

Metalsmith's interest in keys was more than a hobby

If you'd asked Archie McGinnis about his new employee, he would have said that there was none better. The year was 1870, and Johnny Lusk, who said he was from Salem, seemed to be glad he was working for McGinnis, a Bloomington blacksmith.

Lusk was a genius with a piece of metal, but he was particularly good at making keys. In fact, he ended up with quite a collection of them.

McGinnis was once asked about Lusk's obsession with keys and replied, "I reckon he's a genius. All of 'em are queer about something."

But one of Lusk's co-workers, a man by the name of Clark, decided to have a little chat with John P. Smith, the owner of a jewelry store. Clark's information was that Lusk had bragged that he could go in and



Looking back

By Rose McIlveen

out of Smith's store any time he wanted to. Furthermore, Lusk had offered to let Clark in on a merchandise venture.

As a precaution, Smith had the lock on his store changed and bought a large safe. He took James Ryan, the Bloomington constable into his confidence about Clark's allegations.

The constable began to watch Lusk's comings and goings and discovered a rather curious thing.

Each time Lusk appeared in public he seemed to be wearing a different suit.

Ryan then paid a visit to John W. Davis, a Bloomington tailor and heard a long recital about missing clothing from his shop. The result of the conversation was a warrant sworn out for the arrest of Lusk.

When the officers stopped by the young man's rooming house, they interrupted him in the act of hastily moving clothes from one room to another.

Needless to say, Lusk did not take kindly to the idea of being hauled off to jail and fled down the stairs of the rooming house. His escape route led to a house at Fifth and Washington streets, where he hid for awhile before his capture.

Lusk was locked up in Monroe

County's new "escape proof" jail. During the 34 days of his residence there he was a model prisoner. On the 10th of January, 1871, the sheriff, Richard Fulk, left the front door of the jail open while he went across the street to get a pail of water.

When he returned, Lusk was gone. The prisoner had spent his days of incarceration turning a knife into a saw. It was used to saw through each end of a wooden bar at the bottom of the door to the bullpen.

Lusk left a "cocky" note behind for the sheriff. A man resembling him was supposed to have been seen entering Dunn's Woods, but a posse failed to find him there. Rumors about his whereabouts abounded. It was said that Lusk had managed to escape from a lawman

in Kansas by jumping through the window of a train.

Lusk had been missing for about six weeks, when a man by the name of Elias Smith approached the sheriff about turning the fugitive in for a price. The amount agreed upon was \$100.

It turned out that Lusk was in Smith's house, apparently unaware of his host's deal with the sheriff. The officer's plans called for five deputies, and they waited for the cover of darkness.

That night while the house was surrounded, Lusk happened to look out the door. He was holding a gun in his hand.

He spotted a deputy outside and abruptly slammed the door.

Next week: The capture.