

1909 'Blind tiger' case reads like a soap opera

From the vantage point of 77 years after the fact, the Wertz blind tiger (speak-easy) case of 1909 reads like a soap opera with an interesting cast of characters.

No sooner had the wife of William Wertz been arrested for reopening her husband's place of business and released pending her trial, she was re-arrested on May 21. It seemed that the police found a barrel of empties at her West Seventh Street home. It is interesting to note the *Telephone's* flamboyant journalistic style in the early 1900s — a style that would make that newspaper's reporters cringe today. For example, there was the *Telephone's* strange reference to the jail as "the Jones Club." Another nickname for that place — "the Hotel de Ratliff" — is more



Looking back

By Rose
McIveen

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easily explained, since the sheriff at the time was Joseph W. Ratliff.

Hessie Wertz's son-in-law, Ed Franklin, had guaranteed her appearance in court and helped with her bond on the first arrest, but the new bond of \$300 was beyond his means. The most curious aspect of the *Telephone's* reporting of Mrs. Wertz's second arrest is contained in the lead see *Blind tiger*, Back page