

1907 news stories reflect summer of quirky violence

Perhaps it was something in the air or drinking water in the late summer of 1907. On the other hand, maybe the phase of the moon played a part in sudden eruptions of violence.

John Sullivan of Indianapolis came down to Bloomington to work on construction of the McCalla School. The *Bloomington Evening World* of Aug. 14, 1907, noted that Sullivan was a 1907 graduate of Manuel Training School in the capitol city.

His employer on the school project was the W.F. Sitwell Contracting firm of Lafayette. The newspaper neglected to mention whether Sullivan was a carpenter, brick mason, plumber or what.

Anyway, the young man discovered when he reported to work that he was going to be obliged to work beside a kind of busybody bully by the name of Jesse Sipes. Explained the *Evening World*, "Sullivan states that Sipes was not one of the bosses, but persisted in telling him what he ought to do, and then he refused to take orders from Sipes."

Sipes did not take kindly to Sullivan's unwillingness to cooperate. Continued the



LOOKING BACK

By Rose McIlveen

newspaper, "A bitter feeling was engendered between the men, which led to blows. Sipes with a broadax struck Sullivan over the abdomen on the left side below the lower rib, cutting into the abdominal wall."

For good measure, Sipes hit Sullivan again, on the left shoulder.

The physician who treated the victim was cautiously optimistic. The prognosis was ".... if he does not have an internal hemorrhage, he will likely recover." The newspaper noted that Sullivan roomed at the home of a Mrs. Barber on East Third Street. At press time, no warrant had been issued for the arrest of Sipes.

On the 26th of August two boys were pifching hay on the Showers farm. They were Hercules Donihue, 19, and Ernest Simms, 21.

It must have been a very frivolous argument. Certainly the *World* reporter who inter-

viewed Donihue in jail must have thought so.

Donihue told the reporter, "I asked him why he did not help us thresh on Aug. 6, the day of the Wallace Hagenbeck circus was in Bloomington."

Apparently Simms didn't care to account for his absence. He replied, "What's it to you. You don't own the threshing machine." Donihue claimed Simms then called him an s.o.b. Donihue hit Simms on the head so hard that it broke the handle of the pitchfork. It also caused a serious gash in Simms' head.

Even in jail, Donihue talked with bravado. He said to the reporter, "I would not allow even my brother to call me that vile name."

Otis Allen and Raymond Sparks worked together at the Johnson Stone Quarry and shared a room at Mercer's boarding house in Sanders. They quarreled occasionally, but the spats had amounted to nothing.

On Sept. 15, they had a dispute that got tragically out of control. According to the *Bloomington Evening World* of Sept. 16, 1907, the two men had just finished dinner. Sparks went out on the porch while Allen made a phone call to his girlfriend.

Continued the newspaper, "Allen claims that he was interrupted in his conversation by remarks made against him by Sparks. Leaving the phone and going out to the porch, he was met by Sparks, who struck him in the face."

Allen forthwith pulled out a 32-caliber revolver and shot Sparks in the stomach.

When a *World-Courier* reporter went to the jail to interview him, Allen appeared to be haggard and said he hoped Sparks recovered.

Unfortunately, he didn't. On Sept. 19 the *Evening World* reported that Sparks had died. The charge was changed from assault and battery with intent to kill to murder.

What was missing from the articles about the killing cannot be found by looking between the lines. Where the two men rivals for the affection of the same woman?

The violence probably wasn't the result of a long-standing feud, since the two young men came from different communities.

Neither article about the Allen/Sparks shooting has a byline. Both articles must have left the newspaper's readers wondering what was the real reason for the shooting.

Next week: The disposition of the case.

H-T 6/17/96