

Unusual stories published in 19th century papers

Through the years in Monroe County there have been some unusual stories in the newspapers. Here are three of them.

"The Walnut Street Presbyterian Church is in a pickle over their pastoral relations." *Bloomington Telephone*, Sept. 22, 1883.

It was an awkward time in the life of the church. The minister, the Rev. John A. Bower, had been their pastor for five years, and some of the members were beginning to have their doubts about him.

Several months prior to September of 1883, several of Bower's flock had suggested that he turn in his resignation. It was duly accepted by eight members over a majority of the congregation. But in the second week of September, he was given different directions about his future.

Explained the *Telephone*, "Last week Presbytery met and for some reason refused or did not release Mr. Bower from his relations here, consequently he is to continue as pastor, to the pleasure of many and the regret of others."

What was the exact cause of dissatisfaction with him? The *Telephone* elaborated



LOOKING BACK

By Rose McIlveen

upon it. "As has been before stated through these columns, it is his financial affairs and not his spiritual welfare that has been weighed in the balance and found wanting, for it seems that during the Reverend gentleman's stay in our midst, not contented with harvesting souls, he has made numerous efforts to become owner of earthly possessions until his dealings in general affairs have seriously embarrassed him."

At that point in the article, the reporter slipped from news reporting to editorializing. Continued the newspaper, "The fact is, many of his own people are of the opinion that he had better get the mote out of his own eye before he makes a charge on his brother. Anyhow, his reckless financial speculations are anything but credible to a disciple of Bro. Paul..."

Here is another item, a much shorter one.

"Since recent publications in the *Telephone*, there has been some talk among our merchants about preparing what the railroads would term a black list..." *Bloomington Telephone*, Aug. 5, 1883.

The point of the article was to inform *Telephone* readers that the Bloomington businessmen were thinking seriously about going after "deadbeats" in an organized fashion. It seemed that there were some Bloomingtonians who, after wearing out their welcome by not paying their bills at one merchant's, were simply moving on to another unsuspecting one.

The newspaper was ready to give its support to a black list. "It would go far toward protecting our business men, and if many who practice this business of 'dead beating' in a small way, knew that their actions would be made public, there would be a good many less names to add to such a list."

On a happier note, the *Bloomington Evening World* of Oct. 27, 1903, shared with its readers the good news that "a Bloomington boy" had composed and published a popular song. The composer was Thomas C. Clark, who had studied at the University of Chicago.

What was the name of the song? Are we still whistling it today? It was "Mid the Prairies Sweet of Sunny Illinois."

The *Evening World* told its readers how Clark happened to write the song. "Having in his charge an assistant pastorate, the news department of the Christian Century of Chicago, and his regular university work, he was overcome by nervous prostration, and was compelled to abandon his work for a while. While spending his vacation at home in Bloomington, he began to write music as a pastime."

Some residents who had deep roots in Monroe County may have wondered why the beautiful hills of Southern Indiana had not inspired Clark, whose father was a local minister. And, after all, Thomas Clark was not exactly what you would call a transient. He had graduated from Indiana University in the Class of 1899.

There was a local touch to the sheet music, itself. The cover of "Mid the Prairies Sweet of Sunny Illinois" was a photograph taken on Jackson Creek by C.R. Worrall of Bloomington.

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