

Sheriff retraces final steps of murdered bootlegger in 1928

A quarrel with hijackers over the sale of a gallon of white mule is believed to have caused the murder of Ellis A. Medlock, 23, who lived between Kirksville and the home of John H. Koontz in the southwest part of the county."

Bloomington Evening World, Jan. 1928.

One of the unsolved murders that concerned the Monroe County Grand Jury in the spring of 1930 was the mysterious death of Ellis Medlock. While the murder of John Christy could be described as sudden and starting, the demise of Medlock can only be depicted as bizarre.

To begin with, although Medlock had been known to work in the stone business as a "hooker," it was whispered behind closed doors in his neighborhood that his principal source of income was selling bootleg liquor, or white mule. In fact, if



Looking back

By Rose McIlveen

the statements of his neighbors can be believed, his reputation had attracted the attention of federal prohibition officers.

There is no tasteful way of describing how he met his death. According to the *Bloomington Evening World* of Jan. 23, 1928, Medlock was found lying face down in the mud, his legs straddling a tree. There was a wound behind his right ear, and his clothing was partially burned off. In fact, there were burn blisters all over his body.

Medlock's face was so deep in the

mud that only the back of his head was showing when found by Sam and George Hughes. The *Evening World* described what happened next. "It was necessary to take bars of steel used in removing auto tires to get Medlock out of the frozen ground . . . The body was brought to the Allen funeral home where a steady stream of cold water was kept running over it to thaw it out."

Dr. Rodney Smith, deputy prosecutor, determined that Medlock died of a skull-fracturing blow to his head in the area behind the right ear. Evidence at the scene included a frozen pool of blood, presumably Medlock's, and his 44 Colt revolver with one shot fired and the handle burned off.

Medlock's Chevrolet touring car, containing groceries he had bought in the early evening of Jan. 13, when he disappeared, was parked

along the road. The victim had started out the evening with at least \$2, which he spent for the groceries. He had 24 cents in his pocket when the body was found.

Medlock's alleged "profession" was beside the point as far as Monroe County Sheriff W.S. Curry's responsibility was concerned. On Jan. 23 the *Evening World* reported that, "Sheriff Curry is working on a clue he believes may result in arrest and conviction of the hijackers believed responsible for taking the life of Medlock."

The investigation took the usual course, with Curry making the rounds of the Kirksville area to talk to Medlock's neighbors. The sheriff began to piece together a chronological list of the deceased's activities on the night he died.

His wife said he left home at 2:30 in the afternoon. When he stopped

at the Dewey Hudson grocery about 8:30 he was described as intoxicated, though he was in good enough condition to drive to the home of Clarence Teague.

"They're after me," Medlock was supposed to have said to Teague. The latter pointed out that there were no lights in the woods, but Medlock said he had been seeing them all evening.

Later at the home of Curtis East, Medlock, still inebriated, asked for a handful of kitchen matches. The *Evening World* picked up the story, "Having placed his car as usual because he really did see a light this time over in the woods, they (the neighbors) say it was Stanley Koontz and a party cutting down a tree where dogs had chased a raccoon."

Next week: The Medlock case continued.