

Paper chronicles dark side of the holidays

Though Christmas prompted Bloomingtonians to perform acts of charity, the 1903 season had its darker side, as well. Readers of the Bloomington *Evening World* received hints of the seminar side of the holiday.

On Dec. 16, 1903, the newspaper warned its readers about a new swindling scheme that had surfaced in town.

Warned the *Evening World* in a sentence of record-keeping length, "If you receive a cleverly worded circular letter from a firm advising you that you were one of the lucky ones in a guessing contest conducted by the firm some time ago and that a handsome gold watch is yours if you will only send them \$1.45 to pay for the trouble of packing and possibly a year's subscription to the *New York Blood and Thunder* or some other cheap story paper, don't part with your cash, because it is a fake."

Explained the article, sometimes the watch is sent C.O.D. with a letter, suggesting the person who believed the pitch letter to collect the watch at the C.O.D. office. Besides, continued the *Evening World*, "The watch is not worth over 50 cents and contains about as much gold as some of the



Looking back

By Rose McIlveen

western mining companies."

On the 18th of December, a "drunken bum" jumped on the front end of the baggage car of the noon train. When the engineer saw the man, he stopped the train and ordered the bum to get off immediately.

The *Evening World* reported to its readers that the bum compiled, but not without trying to get even, certainly not the sort of behavior one is supposed to exhibit any time, let alone the holiday season. "The bum obeyed (the engineer), but as he touched the ground he picked up a large stone and hurled it the engineer. The missile broke the window in the cab, but did not hit anyone."

The engineer was not alone. A brakeman came to his rescue and knocked the bum down. Still, the bum got away, followed by

a large crowd of onlookers.

After the bum took refuge in A.H. Wilson's barn, he was arrested and marched through town to the jail. It is likely that he spent Christmas Day as a guest of the Monroe County taxpayers.

The next day the *Evening World* gave its readers a front-page headline that looks very strange to us today. It said, "NEW YORK HOUSE Will Be in Operation By Jan. 1st."

Actually, the article was an account of what happened at a City Council meeting. It said, "Marshal Johns reported that the work house would soon be in operation. The County Commissioners have employed John Blair to blast out a great quantity at the city quarry, and prisoners in the county jail will be required to break up the stone."

The article explained that the stone would be used for city street paving, the cost being 40 cents a yard. And, lest any of the prisoners be tempted to try to escape while breaking up stone, the article added, "Sheriff Thrasher has already ordered chains and balls for the prisoners..."

Another newspaper article dealing with things "mean-spirited" appeared after Christmas. It carried a headline which read, "BITE THE DOLLAR To See if They are Genuine — Lots of Counterfeit Money Around."

The *Evening World* of Dec. 30, 1903, had some suggestions about determining whether the coin one has just been given in change is all right. "... Run your fingers across the surface to see if it is smooth and oily. Drop it on the counter to see if it has the proper ring. Plant your teeth into it and ascertain if it is hard or soft. Notice if it has the customary bright appearance or is dull and heavy."

The newspapers warned that "... several persons have had positive proof of the fact that the stuff is here." An Anderson man was taken in by a counterfeit \$250 gold piece, which turned out to be a cheap quality of brass.

Concluded the *Evening World*, "The fact that an unusual amount of bad coin is in circulation has led to the belief that shovers of it may have taken advantage of the holiday rush in business to get rid of the article."

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