

## Odd Thefts in Monroe

# JELLO THIEF OF MARCH 31 WAS 10-YEAR-OLD BOY, POLICE SAY

This caption from the April 29, 1935 issue of the Monroe Evening Times certainly arouses one's curiosity. Read this column to find out about some of the interesting thefts that took place here between 1876 and 1935.

I come across many interesting topics as I continue to read the Monroe newspapers. I hope that you will find the tidbits about local thefts that I share today to be fun and interesting. The first incident was reported in the Monroe Sentinel and the rest in the Monroe Evening Times.

A bevy of little girls decided to have a picnic in Wolcott's grove on Saturday, May 13, 1876, taking along many good things to eat in their baskets and pails. They hid them in a clump of bushes in a clean, cool place before going about their play. After playing for a time, they became hungry and "repaired to their improvised larder and found that some despicable person or persons had robbed them." Not being satisfied with just taking their food, the thieves filled some of the dishes with mud. "The happiness of the day was gone for the little folks — their joyous laughter and glee was turned into disappointment and hunger; some of the smaller ones actually cried." They went home in a famished condition, having fasted instead of feasting "with their picnic transferred by the imps of old nic [the devil]."

Sneak thieves stole \$12 worth of clothes from the property of Mrs. James Cason on west 17th Street shortly after dark on Tuesday evening, May 21, 1912. The theft was made by cutting the wire clothes line at both ends and removing the line with all of the clothes attached. Mrs. Cason said that she knew who the thieves were and would give them 12 hours to return the clothes before she would "have the guilty parties arrested and prosecuted to the limit." I found nothing more in the newspapers.

Mr. and Mrs. H. A. Reneau planned a lawn party at their home on south 23rd Avenue for the evening of September 22 of the same year. The guests numbered almost 60 and included the Gleaners, Volunteers, pupils of the Monroe Business Institute, and C. B. Bolender's Sunday school class. About 20 boys entered the kitchen while the hosts were entertaining. They stole three plates of cake, scattered sandwiches over the floor, and tracked grapes around the kitchen and dining room.

This was the second time that there had been an incident at the Reneau home. It was thought that offenders, who were known, might be punished and examples made of them. The police were called; they rounded up the miscreants. The Times reported the next day that the 30 boys who were implicated in the kitchen incident "settled with Mr. Reneau by signing a written apology and paying him twenty-five cents each."

A newspaper report on April 13, 1921 started, "Here, Chief Mackey, is work for you! Call in the reserves! Throw out the well known dragnet. The crime wave appears about to break over our fair, law-abiding city!" The newspaper mentioned, "Boys will be boys" as it described that they had taken cakes from a hostess when the guests were waiting to be served. Miss Dorothy Tschudy had been having a card party the previous evening. After an enjoyable time, Miss Tschudy went to get the "two fine, frosted cakes" out of the refrigerator. The cakes had disappeared without a trace.

It is unknown how the boys gained access to the cakes as the refrigerator stood in the kitchen, a short distance from where the guests were playing cards. "There was no disturbance or noise and the thieves made their getaway, leaving the hostess in an embarrassing situation and the guests minus part of the refreshments." A note was left saying, "Thanks for the cake."

"Cake Thieves Continue Nefarious Operations" was the headline on an article two days later. It went on to say that, "Unscrupulous villains are still at work in the city." A cake stand with delicious frosting still clinging to it had been found in the yard at the high school and taken into the building. Police were working on clues and warned that the thieves would be severely dealt with if they were found. I saw nothing more in the newspapers.

Four months later, Undersheriff A. E. Mitchell arrested 14-year-old Alvin Divan, of Chicago, who had been visiting his uncle, LaVerne Hoylen, four miles east of Albany in Rock County. The boy, who was in Monroe on Tuesday, August 23, explained to Mitchell, "I didn't set out to steal no horse. I found it going along the road without a driver and I thought it would be nice to drive it. So I did."

Upon investigation it was found that the mare and light buggy that belonged to the Welton brothers, who lived near Browntown, had disappeared from the square. Before she was found at Hoylen's farm it was thought that she had become restless, got loose from her hitching post, and started for home where she had a colt.

"The boy apparently is not a bad fellow, and says he is sorry he caused trouble. The authorities are considering whether further proceedings will be necessary. Assuming that the lad's story is true, it is likely that he will be let go with a warning that borrowing a rig is not proper."

Monroe police announced on April 29, 1935 that they had apprehended the "jello thief" — a 10-year-old boy who they turned over to the Green County children's board. The lad had stolen \$17 from purses in the cloak room of a church on Sunday. The police were led to a local grade school where a new bat and ball indicated someone was "in the money." He had also purchased a toy airplane, a chocolate bar, a movie ticket as well as given his brother some money.

After quizzing the boy admitted that he was the person who took storm windows off homes on the north side of town and entered the Albert C. Theiler home on March 31 where he "licked the bananas out of the jello" and left burnt matches. He was able to give the police back \$15.20.

None of these were horrific crimes, but nonetheless illegal. Seems that people haven't really changed that much in a century.