

MADISON IN THE EARLY 1900s

(A Vintage Vignette by John P. Rankin, April 3, 2010)

Gladys McFarlen True compiled a 150-page book of material collected by various Senior Citizens to reflect the life and times of the early 1900s in Madison. The unpublished book contains newspaper clippings and photos along with a variety of typed historical tidbits. Gladys made a few photocopies of the compiled material and entitled it "Reflections of Madison, 1869-1999", structuring the material into decades of time.

In the section for 1902-1912, she related, "Around 1911 a smallpox epidemic broke out in Huntsville, causing great alarm among the people of Madison. On January 22nd, a motion was carried to quarantine against Huntsville and any other place infected with the disease. This prohibited citizens of Huntsville, as well as travelers passing through Huntsville on their way to other places, from stopping off in Madison. Furthermore, anyone traveling from Madison to Huntsville could not return home."

"In the same year, sidewalks and where to put them was the hot issue. The town decided to lay 9,549 feet of sidewalk. However, they couldn't make up their minds about the width. Finally, R. E. Wiggins and L. Garrett decided on 4 feet. On July 7, 1913, an ordinance was passed prohibiting people from riding their bicycles on the sidewalks. Anyone caught doing so was fined \$1.00."

In the next section (1913-1923), Gladys wrote, "On June 9, 1914 Madison passed an ordinance prohibiting wheel barrows and hand wagons from running on sidewalks. The fine was set at \$1.00. In 1915 an ordinance was passed prohibiting farm implements, debris wagons and buggies from running on the main streets." Later she added, "Whereas some people's yards were perfumed by the scent of magnolias and roses, others were 'perfumed' by the odor of bacon makers (pigs). On August 2, 1915 R. E. Wiggins was appointed inspector for the express purpose of notifying people who had hog pens or other unsanitary conditions on their premises to clean up at once."

"On February 7, 1916, long before the Indy 500, the speed limit for driving an automobile through town was set at 10 mph, and anyone caught speeding was fined from \$5 to \$10. What about fast horses?"

"A certain Mr. Campbell had been going around town preaching and lecturing wherever he found a group of people. This became very annoying and so on October 7, 1918, a motion was carried forth to notify the gentleman that he would not be permitted to preach, talk or lecture to public gatherings on Madison streets."

Gladys also told of a time in 1923 when the Phoenix Drugstore caught fire and the Madison Volunteer Fire Department couldn't put it out with their bucket brigade. The Huntsville Fire Department was requested to assist, but they wouldn't come. Joe Bradley,

in charge of the Merrimac Fire Department, sent a truck and saved the town from burning down. She added, "In those days everyone went to the fire. One of the local residents said that the women always kept a nice pair of red pajamas in their bureau drawer so whenever there was a fire they were 'prepared'."

In the section for 1924-1934, Gladys reported, "There were 97 voters and only one of them was a Republican. In 1931, Madison levied an unusual tax. Every male inhabitant of the town between the ages of 18 and 45 had to pay an annual street tax of \$2.50 to the town clerk. This caused a bit of a stir and so on October 17, 1932, the tax was repealed."

For 1935-1945 Gladys included a note that in 1941 "a certain Mr. Walton appeared before the Town Council to demand that a city toilet be constructed at once." (She did not mention that people obviously had to "go before they went" prior to this when planning a trip to town.) She added that in the same year "the Women's City Clubs decided the cemeteries were in 'grave' need of beautification. They brought up the matter to the Town Council and it was agreed upon that they would raise money for this purpose. Meanwhile, there was much talk concerning the licensing of pinball and nickelodeon machines. However, no action was taken. Rhett Butler was unavailable for comment."