

Hoosiers leave trail of crime before Dillinger's spree

"To Sheriff W.S. Curry goes the credit for obtaining a written confession from Fred Smith, who has been mixed up in police court matters in this city for some time."

— *Bloomington Evening World*, Jan. 25, 1928.

Five years before John Dillinger set out on his crime spree, three other Hoosiers left a trail of robberies that ended in the Monroe County Jail. Their names were Fred Smith, Red Tapp and Herbert Duncan.

The confession given by Smith read like a Dillinger crime spree itinerary. It was quoted in the Jan. 25, 1928, *Evening World*. It began, "Red Tapp, Herbert Duncan and I took Marion Butcher's Hudson car parked at Kirkwood and Washington streets at 7 p.m., January 9 and drove to Columbus and through to Indianapolis on State Road 31."

On their arrival the three parked the car at Washington and Alabama and took a street car to the Hazelton Hotel. Smith was out early the next morning scouting



LOOKING BACK

By Rose McIlveen

for likely places to rob.

He continued, "Picked out two good places, and quick as they opened up, made them." Their take was between \$40 and \$80.

Heading north with over \$100, they eluded police in Lafayette and headed for Chicago. Their objective was to rob a filling station and buy alcohol.

As Smith put it, "We got \$170 in the east part of Chicago (filling station). We also got 10 five-gallon cans of alcohol which cost us \$120, and sold it in Bloomington for \$400.

The three must have thought that their stolen car was too conspicuous and decided to take another one. Meanwhile, they parked the first car at Washington and Eighth. It is odd that the police didn't

notice it.

Smith went on with the story. "Then on the night of Jan. 13 and 14 I saw F.B. Harris, of the Kresge store, park his Hudson. I knew he didn't lock it, so I told Red there was a loose car."

This time their destination was Louisville, but back in Indiana they robbed a filling station in Madison and got \$55. Filling station attendants in Piqua and South Piqua, Ohio, surrendered \$250. The three were involved in a chase with police in Lima and abandoned the car there. Explained Smith, "We left the car in the northwest part of town, and took a taxi to Elida."

The next leg of their itinerary was by interurban to Fort Wayne. There Smith sent a \$195 money order back to Bloomington. Once again they needed a car and stole an Essex sedan to take them to Chicago.

There were other places to rob. They netted \$80 in Plymouth and \$60 in Joliet and went back to Chicago for a day.

The end of their crime spree came on

Jan. 21 when Smith, Tapp and Duncan returned to Bloomington. "We were arrested the same afternoon," said Smith.

Their case was held in Indianapolis, presumably because of their tri-state crime wave. They were charged with auto banditry and robbery. According to the *Evening World* of Jan. 26, the three accused men waived their preliminary hearing before a municipal judge.

Bloomington Mayor J.L. Hetherington, Police Chief F.H. Hancock and Officer Byron Curry were called to Indianapolis to confer with police authorities there. The *Evening World* predicted that even with the confession of Smith, the three men would get the burglary penalty of 10 to 20 years.

In a postscript, the newspaper added that the Bloomington police had received a message from the Indiana Penal Farm to the effect that "Fred Smith had served for separate sentences there for violating liquor laws. He was sentenced twice from this city (Bloomington), one from Greencastle and once from Brazil."

H-T 2/13/95