

Manhunt leads to arrest of 'insane' escapee

"After one of the most exciting manhunts ever in the county, in which about 50 men participated for 9 hours, Stephen Brown, a giant hermit, who escaped from the insane hospital and destroyed the house and barn of his father, Joseph Brown, was arrested at 9 o'clock last night and brought to jail."

— **Bloomington Daily Telephone,**
Dec. 27, 1991.

Things had gone tragically wrong in the life of Stephen Brown. Prior to 1911, he had become so paranoid that he believed his relatives were trying to take his property away from him, and it had been necessary to put him in the "insane hospital" at Madison.

Little was known about mental illness in 1911. The theories of Sigmund Freud, the Viennese psychologist, were being hotly challenged by doctors who had a variety of other theories or none at all.

The Dictionary of Cultural Literacy defines paranoia as a form of psychosis characterized by suspicion and distrust of others; a tendency to look for hidden meaning



Looking back

By Rose McIlveen

behind other people's actions; argumentativeness; complaining; low tolerance for criticism; and a constant display of one's own talents, accomplishments, independence and rationality."

Toward the end of 1911, Stephen Brown he escaped from Madison and headed to Bloomington. Incredibly, he walked all the way, the journey on foot having taken him about a week.

According to the *Telephone*, Brown arrived at the home of his father north of Bloomington and asked for some turpentine to bathe his legs. They had taken considerable punishment on the long trek and

were sore and stiff.

Continued the newspaper, "When Mr. Brown returned he found his home and barn on fire, having been fired during his absence by Stephen. Silas Johnson and others arrived on the scene, but the four-room house and all its contents were destroyed, also a large barn with a large quantity of hay and feed."

As difficult as the fire was for the family, there was a more pressing problem: that of finding Stephen and returning him to custody. The *Telephone* related that he had sworn to kill his brother, who had been appointed his guardian.

Continued the newspaper, "At noon yesterday Sheriff Browning received a call telling him to come well prepared for trouble. Browning, Ira Robinson and Policeman Stevens went to the scene in an automobile, but Brown was hiding."

It was decided that hunting Brown on foot would be very time-consuming. For that reason, blood hounds were brought to the scene and pointed in what turned out to

be the right direction.

The *Telephone* revealed to its readers that "... Brown was tracked to the edge of a thick woods. At that point the crowd of men divided and began scouring the country, and about 8 o'clock Deputy Robinson and his men captured Brown at the home of his sister. . . ."

Ironically, Brown was captured with relatively little fuss, although he was certainly aware that he would be pursued. The *Telephone* states that he was armed with two razors and a butcher knife.

While Brown was in jail, the sheriff was giving some thought to where the prisoner should eventually go. Concluded the newspaper, "Sheriff Browning stated that he . . . would make an effort to have him sent to the Michigan City prison where he can be safely kept in the criminal insane ward."

It is hoped that the quarters there were big enough for Brown. At 6 feet, 3 inches he was considered a giant. The average American male at the time was around 5 feet, 10 inches.

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