

Spelling well could get you on the 1911 front page

There was a time when spelling bees were front page items in Bloomington newspapers. The contest held in January of 1911 attracted a lot of attention because many Monroe County school children were competing.

The Jan. 21 article in the *Bloomington Telephone* began, "The spelling match being held at the high school building this afternoon to select three representatives to represent Monroe County in the 2nd congressional district contest which is to be held a month hence, is proving far more successful than any of the teachers or school officials were anticipating."

The schools had brought forth their best spellers for the competition. Their names were listed on the front page of the newspaper, and it was obvious that spelling prowess ran in families. The contestants were: Bean Blossom — Harry Mayfield, Hettie Mayfield and Edward Trueblood; Benton — Charles F. Durnal, Mary Hensley and Tressa O. Durnal; Bloomington — Frank Southern, Bessie Marlin and Olive Marlin; Clear Creek — Elma Deckard, Ethel Deckard and Mary Deckard; Indian Creek — Glenn Sullivan, Lloyd Rogers and Lydia Crum; Marion (later merged with Benton) — Osa Russ, Flo Pryor and Elmer Hacker.



LOOKING BACK

By Rose McIlveen

Also Perry — Verne Rhodes, Lucy Johnson and Josephine Gilmore; Richland — Wayne Reeves, Loyce Everman and Nellie Coffey; Salt Creek — Maymie Hough, Rhetta Thrasher and Eva Koontz; Washington — Mabel Lynch, Herbert Adams and Ola Huff; Ellettsville — Robert Hall, Edwin Constable and Anna G. Harris; and Bloomington City — Edna Carr, Hester Chasteen and Ruth Rogers.

Officials who were responsible for pronouncing and judging were O.M. Hammond, W.A. Wellons, Elmer Buskirk, Harry H. McCartney and L.A. Pittenger.

The *Telephone* reported to its readers that by noon on Jan. 21, 16 of the 31 contestants were still in the match. Some 200 relatives, friends and interested spectators attended the bee.

In case any of the newspaper readers were wondering where the words came from there was an explanation. "The words which the judges gave out were all taken from a speller

which covers the 5th, 6th, 7th and 8th years of common schools. Besides these words a list of 100 words had been selected and another list of 500 words from the history, grammar, arithmetic and readers."

Perhaps it was the little Hacker boy from Marion Township who attracted the most attention. "The little fellow was a strong speller and was the last one to be taken out of the line before the adjournment for the noon hour."

The "sound method" later called phonics was used by the children. Words misspelled in the morning session were "syllable, plain, plane, coffee, captain, gentleman's" and "expense."

The *Telephone* said the spellers were "almost completely worn out." Herbert Adams misspelled the word "accuracy." After that Miss Huff received the first honors and walked away from the contest with a \$7 prize. Ruth Rogers won \$5 for second place and Herbert Adams \$3 for third.

Everyone was pleased with the Monroe County children, and the *Telephone* pointed out "A total of 2,019 words were spelled, which fact causes the officials to believe that this county has an excellent chance for state honors."

On Feb. 20, spelling was again in the news

on the front page. The article reported the results of the 2nd district contest in which two from Monroe County were chosen to go to the state contest. They were Ruth Rogers of Perry Township and Mamie Huff. The third winner was Ruth Latshaw of Sullivan County.

It took four hours to select the winners. The pronouncers of the words were Guido Stempel, L.A. Pittinger and Andrew Wylie.

All of the county school superintendents were present — Ralph M. Tirey of Lawrence County; Richard Parks of Sullivan; Christian Danielson of Greene; A.O. Fulkerson of Daviess; W.H. Stone of Owen; John Armstrong of Marion and W.H. Jones of Monroe.

A chorus of seventh- and eighth-graders from Central School entertained the audience, and a group picture of the spellers was taken.

Back in January Superintendent Jones had expressed his satisfaction with the little spellers. Commented the *Telephone*, "The result of County Sup't. Jones campaign to revive the interest in Monroe in spelling is already being seen. He was worked untiringly to diminish the large percent of poor spellers and deserved much credit for the success of last Saturday."

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