

# Banks' murder had police fishing for evidence

Residents in the Sanders neighborhood of Monroe County thought Andrew Banks had left for California — just as his son said he had — until Banks' body floated to the surface of a nearby pond. The month was June, and the year 1919.

The trouble was, Banks' body didn't look right. When it was fished out of the pond, Coroner H.H. Allen noticed right away that the back of the skull was crushed, and there was a hole in the front of the neck under the man's chin.

More telling still were the wire and blanket wrapped around Banks' body. His cane had been neatly tucked inside the wire.

The facts of Banks' life were these: He was an unemployed widower with a 20-year-old son, Alva, who worked "as a side man on a machine at the Mathers Stone Company." Andrew did the cooking and housework, and Alva supported them with his \$2.70 a day wage.

The prosecutor and sheriff may have been



## LOOKING BACK

By Rose McIlveen

on a "fishing expedition" when they had Alva picked up for questioning. The young man held up well, showing no signs of nervousness and giving what appeared to be logical answers.

The *Bloomington Evening World* described what Alva told his questioners. "He said his father had been talking about leaving here and going to Brazil to see if he could persuade his sister to accompany him on a trip to California. Banks had \$170 which he carried loose in his right hip pocket and which he took with him when he left."

Alva furnished other details. He said his father had his suitcase packed, and was ready to leave at 9:10 o'clock on Monday, May 26,

when two strangers driving an Overland car stopped in front of the house. According to Alva, they were asking the way to Harrodsburg. Alva also said his father decided to hitch a ride with the two men, and that's the last he saw of him.

Apparently the sheriff and prosecutor weren't entirely convinced they had the truth yet. Explained the newspaper, "When the prosecutor asked him (Alva) how he thought his father had met death, the young man said he believed the stranger had killed him after getting him drunk, in order to get his money."

A couple of things didn't make sense to the authorities. Alva said he didn't know the pond where his father was found existed, although it was less than three city blocks from his house. There was also the question of how the strangers could possibly have known about the pond as a disposal site for Andrew Banks' body.

An *Evening World* reporter did some nosing around and discovered that Alva was con-

sidered a nice young man and (for some) an object of pity. His father was a heavy drinker. Continued the newspaper, "Although Alva Banks was still in jail at this hour, it is quite likely that he will be released some time this evening (June 4)." The neighbors whispered to the reporter that Alva was mistreated by his father, who took all the wages, giving Alva nothing for himself.

After his father's "departure" Alva said he and a Charlie Nelson rented a car and drove to Indianapolis with Edith Butcher and Jessie Nelson. They spent several days, "spending money lavishly."

The suspicions of the sheriff and prosecutor led them to the Banks home where they found some interesting things. There were Banks' hat, some bloodstained newspapers stuffed under the porch, and traces of blood on the floor. That did not jibe with Andrew being murdered by strangers anxious to have his ready cash.

**Continued next week.**

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