

Funny money wasn't so funny after all

On Nov. 15, 1894, when Morton Koons walked out of court, he may have been feeling a little bit shaky. The ordeal he had just been through was enough to wipe the smile off the face of the world's greatest optimist.

Koons had had a close call, and there was no doubt about it. The events that prompted his being hauled before a U.S. Commissioner began in the previous July.

According to the Bloomington *Evening World* of Nov. 16, 1894, on or about July 12, Koons friends were "amusing themselves at Sparks meat market on the east side of the (Bloomington) square." Continued the newspaper, "Just about the time that Koons arrived they had voted to send someone after some refreshments."

Proprietor Sparks gave Koons a dollar bill. On his way to get the refreshments, Koons noticed that the bill didn't look very authentic, and substituted one of his own instead.

Picking up the story, the *Evening World*



Looking back

By Rose McIlveen

continued the story. "When he returned to the meat market, his friends refunded one half of the money and took the rest out in joking him."

Time passed, and Koons forgot about the funny-looking dollar bill. At least, that is the impression conveyed by the newspaper article.

Then there came the day when Koons decided to use the bill and when he was in Sparks' grocery store on South Park Street, Koons "jestingly asked for change for the counterfeit dollar and Mr. Sparks, after looking at it, handed it back remarking that

some fellow had tried to pass a better one than that on him the Fourth of July."

Time passed, and Koons forgot about the incident until Nov. 15, when he was arrested by Deputy United States Marshal C.P. Taylor. The charge was having in his possession and passing counterfeit money.

The *World* reporter did not deal with any anger Koons might have felt. In fact, he was probably in shock.

Nevertheless, he told his story in a court presided over by U.S. Commissioner J.G. McPheeters.

Koons' acquittal was the only sensible verdict. The *World* concluded that, "he has always been a good citizen, and his reputation for truth and veracity is uncompromised."

Actually, Koons didn't know how lucky he was. Counterfeiting — even joking about it — was not taken kindly by Monroe Countians.

On June 5, 1857, a Monroe County consta-

ble by the name of Ed Bingham was whipped to death. Bingham had arrested several men in conjunction with a lynching that led to the death of A.W. Vansickle. Vansickle had refused to reveal the whereabouts of a suspected counterfeiter.

Bingham, who was dragged out into the woods in Van Buren Township, was beaten with "rods and bludgeons." He died a few hours later, and the coroner said that was not one spot on his body that was not "as black as beef liver."

Ironically, among those arrested for Bingham's death was a man by the name of Koons. It is not known whether the Koons of the counterfeit dollar bill incident and the one arrested for Ed Bingham's lynching were related.

It is likely that Morton Koons carefully looked at each piece of folding money that came into his possession. It is also quite probable that he never again tried to pass a counterfeit bill, even as a joke.

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