

Report of 1906 poor farm filth led to charges against Semple

Around the turn of the last century, Hoosiers had what they thought was a humane way of dealing with homeless persons. It was called simply "the poor farm."

It was a place that most Monroe Countians didn't particularly like to think about, much less visit. But apparent one of the stipulations at its establishment was periodic visits by successive grand juries.

Monroe Countians were jolted to attention by the Oct. 23, 1906, edition of the *Bloomington Telephone*, which reported about one of the grand jury's visits. The group's findings began:

"The grand jury would respectfully report we visited the county



Looking back

By Rose McIlveen

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poor asylum on Friday, the 12th day of October, 1906, and found the same in a most pitiable condition, both as regards the house and the inmates. There are fifteen males and eleven females within the walls, some of whom are allowed to become, to say the least, filthy — some so filthy they are permitted to remain in the filth of their different rooms and from their appearance

we are led to believe, that being devoid of mind, they are permitted to eat such filth and besmear themselves with it."

The jury collectively stated they suffered from nausea and noted the "inmates" were poorly clothed and poorly fed. "Their noon day meal today consisted of a small piece of corn bread and a cup of water. So often, we are led to believe, is this the case that the absence of meat was called to our attention by one of them brave enough to speak, and one of them whom God has still spared with a mind."

Other depressing details disclosed to the *Telephone* readers about the institution were foul air.

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