

1928 murder investigation was thorough but not conclusive

After Ellis Medlock was found dead in the Kirksville area, Sheriff W.S. Curry conducted an investigation that could be called thorough, rather than routine. After piecing together in chronological order the activities of the victim, Curry turned his attention to a closer examination of the "cast of characters" in that community.

At that point, some strange things began to happen. On Jan. 27, 1928, the Bloomington *Evening World* informed its readers that the sheriff had interrogated members of Medlock's family.

A hint of one of the directions the investigation was taking can be found in the Jan. 23 edition of the newspaper, which noted, "Although Medlock had been missing since a week from last Friday, his disappearance was not brought to the attention of the sheriff's until Friday



Looking back

By Rose McIlveen

night. Relatives said they believed he would come back and did not begin to worry until the latter part of the week. His car with the groceries was found on the road the same day he left home."

Any sheriff worth his salt would have deduced that Medlock led a rather unconventional life, particularly in relation to his immediate family. Since his disappearance was not immediately reported, it could have been deduced that in the past the victim had been away from home without explanation for several

days at a time. The absences may have been related to Medlock's alleged occupation — that of bootlegging.

If Sheriff Curry was hampered by the lapse of time between Medlock's disappearance and the finding of the body, he had some other very puzzling things to contend with in the investigation. Reported the *Evening World* on Jan. 24, "Sheriff W.S. Curry has received a letter which appeared to have been written by three different women, judging by the handwriting, in which names were mentioned of possible suspects, but little or nothing is expected from the note, which was unsigned."

The sheriff must have asked himself what had motivated the sending of that letter. Were the women writers worried that the investigation was pointing in the direction of a

male or males in their family and hoped to point Curry in a different direction?

If the anonymous letter wasn't baffling enough, Medlock's Kirksville neighbors began to propose an entirely different scenario for the evening that he died. It may be recalled that Curtis East may have been the last person to see Medlock still alive. East said the victim asked for a handful of kitchen matches.

It would be interesting to have seen the expression on Curry's face when he heard the new theory for the first time. According to the *Evening World*, this is how it went: "Several folks of the Victor and Kirksville communities are contending that the death of Medlock was an accident and are discounting the murder theory, despite the fact that the deputy county coro-

ner's official report was that death was caused from a blunt instrument, which crushed the victim's skull."

Medlock had been known to climb a tree when he thought the revenuers were looking for him. Continued the newspaper, "They (some Kirksville neighbors) say as he climbed the tree, the matches ignited his clothing and that as he fell, the back of his head struck on the stump of a limb, which crushed his skull."

Two years later, in February of 1930, the grand jury gave some consideration to the facts of Ellis Medlock's death. Was it an accident, as some neighbors said, or committed by a murderer whose identity was concealed by a conspiracy of silence?

Next week: The death of Homer Oliphant.