

Morgan County, Newspaper Offers a Retrospective Look at the Year 1881

Transcribed by Ruth Dorrel and Karen M. Wood

In January 1882 the *Mooreville Midget* published the article, “Happenings in Mooreville during the Year 1881, Considerably Condensed,” providing readers with an overview of the past year, month by month, week by week.¹ It listed wedding, birth, and death announcements; names of families moving to other cities; weather observations of the changing seasons; and church, community, and business news. Some weeks were more eventful than others. In the fourth week of August, for example, Mrs. Nancy Butner and Miss Rebecca Hobson died; the weather was “extremely hot and dry . . . [that] in the meadows and pastures not a single green spear of grass c[ould] be seen”; two stables and a cow shed burnt to the ground; and the M. P. church had begun its camp meeting.² However, in the first week in February, nothing in particular happened: there were no births, deaths, or marriages to speak of, but the streets were “very slippery,” most likely due to ice or freezing rain.

The weekly dose of information also listed who was sick in the community. In the span of a year, fifteen people were acknowledged as sick, typically with typhoid fever, mumps, or a combination of typhoid fever and malaria. The article reported that seventeen people died, including four previously mentioned as sick. On a more positive note, six children were born and thirteen couples married.

The words “fire” and “burned” often appeared in the hotter, drier months of July and August. One private residence burned to the ground, while another was extinguished before it burned completely. The building of the Independent Order of Odd Fellows (I. O. O. F.) was destroyed by fire. Fortunately, with insurance, the I. O. O. F. was able to rebuild; the brick foundation for the new building was laid at the end of September that same year. When a few stables and a cow shed burned, totaling a loss of about \$1,400, a house belonging to a Mr. Rooker also caught fire, but fortunately was extinguished. However, in December, Rooker’s

house again caught fire and this time was destroyed. Like his fellow residents, Rooker, too, had insurance and would be able to rebuild his home.

One of the most shocking events in the year 1881 was the assassination of President James A. Garfield on July 2. The *New York Times* reported that Charles Guiteau, “a half-crazed, pettifogging lawyer,” shot the president after he boarded a train headed for New York.³ First reports announced the president was dead, but soon news spread that he had survived. The news of the shooting resonated throughout the country; the *Midget* reported that “intense excitement” occurred in Mooresville. When Garfield died in September, “profound sorrow” overtook the town, and a well-attended memorial service at the Friends’ meetinghouse was held for the “martyred president.” Normally, national news would not have made it into Mooresville’s past year of events—since it would likely be irrelevant to local residents—but the president’s assassination affected everyone.

The names “Calvert” and “Excelsior Gallery” also reappeared in the weekly news. Such reports would cover how busy or slow business was at the photographic studio. The last line of the article read, “go to Calvert’s for fine Pictures,” indicating that the author certainly endorsed this local business. Excelsior Gallery was owned by photographer Jarvis/James P. Calvert of Mooresville. He took pictures of the local community as well as the surrounding landscape.⁴ He also took and sold miniature portraits of residents.⁵ Calvert was born in New York and was living in Indiana by the early 1860s. Military records indicate he was a private in Company H, 128th Regiment, Indiana Infantry as well as in Company I, Sixty-third Regiment, Indiana Infantry during the Civil War. By 1870 he was living in Mooresville. He married Delia Perce in 1868, and they had three children: Archie (b. 1869), Percy (b. 1876), and Bertha (b. 1882).⁶

As the article concludes, the writer credits another newspaper, the *Mooresville Monitor*, with providing much of the past year’s information. The *Monitor* previously had published as the *Mooresville Enterprise* (1872–1875) and subsequently as the *Herald* (1875–1879). In 1880 the *Herald* was sold to a stock company and the name changed to the *Mooresville Monitor*. A. W. Macy was the editor of the *Monitor* until September 1881, when he retired and W. A. Hunt became editor.⁷ No evidence has been found to suggest who the editor of the *Midget* was, but the

description of the paper suggested that the *Midget* was “published for the benefit of all and one in particular.”

Notes

1. “Happenings in Mooresville during the Year 1881, Considerably Condensed,” *Mooresville Midget*, January 1882, p. 2–4. Any subsequent mention of the events of 1881 are from this article.
2. The M. P. church mentioned in the article is the Methodist Protestant; likewise, the M. E. church is the Methodist Episcopal. A Friends church and a Christian church in Mooresville are mentioned, as well.
3. “A Great Nation in Grief,” *New York Times*, July 3, 1881, p. 1.
4. Joanne Raetz Stuttgen and Curtis Tomak, *Morgan County*, The Postcard History Series (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Pub., 2007), 9, 25–26, 48, 51, 54.
5. Rebecca Russell, *Diary of Rebecca Russell for the Year 1861* with introduction and notes by Elbert Russell (Indianapolis: Indianapolis Historical Society, after 1926), frontispiece, now on opp. p. 12 of the diary. On the frontispiece is a picture of Rebecca with the following inscription, “J. P. Calvert, of the Excelsior Gallery, Mooresville, Indiana.” In her diary, on July 22, Russell noted in the expense account that she paid \$1 for a “miniature.”
6. For reference to both J. P. Calvert’s service records in the Civil War, see Jarvis P. Calvert, U.S. Soldiers, 1861–1865, M540, Roll 11, online at <http://www.itd.nps.gov/cwss/>; for the record of his marriage, see Works Progress Administration, *Morgan County, Indiana, Index to Marriage Record 1850 to 1920, Inclusive* (original record located county clerk’s office, book CE, p. 155); and reference to his job as a photographer and his children see, 1870 U.S. census, Mooresville Brown Township, Morgan County, Indiana, roll M593, page 10, family number 75, Jarvis P. Calvert; 1880 U.S. census, Mooresville, Morgan County, Indiana, roll 301, enumeration district 262, page 272, family number 131, J. P. Calvert; and 1900 U.S. census, Brown Township, Morgan County, Indiana, roll T623, enumeration district 44, page 4B, family number 100, Jarvis P. Calvert.

7. Charles Blanchard, *Counties of Morgan, Monroe and Brown, Indiana: Historical and Biographical* (Chicago: F. A. Battey & Co., 1884), 35.

The following is the full transcription of the article in the *Mooreville Midget*:

“Happenings in Mooreville During the Year 1881, Considerably Condensed”

January

1st. Week.—Mr. and Mrs. Brownfield removed to Mitchell. Protracted meeting at the M. E. church. Mrs. Low fell and broke her arm. Good Sleighing.

2d. Week.—Nineteen loads of wood brought to town and unloaded at the doors of the poor and needy, by charitable people in the country.

3d. Week.—Mr. O. E. Rooker and Miss Susie Thornburgh were married. Harvey Chandler was quite sick. Excellent sleighing. Cold! Well I should smile.

4th. Week.—A girl born to T. J. Feazle. Revival at the Friends’ church. Jeff Carlisle went fer to be a soldier. Not much haw this week. Business middling at Calvert’s Studio.

February

1st. Week.—Nothing in particular. No births, no deaths, no marriages. The streets and walks are very slippery.

2d. Week.—John Souders went to Noblesville. White Lick on a high. The pool room chaps skipped. Friends’ revival meeting still progressing.

3d. Week—O. E. Rooker got a valentine. So did a good many others. Wm. Ferguson, very sick. The Fair at the Christian church was quite a success. James Rusie returned from Texas.

4th. Week—Monroe Staley died. Cylinder in Comer’s saw mill bursted. Oscar Robbins and Katie Rusie married. Mrs. Abbie Worthington quite sick. May Spoor died of typhoid fever. Peter Mills very sick with typhoid fever.

March

1st. Week—Postoffice burglarized. Spring’s come. What! Mrs. Matthew Comer quite sick. Julia Bucker died very suddenly. Mrs. Ella Myrick died. Business at Calvert’s Gallery good. Who’s glad? Lee Comer. What for? ’Cause it’s a girl. How much does it weigh? 8 lbs.

2d. Week—The amendments were elected. Maple molasses, o-oom! The Protestant Methodists supplied their church with new seats. A notice advising loafers to go to work posted up on Sheets & Bro.'s building.

3d. Week—Protracted meeting at the Christian church. The old hotel building being repaired. Mud! Well, yes. Mrs. Abbie Worthington died. The members of the M. E. church decided to build a new church edifice. The *Monitor* man wants a horse and wants it badly.

4th. Week—Joe Tansey gone to fight for Uncle Sam. Alec Rusie left for Eaglesville/[Eagleville], Mo. Mrs. Matthew Comer died. John Ballard has quit the Dry Goods business and will go on his farm.

April

1st. Week—Who's a fool! Ashley Cooper invented a new kind of sack holder for threshing machines. S. M. Rooker & Co. sold their mill at Brooklyn. Dog fight in town. Fun for the hoodlums.

2d. Week—Mumps in Mooresville. Quarterly Meeting at the M. E. church. Married: Mr. Gilbert Hendren and Miss Anna Hadley. The ladies of the Friends' church organized a missionary society. First issue of the Mooresville *Midget*.

3d. Week—Easter Sunday. B[o]iled eggs. Bad digestion. Mr. W. H. Blake, of Danville, has taken up his residence in Mooresville. According to Mr. B. F. Butler we had 54 snows during the winter of '80-'81. Japanese lecture at the M. E. church: quite interesting.

4th. Week—Mrs. Elizabeth Alley died. Mrs. Belinda Rushton died. Mr. Seilhammer is quite sick. J. A. Marine has the best rail fence in the country. Business good at the Excelsior Gallery.

May

1st. Week—Public schools closed. Corporation election: "Sooner" ticket elected. Two or three fights. Delightful weather.

2d. Week—Power's "big" show showed; the man and woman were if the show was not. Rev. T. G. Beharrel, pastor of the M. E. church, left for California. Corn's a plantin'.

3d. Week—Friends' Quarterly Meeting. Friday, May 13, John A. Taylor, cashier of the Farmer's Bank, died; Mr. Taylor was beloved by all who knew him; his funeral was very largely attended. W. F. Hadley elected as cashier of the Farmer's Bank. Weather quite warm.

4th. Week—Several families went "a fishin'" to White River. A. T. Manker has a neat wire fence around his residence. Business middling at the Photographic Studio. Lawn party at Dr. B. H. Perce's[.] Decoration day was not observed in Mooresville; however, four or five little girls and

one little boy went to the woods and gathered a lot of wild flowers and strewed them on the graves of the dead soldiers. May God bless the little ones.

June

1st. Week—Beautiful weather. Amos Carter is very sick at Indianapolis. Mrs. Nicholson moved to Indianapolis. The *Monitor* man bought a horse. New Stone culvert at the intersection of Harrison and Indiana streets.

2d. Week—The F. K. Baer Cheap Store gone up the spout, Mooresville has no saloon, whereat she rejoices; much whisk[e]y is guzzled however. Fishing parties all the rage. Rev. T. G. Beharrel returned from his trip to California.

3d. Week—New Sunday School organized at the Protestant Methodist church. Rather a serious runaway in town: George Butler, four girls, two horses, and a carriage; nobody hurt seriously but the carriage. Total eclipse of the moon: did you see it? Christian church lawn festival at Mr. Wellman's. Married: Miss Julia Cooper to J. A. Wilson. Lecture by Rev. T. G. Beharrel on his trip to California.

4th. Week—Masonic picnic. The *Monitor* suggested that Mooresville should have a fire brigade. Amos Carter died at Indianapolis. M. E. church lawn festival at Mr. B. F. Jones.

July

1st. Week—News of the President Garfield's assassination; intense excitement. Odd Fellows' building destroyed by fire; the Odd Fellows lost everything in their Lodge Room and the town hall; they were insured for \$3,000 in the Phoenix Ins Co. of Hartford, Conn. Which amount was paid in five days after the fire; W. H. P. Woodward lost some \$400 of his goods, which was also paid by the Phoenix; Henry Woodward's loss was about \$100; this was about the biggest fire that ever visited Mooresville. The glorious Fourth was celebrated after a fashion; the news from our President and the fire in Mooresville, threw a damper over the proceedings. Mr. Ed Carter and Mrs. Josie Catlett were married. Yes, its hot weather.

2d. Week—Mrs. Hobson's smoke house burned. Married: Mr. C. B. Reardon and Miss For a Robbins. About an arcre/[acre] of hay belonging to David Fogleman b[u]rned. Its still hot. Business at Calvert's Gallery might be better. Joseph Madden's house caught fire, but was extinguished.

3d. Week—It rained last Sunday. The building committee of the new M. E. church advertised for bids on the brick work, and also on the wood work. It is somewhat hotter now than it was when it wasn't as hot as it is now. The I.O.O. F. will rebuild their hall.

4th. Week—The *Mooresville Monitor* is one year old; if you can show up a better yearling paper than it is, trot her out. Miss Carrie Rusie has had a small millinery/[millinery] shop built. Dr.

Samuel P. Wharton died; the Doctor suffered a long time before he died; he was a gentleman in every respect.

August

1st. Week—G. W. Bass is having his building across the alley from the Masonic hall remodeled. At present it is quite warm, and we might say dry. The Carter boys are furnishing the rock for the new bridge at Sugar Grove, in Hendricks County.

2d. Week—The old Settlers' Meeting was immensely attended, notwithstanding the dust, which was almost unbearable. The M. E. church had a stand at the ground at which they cleared about \$90. The Christian church gave a dinner at their church at which they cleared about \$60. Mr. Lin Hadley and Miss Kate Eiler were married. A house [that] belong[ed] to Mr. J. C. Comer was burned to the ground; taken altogether the Old Settlers day was quite a day for Mooresville. Business at the Photographic studio pretty good, thank you. A child of Mr. and Mrs. J. O. Thompson died. The Mooresville Hotel is in full blast.

3d. Week—Thomas R. Cook and family removed to Kokomo, Ind. Dry? Yes, its dry, very dry, and likewise hot; the thermometer went to 110 in Calvert's Gallery. Mr. John H. Thornburgh has gone west. O, for rain: just one little bit of rain; say about five inches.

4th. Week—The comet; did's't [you] see it? Died: Mrs. Nancy Butner and Miss Rebecca Hobson. The weather is extremely hot and dry; the drouth/[drought] has been so long continued that almost all vegetation is burned up: in the meadows and pastures not a single green spear of grass can be seen; it is said so long a drouth/[drought] has never been known in this country before. Fire! Fire! John Knox's stable burned to the ground: loss, about \$600; John Bucker's stable also burned, and a cow shed belonging to Captain Rooker; the loss altogether about \$800; the fire was undoubtedly the work of an incendiary. Fire manifesto issued by the corporation. The Odd Fellows have commenced rebuilding their hall. The M. P. church commenced their camp meeting in Nathan Day's grove east of town. O the rain, the blessed rain, it has come at last and we are thankful: scarcely a drop of rain has fallen in this vicinity since the 17th day of July until the 31st of August.

September

1st. Week—Married: Mr. Stewart Comer and Miss Ora Rusie: may they live long and prosper. Considerable drunkenness in town. Oh what a shame that men should debase themselves to the level of brutes. Miss Katie Jackson is dangerously sick. Married: Mr. Ham Jackson and Miss Henrietta Swearengin. Clint Mankez fell from a step ladder, and got considerably "shook up like." The camp meeting was a success.

2d. Week—The [?] killed a horse for Jacob Rusie. School has commenced. Rev. J. A. Ward will preach at the M. E. church the coming conference year. Allen Hadley died, Dr. John M. Snoddy quite sick. Pawpaws, six for a nickle. W. A. Hunt assumed the duties of editor of the *Monitor*; He will make a good one.

3d. Week—News of President Garfield's death; profound sorrow. Rev. T. G. Beharrel and family have removed to New Albany, where he will preach the coming conference year. Big day at Plainfield Yearly Meeting last Sunday. We were all there. Mrs. Margaret Hinson and Miss Viola Hinson are very sick. Quite a number in town are down with typho-malaria. J. P. Calvert went a viewing to Monrovia; he secured several excellent views.

4th. Week—The brick work of the I. O. O. F. hall is completed. Rev. T. E. Lancaster has moved to Mooresville. Rev. J. A. Ward preached his introductory sermon last Sunday. J. D. Sheets is [a] papa; it's a girl. The memorial services of James A. Garfield, our martyred president, at the Friends' church, were largely attended and great interest taken. Mr. J. M. Hill and family departed to Hagerstown. Mooresville was loath to lose so good a citizen. Mr. B. F. Jones came near being killed by being thrown from his buggy while his horse was running away. J. P. Calvert went to Monrovia again and took some more views.

October

1st. Week—T. H. Prather is sick with typhoid fever. M. E. Quarterly meeting. Little Nellie Ballard, youngest daughter of John Ballard, very seriously burned. Hon. Franklin Landers was in town.

2d. Week—Mrs. Margaret Hinson died. Rarey Bray clerk in the Corner Drug Store. Ground has been broken for the foundation of the new M. E. church. J. P. Calvert [hied?] him hence for more photographic views. He got 'em. Plasterers are at work in the new I. O. O. F. Hall.

3d. Week—W. H. Fisher quite sick. Larkin Elliott has bought an invalid's rolling chair. An infant child of John C. Comer was buried here. Lon Dickerson can hear with the aid of an ear trumpet. The engine house at the water tank above town burned. About this time Calvert commenced working the Rapid Dry Plate Process.

4th. Week—Dr. Stucky is sick. Married: Mr. G. W. Bass and Mrs. Mattie Bray. Somebody stole a pair of boots from R. Wooten's shoe shop; Bro. Wooten don't like that kind of cus-tomers. George Conduitt, baby girl, 9 ½ pounds; whoop! J. P. Calvert purchased a lightning shut-[ter?] for his camera. It is astonishing how quick a baby's picture can be taken at his gallery.

November

1st. Week—The foundation of the new M. E. church is being laid. It is the intention to build the foundation this fall and then commence in earnest next Spring. Organization of the Mooresville Mutual Improvement Association. Considerable thieving in Mooresville. The *Monitor* says: "the man who attempts to keep chickens in Mooresville is a victim of misplaced confidence;" correct. Business good at the Excelsior.

2d. Week—Mr. Wm. Smith and family removed to Brooklyn. J. Newton Hadley and family have removed to Mooresville. Lookout for changeable weather; Calvert was four days printing photographs this week; usually it takes only one day.

3d. Week—2d No. of the *Mooreville Midget*. Jack Ferguson had a valuable overcoat stolen a[t] the tile factory. Married: Mr. C. E. Thomas to Miss Katie Jackson. Stealing going on in all parts of town. What a shame that the thieves cannot be brought to justice. The creeks are on a hi[gh]. Bridge on the Monrovia road damaged.

4th. Week—First snow of the season. Married: Mr. Robert Rariden and Miss Julia Lowe. Thanksgiving services at the M. E. and Protestant churches. The ladies' of the M. E. church gave a Thanksgiving dinner and supper at which they realized about \$40. The ladies of the Christian church gave a free dinner to the members at the church. Captain S. M. Rooker's dwelling burned to the ground. Nearly everything was gotten out of the house; some clothing and bed clothing was burned. Mr. Rooker's house caught fire when Mr. Comer's house burned, and also when Mr. Knox's stable burned. It seemed that it was destined to burn. Mr. Rooker had his dwelling and household good[s] insured. Mr. W. H. P. Woodward moved into his new store room in the Odd Fellows' building. Mr. Nicholson bought some back bones and spare ribs; when he would take them home, behold they were naught. Surely Mooreville is the paradise of thieves.

December

1st Week—Henry Woodward removed to his new store room in the Odd Fellows' Block. Protracted meeting at the Protestant Methodist church. W. H. Andrews and family removed to Adair, Iowa. About this time business is a "leettle bit" dull at the photographic studio.

2d. Week—Very fine weather. Protracted meeting at the M. P. church. Several of our citizens paid their respects to Judge Robinson at Martinsville. Christmas is coming. If you do not believe it see the *Mooreville Monitor*. New firm in town: Elliott & Apple; success to them.

3d. Week—Mr. John Hadley is dangerously sick. Married: Miss Emma Mitchell and Mr. Wm. Lewis. New boy at Elam Harvey's. Rainy weather? Well, I guess so, Christmas is still a comin'. New girl at R. R. Scott's; 14 pounds.

4th. Week—Holidays; Christmas tree at the M. E. church and at the Christian church; the M. P. church gave a dinner and supper which was well patronized. Special service at the M. E. Sunday School; nearly 250 persons present. Squire's court boomed: jury failed to agree. Protracted and Quarterly meeting at the M. E. church. Tom Ayers smiles and smiles; he says it is a dish washer. New Year's Arch at the M. P. church. Farewell, 1881. Ta! Ta! Mother Shipton.

The *Mooreville Midget* is indebted to the *Mooreville Monitor* for most of the above items. We did not give dates because it was impossible to get all.

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