

# Proper burial brought an end to Collins' doomed life

People around downtown Bloomington simply accepted that Eddie Collins was one of the town "characters." That was back in the years before the term "homeless" became a national issue.

After Collins' death on July 25, 1922, the *Bloomington Evening World* took pains to point out that people like Eddie shouldn't have happened. "The most obvious thing in connection with his existence was the lamentable laxity of the state laws that allowed his parents who were both degenerates to mar-



## Looking back

By Rose McIlveen

ry and produce children who were doomed to untold suffering and pain even before they were born."

The story of the family also appears in C. Earl East's *Relive It*. "Weasel" Collins got married in No-

vember of 1872, and he and his wife took up residence under an overhanging rock along Stout's Creek northwest of Bloomington.

When the elder Collins died in 1895 of dropsy at the age of 56, he left behind a wife and four boys, a couple of whom were born in the cave-like shelter of the rock. When the son John was old enough to fend for himself, he went to Terre Haute.

Another of the boys, Francis, was occasionally arrested for calling

people names like "You dirty Irishman" and throwing stones at others. He spent the remainder of his life at hospitals at Madison and Butlerville.

Bloomingtonians knew Eddie and Francis by sight. When they walked along the street they would go single file, with Eddie in front. East recalled that once when Eddie had a stomachache, someone gave him a bottle of Lydia Pinkham's compound, and it became his favorite medicine.

Eddie had ways of getting some

loose change to buy coffee or pipe tobacco, East explained. "Wherever he went he acquired a reputation of trying to tell what day of the week one's birth had occurred. Given an exact date, he would look down a couple of minutes, mumbling unintelligible jargon. Then a meek answer, given in low tones, occasionally was rewarded with a few pennies. Probably he did hit it, once in seven." According to the *Evening World*, The town character also danced for pennies and sold small

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