

Locking the barn door on 'Old Fanny' didn't work

Who said our Victorian ancestors didn't have a sense of humor? Maybe only the most straitlaced of that generation.

The story of the reverend and his horse, "Old Fanny," was retold in the *Bloomington Telephone* on March 10, 1943. And a new generation had a few guffaws at the expense of the Reverend William P. McNary, pastor of the United Presbyterian Church.

Old Fanny was his faithful horse, pulling her owner's rig wherever he needed to go. But first it should be explained that one day the pastor was moved to preach a sermon on the subject of the immaculate conception. Perhaps the sermon was timed to lead into the Advent season.

Later, according to the account in the *Telephone*, "If there was sickness in the family soon there came Rev. McNary, driving Old Fanny, and if a brother of the congregation failed to appear in his pew on Sabbath morn-



LOOKING BACK

By Rose McIlveen

ing, he could be sure on Monday to see Old Fanny come down the pike with Rev. McNary to inquire into the cause of his day-before absence."

It was some time after the immaculate conception sermon that the pastor dropped in to see one of the deacons of his church. Continued the story, the deacon said, "Well, Pastor, I see that Old Fanny is going to have a colt."

Taken aback, Rev. McNary replied that that was impossible, since Fanny had not been outside of the pastorage barn for two or three years, except for pulling the buggy. A

couple of months later the deacon who was a farmer and not unacquainted with the sexual life of horses, observed out loud that Fanny was much larger than before.

Still the pastor denied it, saying, "Fanny has been under lock at my barn when not in harness in the buggy, for nearly three years; she has been with no other animal at any time."

Pastor McNary became quite touchy on the subject, but members of his congregation argued among themselves about the outcome of the matter.

Continued the *Telephone*, "Suddenly the thrilling whisper spread over the community that the town had in its midst an illustration of 'immaculate conception,' and husbands and wives whispered together over the subject while children were told, if they made inquiries, to 'mind their own business...' But it remained only a town scandal, a town sensation, a town question: Did Rev. McNary's ser-

mon of months before have anything to do with Old Fanny's subsequent feat?"

Then the mare gave birth to a colt that was long-legged and beautiful and bay-colored. The article does not reveal what Rev. McNary had to say about that.

At last the truth emerged. The Loudon boys, W.M. and T.J. and Newt Allen had had a hand in the pregnancy of the horse. The *Telephone* described what had happened. "They (the boys) had secured the key from Rev. McNary's hiding place, had unlocked the pastorage barn and had given Old Fanny a night of liberty with the animals on a farm north of town. Before daylight Old Fanny was back in the barn and the key back in its hiding place."

According to a history of the United Presbyterian Church, McNary was pastor here from November of 1870 to April of 1884. He died in Riverside, Calif., in 1927. Old Fanny undoubtedly died with a smile on her face.

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