

# 'Premature' news added excitement in 19th century

Before the turn of the century, newspapers tended to get carried away when reporting sensational events in the community. The "affray" between John David and Charles Bates is a case in point.

Consider the headline in the Saturday *Courier* on Aug. 20, 1881. It said, "A FATAL SHOOTING AFFRAY IN BENTON TOWNSHIP. John David Killed in a Dispute Over Timber."

As the newspaper account unfolded the readers learned that the argument between two men took place in the middle of a road in Benton Township. The timber in question was the kind to be used for making wagon wheel spokes.



## Looking back

By Rose McIlveen

Reported the *Courier*, "John David, who resided near the Rader bridge, and Charles Bates, son of Jack Bates, met in the road, both being on horseback." David was demanding a settlement regarding the timber.

Continued the newspaper, "After some hot words, David's statement

is that Bates drew a revolver and fired four shots. He (David) then got a piece of spoke timber and clubbed Bates over the head."

The wounded man was carried to his home and a doctor was summoned. The physician told David he was about to die, and that was when a "Squire Brock" copied down David's version of what happened.

If the readers had already mentally convicted Bates, they were due for a couple of surprises. First, the *Courier* reported that David subsequently died and had left a wife and four children. Meanwhile, Bates had come to Bloomington to have the wounds on his head dressed.

Related the newspaper, "He was

badly bruised about the head. We did not get to see him, but his friends say that the shooting was purely in self-defense; that David clubbed him first, and in order to protect his own life he resorted to his revolver."

The *Courier* reporter added. "This statement is pretty generally accepted as true, as the Bateses are known to be quiet, peaceable citizens, and Charley Bates would not be likely to shoot a man down unless he did it to protect his own life. A gentleman in this city heard David say, recently, that he was going to whip Bates, and he was advised at the time not to do it."

At that time, no charges had been

pressed, and the sheriff seemed to have been biding his time in the hope of gleaning more information.

As for the surprise, first and foremost, David did not die after all. Even as the *Courier* was going to press, the editor was obliged to add a postscript to the article under the heading of "LATER." It said, "Information was received on Thursday evening that David is not yet dead, but in a very critical condition. As far as we can learn, no arrests have yet been made in the case."

Roughly speaking, as the quotation went, the report of David's demise was premature. Records in the Monroe County Public Library indicate that he lived to the age of 76.