

Professor tried to track down bank robber on his own

What did the Indiana University professor and a scruffy-looking young man have in common on that late July day in 1933? Well, nothing, really, except that they were the principal characters in a drama that is known as Bloomington's first bank robbery. Needless to say, the local newspapers, the *Bloomington Telephone* and the *Evening World*, got out their biggest type faces for sensational headlines.

The depression was having a devastating effect on the country as a whole and on some individuals in particular. The young man, Rolla Spice, was feeling desperate, believing that he had no other option in regard to a loan deadline. He had "cased" the Bloomington National Bank on Kirkwood Avenue and returned, fortified with whiskey and a rusty 32-caliber revolver.



Looking back

By Rose McIlveen

The startled cashier, Frank Southern, managed to press the alarm, as the firm's president, William B. Adams, came through the front door on his return from lunch. Spice grabbed the money that was nervously offered to him — some \$470 — and dashed toward the corner of Washington and Fourth streets, where he had parked his car.

Spice's escape route took him down Washington and eastward on First Street to what was then called

the Covenanter Road. In pursuit were two cars and some rather uneasy private citizens, who got close enough to see that the robber had taken the precaution of covering his license plates with pieces of cardboard.

Also in pursuit, although a few moments later, was a city police car. The officers were looking for a man in a khaki shirt and dark hat and did not give much thought to the driver of a passing car — one who was wearing a different shirt and hat.

During his hasty exit from the bank, Spice had encountered a young IU physiology professor by the name of Elber Teter, who was standing in front of the Smith Electric store. At that moment in time, Teter was far less interested in the

robber's clothes than his face.

The professor was on his way home to lunch and while eating he got to thinking that maybe the robber had fled to Bedford. It would not have been more than a lucky hunch, but the professor was right.

Arriving at Bedford, Teter wandered around, looking for the face he had seen for those brief seconds on the street in Bloomington. His patience paid off when he spotted Spice entering a barber shop to have his mustache shaved off.

According to the *Evening World*, "The suspect was getting a shave. In a chair next to him sat the professor, getting a haircut. The professor paid the barber when he sat in the chair, fearing he might have to leave suddenly."

Unfortunately, when Spice left the barber shop Teter lost sight of him. Continued the *World*, "After driving about Bedford several minutes without finding trace of the bandit's car, Teter headed north on State Road 37, intending to give up the chase and go home."

But in Oolitic Teter saw the suspect's blue Ford, he began to follow it, trying to avoid being seen. Finally, he passed the Ford and found a farmhouse, where he thought he could call the Bedford police.

Related the *World*, "The professor was grinding away at the old fashioned country phone when up drove his man and stopped in front of the farm house."

Next week: The rest of the story.