

Report on doctor taxed newspaper standards of delicacy

"The grand jury is now in session and will doubtless indict the doctor, but it is stated on good authority that he left town last night." *Bloomington Courier*, June 6, 1902.

Monroe Countians were giving most of their attention to politics during June 1902. Indeed, many local Democrats were in Indianapolis attending their state convention when the news broke about the scandalous behavior of a Bloomington doctor.

By and large the *Bloomington Courier* handled the story with good taste, but it must have taken some effort on the part of the reporter who gathered the facts about Dr. U.H. Hon. The front-page news item was printed under a restrained headline — "LAMENTABLE Is This Horrible Story of a Physician's Downfall."

It also began carefully, "Until to-



Looking back

By Rose McIlveen

day this paper has refrained from publishing an account of the lamentable plight into which one of Bloomington's physicians has fallen." Actually, that was an understatement.

Rumors had been making the rounds in town for some time, according to the *Courier*. Again, taking the high road, the newspaper continued, "...we consider it our duty to inform our readers of the true state of affairs, and we desire to have it known that our sympathy is with all of the innocent people who unfortunately have to suffer on

account of this heinous crime."

Today, the "crime" would be called sexual molestation of female patients, but in the Victorian parlance of the turn of the century it was a thing "unspeakable." It must have been difficult for the reporter to get all of the facts before he sat down to write.

According to the *Courier*, Grace, 17-year-old daughter of the Rev. and Mrs. T.J. Clark, made a visit to Dr. Hon's office for a vaccination. Continued the newspaper, "After having her remove her shirtwaist, the operation was performed, and then the doctor placed his patient in a chair and began caressing her, urging her to have confidence in him and saying that in his professional position and relations he would protect her."

Even in an age when conversa-

tion about sex had been banished to the back alleys and poolrooms, a well-brought-up young woman like Grace Clark couldn't possibly have misunderstood the doctor. His claim that he commanded enough respect in the community to counteract any possible blame suggests that he was not, at that point, dealing very well with reality.

Dr. Hon left the examination room briefly to see another patient, but then continued his conversation with Grace, who insisted she be allowed to leave his office. According to the *Courier*, "The doctor placed his back against the door, but seeing that the girl was determined, urged her not to talk of what had taken place. She would not promise, and he then threatened that if she told anything he would have her declared insane."

Once informed of what had hap-

pened, Grace's father made an unscheduled visit to the doctor's office and confronted him. The latter's reply was predictable — "the girl must be crazy."

Had the Grace Clark incident been the only one, Dr. Hon might have been able to weather any whispering about his morally unacceptable "bedside manner." Unfortunately, the doctor — who was married, by the way — had unrealistically subscribed to the philosophy that "variety is the spice of life."

Even if Grace had not told her parents about that uncomfortable office visit, Dr. Hon's time in Bloomington was probably running out anyway.

Next week: Who was Dr. Hon?