

# The man who wouldn't stop preaching on the square

Jimmie Pearson knew how to get attention when he wanted it. All he had to do was set up a dry goods box on the southwest side of the square and start preaching.

The year was 1916. Pearson, who hailed from Bloomfield, was no stranger to Bloomington. He had, in fact, been the guest of Monroe County taxpayers during several of his earlier appearances in town.

Whatever else he thought, Pearson had some very decided likes and dislikes. On Sept. 8, 1916, he was verbally blasting away at other religions and their preachers.

The trouble was, Pearson's



## Looking back

By Rose McIlveen

preaching caused a problem for the police — traffic congestion, or rather, horse and buggy congestion.

It was not as if Pearson didn't know his courthouse square rhetoric wasn't appreciated by the law enforcement officers. He had a name

for them — "red-nosed old devils." Pearson's wife wasn't very complimentary toward the officers, either. She called them "beer bloats."

And so, when Pearson was arrested for the 29th time (many of the other arrests were in Indianapolis), he was escorted to what the Bloomington *Telephone* used to refer to as "the Jones Club," or the jail, because an officer of the law by the name of Jones ran it. Two years earlier, when Pearson had been locked up on a similar charge, he had described the place as "very home-like."

On the day he was to be tried,

Pearson breezed back into town and, according to the *Telephone*, announced at the jail he would "preach the gospel on the streets of the city as he sees it or rot in jail." He also described his treatment at the hands of Indianapolis authorities: "The Indianapolis cops, he said, had him sent to the penal farm, but he was released after his hair was cut."

In due course, the preacher had his day in the Bloomington court. Some of the spectators would have called it a day and a half, since Pearson took a swat" at the special judge, Roy Buckley. Unlike some of

his more dignified colleagues, Buckley swatted back.

Specifically, the charge against Pearson was holding a street meeting without a permit. What prompted the preacher's violent reaction was what he believed to be unbecoming behavior on the part of the officials — smoking in the courtroom.

Pearson wasn't impressed by a pro tempore judge. In fact, according to the *Telephone*, Pearson asked the judge, "What do you mean by smoking in court and so insulting

see **Looking back**, page C3