

Professor persuaded bank robber to surrender in '33

Indiana University Professor Ebar A. Teter had been the one with the foresight and gumption to track down Bloomington's first bank robber in July of 1933. The trail led to a near-Bedford farmhouse, where Teter was trying frantically to call the local police about finding the robber.

But suddenly, because he could not shake Teter off his trail, the holdup man, whose name was Rolla Spice, doubled back and drove up to the farmhouse. He called for Teter to come out.

The gist of their conversation appeared in one of the Bloomington newspapers. Spice's opening remark was, "Well, I guess you know who I am." The professor replied, "No, I don't believe I do, but I believe I've seen you before."

Miraculously, Teter talked Spice



Looking back

By Rose McIlveen

into surrendering. Another fortunate factor was that during that conversation, the robber's gun was unloaded and lying in the car.

Teter's approach in persuading Spice to give himself up was offering the opportunity to have a talk with the Bloomington National Bank president, William Adams. Related the newspaper, "They stopped at a general store and Teter made an appointment to see the bank president at his home on South College Avenue. Spice left his car at the store and traveled the

rest of the way in Teter's car."

During the conversation of the three men, (Teter, Spice and Adams) the bank thief revealed that he had needed \$115 to pay off a loan he had taken out at a bank in Lyons. Talking about the money most certainly reminded the bank president that nothing had been said about its whereabouts.

Incredibly, Spice revealed that it was still in his car, which was parked two miles south of the city. Needless to say, the three men hopped in a car and retrieved the \$572 handed to Spice earlier in the day.

According to the newspaper, "Spice showed no remorse at being locked in the Monroe County jail. He said he had to have the money, and although he had been thinking about robbing a bank since Mon-

day, he made up his mind this morning to come here and hold up the Bloomington National Bank."

To bolster his courage, Spice said he stopped at a filling station and drank a half pint of whiskey. He aborted his first attempt at robbery at 11 a.m. His reasoning made a lot of sense, "because the only person in the bank was a woman (Miss Cawley). He said he didn't want to hold up a woman."

Spice told the sheriff that his gun was loaded when he robbed the bank and that he would rather have been shot by police than caught. He also explained that he was able to elude the officers by changing his appearance.

Talking about his escape, Spice said that after he had backtracked on his trail near the Covenanters Cemetery, three miles southeast of

there he passed the police car. "I thought the game was up then," he said.

The charge against Spice was auto banditry. The Greene County sheriff revealed that the young man had been sought there for allegedly having written some bad checks.

It is not known whether Spice's lawyer counseled him to plead guilty or if he made the decision on his own. Nevertheless, he did plead guilty and received a sentence of 10 to 25 years.

And what of the IU professor who tracked him down? Bloomington historian C. Earl East wrote that Teter did not suddenly change his profession to law enforcement. Instead, the professor went back to school to get an M.D. He practiced medicine in Portland, Ore., until his death in 1954.