

Old clock gave Bloomington a hard time in 1906

If Bloomingtonians hadn't known better, they might have been tempted to say that the town clock knew its days were numbered and just quit running. That wasn't so.

Back in 1906 the county fathers had decided that the old courthouse with the tall, skinny tower needed to be replaced. An old photograph of the building with its multiple chimneys reveals that it was heated by wood. On one of the porches there is an enormous stack of firewood.

But back to the clock. The *Bloomington Evening World* reported that the stoppage was intentional. The article on Aug. 8 began, "After a continual service for the city and county for a period of 30 years, the old town clock at the hour of nine this morning struck 17 and then died.

"The demise was witnessed by J.O. Howe, who has been acting as private physician for the old time-piece for many years, and Councilman Cranston Dodds."

Howe applied some kind of "stimulant" when the clock was about to strike nine, and that caused it to strike 17 instead. Lum Croy, the "clock undertaker," climbed up a ladder and checked for any signs of life.



LOOKING BACK

By Rose McIlveen

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The clock, which had been a gift to the county from the Mendelssohn Society, was not destined for the scrap heap. Frank Owens was going to store it in his livery barn. One suggestion for its reincarnation was for it to be installed "on the high school chapel."

The *Evening World* included a tribute to the clock. "The old clock will be missed. It was truly called 'the poor man's time-piece,' and except for the occasions when ice and snow clogged the hands, it kept good time."

Earlier, in July, there had been some discussion about how many of the trees on the court house lawn would have to be removed for the new building. The *Evening World* of July 14 relieved the minds of tree lovers.

"The beautiful trees in the courthouse park are to remain, except the few that it will be necessary to remove for the space the new

building will occupy. The architect first decided that all the trees should be cut down so as to have an unobstructed view of the courthouse, but the courthouse commission and citizens raised so much objection that the architect ... will only remove such trees as are absolutely necessary."

The project was to inspire more front page stories. On Aug. 10 it appeared that at least one of the courthouse's traditions would be continued. Explained the newspaper, "It is not at all unlikely that the old courthouse fish will be placed on the dome of the new building. Capt. W.J. Allen and a number of older leading citizens have asked the courthouse building committee and county commissioners to make a place for the old weather vane on the dome of the new court house, and there was no objection to the proposal."

The fish, which was a fixture of the old courthouse, was displayed temporarily in the window of the Kahn clothing store, but it had been vandalized just a little bit. "Some one plucked out the old finny's eyes to keep as a relic of the building, and Sheriff Hough asks that the eyes be returned." Beneath the fish on the old courthouse was a ball. It was said to

have holes in it as a result of being used for target practice.

After demolition had begun, an interesting thing was found. The Aug. 14 *Evening World* contained this news. "In pulling down the old library building ... Contractor Pike discovered that in ye olden times they had a way of their own in building fireproof buildings. When the roof was lifted it was found that there was about 10 inches of dirt between it and the ceiling."

If the demolition folks were puzzled, City Clerk Browning was able to enlighten them "that when the building was erected in 1826, the county clerk's office and the county recorder's office were located in the east end, and it was thought that in case of fire from the roof, the blaze would not be communicated to the interior of the building on account of the padding with dirt."

There may have been some sentiment attached to the dignified old courthouse, but it gave way to a new one. A photograph of the old courthouse with its graceful tower, iron fence and hitching racks hangs in my dining room. It was gone long before I was born, but I would have enjoyed exploring it.