

# Midnight truck wreck was end to drunken joy ride

*"In that end of town when anything happens in the dead of night nobody runs out of doors and mixes in to pick up the dead or dying and call the cops."*

— *Bloomington Telephone*, Oct. 26, 1915

Sundays used to be quiet periods of time in Bloomington's earlier days. People dressed up in their Sunday clothes and went to church or took the opportunity to sleep late.

There were several local citizens who were doing neither. Law enforcement officers were keeping a sharp eye out for a couple of fellows who looked "banged up."

What the police were looking for were bandages, cuts and bruises, because of a Saturday night/Sunday morning automobile crash that happened on the west side of town — the northwest side, to be precise. Witnesses were scarce to nonexistent.

What prompted the low-key manhunt was the theft of a Johnson Brothers creamery truck. It had been parked next to the building overnight.



## LOOKING BACK

By Rose McIlveen

The *Bloomington Telephone* of Oct. 26, 1915, described the theft. "All of the detectives of the local police force especially Sherlock Holmes Thomas and Dr. Watson Stevens agree that the man driving the car was both soused and thirsty."

Since there were no witnesses, the latter were educated guesses. Explained the newspaper, "They deduct this from the tracks made by the car and the surroundings." The thieves' route took them to North Maple Street.

Apparently they were out of booze and looking for more. Their memories were as bad as their driving. They were headed for the house of a man who used to operate a blind tiger — a bootlegging business. The man had

found another means of making a living and wouldn't have appreciated some midnight visitors, even if he were still at that address.

The *Telephone* described the scene. "On one side (of Maple) was the Blair stone quarry which would have been a dandy spot to wreck the car, for there is a sheer drop of 20 feet over its edge and a good sound bottom, but the Blair quarry was not used and has nothing further to do with these deductions."

Luckily for the two thieves, they chose the opposite side of the street where the former bootleg place used to be.

Continued the newspaper, "The car was going too fast to stop at the door of Jim's place so the driver, running past, sought to turn and come back to it."

Instead, the driver put the car into a 15-foot sink hole. The accident should have wakened neighbors from their sleep and it probably did, but not a one of them went to the rescue. The *Telephone* explained. "They have learned by long experience it is most dangerous to mix in; they let the dead bury their dead

and say nothing about it."

After the sun came up on Sunday morning the wreck was "discovered." Even so, the police were not notified until an hour later.

It is unlikely that the two thieves were caught, all things considered. But the story contains some interesting bits and pieces about life in Bloomington at that time.

First, the newspaper asserted that "there has been no car stealing in Bloomington and it was thought that it was perfectly safe" to park the creamery vehicle next to the building. Second, "Very few people can drive a Ford, anyway."

Finally, the police were handicapped by a corporate decision. Concluded the *Telephone*, "At first there was some talk of calling the Bob Owens bloodhounds from Bedford, but Johnson Bros. very wisely decided to let the bloodhound money help pay for the repair of the truck.

"It will cost about \$200 to put it in shape."

H-T 2-1 -98