

1912 jail breaker was a swashbuckling criminal type

When the Monroe County sheriff brought William Gatlin and George Goode back from Henry, Ill., the two prisoners were chained together. The law officer wasn't taking any chances since their jail break in the early hours of Oct. 29, 1912.

Commented the *Bloomington Daily Telephone* on Nov. 21, "Gatlin was decorated with a pair of heavy handcuffs. Also his cell was double padlocked, and other precautions were taken to prevent him from going on any more junketing trips before he was tried."

"Trips" plural was the operative term, since Gatlin had escaped from the Monroe County jail twice in six weeks. Sheriff Browning had no intention of looking like a fool in the eyes of the voters.

Gatlin and Goode had agreed upon two things, at least. They were planning to plead "not guilty" at their separate trials, and they were going to ask for trials by jury. The *Telephone* suggested that Gatlin preferred to return to Indiana because he might get only a \$50 fine and six months in jail. He could have gotten a two-year sentence in Illinois.



LOOKING BACK

By Rose McIlveen

Meanwhile, both of the escapees had a lot to say to the press. Gatlin wasn't the least bit inhibited about talking to a *Telephone* reporter. He recalled that his escape tools were two pocket knives.

He had scraped the edges of the large blades together until they were serrated. Those he used on the bars and mortar between the bricks. He said Goode hadn't taken part in the work and crawled through the hole in the wall when he was told to.

The colorful Gatlin then described their hiding out in Cascades all day until it got dark. He continued, "The next night we came down town to the I.C. railroad on 11th street and stole a copy of *The Telephone* to read of my escape and then boarded a freight at the water tank."

Their escape route took them through Newton, Decatur and Peoria, all in Illinois. "We had been at Henry, Ill., for almost two weeks before I was pinched in front of the hardware store. They (the Henry police) had descriptions from Sheriff Browning more than a week before they landed us."

Apart from the details of the escape, Gatlin had some cross words to say to the reporter.

"This name of 'Gunman' that the *Telephone* has used in speaking of me has been unfair. That word means a ... safeblower, and I have never blowed up any safes yet. I want that part of it corrected."

Gatlin must have believed in the idea of honor among thieves. He wanted to make sure none of the other prisoners in the Monroe County jail got any heat for the escape.

"And just one more thing — none of the fellows here helped me get through the bars or walls. Charles Dunham knew I was getting away and saying he was hungry wanted to beat upon the door and awaken Browning. I threatened to kill him if he did not go back in the cell and shut his mouth."

Before his trial Goode attempted suicide a couple of times with torn pieces of blanket tied together. He said he preferred death to imprisonment. One of his fellow prisoners, Andy Banks, alerted the sheriff.

"William Gatlin, 'gunman' and jail breaker, after several years of persistent effort, succeeded in breaking into prison today when he plead guilty before Judge Wilson to a charge of robbing the David Hardware store and was sentenced to the reformatory at Jeffersonville from 2 to 14 years." So began a story about Gatlin in the *Telephone* on Dec. 6.

Gatlin's trial had drawn a big crowd. He was neatly dressed in black and didn't look like a crook. But the *Telephone* reminded its readers that Gatlin and his brother (who was in a Navy prison) had "terrorized" Ellettsville one night during a street fair and that William Gatlin had shot George Alexander in 1911.

As for Goode, at his trial he charged that the police had used the "third degree" while he was in custody. Incredibly, the jury found him not guilty, and Goode said he was going to return to Henry, Ill., to work on a farm.

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