

The rise and fall of a county superintendent

"Thomas J. King, the republican County Superintendent of Monroe County, left Bloomington Saturday night for parts unknown. He is a forger and defaulter to the amount of several thousand dollars, a fact that will be a general surprise to all our people, as he was regarded favorably by all who knew him." *The (Bloomington) World*, July 12, 1898.

With barely-concealed glee, *The World* reported to the community that the county superintendent of schools was missing from Bloomington, leaving a wife and a trail of unpaid debts behind him. Although the editor later spelled "Republican" with a capital "R," the lower case spelling of the party's name in the lead sentence could not have been an editorial oversight.

As for King, he seems to have forgotten his priorities — wife, position and professional educator. Oddly enough, the newspaper recounted the point in time when he crossed the line between honest citizen and a man with another life that was not the least bit apparent to any who were considered close friends.

Explained *The World*, "In June of last year he was elected County Superintendent, and this marked the beginning of his



Looking back

By Rose McIlveen

troubles. The election cost him \$1,200 in cash. He borrowed the money from the Monroe County State Bank, forging his father's name as security."

According to the newspaper, King renewed the note every 90 days, continuing to forge his father's name. Had that been his only departure from common sense, he could probably have been reconciled with his father.

Unfortunately, his financial needs exceeded the election debt. After his abrupt departure, friends and community leaders began comparing notes. King's indebtedness was printed on the front of *The World* for everyone to see: John Stipp, \$125, Mrs. Bunger, \$75; Professor James K. Beck, \$500; John C. Whisnand estate, \$150; R.M. Wylie, \$175; E.C. Gilstrap, \$50; Charles and Harry Axtell, \$35; J.F. Blewett, \$300; Connecticut

Life Insurance Co., \$1,500 (forging his wife's name to mortgage her farm); Dr. N.E. Rice, \$450; N.V. Rogers, \$135; Charles Baker, \$50; and A.T. Massy, \$125. He was also behind in accounts owing to the Indiana School Book Company.

In explaining where all the money went, *The World*, revealed that King had been spending a lot of time with a young woman from Crawfordsville, who was supposedly enrolled in a business college at Indianapolis. Continued the newspaper, "They corresponded with each other and would frequently meet in the capital city, Martinsville, Terre Haute and other towns. She was only twenty years old and seemed to be much infatuated with Tom, although she knew he was a married man."

The World dug more deeply into the past of the woman and discovered that perhaps she was more interested in the money that King continued to come up with than the fact that he was generally regarded as a "kind-hearted and accommodating young man."

The Crawfordsville *Journal* sarcastically referred to the young woman as "Nannie Rosebaum of precious memory." In her past she had evolved socially from a re-

spectable, if naive, girl into a shrewd manipulator of men. As the *Journal* put it, "King had picked sweet little Nannie up for a victim, and she victimized him in a manner beautiful to behold."

Her past included suing a man for "trifling with her affections," married briefly, and finally setting herself up "in elegant style" in a "fashionable (Indianapolis) boarding house."

King's sudden departure from Bloomington and his duties forced the County Commissioners to do some legal housekeeping before they could find a successor. On July 13 the newspaper informed its readers that King had, in effect, been tried in absentia at a commissioners' meeting and would elect someone else on July 22.

Commented *The World*, the five Democrats of the 12-member school board would have liked to elect one from their own party. "The position of the Democratic trustees is this. They will vote for a Democrat if there is any chance for his election."

The July 25 voting required 50 ballots to find the new superintendent who was Dr. A.C. Farr, a Republican and former school teacher before turning to the practice of medicine.

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