

Small town Bloomington's 'Gun-Man' Gatlin caught

While we are struggling through heavy traffic during a rush hour, we tend to forget that Bloomington was once a small town with small town ways. A case in point is a front page story in the Oct. 1, 1912, edition of the Bloomington *Telephone*.

"Gun-Man" Gatlin, a Monroe County Jail escapee, had been recaptured in Tennessee. Three local law officers he had dealt with at one time or another were "Sheriff Browning," "Policeman Hinkle" and "Deputy Sheriff Robinson." The newspaper had dispensed with their first names, because Bloomington and Monroe County had such small populations that everybody knew everybody, anyway.



Looking back

By Rose McIlveen

Research in the Indiana Room of the Monroe County Public Library indicates that the Sheriff Browning's first name was probably James and the Policeman Hinkle's, Hugh. Deputy Sheriff Robinson's first name couldn't be found in the old city directories.

The omissions were really the only fault to be found in a good news story that probably brought

some smiles to the faces of readers. It began, "'Gun-Man' Gatlin is in jail here again and will have ample time to finish the bath he was about to start when he took his sudden departure about two weeks ago."

His escape route from the Monroe County Jail was down an alley and into the Hughes lumber yard. From that vantage point, Gatlin apparently observed the law officers who were looking for him.

According to the *Telephone*, the escapee eventually made his way to the University Courts section of Bloomington (east of Indiana Avenue and north of Seventh Street). There he hid out during part of the night.

The newspaper described Gatlin's

next move. "He caught a Monon freight going south and rode into New Albany. He surmised that the officers at Bedford would be on the lookout for him so when he reached the town he stood up on the top of a box car and rode gaily through."

Gatlin made his way to Tennessee by a roundabout route and decided to call on his aunt in Nashville. Since she and the rest of the family were not at home, Gatlin helped himself to about \$150 worth of her jewelry. He traded it for drinks and money in various local bars.

Sheriff Browning didn't take kindly to prisoners escaping from his jail and had a notion that Gatlin would head south. What the escapee had no way of knowing was that

communications about his escape had preceded him in the Nashville, Tenn., area.

Before Gatlin's aunt could bail him out of jail there, Sheriff Browning arrived to retrieve his prisoner.

The *Telephone* described their meeting in the jail at Nashville. Upon seeing Sheriff Browning, Gatlin said, "Oh, hell, it's all up with me." Replied Browning, "What did you run away for and give me so much trouble? You've cost me about \$100." "You would have run, too, if you had 10 years staring you in the face," Gatlin replied.

Despite his complaint, Browning got more than his money's worth.

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