

# Woes of 1916 included trash, smoking, pollution

**“W**hat is Bloomington’s Greatest Need?” was the headline of a front-page article in the *Evening World* on Nov. 14, 1916. It was written after a meeting of the City Club during which some local citizens had their say on the topic. Some of their remarks sound familiar today.

First on the podium was Samuel Pfrimmer, an insurance man, who told the audience that although health and law and order are important to the city, low taxes are even more important. If anyone in the audience was snickering, it was not noticed by the reporter.

Continued the *Evening World*, “Thirteen years ago he (Pfrimmer) made a trip from Indiana to the Golden Gate state and after traveling thousands of miles, chose Bloomington for his home. At that time another man of Mr. Pfrimmer’s acquaintance was also seeking a new home, but he refused to come here when he learned that the tax rate was .50.”

Pfrimmer then introduced John F. Schumann, the next speaker, by saying that Schumann had chosen to relocate to Bloomington, in spite of its tax rate. When he got up to speak, he talked about parks and recreation. “Nature



## LOOKING BACK

By Rose McIlveen

has been very lavish in her gifts (to Southern Indiana), but the people have been lax in taking advantage of them.”

Schumann cited the Jordan River as a stream with clear and pure water, but after it leaves the university property it becomes “a dumping place for stable drains, dirt and filth which make it unfit for a how to wallow.”

Schumann mentioned the Fourth Street wooden bridge (over Spanker’s Branch) which was about to fall and the collection of rubbish as one of the eyesores of the city.” He also advocated the construction of a city park.”

It should be noted that although Pfrimmer cited Schumann as a new citizen of Bloomington who had already invested \$15,000 in property, Schumann’s stay must have been very brief. He cannot be found in the City Directories for 1916-19 or 1920-22.

IU Professor Frank Bates had garbage on his mind. “The Bloomington way is the primitive way or no way at all ... In some cities of similar size, neighborhood associations have been formed to remove it from their neighborhoods and as the good work spreads to other neighborhoods, the citizens have gone en-masse to the city council with petitions that the city take over the matter and have it disposed of in an incinerator as it ought to be.”

An entirely different problem was brought up by the next speaker, E.E. Ramsey, principal of Bloomington High School. Continued the *Evening World*, “Last year he (Ramsey) made a statistical study of boys in school who smoked cigarettes which revealed that freshman class boys who smoked failed in three subjects out of every four. Boys in the same class who did not smoke failed in only one subject.”

Mrs. E.R. Cummings, wife of a university professor, said there was a need for a parent-teacher organization. That suggestion was seconded by W.A. Myers, superintendent of the city schools. A predecessor, H.L. Smith, who was teaching education courses at IU in 1916, complained that “there was a time when the home was the school, but it has

gradually been transferred to another institution.” Like Mrs. Cummings, Smith called for parent-teacher organizations at each school.

Recreation was important to George Schlafer, who taught recreation at the university. He described a pilot program that had been started by his department. “...on the second day of the term the teachers (in the public schools) were taught half a dozen games which were tried out at the various buildings. Fourteen students of the University, three times a week, went to the various playgrounds at the ward buildings to help the teachers ... The division is now ready to begin a recreation survey to see what the people want in winter, and it hopes to establish recreation facilities for the business men of Bloomington.”

There is no indication in the *Evening World* article whether the people who attended the City Club meeting had an opportunity to rank the suggestions in order of importance. But the 50-some members of the club who gathered for dinner and speeches at the Hotel Kirkwood, went home with a lot of food for thought.

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