

The past not too different from today

Sometimes looking back at the past is like looking in a mirror. Consider two items that appeared in the *Saturday Courier* of March 26 and Oct. 29, 1887.

Both of the articles really belonged on the editorial page of the newspaper, if there had been such a place then. One was in the center of the front page, and the other looked like it was merely a filler.

Under a headline which said, "The City and County Debts; Measures of Relief Should be Taken," the March 26 article began, "It seems to us that the financial affairs of the county and city, too, are in such a shape as calls for measures of relief. There is a large floating debt that should be put in some such shape as will secure its payment without too heavily oppressing the tax payers."

The article went on to point out the county probably had more than \$50,000 in outstanding money and county orders, and that the county councilmen's most likely approach to the problem would be to raise taxes. The writer of the article had another



Looking back

By Rose McIlveen

approach to the problem.

"The best way would be to fund this debt by issuing bonds payable in 20 or 30 years. Such bonds could be floated at a less rate of interest than the county orders are now drawing."

At that point in the article can be found a sentiment that is popular today. "There is no earthly reason why the present generation should be taxed to death to pay off this debt; let a future generation help pay it."

The writer went on to say that young men (in 1887), who would be setting up households of their own, would benefit from the public spending on improvements.

The argument proceeded to the point that the future male property owners should bear part of the cost of the improvements.

The *Courier* depicted the 1887 tax rate as "ruinously high" and "sending people away from the county, as well as keeping them from coming here." In case any of the readers of the newspaper didn't know what the city tax rates were, it was spelled out — \$2.55 on each \$100.

Concluded the *Courier*, "If we have any wise counselors at the heads of our city and county governments, they should do something to put the public affairs in a business-like shape and give relief to a tax-burdened public."

The second item appeared on Oct. 29 without a headline. It began, "Young man — and old, too — it's about time to stop your whining about hard times and nothing to do, and go to work. If you can't get work exactly suited to your aesthetic taste, tackle something else."

After that attention-getter, the writer

went on to say that the unemployed spend their time in taverns and loitering on street corners. "Whiskey is an expensive luxury. The price of four drinks a day will buy all the food you want and furnish a suit of comfortable clothes at the end of the year."

If that didn't shame some of the loiterers, the writer drove his point home in the next few sentences. "If you spend foolishly the amount that another man saves, what right have you to grumble and envy him for being ahead in the world? You have the same chance that he did. You spend your money in your own foolish, selfish way, for your own gratification, and no one particularly cares; but have no right to abuse your neighbor because he chose to do as he wished with that which belonged to him."

It is not likely that the mini editorial prompted any of the loiterers of Bloomington to go scurrying around corners to avoid the censure of newspaper editors. But it is entirely possible that, for a time at least, there was less "whining" among the young er "philosophers" around the courthouse.