

Carefully planned robbery hit two banks in one day

It was not an ordinary bank robbery. The well-planned theft on Nov. 6, 1923, took residents of Spencer by surprise in more ways than one.

First the robbers took the precaution of eliminating all "lines" of communication with that community. As the *Bloomington Evening World* put it on Nov. 6, "The bandits cut all electric light, telephone and long distance telephone wires before committing the robbery. Spencer was completely cut off from communication with the outside world for hours."

W.C. McCarty, sheriff of Owen



Looking back

By Rose McIlveen

County, was obliged to drive to Gosport to report the theft to other law enforcement agencies. Meanwhile in Spencer, groups of men were forming themselves into posses to pursue the thieves.

As the theft was inventoried, it became clear why the electric and

telephone lines had been cut: Because of the break in communication, the ambitious robbers felt confident enough to plunder two banks, instead of the usual one.

The loss was enumerated in the United Press article on the front page of the *Evening World*. "At the Spencer National Bank, the robbers got a bag of gold coins amounting to \$2,200 and package of currency containing \$4,000 and negotiable bonds of approximately \$5,000. At the Exchange National Bank, the robbers got \$5,000 in currency."

Putting the pieces of reports together, the United Press related

that the thieves, about 15-strong, arrived in Spencer in four cars. They overpowered Sam Vaughan, the night watchman, tied him up and stuck him in the town hall so he would be out of the way.

The robbery was not exactly a quiet business, explained the article in the *Evening World*. "Heavy charges of explosives (were) used to blow open the doors of the safes in the two banks." Apparently the robbers were not entirely unobserved. Continued the newspaper, "The bandits fired several shots at John Barge, a baker who was shot in the hip; Frank Ray, a second-hand store

dealer, shot in the leg, and George Smith in the leg."

Most of the people of Spencer were peacefully sleeping through the robbery, but another "hero" emerged in the downtown confusion. "... Carl Anderson, editor of the Owen County *Leader* weekly newspaper, slipped into the courthouse within shotgun range of bandits and rang the fire alarm bell. The bandits had been careful to cut the rope before they started their work."

Anderson's feat took some in-

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