

Where did that hacksaw come from in 1912 jail break?

Things were quiet at the Monroe County jail on the early morning of Oct. 29, 1912. Most everyone was sleeping except two prisoners who had decided they would rather be elsewhere.

William Gatlin and George Goode were already gone when the alarm was sounded. Another prisoner had walked down the stairs from the upper cells to get a drink of water and found two odd things: the wash basin was full of bricks and there was a hole in the wall.

The *Bloomington Daily Telephone* tried to explain to its readers. "Goode and Gatlin had both been locked from a corridor just inside the main jail door. Someone inside the jail had raised this lever and allowed the two men to walk out into the main cell."

That was only their first obstacle. The main cell had bars that were nearly an inch thick, and two of them were sawed completely through.

The third obstacle was a brick wall. Gatlin and Goode noticed that its weakest point was the hole where the pipes to the wash basin came through the wall. The two men enlarged



LOOKING BACK

By Rose McIlveen

the hole just enough to squeeze through to freedom some time prior to 4:30 a.m.

While the sheriff, whose name was Browning, was frantically looking for the escapees, other deputies were asking the obvious question. Where did the two prisoners get a hacksaw?

The *Telephone* reported that "Mrs. Goode called at the jail yesterday with a basket of eatables, but this was examined closely, and it is not believed the saw could have been sent in them."

Another theory was that the hacksaw had been dropped through a hole in the screen in a high barred window. Still a third theory was that recently-arrested drunks had brought the saw into the jail hidden in their clothing.

What irritated Sheriff Browning was that the jail escape — for Gatlin — was his second. That time Gatlin had gotten as far as Nashville, Tenn., and Browning had spent \$100 of his own money traveling down there to retrieve the prisoner.

Gatlin was no stranger to trouble. Only the year before (1911) he and his brother, Frank, were walking along College Avenue and arguing loudly enough for most anyone to hear. George Alexander, who was sitting on his front porch with his wife, took offense because the two Gatlins were using a lot of profanity. Alexander was shot by one of the Gatlins, but survived.

Then there was the offense that landed William Gatlin in jail the first time in 1912. The *Telephone* described why he was arrested.

"It is alleged that he broke into the Davis hardware store and he was caught in a rig stolen from Mrs. May Chasteen and had all kinds of ammunition, guns, revolvers and knives with him."

Goode was in jail because it was believed that he had stolen \$15 from William Bafford.

That particular charge would have some humorous repercussions after his trial.

Browning had his own routine for recapturing prisoners or wanted men, besides looking for them. Explained the *Telephone*, "Sheriff Browning had mailed a picture of Gatlin and the Bertillon measurements to almost every town within a radius of several hundred miles ..."

Browning was pretty sure one or both of the escapees would attempt a robbery or at least attract the attention of law officers. One of them did. It was Gatlin, who was arrested in Henry, Ill., leaving a store he had just robbed. Goode, who was not with him, was also arrested.

The State of Illinois wanted to keep Gatlin, but Sheriff Browning was determined to bring him back to Monroe County. The *Telephone* suggested that the prosecutor was also interested in seeing Gatlin again, concluding its Nov. 16 article, "Prosecutor Loudon may accompany Browning."

Next week: Gatlin's "press conference."

H-T 10/28/96