

Catching two jail-breakers cost Monroe sheriff \$125

It was not a good day at the Monroe County jail. The Oct. 14, 1919, edition of the *Bloomington Daily Telephone* reported that two prisoners had escaped.

The missing men were Alva Banks, who was supposed to have killed his father; and a man by the name of "Frank Baxter or Hall" of Bedford. Their departure from custody had not been a spur-of-the-moment thing.

According to the *Telephone*, "The escape of Banks and Baxter was thoughtfully planned and cleverly executed. About 10 days ago the two started an 'art' gallery in the jail by pasting up the picture pages of the Sunday supplements against the harsh looking walls, and then they invited the attention of the sheriff to their display."

Sheriff William H. Baxter thought the two prisoners were up to something and checked the wall behind the pictures to see if all was well. He gave the picture hanging his attention for several days and then forgot about it.

Banks and Baxter had armed themselves with what the newspaper called a handle from a disinfectant pump and an iron bar support-



LOOKING BACK

By Rose McIlveen

ing a step in the jail.

By night the two men picked away at the mortar between the bricks in the 18-inch wall and removed enough bricks to climb outside to freedom. The *Telephone* called it "the cleverest stunt of its kind ever pulled off in Bloomington."

Bartlett was far less concerned about how clever the escape was than recapturing the men. Banks and Baxter had a head start, since they departed in the wee hours of the morning and were not missed until morning.

Police officer Newton Jeffries saw two men about 3 o'clock in the morning, but didn't look into the matter. There was nothing suspicious about them.

Bartlett naturally questioned the other occupants of the jail. One of them was Mar-

garet Greenwell, described by the newspaper as an "18-year-old Kentucky beauty." The other prisoner's name was Phillips. Both claimed they knew nothing of the escape, although Banks and Baxter had apparently given Greenwell \$15 to pay an attorney to get her "a parole."

Bartlett's concern was that the men had escaped in time to hop on a freight train. The sheriff put in calls to his counterparts in surrounding counties to be on the lookout for the two men.

The next day (Oct. 15) the *Telephone* reported that Banks and Baxter had not yet been found. There was real concern that the two had contacted a friend in the Sanford area and received an automobile ride to the state line. There were no clues to their whereabouts. By the weekend the escapees' flight was over. On Oct. 20 the *Telephone* reported that Sheriff Bartlett's calls to other counties had paid off.

A short article revealed to the newspaper's readers that the sheriff of Jackson County, H.L. McCord, had arrested them on a road

near Brownstown. Sheriff Bartlett brought Banks and Baxter back to the Monroe County jail.

The outlook for Banks was not good. The newspaper indicated that he was awaiting sentence. Baxter had been charged with forgery but not yet tried. Banks' escape would not have endeared him to the sentencing judge.

The *Telephone* of Oct. 20 reported that Sheriff Bartlett was one of the losers. "The little trip of Banks and Baxter cost the sheriff \$125 as he spend \$25 for messages and \$100 for a reward."

As for the young lady from Kentucky, whom Bartlett suspected of knowing more about the jail break than she was telling, she got a free ride home. "Ex-Police Sergeant 'Pop' Parks has raised by subscription \$10.50 for the girl among the boys around the Pierson pool room and a ticket will be given her to her home at Union City, Ky., and she will be started home with the remainder of the money."

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