

Crime spree followed Christmas season of 1920

The citizens of Bloomington were still recovering from Christmas when crime took an ugly turn in 1920. *The Evening World*, which was not noted for publishing very many long articles about local matters, ran a big headline over the incident of Dec. 29.

There has been a rash of stolen cars. Around 9:30 in the evening the Bloomington Police headquarters received a call to the effect that there was a "suspicious-looking" car standing parked on Fourth Street between Walnut and Washington.

Captain Ray Stevens grabbed the license plate numbers of three missing cars and went to the scene to have a look. The cars he was looking for belonged to Cletis Nikirk, Robert Ellis and George Reed. The latter car had been stolen in front of the high school on that same evening.

Stevens discovered that the license plate matched that of the Reed car. *The Evening World* of Dec. 30 described what happened next. "Captain Stevens walked around the car and opened the front door.



LOOKING BACK

By Rose McIlveen

It was then that he narrowly escaped death from a deadly trap. A twelve gauge shotgun heavily loaded with No. 4 shot had been propped up in the car in such a manner that the stock of the gun rested against the opposite side, and a strip of an army blanket had been tied to the trigger so that when the gun fell it would be discharged."

Continued the newspaper, "So closely had the distance been calculated that the gun fell striking Captain Stevens squarely in the chest, but owing to some unexplainable fact it was not discharged. The contrivance was more dangerous because it was hidden under a lap robe."

Was Stevens the intended victims? There is ample evidence for that conclusion. Several of the recent crimes had

been related, and Stevens was investigating them.

The Evening World explained. The shotgun had been stolen from the Koontz & Ragan store. The Robert Ellis car when found contained other items from the store. "Captain Stevens had been working on the robbery and was following the trail that led through Hensonburg and had been watching the room of the person he considered guilty."

Police believed that the suspect knew he was being watched and planned the ugly surprise for Stevens. It was, according to the newspaper, Stevens' second "narrow escape."

"It will be recalled," the *Evening World* related, "that several months ago he stopped the robbers who had stolen a car load of merchandise from the Campbell Department Store. The robber who was surprised on North Morton Street, covered Stevens with a revolver, but the officers pulled his gun, disarmed and arrested the robber."

The police were still looking for the

thieves who boldly smashed the windows of two stores on the square and made off with some merchandise. On Jan. 24 the *Evening World* gave its readers a story about an arrest in the Globe Store robbery.

The suspect, whom the newspaper did not name, had been bragging in Bedford that he was present at the robbery. His job on a road gang for the Monon Railroad at Wallace Junction had taken him out of town. But the man's parents lived in Bloomington, and the police bided their time, knowing he would return at some point in time.

When the suspect was seen in a Bloomington pool room, but eluded the two officers sent to arrest him. He ran down East Kirkwood to Washington, veered north and called a taxi, which took him to Harrodsburg. His freedom was cut short on Jan. 20. "Sunday morning Chief Browning learned the young man was in Bedford. He motored to that city and arrested him at the home of a young woman on whom he was making a social call."

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