## Visiting con man pushed his luck a little too far

"He worked the game rather smoothly on several good Bloomington women, but it is a long lane that has no turning."

Bloomington Weekly Courier, Jan. 18, 1916.

Renting out rooms to students and working people used to be what might be called a cottage industry in Bloomington. It was a fairly easy way of supplementing the family income, but there were risks involved.

Take the case of some Bloomington women in January of 1916 who found themselves the victims of a bad check passer. The young man went by a couple of different names — Harry LeMar and Roy West.

Whoever he was, LaMar/West was supposed to have come down to Bloomington from Indianapolis. According to the Weekly Courier, he



## Looking back

By Rose Mcliveen

was 23 years old.

His own particular money-making scheme involved making the rounds of rooming houses and renting rooms. His method of operation was described by the newspaper. "He gave all the women checks made payable to himself and signed by James Moore, getting \$7 back in each case."

By our standards today, \$7 doesn't seem like much, but it had a lot more buying power in 1916. Although the newspaper mentioned the names of only three women,

there may have been more — perhaps too embarrassed to come forward and let the police know about it

The Weekly Courier described a typical encounter between LaMar-/West and the victims. "Mrs. W.S. Sentney, West Sixth Street, Mrs. W.B. Gooldy, South Walnut Street and Mrs. Nallay were all impressed with the natty appearance of the oily-tongued stranger who applied for rooms. The rooms they showed him suited him fine."

In one house, the landlady warned LaMar/West that the room she was showing him did not have any heat, "but LaMar hastened to say that it didn't matter and paid a week in advance."

Sentney was the first to catch on to the bad check scheme. What made her suspicious was that her new roomer did not occupy the

room. Continued the *Courier*, "The other women also phoned the police department and after a description had been given, Supt. Hensley picked up the young man in front of the First National Bank."

Denial of his crime was his first defense, but after he had been identified by his multiple "landladies," he finally confessed. What happened next was described by the newspaper: "When arranged before Justice Bailey today he waived examination and was recognized to the February term of Circuit Court. In default of \$500 bond he will remain in jail."

LaMar/West had pressed his luck too far by staying around town after bilking local women out of hardearned cash. The *Courier* went on to explain that the chief of police at Linton had phoned Bloomington authorities to say that the young man

was wanted in Linton on similar charges. Furthermore, there was a suggestion that the police in Illinois wanted to have a chat with LaMar-/West.

Sure enough, he was treated to a free ride to Clinton, Ill., where he was to be the guest of DeWitt County taxpayers. The Jan. 21 issue of the Courier explained, "LaMar is known in Illinois as Frank Brown under which name he was indicted by the DeWitt County grand jury for passing bad checks." His extradition papers were signed by none other than that state's governor.

In a little postscript to the story, the *Courier* concluded, "When arrested here by Supt. Hensley he had less than \$5 in his pockets. He had spent the tainted money he obtained here by 'joy riding' in autos, one trip of which was made to Ellettsville."