

Steamroller debate inspired more drama than action

In the great 1896 Bloomington City Council debate over whether the city should buy a steamroller to smooth out macadamized streets, someone suggested that Indianapolis had done just that.

State Senator H.C. Duncan, who had come to the meeting to oppose the purchase, retorted angrily, "I have been in Indianapolis more — yea three times more than any man in this room — and I have yet to see the first steamroller being used upon that city's streets."

Duncan was only getting warmed up for the real thrust of his attack. He continued, "No, gentlemen, it



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By Rose McIlveen

has been stated, and I know it to be a fact, that certain parties have been approached in this matter and propositions made to them to assist in saddling off one of these machines on the city at the city's expense, and I tell you it is nothing but a bunco game."

The state senator put a blunt question to the council and others in the room. "Trips are talked of for the members of the council to go and see one of these machines work. Who is going to pay the bill?"

Duncan suggested that any money that might be used for a trip to Indianapolis would be better spent on fixing up the streets. Stating that they were in the worst condition in recent memory, he cited at least one case. "Why, upon the south side of the public square is a hole full of water that has been standing there for months. Why don't you repair it? With the money one of these ma-

chines would cost, \$3,500, you could place your streets in better condition than they ever were."

By this time, the reporter for the Bloomington *Evening World* must have been goggle-eyed over the tidbits of angry rhetoric he was going to include in his article about the meeting. Duncan didn't fail him. Accusing Fred Fess (one of the steamroller proponents) of ignorance, the state senator reminded him that he had been able to persuade the council not to succumb to another scheme — a "nefarious waterworks franchise."

Duncan brought up another point

— that of the price being asked for the steamroller. "Why, there are hardware merchants in this city who tell me that you get the lowest figures for one of these machines from these men and they (the hardware merchants) will furnish you with a machine at a greater discount."

Fess, a former city councilman, was not intimidated by Duncan and lashed back at him. "It would cost the city \$25,000 per year to keep the streets in condition the way Judge (another of his titles) Duncan

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