

1895 letter to Santa the doggonedest you ever read

When the Bloomington *Courier* put out a call for children's letters to Santa as a promotional campaign in 1895, the editors surely didn't expect to hear from Old Tramp. It was not expected that he would be able to "paws" long enough to write.

You see, Old Tramp was a dog, belonging to Col D.O. Spencer, a local attorney. But, to be more precise, the animal was everybody's dog, having a wide range of human acquaintances and stops to make during his daily rounds in Bloomington.

In the first place, it is likely that Old Tramp didn't know he was a dog. Some of the four-legged creatures of the canine variety are like that.

Anyway, Old Tramp's letter — dated Dec. 21, 1895 — appeared in



Looking back

By Rose McIlveen

the newspaper. He began by stating that he was nine years old, which meant he wasn't a puppy any more. Tramp also revealed that he grew up in Beaver Dam, Pa. (It is not clear how he and the colonel had struck up a master/pet relationship, since Spencer, a Civil War veteran, was from Bloomington and eventually returned here to live.)

Claiming to have been a "good dog," Tramp made his Christmas

wishes plain, beginning, naturally, with food. "I want something good to eat for Christmas, New Year's and every other day so long as I live."

Having thought about the delectable cooking odors that would undoubtedly waft through the Spencer house on East Fourth Street, Tramp felt it not unreasonable to suppose that he would get his "cut." As he politely put it, "I want three bones, if there are any left. Two will do if they are big enough and have plenty of meat on them."

But Old Tramp's horizons were wider than his next meal. Though few dogs have the privilege of going to work with their masters, he was an exception. Since the courtroom was one of Spencer's work places,

the dog was known to hang out there.

A fellow might as well be comfortable while he was passing the time, and so Tramp continued, "I want a little bed or rug beside Judge Miers' desk in the court room, and a duplicate key to the front door of the court house by which I can get possession of the aforesaid bed or rug as the case may be." (The word "aforesaid" being legal jargon, leads the reader to believe that the fine hand of Spencer, the lawyer, may have been involved in the letter writing.)

Old Tramp's next request probably may have had something to do with the periodic encampments of Civil War veterans. "I want a Mechanics' brass band to take with me

to Camp Norton next summer." (Actually, Bloomington had a community band by that name.)

Getting back to personal comfort, the dog "wrote" that he wanted "a coat of mo'hair, yellow preferred, and anything else that is nice for a bow-wow," and added, "But don't send any fire-crackers, cats or kittens."

A regular stop on Tramp's daily rounds may have been the train station in downtown Bloomington, because he referred to it. "I will be at the depot to meet every train until you come."

In a post-script with a touch of humor Tramp wrote, "P.S. Your name is Santa Claus. I have four sets of claws, and therefore we are related."