

# Shooting in 1914 claims headlines

"JOHN BARLEYCORN CLAIMS A VICTIM ON SUNDAY," said the headline on page one of the Aug. 27, 1914, *Bloomington Telephone*. And the story turned out to be one of the longest-running in local newspaper history.

Considering that local law enforcement personnel seemed to be fighting a losing battle against blind tigers (speakeasies), drunken brawls were not all that unusual in Bloomington when the 20th century was still young. But a brawl resulting in death was another matter. As for the circumstances, Tony Scarpino, who lived west of the Consolidated Stone Company, had a blind tiger operation that included a game of chance commonly known as shooting craps. Two of his regular customers were Henry Nunn, a storekeeper at Hensonburg, and Johnson Scarbaugh, a workman at Consolidated.

Commenting that all of the participants except Tony were from Warren County, Ky., the *Telephone* reported, "The tragedy took on much the character of a Kentucky moonshine feud. All grew up together, fought, drank together and finally came to Monroe County as a sort of colony."

The newspaper reporter couldn't find any witnesses who could give a plausible reason why Scarbaugh shot his friend, Nunn, except that Nunn had said Scarbaugh was responsible for his own buddy being beaten up on the previous evening. Abruptly Scarbaugh left the crap game and returned with a single-barrel shotgun.

Again witnesses differed in their accounts, but the result was the same. Nunn was shot in the chest and died before his wife could come running from their house. Nunn was heard to say to his brother, "Louie, I'm killed!"

The surviving brother later said he tried to restrain Scarbaugh and was severely bitten



## Looking back

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on the hand. In the melee, a couple of gunshots shattered a window in Tony Scarpino's house and broke a dresser mirror inside a bedroom.

Having made his point, Scarbaugh disappeared into the woods to the west of the cluster of houses. As for Louis Nunn, he was heard very clearly by the *Telephone* reporter. "You can put this down in your notebook. They can put the noose around my neck, but I'll kill Scarbaugh if I ever see him!"

The *Telephone* made the most of the story. It knocked the usual screaming World War I headlines clear over to the right half of the front page. At the end of the main story about the murder, the reporter or editor kept adding extra tidbits of news related to the killing.

For example, the *Telephone* readers were informed, "Last Saturday night Henry Nunn was arrested by Policemen Davis and Huber on a charge of intoxication. . . . There is talk in the stone quarry district that Henry Nunn killed a man in Kentucky before coming here, but the police discredit it."

In the aftermath, Scarbaugh's widow had an entirely different account of what happened. She said it was a matter of self-defense that the gun went off as she and Louis and her husband scuffled. The discharge hit Henry Nunn as he approached them.

Whatever the truth, the hunt was on for Scarbaugh — a hunt that was to include an old-fashioned posse.

Next week: The hunt for Johnson Scarbaugh