Rose McIlveen

themselves of the feathered intruders, but to no avail. Finally, they took the problem to the local Board of Health, but "...the Board was in a quandary as to what method to pursue, as the birds could not be classed as garbage."

To the rescue came Rhett and Benjamin Voss. What qualified them as exterminators is not clear, but they came up with a promising idea.

Explained *The World*, "They hit upon the novel idea of scaring the birds from the neighborhood with the use of fireworks."

Rhett appeared with lots of Roman candles and set them off. Continued the newspa-

per, "For a few minutes the bird convention was broken up, the participants evidently being of the opinion that anarchists were throwing bombs into their camp. They adjourned for a few minutes but, when the Professor had exhausted his supply of pyrotechnics, resumed operations at the old stand."

Obviously more drastic measures were called for, and others thought they were equal to the task. They formed a committee.

Who were those appointed? *The World* lists the aforementioned Rhett, Wesley Walker, a Professor Rogers, James Manley and Robert Marshall.

*The World* described what the men planned to do. "Each of the above gentlemen will procure a shotgun, load, cock and prime the same with shot and shell and after taking positions under the different trees, elevate their howitzers, shut their eyes, take aim and blaze away at a given signal."

Of course, a lot of dead birds could cause a serious health problem, but the residents of North Lincoln Street were already thinking optimistically. "It is expected that the Board of Health will order garbage wagons to the scene to remove the dead and dying, if the company's cherished hopes meet with any degree of success."

It was suggested that "ladies and children" be elsewhere during the shooting. Did that imply that females who weren't ladies needn't leave? In any case, the exodus of women and children was a prudent safety measure, "as the participants are not good shots and familiar in the use of fire arms."

Did the drastic plan actually do away with the birds? An avid scanner of the microfilm of the 1897 editions of *The World* would expect to find a report of the martin/swallow shoot. To no avail. At some point the birds went away on their own accord.

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