Legal loophole saves four Rebels

Looking back

By Rose McIlveen

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In the spring of 1867 there appeared in Bloomington the first edition of a new newspaper called the *Progress*. The readers may have been somewhat puzzled by its announcement that it was supporting the Radical Union Party, but in an editorial the editor, William A. Gabe, explained that the publication was really championing the cause of "progressive Republicanism."

The *Progress* contains two full pages of ads for local merchants and patent medicines. The other two pages are divided between national news items and local and state ones.

One of the more interesting local articles in the newspaper appeared in the Dec. 12, 1867, issue. The writer recalled that in the August 1865 term of the Court of Common Pleas of Monroe County four men had been convicted of grand larceny and sentenced to the state prison, then at Jeffersonville. The men, all of whom claimed to be Confederate deserters, were James Morris, Isaac Reed, James Sanders and George W. Denson, hometowns unknown.

They had been charged with entering the home of the Ketcham family, "living five miles south of Bloomington." The Ketchams would have been relatives of Col. John Ketcham, veteran of Indian fighting when Indiana was still a territory. The colonel built the county's second courthouse and served as an Indiana University trustee.

Anyway, once inside the Ketcham home, the accused threatened to shoot a male Ketcham or any member of the family "who should dare to offer resistance." Robbery was their motive, and the four made off with a considerable amount of money. Upon departing, they tried to set fire to the house.

According to the *Progress*, Monroe County Prosecutor A.J. Ryors didn't do quite enough homework when he was preparing his case against the "rebels." There is the barest of implications in the newspaper's article that the legal "loophole" left by Ryors was intentional.

Commented the *Progress*, " . . . by some informality of the proceedings, a loophole was left by