

# Newspaper labled man a murderer before trial

**Looking back, from page A1**

much praise, and Mr. H. Desirs that those who read the report as formerly published, will read it now as it is correctly amended. . . "

The case was not tried until August 13, 1867, and the *Progress* labelling him as a murderer was clearly a violation of his right to a good name.

An even better example of a potential libel case can be found in the *Bloomington Telephone* in 1889. Newspaper editors were still scanning each other's issues for items to put into empty spaces on "slow news days."

As a re-print filler, a particular article in the *Louisville Commercial* in the spring of 1889, had two things going for it — sensationalism and a local angle. In short, it contained the name of a woman who was supposed to have been from Bloomington.

It should be noted that the woman's full name — including maiden name — was clearly stated in the lead sentence. The reason for the article in the first place was that she had been arrested after having been found, "out most of the night lying on the sidewalk in the rain and was thoroughly drenched when found."

Had the editor of the *Commercial* stopped at that point, he would not have been guilty of libel by our standards today. An arrest is considered a matter of public record.

But he could not resist the temptation to indulge in hearsay. After recounting that the woman was a native of Bloomington, Indiana, from apparently respectable parents, a high school graduate and a proficient pianist, the writer proceeded to relate that she had "fallen from the path of virtue and five years ago became a woman of the town." Suggesting that the woman's sporadic efforts at employment were solely for the purpose of supporting her whisky and morphine habit, the writer projected a miserable future for her.

Both instances of libel from the past indicate we have fortunately made some progress since the raw days of yellow journalism.

## Possible suicide focus of probe in Iowa explosion

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Investigators of the USS Iowa explosion that killed 47 sailors are now focusing on a despondent sailor who showed off a timing device and was quoted by a crewmate as saying, "If you've got to go, go in a blast," NBC News said Friday.

The sailor, killed in the explosion, was gunner's mate Clayton Hartwig, 25. The network said was the last man to touch the gunpowder that exploded in the ship's second turret on April 19.