

Publisher believed good news is the only news to print

In the 1890s, when Ellettsville publisher W.B. Harris was choosing towns in which to found newspapers, he regarded the ventures as calculated risks.

The "calculated" part involved a careful survey of merchants whose advertising would pay a prospective newspaper's way.

In an *Indiana Magazine of History* article about Harris, Robert D. Bickett wrote that if the prospective town passed the financial backing test, Harris looked around for a local editor.

Obviously, he could not edit all



Looking back

By Rose McIlveen

his papers. Teachers and retired ministers were his first choices for editors.

The business arrangement between Harris and the new editors was a simple one: the editors collected local news and received sub-

scription collections; Harris kept all advertising income.

Local news was to be pristine. Harris wasn't interested in publishing gossip sheets.

His instructions to the editors on that score followed the old-fashioned saying: "If you can't say anything good about folks, don't say anything."

Overseeing the publication of more than one newspaper was new to Harris, and in time he learned that 15 at one time was all he could manage. In general, he did not indulge himself in sentimentality

about the newspapers. There were a few exceptions.

(It should be explained that Harris' financial approach to newspaper publishing was as simple as his philosophy about good news. Three-month subscriptions were asked for, and if local support was insufficient at the end of that time, Harris discontinued publishing and picked another town.)

Though he gave the coup de grace to other in-the-red newspapers, the one in Warren County was somehow different. Bickett wrote that Harris revived the State Line (In-

diana) *Pioneer* three times after its initial failure.

With multiple publications to be overseen, Harris paced himself, traveling half of each month in the spring and fall.

All of his newspapers were printed in the Ellettsville shop, which had 14 employees, but Harris shrewdly underscored the local nature of each newspaper by having it mailed from its local post office.

Bickett described a crisis in Harris' career in 1900 when there was a

see Looking back, page C3