

# Skeleton out of the closet caused big stir

One of the aspects of human understanding that separates children from adults is the realization that things are not always what they appear to be. That facet of life was underscored in Monroe County in November of 1883.

The headline on a front-page story in the (Bloomington) *Saturday Courier* of Nov. 24 had a scull and cross-bones in the middle of it — "A Ghastly Sensation! The Horrible Discovery at Hunter's Pond." The headline was certainly an attention-getter among the newspaper's readers.

There was a layer of ice on the pond, and some boys found a skeleton under the transparent surface. Continued the *Courier*, "The news of the ghastly find spread rapidly over town, but it was too late to go fishing for skeletons."

Students of that particular newspaper might have taken their first clue from the newspaper's somewhat irreverent approach to a serious subject. After all, skeletons are tangible representations of former



## Looking back

By Rose McIlveen

human beings and have to be accounted for by the authorities.

With tongue in cheek, the article continued, "Early in the morning a party of brave men advanced upon the pond, and the skeleton was resurrected from its watery grave." Presumably there was not a forensic pathologist among the party.

That became readily apparent as the article continued. "It was, sure enough, the skeleton of a male or female." (Actually, there really weren't any other alternatives for the writer or the recovery party.)

Anyway, stray skeletons in the 1880s did

not conveniently wear identification bracelets, and the *Courier* continued, "Whose skeleton was it? Where did it come from? How did it get in the pond?"

Those were questions that needed to be answered. The skeleton had to be accounted for somehow.

And then someone found a convenient explanation. "Several years ago Huntoon and others were accused of murdering an unknown man and burying his body near the railroad northwest of town. The body was sought for and dug for several days and nights."

Ah, hah! It all fit together so nicely that the writer pointed out, "The finding of this skeleton unraveled the whole mystery. Murder will out!"

Elaborating upon their finding, the police speculated that they would at last be able to nail Huntoon and his cronies with the murder. "Here at last was the corpus delicti."

That conclusion sent several authorities into action. Commented the *Courier* merri-

ly, "The people were awestricken. The coroner got ready for business. The lawyers began to size up big fees. The women shook their heads and said, 'I told you so.' "

Even the newspaper, explained the writer, was affected. "The *Courier* bought a half dozen pencils on credit at Lindley's (while Lindley was out) and the 'experts' put their heads together."

The article did not include the opinion of the courthouse hangers-on. They may have been expecting a sensational trial to take up some of their spare time. Unfortunately, they were bound to be disappointed when the truth finally came out.

Concluding the article, the *Courier* explained to its readers, "Just about this time along comes Prof. Beck and says that a year ago some godless Preps stole the skeleton from the high school closet. That skeleton was wired together; so was this one. Thus was the sensation exploded — thus were we robbed of a big item. And the high school has a skeleton in its closet once more."

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