

Wertz's wife arrested

While William Wertz was a guest of Monroe County at the jail in the spring of 1909 — sentenced there for illegal sale of alcoholic beverages — his merchandise was aging at his place of business, but not for long. According to the *Bloomington Telephone*, "Saturday the news leaked to the police that in spite of the recent conviction of Wertz, there was still something 'doing' at the Wertz homestead, and that it was the general understanding among the 'boys' that if one had the price the 'goods' could be secured."

That someone who leaked information to the police may have been a man who lived in the neighborhood. That man was Charles Harris — nicknamed "China" — a self-styled private detective. That his credentials weren't exactly regular comes through in the newspaper accounts of the Wertz case. The *Telephone* referred to Harris as "a local detective, while the *Bloomington Evening World* called him "the famous detective."

Whatever his qualifications, Harris had apparently kept the Wertz place under surveillance from the convenient vantage point of a nearby barn. When Wesley Buchanan was pressed into service as a decoy and the Wertz house surrounded, he returned with news that HESSIE WERTZ had told him to come back later.

Upon Buchanan's return to the house some two hours later, he and the woman secured a buggy for a drive in the country. Reported the *Telephone*, "They came to the 'grave' and dug the whiskey up and hauled it back to the Wertz home."

During the subsequent police raid of the house, it was some time before they found the evidence they were looking for. "... but after a diligent search Chief Johns located the contraband goods in the kitchen flour bin. The 48 pints of whiskey had been placed in the bottom of the bin and covered with a newspa-



Looking back

By Rose McIlveen

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per and the paper covered with about 2 inches of flour. The bin, whiskey, flour and all were taken to police headquarters."

Unlike her husband, HESSIE was not put in jail on that occasion, since she was able to post a \$50 bond. The following day her attorney duly appeared with her in Mayor Malott's court, where she learned that her bond pending a circuit court trial would be \$200. Her one-hour tardiness had apparently made the local authorities somewhat nervous.

Commented the *Telephone* (in a free-wheeling journalistic style that wouldn't get past the copy editor's desk today): "The defendant, in charge of one of the police, was allowed to go out and hustle for a bond to prevent her being committed to the county jail along with her husband."

Meanwhile, the mayor gave special orders to his police department to be on the lookout for illegal sales of liquor. He also warned druggists to refrain from selling alcohol — for medicinal purposes — to anyone who "is in the habit of becoming intoxicated or using it as a beverage." In spite of his warning, there was at least one person in town who thought it wasn't enough and said so in public.

At a mass meeting early in April, the Rev. Thomas A. White, pastor of the First Presbyterian Church, charged that Police Chief Ed Johns was "inefficient and lax in his duty." On April 9, the mayor retaliated by branding the minister and others as a "crowd of agitators."

Next week: The Mayor, the Minister and HESSIE WERTZ.