

Story of student's brutal beating just a hoax

"Two hours later he was found by his classmates. He was still unconscious and wore only a few scraps of clothing. He lay in a pool of blood." *Bloomington Evening World*, Oct. 22, 1903.

Things are not always what they appear to be. That was a lesson learned by several people who knew of Charles A. Ballard, an Indiana University student.

The story began when a student told a reporter that Ballard had been hurt in a freshman-sophomore scrap, an annual class rivalry free-for-all that caused considerable embarrassment to the university.

During the melee, students were known to suffer from broken noses and black eyes.

The trouble was, Ballard wasn't hurt in the freshman-sophomore scrap. In fact, he wasn't hurt at all.

The person who related the story to the reporter was just kidding.

Unfortunately, the story of Ballard's injuries made it into his hometown newspaper, the *Logansport Journal*. What happened after that was reported in the *Evening World*.



Looking back

By Rose McIlveen

"When Ballard's parents saw the article they were naturally frightened, and Mrs. Ballard came at once to Bloomington to see her son. When she arrived here she found her son in the classroom instead of the hospital."

The other Ballard parent was a doctor, and he did not take kindly to the hoax. Continued the newspaper, "When Mrs. Ballard returned to Logansport, she and her husband, Dr. Ballard, went to the *Journal* office to demand an explanation. Dr. Ballard and two of the editors got into a fight, which came near resulting in tragedy."

Finally, the editors were able to explain that the story had been a joke, but the newspaper's reporter had taken it seriously.

So intrigued was the *Bloomington Eve-*

ning World with the fake story, that it was printed in its entirety in the Oct. 22 issue. The headline read, "Wiles of Co-eds at IU."

According to the bogus story, Ballard was supposed to have captured a "golden-haired" sophomore, whose hair he cut off.

Continued the account in the *Logansport* paper, "Since that eventful time, Ballard has been a marked man, it only being a question of time when he would come to a tragic end."

A Miss Edith Alexander, also of *Logansport*, was talked into luring Ballard to a sophomore dance. There he was met by a group of males itching to get even.

The story continued, "For five minutes the room was a perfect whirlwind of humanity with Ballard the center of attraction and everyone taking a poke at him.

(Now what is wrong with that point in the story is that all university dances were chaperoned. No bona fide chaperone would have allowed a participant to be pummeled on the dance floor. Surely an alert editor of the *Journal* or Ballard's parents would have picked up on that point.)

Nevertheless, the fabricated story continued, "Out of this whirlwind of humanity, he (Ballard) was sent bounding down the first flight of stairs, only to be followed by the boys and the pretty coeds, and kicked down the next flight to the ground."

(Still, no one picked up on the fact that Ballard had no person coming to his rescue.)

"Here Ballard turned over with a groan, hoping that his struggles had ended, and that he might be allowed to die in peace.

"Such was not the case, however, for like a howling pack of hyenas bound on vengeance, the students made a second rush and put him through another beating that would have killed a weak man.

"Fortunately for Ballard, his senses left him in the middle of this last degree, and he was left unconscious at the side of the building by the sophomores."

The *Evening World* called the printing of the story "a sample of yellow journalism."

The newspaper could also have called the people of *Logansport* "gullible."

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