

1908 county school superintendent in controversy

Once upon a time, the county superintendent of school was elected, and in actual practice, it was a very political process. The man elected in 1903 was H.O. Buzzaird, a Republican. The ones who chose him by ballot were the township trustees.

Buzzaird had been born near Bloomington. In the biographical information about him on the front page of the *Bloomington Telephone* of June 2, he was described as "the youngest county superintendent in the state" and a self-made young man."

Continued the newspaper, "After completing the common schools, Mr. Buzzaird began teaching and in the meantime kept up his studies. By his own efforts he has acquired a fair education and was a student of the University for one year." (In other words, he attended Indiana University for one year, but never received a degree.)

The article also described Buzzaird's career up to the date of his election as superintendent of schools. "He has taught school in Washington, Bloomington and Bean Blossom townships, two schools in Morgan County, was principal of the Stanford schools two years ago and last year was principal of the Harrodsburg schools and taught a high school



LOOKING BACK

By Rose McIlveen

course."

The Republican-leaning *Telephone* crowed about Buzzaird's election, because his predecessor had been a Democrat by the name of W.V. Payne. Buzzaird's tenure as superintendent would have been uneventful, except for a couple of interesting incidents.

According to the *Bloomington Evening World* of Aug. 1, 1906, Buzzaird nearly died because of a visit to the drug store. It happened like this: "A headache remedy bought at a drug store came very near causing the death of Supt. H.O. Buzzaird yesterday afternoon. Mr. Buzzaird had been suffering with a severe headache when he called for a prescription."

A well-known remedy was given to him, and he took it in the store. On the way to the post office he began to feel very peculiar and returned to the store. Continued the newspaper article, "His condition continued to grow

rapidly worse and accompanied by the druggist he went to the office of Dr. Tourner. When he reached the physician's office, Mr. Buzzaird was unable to talk. He was affected with coughing and strangulation and was unable to get his breath freely."

The opinion of the doctor was that Buzzaird's rheumatism prescription and the headache remedy had combined to "form a poison in his system." The doctor had noted that the superintendent had considerable congestion in the mucus membranes of his throat. It may well have been a documented case of medicines that conflicted with each other in the days before medical science knew much about the potential problem.

Anyway, Buzzaird was sick for several days, but was back at work the next day.

In the March 13, 1908, edition of the *Telephone* there was an article which indicated that one person, at least, was not impressed with Buzzaird. The story began, "Before Squire Dickson, G.I. Thompson, the well-known Indiana University tennis player and a son of Austin Thompson, the book salesman, has filed an affidavit charging assault against County Superintendent Buzzaird. The affidavit is the outgrowth between Thompson

and Sup't. Buzzaird on Saturday last, on which day the monthly examination for teachers license was held."

The county superintendent was charging \$1 to each applicant. Thompson's father had objected to the fee and had been very vocal about it. A grand jury had looked into the matter some months earlier and found for Buzzaird. Nevertheless, young Thompson vehemently objected. By March 24, there were more details to the story.

"In the complaint Thompson tells his story of his differences with the county officer. He alleges that on Feb. 29 he went to take the examination in English Literature. He offered the superintendent \$1 for a state fee as the paper was to be sent to Supt. Cotton for grading, 10 cents for manuscript and 10 cents for postage. He alleges the superintendent refused to accept this and chased him out of the office. A suit against Buzzaird by Thompson, charging assault, is pending before Squire Dickson and by mutual consent has been set for April 11."

There is no record in the Monroe County clerk's office regarding the case. Perhaps the respective attorneys reached some kind of compromise.

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