

# Telephone rate hike protested in 1908

In December 1907, telephone users in Bloomington got a rude shock. The shock came in the form of an announcement that the monthly rate of \$1.25 charged by the Home Telephone Company was being raised to \$1.50, a hefty 20 percent increase.

Accustomed to the recourse prerogatives available in a democratic society, several community leaders circulated a petition which asked that the Louisville-based investors in Home Telephone reconsider the rate increase. The number of Bloomington phones was then estimated at between 1,300 and 1,400. The petition contained the signatures of 535 residents and 76 business and office patrons.

The recipient of the evidence of Bloomingtonians displeasure was the local manager, Fred Shoe-maker. When he replied that the new rate was not negotiable, the Bloomington telephone war of 1908 began. Announced the committee composed of T.B. Ritter, S.E. Carmichael and R.H. East in the Bloomington *Evening World*



## Looking back

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of Jan. 25, "Your committee to whom was delivered the petitions of the people asking for continuance of former rates, beg to say that we have delivered the petitions to the company and have their official answer that they will still insist on the advanced rate, and will not deviate therefrom. It is now for you to decide what to do next."

What came next was a mass meeting in the Monroe County Courthouse, the first of several gatherings on the subject. In calling the meeting the committee commented, "Citizens this is your fight! Everybody come tomorrow night." Quipped the *World* reporter in the same article, "The 'boar's nest' is very busy just now hatching up schemes to defeat the

will of the people. Have they forgotten the lesson the school fight taught them?"

To add fuel to the controversy, the Rev. Thomas White of the First Presbyterian Church wrote a letter to the editor of the *World*. The Whites, recently moved from Wisconsin, had experienced a similar rate increase, cheerfully accepted by the public there, because the company had been able to demonstrate the necessity of it. He commented further that, on the other hand, the charter authorized by the Bloomington City Council to the Home Telephone Company had no provision for rate limits.

White added, "I have been told by both Bloomington and Bell telephone men that there is not a telephone company in Indiana which is making money. Is it possible that wise business men are keeping their funds tied up in undertakings that are not paying. In view of the sagacity of the age, one must swallow hard" see Telephone war, Back page