

# Farmer's demise drew irreverent newspaper coverage

The heirs of farmer Calvin Baxter couldn't have been very happy about the account of his death in the *Bloomington Daily Telephone* on Nov. 16, 1910. They came off looking more greedy than grieving.

Baxter, who lived in Salt Creek Township, had a saving habit and a suspicion of banks. He also had a reputation for being thriftier than the average man.

Baxter was a familiar face in Bloomington, where he sold loads of firewood from time to time. In fact, that was precisely what he was about to do when he met with an unfortunate accident.

According to the *Telephone*, Bax-



## Looking back

By Rose McIlveen

er, the father of eight children, was a half mile from his house in the woods. He and his son, William, were setting out to transport a load of logs to town.

Related the newspaper, "... Baxter had just stooped over to unfasten a trace (part of the harness), when

the mule dealt the death blow." Specifically, the animal kicked the farmer in the head over his left eye.

William quickly took his father home and three doctors were summoned from town — Frank Holland, Rodney Smith and Fred Batman. Their diagnosis was not good.

Baxter's skull had been crushed in two places. The reporter succumbed to his more sensational side by adding that, "The skull was so badly crushed that the brain oozed out."

There was little doctors could do except keep him as comfortable as possible. Because he was a man of great physical strength, it took him

a long time to die.

But a distrust of banks was not the farmer's only idiosyncrasy. Explained the *Telephone*, "Baxter wore his hair to his shoulders and also wore a very long beard, which was in keeping with his eccentric nature."

The 1900 census listed him as 54 years old. The other Baxters in the household were Alice, 32; Dottie, 14; Claud E., 12; John C., 10; Ester, 8; William 4; and Leona, 1. By 1910, there were two other children in the family — Orville and Pauline.

The newspaper reporter had also discovered that Baxter had two sisters who were living not too far

away. They were Mrs. Calvin Payne of Bloomington and Mrs. Abe May of Paynetown.

All of the family members had reason to resent the way in which the newspaper handled the story about Baxter. There is a flippancy about the account that might possibly have been the basis for a lawsuit against the *Telephone*.

There have been instances in history when the ink wasn't even dry on a person's will before his relatives were fighting over whatever they might inherit. The reporter should have begun with the as-

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