

# Legal community rocked by scandal

On Jan. 10, 1905, under the simple headline -- "A Boy's Caper" -- the *Bloomington Telephone* informed its readers that Fred Thrasher had stolen the horse and buggy of John Hinkle from the north side of the square. The theft, and the news story were to have far-reaching consequences for the city and county.

Thrasher, who was apprehended near Smithville by Ab Wooden and returned to Bloomington by Marshall Johns, claimed he was drunk at the time. The *Telephone* noted that the alleged thief "waived examination" before Mayor Claude Malotte, was "bound over to the circuit court" and released on \$1,500 bond.

There wasn't anything extraordinary about the case until March 28, when it blossomed into a much larger headline in the *Telephone*. On that date it read, "Ready To Investigate: Controversy Of Attorney's Growing Out of Thrasher Horse Theft Taken Up By Judge Wilson -- Committee to Draft Charges and Jury To Try."

Readers of the newspaper were informed that Judge James B. Wilson had responded to some disturbing information. Specifically the judge wrote an official order, which said in part: "The court has received informational statements and newspaper reports reflecting upon the honor and integrity of certain attorneys of this bar, and imply-



## Looking back

By Rose McIlveen

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ing a willful violation of their duties as such attorneys. Such information leaves but one course for the court -- judicial investigation -- a vindication of the innocent, justice to the accused alike demand this. . . . Certain members of this bar have been informally accused, some of the them asked the court that the charges be investigated, others cannot object to such investigation."

Ludicrous as the cases look from a 1935 perspective, the spring of 1905 was undoubtedly a painful period for Bloomington and Monroe County. As the case unfolded, here is a rundown of the major participants:

- Claude Malotte -- attorney, mayor of Bloomington, elected in 1904 and ex officio judge of the city court, activities to be investigated;
- Arthur M. Hadley, attorney, former mayor (1897-1902) and law partner of the county prosecutor, activities to be investigated;
- Robert Miller, attorney, prosecutor

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