

Suspect never indicted in 1915 train yard murder

"An umbrella mender, known as 'Uncle Billy' was the first to find the body, which was brought back to town by a switch engine that had just finished pushing a freight train over the hill." Bloomington Weekly Courier, Oct. 5, 1915.

Perry Eads was found lying unconscious near the junction of the Monon and Illinois Central railroad tracks early on the morning of Oct. 3, 1915. The most casual observer might have jumped to the conclusion that he had been hit by a passing train, but the local police had other ideas about how he came to be in that condition.

The condition included a hemorrhage of the brain caused by a blow over his right eye and a cut on his leg that went clear to the bone. Dr. C.E. Harris, the Monon Railroad Company surgeon operated to re-



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By Rose McIlveen

lieve the pressure on Eads' brain, but the patient never regained consciousness before he died on Oct. 8 at the Bloomington Hospital.

Officers suspected the victim's injuries had some relationship with a Saturday night incident. According to the *Courier*, William Mershon was at home when he saw his wife coming down the street. Eads was walking behind her.

Continued the newspaper, "He (Mershon) accused his wife of bringing Eads home with her and

then went out and knocked Eads down. He returned to the house and beat his wife. Then Mershon left the house and did not return until just before daybreak Sunday morning."

The wife's complaint to the police about having been beaten prompted her husband to leave their house again, the second time in a great hurry. The officers found him in the loft of Scales' livery barn at 214 W. Seventh St.

Putting two and two together, the officers recalled that Perry Eads didn't believe in banks and carried his savings (approximately \$200 in an inside coat pocket.) Since the money was still there when he was found, the police concluded that the assailant or assailants were frightened away by the headlamps of the approaching freight train.

The *Courier* concluded its ac-

count of Eads' death with a rather revealing comment about the man's private life. "Eads had been drinking before the accident, for the first time in many months, as it is understood that he has been letting liquor alone for some time."

Others were arrested with Mershon. They were Bert Franklin and Deffron Hacker.

Mershon denied having anything to do with Eads' death and claimed that the reason they got into a fight was that Eads had insulted Mershon's wife. Unfortunately for Mershon, she denied the allegation.

Despite Mershon's claim that the train probably hit Eads, the police concluded that was unlikely. Their reasoning was reported in the *Courier*. "It is claimed that Eads was not struck by a train because he was lying close to the track and that

a blow from a train coming down the grade at that point would have hurled him a distance of several feet from the track."

The Eads death was not the only case taken up by the grand jury that fall. The docket was full of instances of bootlegging and attempted murder at Ellettsville.

The *Courier* reported the sudden appearance of two "mystery" witnesses who were expected to guarantee an indictment against Mershon. Explained the newspaper, "A farmer and his wife whose names are not to be divulged now were driving to the city at 5 o'clock the Sunday morning Eads was found. He said Mershon was climbing over a fence (near where the body was found) to pass through an

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