

# Professor's death on train throws campus for a loop

The congenial passenger on the Monon accommodation train was sitting on the railing of the observation car as it approached Stinesville. He had been chatting with Carrol Beck of Bloomington and S.L. Birde of Detroit, Mich.

Suddenly, the congenial passenger began to fall backward, seeming to lose his balance on the rail. But the reflexes of Beck were in good condition, and with the help of Birde, he kept the passenger from falling off the train. The *Bloomington Daily Telephone* of June 18, 1912, described the incident. "When Mr. Beck caught him, most of his body was over the railing, and it was with difficulty he held him from falling overboard until assisted by Mr. Birde."

At first Beck and Bird thought the passenger had merely lost his balance, but it was soon clear that the man had another problem. He was unconscious and breathing heavily.

The train sped on through Stinesville, but when the conductor had been told that the passenger seemed to be very ill, he had the train halted at Ellettsville. Dr. O.K. Harris rushed to the station and tried to revive the



## LOOKING BACK

By Rose McIlveen

passenger as the train continued on to Bloomington.

The man was dead, despite the doctor's efforts. The immediate conclusion was that he had suffered a fatal heart attack.

Who was the stricken passenger on that Monon accommodation train, which had come down from Indianapolis? The man was Harold W. Johnston, a professor and head of the Latin Department at Indiana University.

When the train arrived in Bloomington, IU President William Lowe Bryan was notified, and he ordered that the body be transported to an undertaker's, rather than his (Johnston's) home, which would have been customary in those days. Bryan wanted to have the opportunity to break the news to the Johnston family.

Aside from his professorship, Johnston

had another claim to fame in the university and other circles. For years he had been the faculty director of athletics.

According to the *Telephone*, he had been "the first man to make athletics 'pay' at Indiana and saw this college admitted to the 'Big Nine' in 1896. He was chairman of the 'Big Eight' conference, and had been vice president and only on the day of his death, became the president of the National Intercollegiate Athletic Association."

Bryan immediately notified the faculty, who gathered in Kirkwood Hall to write a resolution that included, "Whereas. His many years of efficient service have made his position at Indiana University one of honor and distinction; and whereas, his gift of fellowship has peculiarly endeared him to his associates ..."

The university had a Committee on Assemblies. It got together with the university's trustees (who happened to be meeting in Bloomington) to make arrangements for Johnston's funeral.

The *Telephone* article also contained the information about the professor's family. He

had a wife, the former Eugenia Hinrichsen (whose brother had once been secretary of state in Illinois). Their children were Mary, Katherine, Eugene, Harry, Teddy, Anne, Elizabeth and William. The last four had been born in Bloomington.

Johnston was an Episcopalian, and the funeral was to be at that church. The services were scheduled for 3 o'clock on June 19 with burial in Rose Hill Cemetery.

There had been a dramatic performance at the university scheduled for the evening of June 18. It went on as scheduled, but the reception that was to follow, was canceled. There were other changes mentioned in the *Telephone*. At the annual alumni banquet (in the Methodist Church) toasts were not given. Also, a reception scheduled for the Student Building was canceled.

Tragic though the death of the 55-year-old man was, it did not appear to be all that unusual — until the *Telephone* revealed further details of his life and death.

*Continued next week: A new look at the professor's death.*

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