

Country doctor's death a local mystery to solve

"What Killed Dr. Threlkelde?" was a mystery posed by the *Bloomington Evening World* on the front page of its Sept. 23, 1901, edition. The drama of the physician's death unfolded on the page next to another story that dealt with the possibility of the poisoning of a national figure.

Threlkelde, age 52, was a relative newcomer to Monroe County. He was also a relative newcomer to the medical profession, having spent the early part of his working life as a minister of the gospel. In a mid-life career change the man had enrolled and graduated from "a Kentucky medical school."

According to the *Evening World*, Threlkelde arrived at the home of (Abb) Mays in Polk Township to make a routine house call. But there was nothing routine about the visit. Reported the *World*, "As he walked into the May home, he exclaimed, 'I am going to die,' and fell across a bed, where for an hour he suffered convulsion after convulsion until death relieved him."

The May family did not stand by helplessly. Another doctor, who lived three miles away, was summoned, but it was too late to save Threlkelde.

Mysteries and scandals were the enhancers of newspaper circulation. Presumably Monroe Countians were intrigued by the sudden death of the country doctor. The *Evening World*



Looking back

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8-22-1987

obliged them by reporting that, "He (Threlkelde) died without making a statement of any kind (a difficult feat during a convulsion) as to his ailment, or the cause thereof, which has brought forth the supposition that he expired from taking a drug."

By law, unexpected deaths require the services of the coroner, and ferreting out the facts surrounding the sudden death of Threlkelde fell to the lot of Dr. Robert Rogers. Approaching the case in a professional fashion, the coroner paid a visit to the deceased doctor's home. There in his medical case Dr. Rogers found a half-empty bottle of Nux Vomica, a poisonous drug found in such faraway places as Burma, India and Thailand, among other places. According to the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, sparingly used, Nux Vomica, which contains strychnine, increases the flow of gastric juices and excites the central nervous system. One of the medicinal uses of the drug is a heart stimulant.

Rogers' investigation turned up the curious information that
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