

# Graphic descriptions of 1884 explosion injuries exaggerated

(Second of two parts)

Perhaps only once in a lifetime is a small town newspaper editor faced with the temptation to publish an "extra," and in 1884, W.B. Harris of the Ellettsville *Citizen* succumbed to it. Giving a sister newspaper a pat on the back, the *Bloomington Telephone* reported, "The Ellettsville *Citizen* displayed commendable enterprise in issuing an extra Tuesday evening containing a full and correct account of the explosion. Mr. Harris is full of enterprise and is making the *Citizen* a good paper."

The explosion, caused by the accidental fall of dynamite cartridges stored in the smoke house at the Mathews family home, was also the subject of some 5,000 words of newspaper copy telegraphed to "the city." Commented the *Telephone*, "... the manner in which the operators here disposed of it, proved they were well up to their calling."

Meanwhile, in Ellettsville, the struggle to keep the explosion victims alive continued. First and



## Looking back

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foremost was the necessity of removing, if possible, the shrapnel-like pieces of the kettle blown apart by the dynamite blast. Said the *Telephone*, "What is a peculiar fact is that the metal that entered can not be found with a probe in a single instance, the pieces seeming to have been so small and to have entered so deep as to be beyond reach. This in itself is a bad feature, as the metal that caused these wounds is pot-iron, old and rusty, with ragged edges that are continually causing inflammation."

The reader of the *Bloomington* newspaper's version of the tragedy was lead to believe that few, if any, of the victims would survive. To be sure, the lives of Peter Mathews, William Williams and Lonzo Math-

tingly were beyond saving. Math-

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