

Blizzard of 1918 recalled

'If you thought '78 was bad . . .'

Say "blizzard" to a Monroe Countian who was around 66 years ago, and you probably hear — with embellishments — a first-hand account of the blizzard of 1918.

IT WASN'T exactly one of the better aspects of the "good old days." The facts — as reported in the *Weekly Star* and in the *Weekly Courier* — were these: between Friday, Jan. 11 and Tuesday, Jan. 15, 1918, 18 inches of snow fell on Monroe County. If the inconvenience of deep snow was not enough misery, the weather in that period also included a 23 below zero temperature and 40-mile-an-hour winds (wind chill factor of minus 84 degrees).

Rural mail carriers, reported the *Star*, dutifully started their rounds, but "were forced to turn back and abandoned their routes." Farm families were snowbound, with the exception of the lucky ones who managed to get to town in "oldtime" horse-drawn sleds.

In fact, horse-power was the order of the day. Firemen used horses to drag their truck to

Looking back

By Rose McIlveen

small fires at the home of Dr. J.W. Wiltshire and J.O. Payne, and merchants reverted to horse-drawn carts for deliveries.

AMERICA was at war, and coal was in short supply. The two biggest local users were the Central Indiana Lighting Company and the Showers furniture factory. During the emergency only one Monon train with a few coal cars got through the drifts to Bloomington. Reported the *Star*, "... many trains were stalled in the snow along the line, in some cases causing much suffering to the passengers. Some engines

froze their cylinders with 180 pounds of steam."

Bloomington's telephone exchange logged some 200 calls for help from persons out of food and/or coal. According to the *Star*, a dozen families found food and emergency shelter in the city hall. The Showers Company followed suit with cots and food for the families of some employees.

B.F. Adams, appointed war-time county fuel administrator, used his discretion and authority to confiscate one of the railroad coal cars headed for the Central Indiana Lighting Company and had its contents distributed in small lots to homes where the bins were empty. The *Star* editor estimated that some 500 families, half the families in Bloomington, got coal from the commandeered railroad car.

NOT ALL Bloomingtonians rose selflessly to the occasion. During the emergency a "gang" of four men and one woman was arrested for