

# Whitcapping trial doomed in 1898

## Whitcapping, from page A1

Ketcham was made familiar with the case."

The problem was that the most important witness, Benjamin Southern, had gotten lost on purpose, and two others taken into custody so they would be obliged to testify, had been bailed out of the Monroe County Jail, despite \$300 bonds for each.

The tactics of defense and prosecution took the usual courses with the prosecutors attempting to present the victims as paragons of virtue, while blackening the characters of the nine defendants. The defense counsel would have the jury believe that the Southern family "had it coming," whoever did the deed.

Determined that there would be no delay in hearing the case, the judge had ordered that some 50 potential jurors be subpoenaed. Noted the *Bloomington Telephone*, "The courtroom is literally packed

with people, it being almost impossible to pass through the aisles. Many are witnesses, others are spectators, the majority from the country."

The majority of the jurymen were residents of the northern part of the county. They were Ellis Hickam, Joseph Hadden, Samuel Carson, Thomas Langley, D.M. Rumple, J.C. Whitaker, Fred Owen, William Stine, William Mason, Lewis N. William, Benton Hough and Frank M. Anderson.

Crippled by the absence of the most important witness, the prosecution's case was apparently doomed from the outset. Nevertheless, the attorneys involved had given the jury enough to think about to cause an all-night deliberation.

The defendants were, no doubt, relieved, but they were probably the only Monroe Countians who felt that way. Some of the frustration felt by others was reflected in the *World* of April 17. "The cost to the

county in continuing the case, in witness and jury fees was enormous, and yet no one believes but that Judge Martin used all of the power of court to bring the guilty parties to justice."

The *Telephone* attempted to salvage something positive from the case. On April 22 it commented, "The whitcap trial last week, from beginning to end, cost Monroe County about \$500, but notwithstanding this extra expense, Judge Martin kept the expenses for the term ending to a little less than the usual figures."

Five years later, when three near downtown residents of Bloomington were dragged from their houses and flogged near the Indiana University campus, Gov. Winfield T. Durbin sent telegrams, chastising all of the authority figures he could think of — the Bloomington mayor and Monroe County judge, prosecutor and sheriff — for not having their ears to the ground often enough to prevent vigilantism.