

The 'perfect crime' proved not so perfect after all

The "perfect crime" turned out to be not so perfect after all in 1920, when a local merchant called in the bloodhounds. It was mid-April, and the angry storeowner was a well-known grocer by the name of Roy Burns.

Actually, his store had been robbed three times in as many months. Nor was he the only merchant who had "missing inventory." Furthermore, the police didn't seem to be getting anywhere in solving the robberies.

The bloodhounds came from Bedford, and the going rate for their services was \$60. That turned out to be a bargain, since the estimated total value of missing goods was \$600.

According to the *Bloomington Evening World*, the bloodhounds eared up their keep immediately after



Looking back

By Rose McIlveen

their arrival. Explained the newspaper, "They took up the scent at the back of the (Burns) store (Sixth and Morton streets) and followed it to Seventh and Rogers streets. Then they turned and went to the back door of a home."

There was no mention of a search warrant in the *Evening World* article. Did the police pause while one of the officers ran to the courthouse to get one? In any case, they entered

the house.

A female occupant, continued the newspaper, was "very indignant because they (the police) asked to search the house." Finding one locked door, the officers asked the woman what was in that particular room, and she replied that she did not know.

"Breaking open the door, the officers beheld enough goods to stock up a small store. They sent for a large truck and hauled it down to the city hall where it will be turned over to the rightful owners," related the *Evening World*.

Apparently, the thief had chosen a variety of things from the various businesses. The inventory included a rug valued at \$18.75; blankets, \$15; furs, shoes, sweaters, shirts, toilet articles and other things to the va-

lue of about \$200 stolen from the Wicks Company; groceries of all kinds, including buckets of lard, whole boxes of chewing tobacco and many small articles with the name of Roy Burns on the boxes; chinaware, work shirts and other articles believed to have been stolen from the J.B. Smallwood wholesale grocery; three shotguns, a revolver, several boxes of shells and other articles taken from the Foster & Hurdson store.

In reconstructing the thief's method of operation, the police concluded that he loitered in the store and remained hidden there until after closing, when everyone had gone home. Continued the newspaper, "... he would then unlock the doors from the inside and escape with his booty. This explanation

seems plausible in view of the fact that none of the stores except the Burns grocery had ever been found unlocked at opening time."

After the thief's arrest, the police made a public statement that they had suspected him all along. Their line of reasoning was, "He was not a working man."

Whatever else he was, being a good husband and father was not among his strong points. He had already served time in the state penitentiary at Jeffersonville for larceny. In 1914, he had been in trouble for knifing another man. When the Monroe Circuit court was finished with him in 1920, he left behind in Bloomington a wife and five children, who were presumably obliged to fend for themselves.