

Police borrow a page from 'whitecap' book

No history of the growing pains of Monroe County at the turn of the century would be complete without an account of whitecapping fever that threatened the very peace-keeping and judicial systems designed to separate the innocent from the guilty.

Of all the cases on record the most bizarre one was an occasion when the courts and law officers had to go to extreme measures nearly equal to those of the whitecappers. It should be noted that Monroe County had developed a bad reputation for its self-appointed arbiters of their neighbors' lifestyles and morals. So bad, in fact, was the reputation, that in an editorial the *Indianapolis News* suggested a convention of experienced floggers could be assembled for the purpose of setting up a whitecapping department at Indiana University.

The particular case that called for extraordinary measures on the part of local authorities had its beginning on the night of Aug. 17, 1897, in the Fairfax neighborhood. A group of men dropped by the home of Milton Southern to let him know how they felt about his relationship with Josie Treadway, who lived in his house.

Among the alleged victims of the switching were Southern, his aged mother, Treadway and possibly one or two others from the household. (The April 15, 1898, edition of the *Bloomington Telephone* had a struggle with telling the readers who was who in the



Looking back

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kangaroo court confusion that night. "Those who were either the victims of the alleged white caps or are now the prosecuting witnesses are Ben Sutherland, Milton Southern, Julia Ann Southern, Posey Southern, Mrs. Milton Southern, Josie Treadway, Ida Treadway and Myrtle Young.")

By the April trial date, the authorities had nine men in custody — William Sexton, Eli Eads, George Hartsock, Oscar Mitchell, John Mitchell, Everett Chambers, Morris Lucas, Charles Bodkins and George Palmer. But earlier whitecapping cases had hinged upon positive identification of the perpetrators by reliable witnesses.

There was genuine concern on the part of law enforcement and judicial officers that the case was not solidly prosecutable without witnesses. For that reason, Bloomingtonian subscribers to the *Telephone* read on April Fools Day of 1898, "Five white cap witnesses were before Judge Martin this morning and are now in jail for safe keeping. The judge will not be outdone by the whitecappers. They came not of
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