

Mechanic's Band found itself in financial trouble

"W.J. Leas was arrested last night on a charge of embezzlement. He is now under bond for \$1,000 to appear at the coming term of the Monroe Circuit Court."

—*Bloomington Telephone*, Sept. 6, 1895.

Near the turn of the century, Bloomington had its share of bootleggers, thieves, prostitutes and crimes of passion, but a white collar crime associated with a public treasure like the Mechanic's Band was a real scandal.

The group was strictly volunteer had played for all of the public gatherings at holidays and the Bloomington appearances of nationally-known politicians. In fact, the band was an institution everyone took for granted.

The trouble began when Leas, the band treasurer, refused to account for about \$500 in band treasury money. As the *Telephone* explained it, "For several days there have been rumors on the streets concerning Mr. Leas, but inasmuch as the same rumors stated that he had promised to adjust the trouble, it was



LOOKING BACK

By Rose McIlveen

supposed that that would end the matter."

The newspaper went on to explain that Leas had been treasurer of the band for about four years, and the money he held was to be applied to any outstanding indebtedness of the organization. Apparently, that had not been done. After a reasonable length of time, a new treasurer was elected and a warrant sworn out for Leas' arrest. He was taken to the mayor's court and released on \$1,000 bond.

The next morning, standing before the mayor, Leas had nothing to say. A second bond signed by H.D. Orchard and H.E. Wade, respectable Bloomington businessmen, and referred to the grand jury.

The details of Mechanic's Band business was revealed in the *Telephone* for anyone who cared to read about it. Explained the newspaper, "About four years ago the organization purchased a complete set of new instruments, and to make the purchase it was necessary to borrow \$400."

The money came from W.I. Owens, who lived northwest of town, and the note was signed by Alban Hinds, W.H. Seward, Walter Collins, W.T. Blair and Joseph Allen. Band members thought Leas had been making payments on the loan. In fact, the treasurer had reported that at band meetings, and members were under the impression that the debt had been paid in full.

The Mechanic's Band dropped out of the news until December, when the *Telephone* informed its readers that all was well again with the organization. Boasted the newspaper, "The Mechanics" band is being reorganized, and when this is completed Bloomington will have one of the largest bands in the State, as well as one of the best."

According to the *Telephone*, some new members had been recruited. ("About a dozen young men are practicing on different instruments under the tutorship of W.H. Seward and Charles Stineburg, who are both well known musicians.")

Actually, the new class of probationary members met twice a week for practice. There were practical reasons for an enlarged band — to have a large band on special occasions and be assured of substitutes when needed.

What about the former treasurer? In the Dec. 3 article Leas was not mentioned even once. The only reference to the band's earlier troubles was a single sentence. "The Mechanics' band is about \$200 in debt, but it is hoped to cancel all such obligations within another year by giving a number of entertainments."

The reporter added, "There is much good material in the city, including Wallace Pauley, Taylor Voss, Gee Adkins, Charley Stineburg, S.L. Wilhite and others."

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