

Curious stories found their way into newspapers

Some curious little stories can be found in Bloomington newspapers printed before the turn of the century. Some are mentioned in passing, without any attempt to let the readers know what ultimately became of those involved. Here are a couple of them.

Billy Moree, a local character, turned up on page 4 of the *Republican Progress* of May 17, 1882. It is likely that he was unaware of his brief notoriety.

According to the newspaper, Moree had recently been seen "in the court house yard, gathering up an armful of stones with which to 'break up the court ...'" The *Republican Progress* said in plain English that the man "has been insane for some time."

To make its point, the newspaper let the readers in on some of Moree's rather odd behavior: "Last summer he insisted upon bringing suit in circuit court to depose (President) Garfield, claiming that he, himself, had been elected, and he became so viciously importunate that Mr. J.F. Pittman, whom he had engaged as his attorney, became somewhat solicitous for his own safety."

Anyway, on the day that Moree was gathering stones on the court house lawn, some-



LOOKING BACK

By Rose McIlveen

one suggested to him that he find something else to do. The *Republican Progress* reported what happened next.

"He was persuaded to leave, and mounting his horse, dashed north on College Avenue till opposite the residence of Rev. W.P. McNary, when he hurled a stone through one of the windows, and rode his horse out of town at full speed." It is not known why Moree chose to damage the minister's house.

Apparently, the man had a history of bizarre behavior. Apparently, the editor of the *Republican Progress* was not concerned by a libel suit, since in addition to "insane," the newspaper also used the word "crazy."

The problem was what to do with him. "A man as crazy as Moree seems, should be confined where he can do no one harm. No telling where the murderous mania may prompt him to cut the throats of the entire family

while they sleep."

There was an "Asylum" for such persons, but there was no room in 1882 for Moree. Grumbled the *Republican Progress*, "The State of Indiana has no room in her Asylum for the incurably insane, and in consequence they are kept in poor houses, jails and dungeons, or are permitted to roam about the country to murder and destroy. Indiana can invest several millions of dollars in a State House for the accommodation of high salaried officers, but its army of 'incurables receive little or no attention."

There is no trace of Moree in census and court records.

In June of 1881, there was the story of "A MYSTERIOUS MULE" that appeared in the *Saturday Courier*. It began, "The readers of the *Courier* will remember an item which appeared in this paper about two years ago in regard to an ownerless mule that was wandering along the highway north of the city." (The writer of the article may have been mistaken about how much time had passed. I have been unable to find the earlier reference.)

The mule had been seen along the road for some 12 years and "subsisted by browsing

(cq) about the public roads in the vicinity of Dan Stout's farm ... " The story of how he came to be there says something about public attitudes toward stray animals before the turn of the century.

How did the mule come to be in that predicament? The *Saturday Courier* obliged its readers with an explanation. "The mule belonged to a team that passed through that neighborhood, when an accident occurred in which the animal was injured in the spine, and it was left by the wayside to die."

Continued the newspaper, since that time, the animal has hobbled around on three legs without shelter or food, fending for itself. The mule has stayed in the same locality for 12 long years.

The writer concluded, "Everybody thought that the animal would never get through the long and severe spell of cold weather of the past winter. But it is still alive and appears as hearty as ever. Superstitious people are inclined to the belief that the mysterious beast is bewitched, and in the night time many who are required to pass in that neighborhood treat his muleship with a great deal of suspicion."

H-T 6/5/95