

Bloomington holds string of bad luck for student

Bloomington wasn't supposed to be a particularly dangerous place to live in in 1907. After all, people then were more "church-going" and "God-fearing." Of course, there were occasional murders, robberies and businessmen who tried to circumvent the liquor laws, but most of the time the Bloomington police could look forward to a mid-afternoon nap.

So Wallace Major, a 20-year-old freshman at Indiana University, didn't have any reason to believe it wouldn't be all right to walk home alone at around 8 o'clock in the evening. Actually, he was heading back to his rooming house on East Sixth Street after buying a cigar at Penrod's Drug Store.

According to the *Bloomington Telephone* of Nov. 11, 1907, Major had "passed a stranger near the Presbyterian Church. The unknown man, whom Major declares was about six feet tall, wore a brown cash hat, black coat, not overcoat, and had a black mustache, followed him, and when he was in front of the Stires' residence only two doors from his rooming place rushed up behind him and struck him two blows."



Looking back

By Rose McIlveen

After the first blow, Major cried out for help, and the assailant hit him again, then turned and ran toward the square. The injured student staggered up to the Stout residence where Mrs. Stout summoned her husband and a physician.

The injuries to Major's head were not exactly superficial. The *Telephone* explained. "Doctors Holland and Kline were called and after an examination pronounced neither of the wounds serious, though one of them reached to the skull. The blows were at the back of the head and near the top as though struck with a sharp pointed club or an instrument with a keen edge."

The doctors believed that Major would recover soon enough. Meanwhile, the po-

lice were looking for a motive. Robbery was one possibility, but nothing had been taken from Major.

The newspaper revealed what might have been the motive, rather than robbery. "The police regard the assault as either the work of a cocaine fiend or a case of mistaken identity, but have no clue as to the man who committed it."

Had the attack been the only misfortune Major experienced at that time, he probably would have remained at IU until graduation. Unfortunately, other things went wrong for him.

An article in the Dec. 10, 1907, edition of the *Telephone* reported that Major had decided to drop out of school and move back to his home in Shelbyville. To begin with, after the first blow to his head, he had put his hand up to protect it. The hand had been badly damaged by the second blow.

Continued the newspaper, "Shortly after that (the attack) he was forced to go to the hospital for an operation to remove an abs-

cess from his spine caused by the assault." He had barely recovered from the operation when he was called home to Shelbyville to see his mother before she died.

After her funeral, Major returned to Bloomington and schoolwork, but he had to rush back to Shelbyville again when his sister died.

It was all too much for Major. It was as if somebody was trying to tell him that Bloomington was not a good place for him to be.

As the *Telephone* put it, "Now he feels that Indiana University is no place for him; at least not for the present."

Nor was it ever again, apparently. As far as the *Telephone* was concerned, the most important thing about Major was not the fact that he was in the wrong place at the wrong time. It was rather Major's relationship to a famous writer.

Wallace Major was nephew to Charles Major, author of the novel, *When Knighthood Was in Flower* and other books.

H-T 2/14/94