

Fake convict, train-riding dog make news whimsical

After the turn of the century there were articles in the *Bloomington Telephone* that were neither humdrum nor sensational. Instead, they fell into the category of whimsical.

There was the Jan. 25, 1907, article that described an incident on the square. A production by the name of "The Convict's Stripes" had been scheduled for the old opera house.

According to the article, The main advertisement used was for one of the members of the company to dress in a convict's suit and run through the streets, pursued by a number of would-be "captors." As it happened, on the day the production was to appear in Bloomington, there were some horse traders on the southwest corner of the square.

Among them was Buzz Souders, whose previous experience with an escaped convict had cost him a \$50 reward. He had a ring side seat when a man in a scruffy looking convict's suit suddenly spurted out of the alley next to the Kahn's clothing store. He was being realistically pursued by stage hands who were call-



LOOKING BACK

By Rose McIlveen

ing, "Stop, convict!"

The Telephone took up the story. "Hastily Buzz reached for a cobblestone about the size of a brick and with great accuracy hit the running advertisement along the side of the head. He dropped like a log and was carried in the Faris' drug store where for a while it was thought he would die, but he was able to proceed next morning with his company."

A couple of years later Mell Faris was traveling in the Southwest as an advance agent of the Floto shows. *The Telephone* reported, "...one day a man approached him and holding out his hand asked if he remembered him. Mell acknowledged that he didn't. 'Well,' said the man, 'do you remember the convict that escaped on the square at Bloomington?'"

The young man told Faris that after the Bloomington engagement he never played the convict again for advertising purposes. "No," he said, "my contract called for a trombone player, not a convict and after that I lived up to it."

Then there was the front-page story about a tramp dog that rode the rails with the kindly permission of the railroad crews. The story in the Feb. 16, 1911, edition of the *Telephone* began, "A nameless wanderer on the face of the earth, a dog, whose abode is not known, has during the past three months attracted no little attention and comment by a mania he exhibits for riding trains, says the *Linton Call*."

Described as "a common white mongrel," the dog was in time given the name "Jump" by the employees of the Indianapolis Southern Railroad. He first appeared in Linton on a train that had just left Bloomington. "Jump" hopped off the train at Linton.

Continued the *Telephone*, "Since that date he has spent about all his time on the passenger trains between Linton, Bloomington and Indianapolis. 'Jump' has become such a famil-

iar patron of the road that the train men have grown to expect him to show up at all outgoing trains. The dog sometimes remains in Linton during the day and night and then takes the early train for Indianapolis."

Where did "Jump" spend his time in the capitol city? No one seemed to know. What was certain was the uncertainty. On the certain side, "Jump" was always on hand when the train for Linton left the Indianapolis station. On the uncertain side was his occasional side trips to Effingham, Ill.

Concluded the *Telephone*, "He boards the train, walks into the smoker and finds a convenient seat, if the train is not crowded, sits on his haunches gazing intently out of the window as the train speeds over the rails. He always has a friendly bob of the head or wag of the tail for the train men, who have grown to look upon him in the light of a mascot."

The number of miles that "Jump" has traveled have never been computed, but a rough estimate places the figure near the 10,000 mark.

H-T 2/24/97