

1909 case reads like a soap opera

Blind tiger, from page A1

which said: "That Mrs. HESSIE WERTZ, wife of William Wertz, the blind tiger king who is now a fugitive from the Bloomington police, will either have to leave Bloomington or likely end up in the Indiana prison for women, is evident." It is not clear whether Mr. Wertz was a jail escapee or had violated probation. If the former was the case, his escape was certainly not reported in either the *Telephone* or the *Evening World*.

The fact that blind tigers sometimes show their claws was soon apparent in the case of Wesley Buchanan. The reader may recall that he was sent into the Wertz household as a police decoy to purchase alcohol. According to the *Telephone*, the police got a hot tip from a westender by the name of Frank Jones, who claimed that Buchanan had liquor hidden under

his house. Sure enough, when the officers checked, they found some, but Buchanan was acquitted for a couple of reasons. The judge believed that the incriminating evidence had been revengefully planted there and that Jones lacked credibility, since he had recently been convicted of bootlegging himself.

On June 16, under a headline: "AN APPEAL FROM THE JONES CLUB," the *Telephone* printed a letter to the editor from Mrs. Wertz. It said, in part: "I left my home last summer and staid away four months to get away from the booze. I haven't had a case of beer on the place since my husband left and don't want it." She claimed that she had torn down the board fence around her house so everyone could see who came and went and concluded: "I don't think it right to protect a man in violating the law and after he is gone, take their spite out on a woman."

Though the *Evening World* did occasionally report some of the spring-of-1909 blind tiger raid and subsequent convictions, its editor may have thought he had better things to publish. It was up to the *Telephone* to report to the curious the postscript to the news about Mrs. Wertz. On Aug. 7 the newspaper ran a little article under a big headline: "MRS. WETZ LOCATED AT WESTPORT." It began with a letter: "Mr. Chief of Police: Is Mrs. Will Wertz wanted in Bloomington? If she is, she can be found at Westport, Ind. She is a bad woman and we do not want her in our town. A GOOD CITIZEN." The *Telephone* continued: "Supt. Hensley received the above letter in his mail this morning, but no effort will be made to get Mrs. Wertz. As long as she stays out of Bloomington, the local authorities are satisfied."

And what of the self-styled detective, "China" Harris? Well, that's another story.