

Panhandlers of 1922 carried guns, fired shots

September of 1922 was a month that would be remembered by a number of people in the Bloomington area.

On the 27th, in a front-page story, the *Evening World* informed its readers that traveling south from town on the Walnut Street Pike could be hazardous to their wallets.

Unwary drivers in the vicinity of the Mitchell Schoolhouse and the Red Hog stone quarry were confronted with a "rail" lying across the road. When a driver stopped to remove the rail, he discovered he was not alone.

The newspaper article warned what would happen next. "Then three men would appear suddenly and stick revolvers in his face, demanding his spare change."

At least two of the potential victims found ways to thwart the robbers. According to the *Evening World*, "One man riding a motorcycle, after removing the rail, when confronted by the gunmen, jumped on his machine and speeded away while the three holdup men fired a number of shots after him."



LOOKING BACK

By Rose McIlveen

The other driver, who lived near the Mitchell Schoolhouse, spotted the rail across the road and floored his accelerator, splintering the rail. Fortunately, he had heard rumors about the "old trick" and risked his brand new Ford in the process. He would not give his name to the newspaper.

Sheriff Peterson was dealing with rumors rather than actual reports from victims. The *Evening World* reflected his frustration. "He said that had he been informed after the first holdup he might have been able to have ridden into the decoy and have arrested the highwaymen within an hour."

Once their method of operation had been reported in the newspaper, it is likely that the

three robbers decided to move on to another locale where the residents would not suspect that an innocent-looking rail in the road was a preface to robbery.

Robbers tend to have their specialties. Only two days before the highway robberies, the *Evening World* revealed that merchants in town had been duped by a bad check artist.

That method has since been dubbed "paper-hanging."

The merchants — all grocers — and their losses were: Whitaker-Carpenter, \$12.75; Roy Burns, \$17; and Collins & Woodburn, \$18.75. All agreed upon the thief's description: "A tall, slim stoop-shouldered man."

The man knew better than to use the same name on the checks. An important clue was supplied by Walter Collins, who was cashier in his grocery. The newspaper supplied the details for readers:

"He (Collins) noted the man had talked to a boy about fourteen years of age just before offering the check to a clerk."

The *Evening World* commended the

police for following up on that tip. Though they did not have the boy's name, they found him and no doubt subjected him to a not-too-gentle questioning.

"When found, however, he said the man's name was Charles Vint." The police also learned that Vint had departed Bloomington.

A description was sent out to other counties and it was not long before that effort bore fruit. On the 29th the *Evening World* reported, "Today the police at Lafayette telephoned that Charles Vint, answering the description sent out, was being held there."

The newspaper gave its readers a hint of what was to come for the man accused of passing bad checks. "At this time an example is made of bad check passers and forgers," declared Walter Woodburn this morning, "and this being the first time I have been caught on a bad check along with two other grocery men last Saturday, we mean that the forger will be prosecuted to the limit."