

Pool room shooting strikes the 'Levee'

In Bloomington's early years, Morton Street was largely a residential street, despite its closeness to the courthouse square. In fact, Indiana University President David Starr Jordan once lived in a house at the northern end of the street near 11th Street.

The moving of the university from the Second and College Avenue site to Dunn's Woods may have triggered changes in the character of the "Levee." By 1909 the previously residential area began to have some businesses. At the corner of Sixth and Morton could be found the Underwood and Wilson Livery Stable, the Model Roller Mills and the Morton Street House for boarders. The 1916 city directory lists an auto dealer, vulcanizing shop, three restaurants, a monument shop, grocery and poultry dealer on North Morton alone.

When John Ridley, who worked in the Campbell restaurant in November of 1914, saw that his adversary, John Stewart, was angry enough to kill, the former fled to Shaw's pool room, also on the levee. When Stewart entered the place, waving a gun, all concerned began to take the argument more seriously. "Don't do it, don't do it," Ridley called to Stewart. The latter's intended target was all the while running around the pool tables, trying to escape.

Shaw's advice was for Ridley to run out the door, certainly sensible counsel under the circumstances. But Ridley wasn't quick enough, and Stewart shot him at close range. Had the outcome not been so tragic, the scene could have been a comedy vignette. According to the Bloomington Telephone, "The chase was around the pool table and at every jump Ridley cried out for Stewart not to shoot.



Looking back

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With his billiard cue Shaw started after Stewart to stop the trouble, and yelled to Ridley to dodge out the door. As he ran after his victim, Stewart pulled the trigger of his revolver five times, but it did not go off.

Despite being wounded, Ridley managed to get out of the pool room and kept heading in the direction of 6th Street. Meanwhile, Stewart, too, emerged from the pool room and surrendered to police officers, who happened to be in the neighborhood. The angry man was heard to say, "I done just what I intended to do. I've killed the — here I am, Scott; here's my gun. You better go and find him. I got him all right."

While Stewart was busy incriminating himself, Ridley had collapsed in the neighborhood. In fact, the police station had received a call that an intoxicated man had passed out on the pavement in front of the Moose home. Not knowing about the shooting, other officers answered the call and loaded Ridley into what the Telephone called the police's "Tin Liz." At the station the victim died.

The Telephone gave the impression that Stewart's return to the jail was like "old home week." He apparently did considerable talking and "appeared to be in a very cheerful frame of mind."

Next week: The trial of John Stewart