

# Firefighters' wages a hot city council topic in 1905

When the Bloomington City Council members assembled on a June evening in 1905 there was a surprise waiting to happen. It is not known whether the elected representatives had any inkling of what awaited them.

The agenda for June 6 included purely routine matters — street improvements in the areas of Forest Place (which no longer exists), Henderson and First streets. Too, there was the usual approval of claims against the city treasury for services such as drayage, labor, the water works and People's Company for street lights.

The councilmen were about to adjourn when they received a petition



## Looking back

By Rose McIlveen

from the Bloomington fire chief, Cron Thrasher, and his men. It asked for a \$10 per month increase in salary.

Apparently there was not much debate about the matter. According to the Bloomington *Evening World* of June 7, "The request was turned down by the council, whereupon the resignation of every fire depart-

ment employee was tenured."

The city employees who were responsible for fighting fires may have felt they were "playing hard ball" with their employers, but the latter must have had some experience with bargaining too.

Instead of getting a sympathetic hearing, the firemen met with stiff resistance and a threat. The *Evening World* spelled it out. "This action of the fire laddies seemed to arouse some members of the council and the fire boys were told if they resigned without giving the council notice they would be liable for any damage from fire."

It must have given the firemen pause for thought, because they

withdrew their petition. At the same time, though, they "gave the council until the next meeting to think over their request."

Among the expenses the councilmen had approved earlier were the wages in question. The chief received \$37.50 a month and the other wages were: Frank Todd, \$33.75; L.E. Raney, \$30; George Giles, \$28.58; and Olin Rogers, \$17.46. Presumably Rogers was the most recently hired among them.

Before the meeting was adjourned, both sides of the dispute had an opportunity to get their points across. The *Evening World* gave a pretty balanced picture of the comments. "Members of the

council state that the fire boys were hired last September for a period of twelve months at their present pay, and that no increase will be given until the year is up, if at all. They assert that the firemen are exempt from all taxes after serving one year."

A change in economic conditions was pointed out by the petitioners in their argument. "On the other hand, the firemen claim that the pay is by far too small for the service rendered as they are compelled to spend both night and day at the engine house. They also claim that the present schedule was made dur-

see **Looking back**, page C2