

# Crowded sidewalks a problem in 1883

"We wish respectfully to call the attention of the City Council to a common and longstanding complaint. It is a well known fact that on Saturdays, our sidewalks on the public square are next to impassible. People from the country thoughtlessly, and without intention of imposing upon anyone (which they seriously do) so blockade the walk that a man who is thinking about going someplace, finds it more convenient to take the middle of the road." *Bloomington Progress*, Oct. 17, 1883.

In the early days of Bloomington, the Courthouse Square was a popular meeting place for rural and townspeople alike. It was customary in those days for rural Monroe Countians to save up their errands for their weekly visit to town.

Complained the *Progress*, "We have seen ladies, after being rudely jostled, walk out in the gutter in



## Looking back

By Rose McIlveen

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order to get around the crowd; and we had a harmless fellow who supposed the walks were made to stand on, get quite indignant at us once, for making a gentle effort to get him to stand aside to let some ladies pass. It is well known that many ladies of the city avoid shopping on Saturday on account of this nuisance."

Running interference was not the only problem on the square on Saturdays. A slight miscalculation of progress forward by a female could result in a sudden tobacco stain on her long skirt — an unintentional and deplorable accident.

Nor was a detour into the street desirable in wet weather, since many of Bloomington's thoroughfares were not paved. A dry spell was hardly better, since a dusty skirt was almost as bad as a stained one.

In April 1899 a Bloomington newspaper commented, "Bloomington will have two street sprinklers this summer. Otto May will operate one in opposition to Ralph Pauley, who has had the contract the past four years." Needless to say, the sprinkling of city streets was a necessity during a long dry spell.

The city fathers cherished the notion that Bloomington was a thriving community, but the appearance of the place — particularly the public square — didn't exactly jibe with the claims for it.

Dodging spurring tobacco juice wasn't the only hazard during a

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