

Search of room provided key evidence against escapee

The local law officers had Johnny Lusk, keysmith, burglar and first-class escape artist, surrounded in a log house at the corner of Sixth and Dunn streets on that night in 1871. Their quarry had fashioned a makeshift saw and sawed his way out of the new "escape-proof" jail in January, and they weren't about to let him get away again.

Perhaps sensing that he was about to be captured, Lusk peeked out the door with a gun in his hand. He saw a deputy and darted back into the house, slamming the door. In his book, *Relive It*, the late C. Earl East described what happened



Looking back

By Rose McIlveen

next.

"Pretty soon soot was observed to be coming out of the chimney and it later developed Lusk had been trying to climb that way to the roof. Then a banging was heard coming from the housetop and looking up, the officers decided Lusk was trying

for a high exit.."

Suddenly, there were noises from a different part of the house. When the deputies went to that particular spot, they discovered that Lusk had beaten an opening in the weatherboarding.

Apparently, apart from wanting to escape the judgment of the court, Lusk was afraid of being lynched. He secured a promise from Sheriff Richard Fulk that there would be no lynching and surrendered.

It would be interesting to know where East found the details of Lusk's Bloomington exploits, since they are certainly not in the *Repub-*

lican Progress. That newspaper carried little local news except politics, particularly the editor/publisher's own variety.

Among the witnesses at his trial was a Mrs. Bishop, his landlady, who testified about Lusk's frequent trips out of town. He always took a trunk with him, certainly an excessive amount of luggage for a weekend visit.

Another witness talked to the court about evidence found in Lusk's rooming house. "In the one (trunk) found by officers immediately after his first arrest by (former police officer James) Ryan, was

quite an assortment of merchandise identified by various store owners as having been stolen from them."

Perhaps the most incriminating piece of evidence was a ring of keys made by Lusk during his days of employment in Archie McGinnis' blacksmith shop. By this time it was no surprise to the law enforcement officers that the keys unlocked the doors of "three-fourths" of the businesses in Bloomington.

Lusk enjoyed the luxury of four defense lawyers. One was the father of Paul V. McNutt, who became

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