

# With persistence, police discover details of father's killing

When Andrew Banks' partially decomposed body was found in a pond near Sanders in June of 1919, it was at first believed that he had been killed by some strangers. That was the story Banks' son, Alva, wanted the police to believe.

That was before the officers found traces of blood on the floor of their shack and bloody newspapers under the porch. Alva had also told his interrogators that as Andrew was leaving for Brazil, he said Alva could sell their horse, if they needed any money.

Part of the story, at least, was true. Alva had sold the horse for \$65, in spite of the fact that his father had paid \$95. Even so, the officers were not entirely satisfied with Alva's story.

It was early on June 5 when the officers finally got the truth from the young man. The *Bloomington Evening World* of that date shared the story with its readers:

"Alva said a number of his boy companions came by the house and when he wanted to go out with them, his father remonstrated and said he must remain at home with him."

The boys left, but Alva, dissatisfied with his



## LOOKING BACK

By Rose McIlveen

father's decision, continued to argue about it. Finally Andrew got his shotgun and chased his son into the kitchen.

Continued the newspaper, "Alva says he picked up a hickory club and as his father entered the room, dealt him a blow on the side of his head. He found he had struck harder than he had intended and seeing that his father was about to die, he hastened the end by leveling the shotgun at him as he lay on the floor."

Alva tried to sop up the blood with the newspapers that were later found under the porch. He finally wrapped his father in a blanket with clothesline to secure it and dumped him in the pond.

In the end, it was the persistence of the interrogators that finally broke down Alva. Explained the *Evening World*, "They (the

interrogators) told Alva they planned to have an expert examine the blood spots to see if they were human. They also told him doctors were going to examine his father's body closely to see if it contained shot and if so the size of the shot would be compared with the size in the shells at the Banks home."

The officers may have been taken aback by Alva when he finally confessed. "During his recital of the gruesome details Alva showed no emotion whatever and never shed a tear. He did not even seem relieved after he had made a clean break of the whole affair but held up stoically all the time."

It was at that time that the authorities learned what Alva had done after the murder. "After he had killed his father, Alva went to the home of Harrison Nelson and spent the night, where he had since stayed. ... Nelson said Alva slept like a baby in the same bed with him. He took board at the Nelson house, ate heartily and seemed to be in good spirits until a few days ago when his actions changed and it appeared there was something on his mind."

During his stay with the Nelson family Alva spent \$16 for a car to take a party of his

friends to Indianapolis to "see the auto races." Altogether the trip cost him \$100.

Continued the newspaper, "They returned on Sunday. Monday Alva came to Bloomington and purchased a new suit of clothes, new shoes and hat and still had \$16 in cash left."

In spite of the confession, there was a certain amount of sympathy for Alva Banks. The *Evening World* summed it up for the readers.

"Local police officers say it is true that Banks was a bad character, and that he beat his boy upon the least provocation. They say he compelled him to sell beer and whiskey when he was a mere child and that he had gamblers come to the house nearly every night and carry on in the presence of the boy."

Also, Alva gave all of his wages to his father, who was known as a professional gambler.

In spite of the fact that Alva's father was not a nice person, the justice system had to do something with the boy. He pleaded guilty to the charge of manslaughter and was sentenced to two to 21 years in the Jeffersonville reformatory.

H-T 3/20/95