

Hitching rack dispute split Monroe County

Apart from Bloomington's water system, perhaps no other issue has been more controversial than the hitching rack on the courthouse square. It was certainly a necessity before the invention of the automobile. How else could Monroe Countians be sure buggies and wagons would remain where they left them?

BY 1909 SOME of the more fastidious Bloomingtonians had serious reservations about sanitary conditions on the square. It may be remembered that before the turn of the century there were occasional outbreaks of typhoid fever and cholera here. It did not take State Health Commissioner John M. Hurty long to figure out that a courthouse lawn outhouse plus a nearby town pump well added up to a very germey water supply. He had only to dump some concentrated dye into the outdoor convenience and a couple of hours later pump up some blue water, to prove his point.

In 1909 Monroe County had a brand new courthouse — the present one — replacing the old brick one with columns and outside staircases. Presumably the hitching racks had been removed, or at least dislocated during the construction period.

THE CONTROVERSY over the hitching racks began unobtrusively enough. In their meeting on March 2, the county council discussed the matter of a new rack for the courthouse property.

W. I. Fee and Fred Owens, Republicans, moved and seconded that the county spend \$1,000 to buy

Looking Back

By Rose H. McIlveen

off-the-square parking lots for horses. The Democratic members of the council — Anthony Johnson, John O'Harrow, Frank Kinser, John Shields and Nathan Smith — voted to appropriate \$500 for a rack for the courthouse lawn.

The *Daily Telephone* of March 12 reported that the commissioners had gone hitching rack shopping in Martinsville. Meanwhile, anti-rack partisans vowed to gather legal ammunition for an injunction to be used "as soon as a single, solitary man with a spade and post is sighted going in the direction of the courthouse."

Thirty pro-rack downtown businessmen got together to discuss the issue. Uppermost in their minds was the simple financial fact that farmer-shoppers needed some place to park their horses.

THE BUSINESSMEN'S resolution said: "Resolved that it be the sense of the merchants of Bloomington that the square be paved and that, if available and adequate hitch lots cannot be provided, that the hitch rack be replaced. Further resolved, that adequate means be provided to keep the square clean."

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