

# IOWA HISTORY



(Courtesy Library of Congress)

## Jailbirds Promise Reform

Robert Smith insisted he and his bank robbing accomplice could have gotten away with most of the loot from the North Liberty bank if William Loomis hadn't been so intent on getting married.

In August 1915 the pair were apprehended by authorities and confessed to their crimes. They had robbed the North Liberty bank and had stolen an automobile to use for a get-away vehicle. They had been on the run for three weeks when the Iowa City police caught up with them. Loomis was tracked down in Rock Island and Smith in Detroit.

Smith and Loomis had met in the Quad Cities in 1912. Smith worked in gambling halls that Loomis frequented. The two became friends and eventually fell into a life of crime.

After they robbed the North Liberty bank they set out for Iowa City where Smith's sister lived. He sent her to the store to purchase a new suit of clothes for himself. They wanted her out

of the way while they divided up the money. And Smith needed some nice clothes for his new life in Detroit. He planned to get a job in an automobile factory and turn over a new leaf. No more gambling nor crime for him.

“I was going to start out all new again,” Smith said. “I had made up my mind that I had played my last cards and was going to try to go straight. But they have got me now,” he lamented.

On the long trip from Detroit to Iowa Smith told the police he wanted to enter a guilty plea. He confessed to his crime and said he was ready to start serving his sentence immediately. When they arrived in Iowa City the authorities put him in jail and set his bail at \$10,000. He wasn't able to post bail so he remained behind bars. The police told Smith that Loomis had complained to them that Smith hadn't shared the money from the robbery.

When Smith heard this twist to the story, he was highly insulted. “That yarn about me gipping him out of his share of the money was false. Do you think I'm that kind of guy!” he asked as he peered through the bars. “I wouldn't do a trick like that!” In fact, Smith claimed that Loomis had been the one who counted out the money. He insisted that Loomis's story was his way of trying to win favor with the police.

And Smith blamed Loomis for their predicament. He said if Loomis hadn't stayed in Iowa to get married both would have been out of state and free as birds.

“If Loomis hadn't been so crazy to stay around here and marry that girl things would have been different. He had got a divorce in Davenport and wanted to marry this girl. Well, he'll have plenty of time to think it over now.”

Smith was right about that. They each got 20 years in prison for their crime. And they wouldn't be seeing much of each other. Smith was going to serve his time in Fort Madison; Loomis would be in Anamosa. However, both pledged that they would reform when they were released.

#### Sources

“Auto Bandits to Iowa City Now Jailed Here,” *Iowa City Press Citizen*, Aug 5, 1915.

“Bank Robber Bitter,” *Times-Republican*, Aug 6, 1915.

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