

# Molestation scandal in 1902 left community whispering

Bloomington had a genuine scandal in June of 1902. It had been rumored that a local physician by the name of Ulrich H. Hon had violated his Hippocratic oath behind the closed doors of the office examination room.

The rumors blossomed into print on the front page of the *Bloomington Courier* of June 6. Had the alleged sexual molestation of a 17-year-old patient been his only "slip," the doctor, who called himself a physician and surgeon, would probably have been forgiven.

But whisperings about Hon became widespread when former female patients began to compare notes about his behavior. Commented the *Courier*, "The story soon reached the public, and then there came to light two more cases,



## Looking back

By Rose McIlveen

one wherein a similar attempt was made, it is said, upon Miss Helfrich, whom the doctor had been treating for rheumatism. The other case was that of a highly respected wife of a business man of this city."

While some relatives of the victims were reluctant to "go public" with the problem, others were not a bit hesitant. "While Rev. Clark on account of his position shunned publicity of the matter, the relatives of the other alleged victim are highly indignant, and it has required

strong efforts on the part of their friends to keep them from doing violence to the physician," the story said.

By the time the *Courier* got the scent of a scandalous story, the doctor had taken refuge in a friend's house overnight and then fled town. It is not known whether he left alone.

Who was Dr. Ulrich H. Hon, and where did he come from? It is likely that he was born in Orange County, since that was his last place of residence prior to setting up practice in Bloomington. A turn-of-the-century gazette of Indiana business and professional men lists him as practicing in Paoli. Too, there are people by the name of Hon buried in a cemetery in Orange County.

By 1900, he was in Bloomington.

A city directory indicates that his home and office were in the same house at 309 N. Walnut St.

The doctor's alleged fondling of female patients was not the only activity that brought him to the attention of the authorities. It seems that when his distressed female patients switched to another doctor, Hon sent threatening letters, demanding they return to his care. That brought a postal inspector to town to have a closer look at the letters with prosecution in mind.

When young Grace Clark had resisted Dr. Hon's advances, he claimed that no matter what happened in the future, he could protect himself and her with his "position in the community." The *Courier* explained, in case there were any readers who had never heard of the physician, "Dr. Hon

came here 12 years ago from Orange County. He is 45 years old and of fine personal appearance. He was one of the leading members of the Christian Church and his wife, a most estimable lady, is an industrious church worker. Until recently the doctor's standing in the community has been good."

Hon was indeed indicted by the grand jury on two counts, and a warrant was sworn out for his arrest. Unfortunately, he had already left town for parts unknown. The Monroe Circuit Court took the charges very seriously, continuing the warrants until 1908.

It was unlikely he would ever return to Bloomington. Concluded the *Courier*, "The Christian Church expelled him last Tuesday night, and the fact will be announced at the service next Sunday."