

# Suit caper listed in 1886 book

In 1886 there appeared in bookstores in the United States an interesting and (for then) unusual book called *1886 Professional Criminals of America*. Its author, New York City Police Inspector Thomas Byrnes, had compiled perhaps the very first ever collection of chronic lawbreakers, their photographs and methods.

In the "shoplifters and pick-pockets" section of the book there are several methods described, but none quite like the one that was foisted on two Bloomington clothing stores in June 1928. The disappointed proprietors were those of the Kahn Clothing Company and Globe Clothing Store, located on the square.

Actually, the thieves — both described as young and well-dressed — were hit-and-run artists, smart enough to keep moving from one community to another, not pressing their luck too far. It was the Lebanon police who caught the strangers with a penchant for taking short-cuts in making a living.



## Looking back

By Rose  
McIlveen

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Their method, which was really only a variation on a theme, was to work together. Reported the *Bloomington Evening World*. "The young men called at the leading clothing stores of the city where they asked to look at the best suits carried in stock. One of the men carried a coat thrown over one shoulder and arm."

At this juncture one would wonder why no one in the stores thought it rather strange for a man to be toting an overcoat in June. If, however, it was a suit coat, it must have had generous proportions.

Anyway, one of the thieves would be busily trying on suits to distract the attention of the clerk.

In the meantime, his partner was, according to the *World*, smuggling a good suit under his coat "and slowly and carefully make his exit from the store."

In due time, the remaining partner would decide which suit he "wanted" and ask that it be kept aside for his purchase the following day. The thieves were then free to "case" the clerk populations in other stores in town.

What made the suit thefts somewhat unusual was the bulk of the booty. Inspector Byrnes wrote that shoplifters usually confined their take to small items easily concealed from the watchful eyes of clerks and floorwalkers.

It is not mentioned in the *World* article how many other towns the thieves had visited between Bloomington and Lebanon. The police in the latter town estimated that the shoplifters had taken and disposed of most of 100 suits.

What tripped them up in Lebanon? Well, they apparently got **see Crime book, Back page**