

# Strange doings in Ellettsville during summer of 1883

The town of Ellettsville has always had its own style. A case in point: some unusual goings-on during the 1800s.

In July 1883, it was obvious that some of the Ellettsville boys didn't have enough to do during the long days of summer vacation. Their ingenious form of "recreation" provided their elders with some humor during the sultry days.

"It is quite unfrequent that very funny things occur in an isolated place like Ellettsville, yet the very fact that Peck's bad boy is so wonderfully ubiquitous, makes it not absolutely impossible for a moderately funny thing to happen here," reported the *Monroe County Citizen* of July 12.

The boys had apparently spotted a neighbor who was doing something rather bizarre (particularly for a female during the Victorian era). But let the *Citizen* tell the story.

"A real good one is reported by the bad boy to us. Said he: 'We got it onto her. She has been in the habit of passing along the streets looking for cigar stubs with more energy than a small boy exhibits hunting up 4th of July money.'"

The boys got their heads together and came up with a cruel prank. Continued the boy who disclosed what they did, "Well, the other evening we placed a darn nice looking stub in her path. She came along with her eyes



## LOOKING BACK

By Rose McIlveen

peeled and spied it."

The unsuspecting woman was certainly resourceful. Furthermore, she still had some shreds of dignity left.

The boy told the *Citizen* reporter, "Her fan dropped to the ground as usual, and she stooped to pick up the fan and stub, congratulating herself on the size of the 'snipe' (apparently a slang name for a cigar butt). But, Golly, we had it onto 'er."

The narrator continued, "My chum was around the corner and pulled the thread which was tied to the Havana filler just as the old lady reached for it. She made a lunge or two and caught it, but he pulled it out of her hand."

At that, the woman gave up. "She went on down the street, and me and my chum went back into the grocery and continued our game of checkers."

That was not the last of the story. In the July 19 issue the editor of the *Citizen* included the comment that, "The bad boys on the public square at this place have erected a 'snipe

box' in which all are requested to deposit their cigar stubs for the benefit of the old lady who still persists in lifting them from the gutters. How would this old lady like to see her name in print?"

Then there was the story that appeared in the Dec. 5, 1891, issue of the *Citizen*. F.E. Worley, one of Ellettsville's leading citizens, owned a bank, which attracted the attention of some would-be robbers. Harley Marshall had been coming home about midnight; he hitched his horse at the hotel.

Before the turn of the century, it is likely that the good people of Ellettsville "rolled up the sidewalks," as the saying goes, pretty early in the evening. So it was very quiet when Marshall got home — so quiet in fact that he heard some noises that didn't sound quite right.

The *Citizen* described what happened next. "His attention was attracted toward the store by a noise, and after a minute's reconnaissance, he decided there was someone in Worley's store."

Who was nearest at hand to help? He woke up Dora Sedwick, who accompanied him to the store in question.

What they found prompted them to get some additional help. Explained the *Citizen*, "they decided to awaken Frank Sharp, and while Dora stood guard at the blacksmith corner, a man ran out of the back room of the

store, up the street and across the bridge."

Dora saw the robber. What was she to do?

The *Citizen* continued, "Dora had no shooting iron, but fired a boulder into the fleeing villain's back, and caused him to do some grunting, but he kept to his legs and has not been seen since."

The three — Marshall, Sedwick and Sharp — went into the store and discovered what the intruder had been up to. Apparently, the safe had two doors. The first one had been opened, and the robber had been at work on the second door when he was interrupted.

The damage included a half-inch hole in the first door near the tumbler in the lock, a technique that indicated that the robber was not an amateur. When Worley arrived, he explained that having opened the safe doors, the robber would still have had an additional hurdle — a burglar-proof cash vault.

Later a Mr. Ray, the cashier, recalled having seen on Saturday evening two "mechanical-looking" men in the bank/store. They may well have been sizing up the layout.

And how did the robbers escape so quickly? The *Citizen*.. "... no effort was made to overtake the robbers, as they had escaped on the (railroad) hand car, which they had procured by breaking into the car house before commencing their work on the safe."

H-T 7/15/96