

Sherrif talks back to governor

Monroe County Sheriff Pete Thrasher was stung by Gov. Winfield Durbin's charge in April of 1903 that lawlessness prevailed in Bloomington. The accusation, in the form of a telegram, stemmed from an alleged "whitecapping" incident in Dunn Meadow on the Indiana University campus.

The whitecappers were a Klan-like group who regarded themselves as "self-appointed attitude adjusters" for the area.

Thrasher's reply to the governor was understandably defensive in tone and he cited a similar case when he had acted "promptly and vigorously" in conjunction with the county prosecutor.

Thrasher also suggested that he would like the assistance of the governor's IU student informant to help identify the participants and to give further details of the incident. "If these people who are corresponding with you will furnish the officers here with information sufficient to procure a warrant, I feel safe in saying, your honor, that I have the confidence in our judge, Hon. J.B. Wilson, with the prosecutor, Hon. R.G. Miller, that they will do their whole duty as promptly as any officers in the state. . . ."

The sheriff was not the only



Looking back

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one stunned by the governor's telegram. The two officers who said they had been deterred from investigating the "whitecapping" incident and turned away by four masked men were city patrolmen. Furthermore, another city officer, Whilliam Shinn, was accused of being one of the mob.

For Bloomington crime watchers, the accounts in the *Telephone* must have been confusing, since the published names of suspects were not always the same in subsequent editions. The original list consisted of Tib H. Cox, Shinn, David Gray, "Pikey" Brannam, Lon Shaw and a Mr. Jackson.

Shinn told the newspaper he was at home during the "whitecapping" and had relatives as witnesses. Cox had been out of town since the incident, but also said he had family who would vouch for his whereabouts the night of the incident.

In case Bloomington authorities had not fully understood his

threat in regard to IU, the governor chose the Indiana *Sentinel* to air his displeasure. He told a reporter, "I have made up my mind that unless certain assurances are given me as to the punishment of the men that so cruelly whipped these women and as to the prevention of anarchy in the future, I shall ask for legislation from the next General Assembly that the people of Bloomington will not like. They refuse to guard the sacred name of the university. They have no regard for their own good names. Well then, the state itself must look after the university's name, and I have an idea that the time is about to come for the Legislature to take a hand."

As promised to the governor by Thrasher, warrants were issued and arrests were made during June. Twice affidavits against the men were quashed on technicalities and reissued.

Meanwhile, one of the victims, Joseph Shively, had second thoughts about Shinn being among the "whitecappers." "Inasmuch as Shively is the star witness for the state in convicting the six alledged whitecappers, it seems that the serious change of mind as the time for trial advances will seriously affect the prosecution," the *Telephone* commented.