

Monroe County residents benefit from windfalls

"Windfall — an unexpected gain, piece of good fortune or the like."

— Random House Collegiate Dictionary.

J.H. Hobbs scraped together a meager living for his family by selling fruit trees. There were seven mouths to feed, not counting that of his wife and himself. Then in the midst of winter Hobbs got some unexpected news.

Their story was printed on the back page of the *Bloomington Telephone* of March 6, 1903. "About three months ago Mr. and Mrs. Hobbs received notice through an attorney of the division of the property."

"The property" turned out to be 8,800 acres of land in Muskogee Indian Territory and \$8,200 in cash. The land had belonged to Mrs. Hobbs' great-great grandmother, John Harper, an Indian chief.

The inheritance was no scam. According to the *Telephone*, Hobbs and his wife had made a trip to Muskogee to have a firsthand look at the situation and shown the authorities there proof of their relationship to Harper.

And so, on March 6 the nine members of the family left for Muskogee and their inheri-



LOOKING BACK

By Rose McIlveen

tance. As a precaution their Bloomington attorney, H.A. Lee, went with them to look after their interests.

The odd thing about the story in the *Telephone* is a short item printed directly under the Hobbs story. Word about money and good luck tends to get around by word of mouth.

It seems that the Hobbs family was not the only Monroe County party rushing to Muskogee. According to the newspaper, Isaac Bledsaw and his sister, Mrs. John Rice, also believed they were entitled to some of the John Harper property. In the Bledsaw/Rice party were half-brothers Nicholas Walker, Sherman Adkins and William Masters.

The *Telephone* informed its readers about the relationship on which the Bledsaw/Rice claim was made. "Mr. Bledsaw and Mrs. Rice

state that they are the grandsons of Nicholas Harper, who was a brother of the Indian chief, and who had an interest in his brother's estate. They claim that at the death of their grandfather his property came into possession of John Harper as it was not known at the time that he had any heirs."

Too bad that the *Telephone* didn't send a reporter after the two parties to follow through on the story. The readers were obliged to write the ending in their own imaginations.

Another Monroe County family received a windfall almost exactly five years later. Their story was on the front page of the newspaper with a headline that was bound to grab attention. "FALLS HEIR TO \$125,000. Unexpected Fortune Coming to Richard Adams."

The man was lucky enough to have been born to an industrious father back in Germany. His entire estate was valued at \$750,000 to be divided among six children.

Adams had known that his father was well-off, but never gave much thought to what he might inherit. The whole family had come to America many years ago, but the parents

returned to Germany, leaving the children behind to seek their own fortunes. Richard Adams had not done too badly. He had learned the trade of harness making and owned shops in Illinois and Iowa. Just prior to moving to Bloomington, he had lived in Milwaukee.

At the time of receiving word of his windfall, Adams was the foreman in the Griffin Harness Shop in Bloomington. He had a brother and sister in Terre Haute and brothers in Moline, Ill., Fountainette (Ind.) and Lafayette.

Their father had made his money in the foundry and machinery business in Upladen, Germany. His will had already been probated in that country when Richard Adams had received the letter from his brother in Terre Haute.

The *Telephone* was more excited about the windfall that Adams was. "He is not excited over his good luck, saying laconically that he will remain in the harness business. He doesn't even intend to give up his present position for a while at least, but says he may buy a factory later. He is about 30 years old."

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