

Two tried to mine coal in 1918 when fuel was in demand

In 1883, Frank Coleman, a farmer of Van Buren Township in the Harmony neighborhood, was digging a well. The trouble was, when he reached a certain level, he ran into a layer that was definitely different from Monroe County's pesky red clay.

Undaunted by the obstruction, Coleman resorted to dynamite to remove it. To his surprise, what was jolted loose by the blast was not limestone, but coal.

Actually, the discovery of a vein of coal should not have been any great surprise, since the mineral is plentiful in neighboring Greene County. But apart from sharing coal with his neighbors, Coleman didn't seem to exhibit any special enthusiasm for his "underground asset."

Came the winter of 1918, and the weatherman put on his worst face. Commented one Bloomington newspaper in February of that year, "Discussing the fuel situation is the order of the day. And both President Wilson and Dr. Garfield come in



Looking back

By Rose
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for a large share of the blame."

The article recounted the heavy snows and severe cold that had disrupted the transportation of coal and added, "If the weather had not been so severe, there would not have been such an extraordinary demand for fuel."

No doubt the fuel shortage jolted Coleman's memory about the coal resource beneath his very feet. The newspaper indicated that he had had the good sense to consult with the experts — professors of geology at Indiana University.

The university archives reports that the department had at least three faculty who would have been of help to Coleman. They were Edgar R. Cumings,

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