

# Chickens, cars were 'hot' property in 1917

Articles about World War I battles took up most of the front pages of Bloomington newspapers in 1917-18, but there were a few pieces about local happenings. Obituaries and crime stories filled in the spaces between accounts of battles.

In October of 1917, after her car was stolen, Anna Farmer decided she shouldn't have to do without it. Fortunately, the car was found on the Whitehall Pike, not too far from where she lived.

Determined to thwart any further attempts to steal it, Farmer went out and bought a heavy chain. Unfortunately, the robber came prepared. He used a bar to break the chain.

The *Bloomington Weekly Courier* of Oct. 19 described what happened next.

"He (the robber) was having trouble in getting it (the car) cranked when Miss Farmer heard him. Taking down a double barrel



## LOOKING BACK

By Rose McIlveen

shot gun, the young woman fired at the man as he beat a hasty retreat."

The robber's size 9 or 10 footprints were found on the following morning around the garage. Farmer reckoned decided to make another investment — "a savage-looking dog" who would sleep in the car.

About a month later, a car thief tried to steal the automobile belonging to L.E. Shaw while he was attending services at the Lincoln Street Church of Christ. Bernice Lanam saw a man get into the car and yelled for Dwight Dill to stop the thief, who got away.

Edith Fowler and members of her family were sitting quietly at home on the night of Nov. 15. At the

back of the house, robbers tried to force a door open. Someone in the family heard noises at the back of the house and made a run for the telephone.

Robbers had tried to force the rear door open, but a member of the family gave the local police a call. The robbers left for a more promising target.

Perhaps the target was the home of Will Harmon on South Walnut Street. His safe was found in a corn field southeast of town. It had been badly damaged by what the police supposed was a sledge hammer. The thieves left their calling card — an empty brandy bottle.

Chicken-stealing was the hobby of three young men, who were members of well-known families. The chickens belonged to S.B. Bryan, who lived on South Sluss Avenue. The *Weekly Courier* noted that "in the past three months there has been almost an epidemic of petty thieving, and in more than

half the cases it has been traced to boys who have been brought before the juvenile officers.

Naturally, the latter was curious about why boys from prosperous families would be involved in petty theft. Continued the newspaper, "Many of the boys said they stole in order to get money to gamble in pool rooms and patronize the 'punch boards.' These devices," proclaimed the newspaper piously, have been ordered out of all stores by Supt. of Police Browning."

In February, anxious to soothe the throats of her two children recovering from scarlet fever, Mrs. Ezra Utterback bought some cocoa from the peddler who regularly came to her door on Faculty Avenue. She didn't notice anything unusual while it was simmering on the stove. Her throat certainly knew the difference.

When she swallowed the cocoa, her throat hurt terribly. Actually, it

was cut by ground glass in the cocoa powder. The doctor explained that stomach acid would probably blunt all of the sharp edges of glass, and there was no real harm done.

Utterback was well enough to warn all of the neighbors who might have bought some of the cocoa, too.

Then there was Quincy Cox, who owned a store on South Walnut Street. His car had been stolen on election night, and when he spotted it on the square. Overjoyed, he hopped in the car to drive home.

The term "drive" presupposes that the car's steering mechanism was working properly. It wasn't. Apparently the thieves had damaged it. Cox went off the road and struck a lamppost. Reported the *Weekly Courier*, "He was rendered unconscious and remained in that condition all night."

Not all of the excitement was in the trenches.

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