

# Small-town con man's scheme short-lived in 1919-20

In the 1880s, Thomas Byrnes, chief of detectives in New York City, described the "bunco" method used by criminals as the "safest, pleasantest and most amusing way for a shrewd thief to make his living."

In his book *Professional Criminals of America*, Byrnes explained that bunco artists were generally well-dressed, affable and very convincing.

Glen Galloway was like that. In 1919 he saw an opportunity to take advantage of people who wanted a shortcut to buying something alcoholic to drink. It was an interesting time, in that individual states were voting to ratify the 18th amendment to the Constitution, the one that would begin the Prohibition era.

Galloway was said to be "a local man," but no such person is listed in either the 1919 or 1920 *City Directory*. Anyway, he had what he



## Looking back

By Rose McIlveen

thought was a good thing going. He singled out men he thought would like to buy whiskey and offered to get them a quart of it for \$8 in cash.

According to the *Bloomington Weekly Star*, in November of 1920, Galloway had an accomplice temporarily staying in the Bowles Hotel downtown. By convenient coincidence, that was where the visiting Syracuse football team was staying on Nov. 22.

Explained the newspaper, "... Galloway took some of the football men in tow, hired a taxicab and drove to a restaurant on North Mor-

ton Street. Here the Syracuse men gave Galloway \$21 for which he said he would get the whiskey, but Galloway disappeared through the back door of the restaurant and was seen no more until after the Syracuse team departed."

That particular venture was safe enough, since the victims were going to leave town after the game and would probably chalk the whole thing up to experience. But success in crime tends to make people like Galloway confuse greed with caution.

He counted on the victims' silence, either through their embarrassment at being "taken" or fear that trying to buy alcoholic beverages would mean prosecution. The assumption was a mistake.

It was a group of Indiana University students who finally "blew the whistle" on Galloway. The *Star* of Jan. 16, 1920, reported that, "Four

students of the university, also alleged victims, appeared against Galloway in police court Thursday night and testified that he had got \$8 of their money."

There is no hint in the newspaper article that Galloway was "set up" by the students for his eventual arrest. Apparently, he had given no thought to the history of "temperance" fervor in the Bloomington community.

In fact, during the years of local option in Indiana, the local temperance-minded campaign leaders had enlisted students to register and vote on the referendum. The voting led to their arrest on the controversial issue that they were not residents and therefore ineligible to vote.

New York City Detective Byrnes wrote that really professional bunco men pay close attention to what experience can teach them and de-

velop a certain amount of built-in caution about picking potential victims. In his Bloomington ventures Galloway had no such experience to draw upon.

He was a 19-year-old newlywed, having been married in Monroe County in February of 1919. He may have come up with the bunco scheme in order to pay for setting up housekeeping.

Another miscalculation on Galloway's part was that Bloomington was really a small town, after all. Once the police started looking for him, it was only a matter of time.

Concluded the *Star*, "The police think that Galloway's game has been worked extensively here, and were not able to find him until last Monday when he was arrested at Branam's pool room. Galloway was bound over to the circuit court and remains in jail in default of \$250 bond."