

Whiskey in a dry county turned heads for another reason

The box was supposed to have been delivered by an "expressman" to the office of George Edwards, auditor-elect of Owen County. Accompanying it was a type-written letter with an Indianapolis date line.

The letter was friendly enough. The article in the *Bloomington Evening World* of Feb. 23, 1907, was quoting a dispatch from Spencer. It said, "...that a friend of the writer had come across some 16-year-old whiskey, and being aware that Spencer was a 'dry' town, the writer was sending the accompanying whiskey that Mr. Edwards might enjoy it."

Well, Edwards didn't give the package much thought right after he received it, but eventually the nature of its contents was too much to ignore. When he unscrewed the cap and tasted it, it didn't seem right. As the *Evening World* put it, "...Edwards took a taste of the contents of the bottle and found it to be bitter." He, as the newspaper described it, expectorated the sip.



LOOKING BACK

By Rose McIlveen

That might have been the end of the story, except for the fact that Edwards was not alone when he sampled the bottle's contents. There were some friends standing around. They were Asa Williams, Robert Fisher, Martin Walden and Dr. D.J. Briceland.

All of the friends had a swig, but they swallowed theirs, also noting that the liquid had a bitter taste. The effect of what was so bitter didn't take an hour to materialize. All except Edwards were violently ill.

At press time, all of the men were out of danger except Dr. Briceland, and there was real fear about his recovery. It was truly an anxious time for his friends and family.

The problem was that the whiskey had

been laced with strychnine, not a very neighborly thing to do. There was the suspicion that Edwards had enemies.

No one in Spencer thought the mysterious package was a prank. The reaction described in the Feb. 27 edition of the *Evening World* was that of an "uproar." "People congregate in the business house and in the streets and discuss the attempt."

The police in Owen County were taking the anonymous package very seriously. Though they didn't have the advantage of today's technological equipment to track down the perpetrator, their was nothing wrong with their reasoning or powers of deduction.

The newspaper explained. "The letter found in the box was typewritten, and the police are working on the possible clue that may afford. Spencer has only a few typewriting machines in service, and each one is reported to be of a different make."

Owners were obliged to turn over samples and report the name of the person who

had been using the typewriter recently. What the police were looking for, of course, was a match.

The police had few other clues. The box was make-shift. As the newspaper described it, "There seems to be no doubt but that the guilty party was several days perfecting his ideas. The box left at Mr. Edwards' place of business bears the lettering of sweet corn and part of the brand remains. The box had been cut down to fit the quart bottle enclosed."

Too, the sender of the tainted whiskey didn't really know much about the subject of doing away with someone else by means of poison. Said the *Evening World*, "The whiskey contained tincture of nux vomica, but the man preparing the mixture was not versed in the use of drugs, and the whiskey held so much of the tincture that it made it almost impossible for any person to drink it."

Thereafter the story disappeared from the pages of the *Evening World*. And so the mystery remained. Was it a prank, or did someone really try to kill George Edwards?

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