

Vigilance continued in spite of warning

If Monroe County fathers were taking Gov. Winfield Durbin at his word when he threatened to move Indiana University from Bloomington in 1903, you couldn't tell it by looking at county court records. The issue was yet another "whitecapping" case, allegedly perpetrated by six men April 26, 1903, on East Eighth Street, a stone's throw from Dunn Meadow.

Durbin, a military veteran, was fed up with "whitecapping" in the state, and for the first time, he may have been seriously listening to those who periodically tried to get the university moved to Indianapolis. That was a threatening combination, as far as Bloomington was concerned.

Monroe residents were a natural target for the governor's ire, since local prosecutors couldn't seem to get convictions in the cases found in the records of the late 1800s and even after the turn of the century. Sociologists and historians would probably suggest that extra-legal, self-appointed gangs of attitude adjusters were a sign of the times.

The "crimes" of the victims of mob flogging ranged from alcoholic, non-supporting fathers to loose woman to collaborators with counterfeiters. Although society in general disapproved of those patterns of behavior, there was some hypocrisy underlying the finger-pointing, violent or otherwise.

Whatever the real cause of the incident in April 1903, the hustle and bustle of law enforcement and prosecutors deteriorated into a series of court appearances characterized by objections to legal fine points by defense attorneys and repeated continuances of the cases.

It is difficult to trace the outcome of the cases in the court records, since they were variously listed under the names of individual defendants along with "et al." meaning the others. Bench warrants for three Branams — Pikey, Lessie and Raleigh — Lee Jackson, David



Looking back

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Gray, Tilghman Cox and Len Shaw were issued in October 1903. The following February the cases were sent to the grand jury.

Between 1904 and 1905 the names of those originally charged gradually disappeared from the indexes of court cases. Only the name of Pikey Branam, No. 2374, kept reappearing, and it is entirely possible that that was because of an entirely different charge. Finally, in January 1906, the prosecutor asked for dismissal of the charge against Pikey Branam.

Despite the fact that there were no convictions, the governor's threat turned out to be just another "scare" for Bloomington and Monroe County. It may have been that the state's chief executive had other things on his mind.

Seven months after the local "whitecapping" incident, the *Telephone* reported that Durbin had been deliberately "snubbed" by the governor of Kentucky. The Indiana governor was supposed to have been left standing on a platform in the drizzling rain after having been invited to ride with his Kentucky counterpart to Louisville. While the Bloomington "whitecapping" cases were deteriorating in the Monroe County courts, Durbin chose not to run for governor again in 1904.

And what of the alleged victims of the night of violence in Bloomington? Perhaps any satisfaction they might have received was lost when Shively, the boarder, changed his mind about an identification and the sheriff was quoted as saying that he had been informed that the whole thing was "only a row in a house of bad repute."