

Which paper had the story right on the wolf attack?

Citizens of Bloomington must have been wondering who really rescued a little boy who was attacked by wolves in September of 1908. It was a case of two local newspapers giving differing accounts of the incident.

The *Bloomington Evening World* lead off on Sept. 8 with a front-page story about 12-year-old Harold Alexander, who lived with his parents, Mr. and Mrs. John Alexander, on South Fess. The boy was attracted to a cage of wolves kept at the home of H.A. Leffler.

The animals were definitely not pets. On the contrary, they were used by Robert H. Harris, a showman, in a stage production of *Daniel Boone on the Trail*.

The *Evening World* printed its version of what happened.

"Through curiosity he (Harold) placed his right hand inside the cage and immediately one of the animals took hold of it. The boy pulled and screamed, and the wolf held on and soon two wolves were pulling in an effort to get the boy's body through the iron bars."

It is likely that the boy thought the wolves were merely dogs and therefore friendly. A 12-



LOOKING BACK

By Rose McIlveen

year-old boy unfamiliar with wolves wouldn't be expected to know the difference.

The *Evening World* continued with its version of the story. "The boy was off his head and in a short time would have been inside the cage, but his cries attracted a number of men, who with clubs hit the wolves until they released their hold."

Readers wouldn't have known the difference if three days later the *Telephone* hadn't related another story.

It began "A small boy facing death between the gnashing jaws of two angry wolves, and his life barely saved by the heroism of a girl, was the tragic situation on East 2nd street late yesterday afternoon."

That lead sentence presents an immediate problem. The *Evening World* said the boy was attacked on the evening of Sept. 7. The

Sept. 11 edition of the *Telephone* gave Sept. 10 as the date.

Anyway, the latter newspaper's account paralleled that of the *Evening World* in part. The *Telephone* said, "Two wolves, belonging to Robert H. Harris, the theatrical manager, attacked Harold Alexander, the 12-year-old son of John Alexander, badly chewed up his right arm and would have dragged him to an awful death inside their cage but for the timely arrival and heroic work of Miss Olive Leffler."

According to the *Telephone*, Harold was playing with some other children near the cage. When the boy was looking around at some of his friends, a male wolf made a grab for Harold.

Continued the *Telephone*, "The child was dragged off his feet flat against the wire netting which runs half way up the cage. Above this are iron bars several inches apart, and through this the lad's arm was pulled by the wild animals in their mad effort to get him inside."

Harold's screams brought several women, including Olive. According to the *Telephone*,

"Most of them (the women) fainted or ran, but not so the girl who tried to pry open the animal's jaws. Unsuccessful in this, she hammered it over the head until near exhausted. The boy used his wits and tried to jab the animal in the eyes."

Finally Olive had the help of Charles Hopper, a laborer. Harold then needed a doctor. The *Evening World* and *Telephone* agreed upon the name of the physician. Young Harold got some stitches from Dr. Fletcher Gardner.

Which account of the incident was correct? What is certain is that the wolves couldn't remain in the neighborhood.

In another article on the same day (Sept. 11) the *Telephone* provided some welcome news for the neighborhood mothers. "Vinegar Hill is once more a place of peace and quiet. The eight wolves belonging to Robert W. Harris have been removed from that section of town. The wolves were moved in their cages by Sam Dill to their new home which is somewhat isolated, so they can howl to their heart's delight."

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