

IU students of the '20s welcomed spring in style

"The more things change, the more they remain the same."

Alphonse Karr
Les Guepes (1849)

April may have become "the cruelest month" for beleaguered local law enforcement officers coping with a malady commonly known as spring fever. Although Indiana University students haven't been the only perpetrators of public nuisances, they certainly caused their share of local trouble.

There was, for example, the spring of 1920. The *Bloomington Weekly Star* of April 24 reported, "There has been mischief afoot aplenty among university students this week, and as a result ten college men have been before the police court judge — five for public intoxication and five for gambling."



Looking back

By Rose McIlveen

The circumstances of their arrest were clear enough. According to the newspaper, the assault on public peace and safety began when, "The police broke up a drunken orgy of half dozen college men on the downtown street Wednesday night, placing three of them in jail."

Those were the ones the officers could catch. Apparently three others managed to get away. Commented the *Star*, "They had been drinking Virginia Dare — the real stuff."

Translated, the newspaper's comment meant that some of the commercial bottled wine was still circulating in town. Prohibition had gone into effect officially only three months earlier. The newspaper does not speculate about how the students obtained it or where.

The following night, some students were in trouble farther from downtown. Two were arrested for public intoxication on Indiana Avenue, "opposite the university campus."

On the same day, the police had a different run to make. Reported the *Star*, "That the festive sport of 'rolling the bones' has replaced marbles as a harbinger of spring is the belief of the Bloomington police, following the arrest of fourteen crap shooters in twenty-four hours."

Were they students? Yes, indeed,

and only a stone's throw from the campus. What's more, they hadn't even the inclination to play the game in a smoke-filled backroom, plenty of which could surely have been found in 1920.

Continued the *Star*, "In the middle of Sixth Street in broad daylight, with watching neighbors and passing traffic as a background, five students of the university tossed the ivories to the jingle of coins Thursday evening. The neighbors called the cops, and a few moments later the five gamblers were riding to the calaboose with Patrolmen David and Stevens."

The *Star* added with solemnity, "All the young men are of prominent families of the state, and may now face the disgrace by expulsion from the university."

There wasn't any question about

where IU President William Lowe Bryan stood in regard to drinking and gambling, but he was, to some extent, a realist. In a commencement address in June of 1926, he told a story that surely must have left his audience chuckling a bit. He talked about a professor "of a neighbor university." "That man had said that among thousands of students he finds in seven years no more than four who have any yearning of the mind, any touch of the flame. The rest are keen about nothing but football and fudge."

The legal penalty for the students who were gambling in the middle of Sixth Street was a \$5 fine and costs, amounting to approximately \$75. Beyond that, they were left to university regulations and the scorn of the campus chapter of the Intercollegiate Prohibition Association.