

Bloomington residential streets weren't always safe in 1902

Walking on the residential streets of Bloomington should have been safe in 1902. One exception involved a 16-year-old girl by the name of Alice Allen.

On April 15 one of the local newspapers reported that Alice was on her way to choir practice at the College Avenue Methodist Church about 8 o'clock in the evening. The home of her parents, Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Allen, was on East Fourth Street.

On Dunn Street between Third and Fourth, Alice realized someone was following her. In fact, the newspaper account says so: "... a man whom she had noticed following her before she turned back, made a dive at her, knocking her back against the fence by striking her on



Looking back

By Rose McIlveen

the chest. . ."

At first, the young girl was unable to move, because the blow had knocked the breath out of her. She may have been frightened that the man was going to sexually molest her, but that wasn't what he was after.

Continued the account, he was, instead, "grabbing her gold chain on which was fastened a gold locket and opal ring. . . ." With that, the man ran away.

It should be noted the incident drew the attention of the newspaper because it was unusual in 1902. Not that Bloomington was crime-free in those days. The newspapers of that period regularly reported accounts of run-of-the-mill flirtations with the limits of the law — alcohol-induced fights, bootlegging, paternity, slander and breach-of-promise suits. But a "mugging" in a residential neighborhood was unthinkable.

Gasping to catch her breath, Alice called to a man by the name of Rufus Adams, who was walking on Third Street. She said, "Stop that man! He is a thief!"

Once alerted, Adams gave chase, but the robber grabbed a wagon spoke and hurled it at Adams. (A

wagon spoke factory once occupied the area of the present Third Street Park.) Having a makeshift weapon thrown at him was quite enough for Adams.

At first, young Alice was too dazed to be of much help to the police. Even if she had not been in shock, the meager light at 8 p.m. would have made it difficult for her to have gotten a very good look at her assailant.

Continued the newspaper, "There seems no clew to the highwayman. Miss Allen was too badly frightened to recognize anyone, and Mr. Adams is of the opinion that the robber wore a masque."

Adams concluded that even if he had the man standing before him he could not positively identify him

and added, "The man had evidently planned the attack and knew how to escape."

It is likely that the assailant was just passing through Bloomington and decided "to take a short cut" to getting money for food or some booze. That educated guess was somewhat confirmed by a postscript to the original news article about the robbery.

It said, "The chain stolen from Miss Alice Allen on Friday night by an unknown highwayman, was found Saturday near the 2nd street railroad crossing by Bennie Northcott, who returned the property to its owner. The locket and ring, however, had been removed from the chain, and it is supposed that the thief accidentally dropped the chain as he was running."