

Town fathers were on mission to stamp out vice

One of the most predictable characteristics of those who lived through the Victorian era was their zeal in stamping out vice — particularly other people's.

"STEPPED From the Path of Virtue to Lead a Life of Shame. Father, Husband and Children's Heads Are Now Bowed in Pain," was the headline on a front-page article in the Jan. 3, 1896, edition of Bloomington's *The World*. It would have been a day when the newspaper was hidden from the teenagers in the family to avoid having to answer embarrassing questions.

The view of libel was different then, and the name of the woman was in the lead sentence of the article where every reader could see it. The newspaper had no qualms about printing it.

She was the wife of an employee of Consolidated Quarries and was relatively new to the Bloomington area. *The World* added that they had moved here from Salem.

The charge was fornication, plain and simple. The evidence was clear cut — she and the man in question had been found occupying the same room at the National Hotel in downtown Bloomington.

* As *The World* put it, "She called at the



Looking back

By Rose McIlveen

hotel about eleven o'clock and asked for a room, stating that her name was Nina Allen. A room was assigned her, and she retired. Later Edward Strother also came in the office and registered, and he, too, was given a room."

The hotel night clerk, Alva Carter, said he didn't connect the two guests until he was walking down the hallway. At that point he discovered that one of the two late-night registrants had ended up in the room of the other.

There is no explanation in the article about how Carter discovered this shocking fact. Was he listening at the keyholes of the rooms? Surely he had not violated the privacy of guests by using a passkey.

Anyway, when the woman in question appeared in Mayor L.V. Buskirk's court

charged with fornication she was the picture of a lady. *The World* described her. "She sat in the police court yesterday morning wrapped in a fine fur cape, the collar of which was pulled high about her face that looked the picture of sadness. Her hands were encased in a fine muff, and one to see her would think she was a lady in every sense of the word, and not in the temple of justice to pay for her folly."

When she was arrested by Officer Ed Johns, she was said to have fainted three times on the way to the jail. Small wonder, since her husband and three children would have something to say about her fall from grace, if the latter were old enough to understand.

She and Strother pleaded guilty to fornication and were given a sentence of a \$10 fine and costs. Strother's father paid his, and the woman managed to come up with her own money.

Concluded the newspaper, "She stated in court that this was her first offense, and she couldn't explain why she had taken the rash step." The article prozed on and on about her surrender to the wiles of "his satanic majesty" and the blight on her chil-

dren's lives.

The very next day *The World* announced that the laws would be enforced and that "The Police Are Determined To Arrest All Evil Doers." "The police are in deadly earnest in their warfare against houses of prostitution in the city. Chief Owen has stated and announced his intention of prosecuting every inmate of these houses of ill-repute."

The article refers to so-called "hot sausage" dances, whatever that means, but adds that they "have for years been a disgrace to the city" and "will come in for their share of attention at the hands of the police."

A case in point was a dance in the Ross block that was raided by the police on the preceding Thursday. Fifteen people were arrested. "Yesterday they were before Mayor Buskirk, some on the charge of 'associating,' others for keeping houses of ill-fame."

Concluded *The World* on Jan. 4, "Wait a crowd of poor deluded human souls they were as they stood before Mayor Buskirk and pleaded 'not guilty' . . . The police are not alone in this fight as the law-abiding and moral people of Bloomington are at their back."

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