

Telephone call tested the love of man's best friend

"An interesting experiment was tried, Saturday night, on 'Tramp,' the celebrated canine that belongs to everybody in Bloomington and to Col. D.O. Spencer in particular."

— Bloomington World,
Dec. 17, 1895.

Readers of the Bloomington *World* probably smiled a little when they picked up their paper on Dec. 17, 1895, and learned that everyone's friend, Old Tramp, had been treated to a cross-town telephone "conversation."

Whose idea was it? There is no hint in the front-page article that referred to the animal as "his dogship."

At the newspaper office someone



Looking back

By Rose McIlveen

rang the central office of the phone company and asked to be connected with Tramp's owner, Col. D.O. Spencer, a Civil War veteran and Bloomington attorney who was then living on South Walnut Street.

Once the connection had been made, the colonel was instructed to talk to Tramp. According to the *World*, when the receiver was

against one of the dog's ears, Spencer said, "Yah, Tramp, yah, yah."

According to the newspaper, "The electric fluid had brought the familiar voice to willing ears. The dog's eyes glistened with gladness as he heard that voice . . . His ears became elongated, and his tail began to beat time."

Tramp was getting on in years, but he reacted energetically. "The old canine forgot his age, and danced a two-step that would have put a Bedford dude to shame."

The "experiment" in their midst was too good to miss, and the *World* office workers stopped whatever they were doing to watch. Meanwhile, the reporter who covered the

event indulged in a little anthropomorphism. "Seeing that he was watched, he (Tramp) seemed to want to more enthusiastically show his love for his master." Like the dog in the old RCA advertisements, Tramp tilted his head first on one side and then the other.

Now it should be explained that Col. Spencer had an exquisite sense of humor. When he died in September of 1900, he was eulogized as a man who enjoyed laughter, good companionship and telling jokes. Noted the *Courier* on that occasion, "He was the official stenographer of the Monroe circuit court and on more than one occasion did he convulse the court, jury and spectators

by his original jokes and actions.

It was predictable that Tramp would respond to the voice of his master, even if the voice did not seem to have a body. The *Courier* of Sept. 14, 1900, recalled that the dog was "homeless until 'Dank' (Spencer's nickname) adopted him, and from that day until his death the admiration that 'Dank' and Tramp had for each other was the subject of most favorable comment from everybody."

On the occasion of the phone experiment, Tramp "looked into the waste basket, but Dank was not there. To emphasize his desire to

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