

Creative bookkeeping was not appreciated in 1905

Perhaps the auditors of the American Express weren't suspicious about the disappearance of Dennis Teaford until they learned that when he left Bloomington he had taken his clothes with him. As the head man in the American Express office in town he was responsible for the reliability of the financial transactions.

On Feb. 4, 1905, the *Bloomington Telephone* reported in a brief article that Teaford was still missing. The article also revealed that the man was originally from Paoli, and that his relatives there had not heard from him.

It took the American Express auditors a couple of weeks to discover the real reason for Teaford's disappearance. On Feb. 18 the details were printed on the first page of the newspaper.

"The alleged shortage of Dennis Teaford in his accounts as agent for the American Express company here a number of years, announced exclusively in the *Telephone* yesterday, so the officials allege, prove him to be a past master in the art of doctoring books and



LOOKING BACK

By Rose McIlveen

accounts. Two investigations were necessary to locate the trouble, and the final result is a warrant for Teaford's arrest for \$1,014 shortage."

Prior to the in-detail audit, there had been concern that Teaford had met with an accident or foul play, since his wife had not heard from him. (He had left on Saturday, Jan. 28, saying he would be back the next day.)

The Jan. 18 *Telephone* article explained why the company was not immediately suspicious. "In fact, it was the \$200 left in the safe after he took French leave that helped deceive the company."

For the benefit of its readers, the newspaper spelled out what had been going on at the American Express office prior to Teaford's

sudden departure. Initially, the only complaint of the company was that their Bloomington manager was a sloppy bookkeeper.

But the deeper significance gradually became apparent. "With the new clue from headquarters, a lead was soon found, and it is said that an entirely new method was developed by Teaford in which he would receive a package, note it on the books used for collecting, take in the money charges, have them receipted for on this same book, but in making his daily reports would not make an entry of either the package or the cash."

According to the newspaper account, Teaford had managed his theft so carefully that it had been going on for a long time. "If any other method was used, it is said Teaford, when he found the checking agent here, would go to a friend and get a package of money and have it in the safe for exhibition."

In revealing the young agent's deception, the American Express Company claimed that "he has already been located." In any case, they vowed to run him down, wherever he

was hiding.

Teaford's case number was 2510. It first appeared in the books of the county clerk's office on April 29, 1905. A warrant for Teaford's arrest was issued. Days went by with no sign of the young man.

The warrant was continued through all of 1905, 1906, 1907, 1908 and into 1909. Finally, on Nov. 20, 1909, there is a notation in the court record. "The foregoing causes (Teaford's case included) are dismissed on the motion of Prosecuting Attorney."

In other words, Teaford got away with it. The *Telephone* article of Feb. 18 described the other consequences of the theft. "A sad part of the unfortunate transaction is the wife who says she knew nothing of his intended disappearance, who after he had gone watched the trains for days hoping against hope for his return ... Finally she gave up in despair, sold the contents of their new home, and returned to her parents in Orange County."

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