

Hoosiers not always immune to confidence schemes

Hoosiers have not been immune to the schemes of bunko artists nor too wise to be taken in by them. A Bedford immigrant and Bloomington merchants were the victims in 1922.

On Sept. 18, 1922, the Bloomington *Evening World* reported the belated capture of a man who had jumped bail in 1920 on a charge of "a box deal." The escapee, Joe Reckovena, was picked up in Indiana Harbor. The police there had called Bloomington to ask if there was still an outstanding warrant on Reckovena and obligingly delivered the man to our jail.

Actually, the crime of Reckovena had been committed in Bedford, but the trial had been moved to Monroe County. The accused, along with some friends, had appeared in Bedford with an appealing story.

A benefactor, said Reckovena, had decided to leave his considerable estate to an Italian immigrant, who by his labor had proved himself worthy. The only catch was that the immigrant was to put up \$4,000 to prove that he



LOOKING BACK

By Rose McIlveen

had been industrious. Frank Dorschen bit on the offer.

There was a problem for him — that of coming up with all that money. The *Evening World* described what happened.

"It seems that Frank Dorschen scraped together \$3,500 and begged the 'rich man' to take this as evidence of his industry."

Reckovena said, "No," but Dorschen begged just enough more. After all, Reckovena wanted to look reasonable and compassionate. He suggested that the \$3,500 should be put into a box and deposited at a Bedford bank while he (Reckovena) "called" the benefactor to see if the money was acceptable. Dorschen was told that he could go to the

bank at any time and check on his money or remove it.

The *Evening World* continued. "Friends of Dorschen persuaded him that something was wrong as soon as he told them of his 'good luck.' They went with him to the bank and discovered that the box had been switched. The box contained only paper."

Reckovena and his companions fled northward. After his arrest, Reckovena posted a \$2,500 bond and disappeared. That was in 1920. After his re-arrest in 1922, it is likely that he joined one of his cohorts at the prison in Michigan City.

Then there were the cases of men taking advantage of local concern during the 1922 railroad strike. The unscrupulous visitors to town were described in the Sept. 13 edition of the *Evening World*. "The first time was in May, when one fellow represented that he was getting out 'a time book' for railroad men and charged probably twenty merchants in this city \$25 each for representation in the book — that was the last we heard of the fellow."

Later two more men came to town and tried to pull the same scam. Henry Jones, chairman of the striking local shopmen committee, told the *Evening World*. "I had them arrested and made them give back all the money they had collected, made them pay their hotel bills and saw them walk out of town — broke."

Still a third bunch of "grifters" came to town with a slightly different version of the strike scam. Merchants were asked to donate \$10 each for a card which said "We are in favor of organized labor."

Again, Jones denied that the union had any connection with the strangers. He explained that any bona fide solicitor would have had an "official endorsement of the Central Labor Council."

It is not clear whether any of the latter scam artists were caught. The Sept. 14 issue of the *Evening World* reported that the strike had ended. Three shifts of shopmen went back to work at the McDoel shops on Sept. 21.

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