

Christmas memories: Bloomington in 1884

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It was a simpler time. Monroe Countians in the 1880s got around on foot or in wagons and buggies. Calendar-watching by children may have intensified after Thanksgiving, but early in December 1884, Bloomington newspapers didn't seem to take any notice of THE holiday in that month.

One of the most striking things about issues of the *Telephone* of that time is what isn't there, rather than what is. The newspaper didn't take any notice of Christmas until a couple of advertisements on Dec. 13.

"Christmas is coming," proclaimed the ad of C.P. Turner, who sold a variety of household goods. In 1884 he was calling the buying public's attention to "Chamber suits, parlor suits, parlor sets, willow chairs, carpet chairs, fancy stands, chromos (whatever they were), paper racks & and baby carriages, boy's wagons & sleds, &., &."

J.O. Howe, on the other hand, wanted to sell "watches, clocks, jewelry, silverware and spectacles," as well as an "assortment of fine watches." His Christmas inventory also included "chains, charms, rings, fine bracelets, gold spectacles, triple-plate water pitcher, cake baskets, castors, spoons holder, sugar bowls, cream pitchers, napkin rings,



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spoons, forks and sterling silver spoons." Furthermore, Howe told the *Telephone* readers, "these goods are selected with the greatest care and are of the best qualities. call and examine the goods, prices will be made to suit YOU, regardless of cost."

Not to be outdone, E.P. Cole placed an ad in the very next edition. He specialized in books, stationery, greeting cards, pictures (including oil paintings), statues, albums, toilet cases and gold pens. Furthermore, the proprietor boasted that he had in stock 1,001 items to tempt Christmas shoppers.

Modesty was apparently not Cole's strong point, for he boasted to *Telephone* readers in terms that would be laughable today. "The crowds that are daily inspecting them (his inventory) are struck with admiration at their attractiveness, and are rendered dumb with astonishment at their cheapness."

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