

# Bogus news showed editors had sense of humor

Most newspaper editors have a sense of humor. No kidding. And there are some notable examples from Bloomington newspaper history.

William Gabe, editor of the *Progress*, occasionally indulged in printing stories that just weren't true. Humor was apparently his object. In November of 1868, the newspaperman startled his readers by printing a story with an eye-catching headline: "A HORRIBLE DEATH IN THE WOODS — A YOUNG LADY EATEN BY A BEAR."

Who would pass up that article for more mundane matters? What was missing from Gabe's coverage of the incident was a subsequent obituary. Without the least amount of shame, he reported that the young woman had been completely consumed by the bear — all except her chignon.

Then there was the series of Indiana University student newspaper articles about the doings of Ambrose Wilkins, a bon vivant, who hobnobbed with anyone who was anyone — people like the Roosevelts. Periodically, Wilkins would boast in print about his social activities with the rich and famous.

The truth of the matter was that Ambrose Wilkins did not exist. He was a whimsical creation of the newspaper editor.



## LOOKING BACK

By Rose McIlveen

Another local newspaper editor warned Bloomington homemakers not to drink or otherwise use the local water. He wrote that a chemical had polluted it. The date the article appeared was April 1. Was he sitting back in his office chair chortling over the consternation he had caused? Perhaps.

One of the most blatant examples of April foolery appeared in the *Bloomington Evening World* on April 1, 1912. The headline read: "BABY FOUND IN CISTERN — FOUL PLAY SUSPECTED — Police Discover Bloody Garments and Investigate. Body Secreted in Box and Dropped in Water."

The article began conventionally enough. "At two o'clock this afternoon Policemen Stevens and Dudley were called to south Walnut Street to investigate some blood stains that were noticed near a cistern in the rear of the City Hall. The police discovered a baby garment that had been dropped near the scene, and this convinced them that a foul

murder had been committed."

Of course the two policemen raised the lid over the cistern and saw "a bloody box floating on the water." The law officers sent for grappling hooks to retrieve the box.

Naturally, a large crowd gathered. Some of the onlookers, according to the article, assisted the policemen in raising the box to the surface.

More details emerged in the story. "The spectators gasped in horrified amazement at a tiny section of a dainty lace underdress protruding from beneath the lid all covered with clots of blood."

In case the newspaper's readers were trying to visualize the details of the story, some of those were supplied. "The box is slightly less than two feet long and about six inches square. It had been weighted with some heavy substance in order to cause it to sink, but as the water was not very deep, the police discovered the grewsome (the newspaper's spelling) object when the lid was first raised."

Such an occasion would call for the county coroner, and he was summoned to the scene. His immediate conclusion was that a murder had been committed. Did he have his tongue in his cheek when he suggested that the Smithville coroner, Dr. Kentling, be called

to join the crowd behind the city hall? He was out on a call and expected to arrive on the 7 o'clock accommodation train.

In the meantime, a sheet was placed over the bloody box, and a patrolman stood guard over it. Other details emerged.

"Patrolman Stevens will stand guard, allowing no one to approach within twenty feet of the cistern, as the footprints of the woman who placed the baby in the were plainly visible and the crowd was prevented from obliterating them."

To add to the mystery, the article said that "The officers are on a hot scent of the guilty party and an arrest is expected at any moment. Last night a veiled woman, wearing a long black coat and carrying a large dress-suitcase alighted from the Indianapolis train and aroused the suspicion of policemen Hinkle and Shaw by her queer movements."

Apparently, she had a rendezvous with a young man. She also seemed upset.

Well, once the readers had been led down the garden path by all of those details, they breathlessly awaited the end of the story. The *Evening World* solved it in this way: "Later. It has been learned that the grewsome crime was indeed caused by fowl play — a baby rooster was found in the bloody box, its throat cut from ear to ear on April 1st."

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