

JAIL etc.

Source: A.W. Bowen's history of Montgomery County, Indiana. Indianapolis: 1913,, page 119 and 120.

" In the year 1824, soon after the completion of the court-house, the commissioners of the county ordered a jail to be constructed on the northeast corner of the public square, about where J. S. Miller & Co's blacksmith shop now stands. The specifications of the work show it to have been a quaint structure, and as likely to prove interesting to the general reader. We give sufficient details to show what kind of prison walls were deemed sufficient to hold prisoners in those days: "The jail-house to be 24 feet by 20 feet from out to out ; the foundation to be laid with stone sunk 18 inches under ground, and to be 12 inches above the ground, and to be 3 feet wide, on which there is to be built, with logs hewed 12 inches square, double walls with a vacancy of one foot between the walls ; the vacancy between the walls to be filled with peeled poles, not more than six inches thick." The jail contained two rooms : the " debtors' room," for the incarceration of persons unwilling or unable to pay their honest debts, had the only door opening to the outside of the building, and communicated within by a single door opening into the felons' cell ; a single grated window, cut high up in each room, furnished light and air to the inmates. Abraham Griffith was the builder, and received \$243 for his work. The first inmate of this jail was Peter Smith, who was arrested for stealing a silver watch. He was awaiting trial and had been confined but a few days, when one stormy night. gave him the opportunity to burn the lock off the oaken door of his cell and gain access to the debtors' room, where he easily filed the fastenings from the outer door and made his escape, leaving the building in flames. The citizens were aroused, but not in time to save the jail. Suspicion was rife that Smith had assistance from some confederate scamp outside, and finally it settled with sufficient certainty upon a worthless chicken-thief named Jack, who had long been a lazy pensioner upon the industrious little community, and a crowd of citizens, duly disguised and armed, collected to administer lynch law upon the offender. He was arrested and taken down in the ravine northwest of town, now the road running to the Sperry bridge and Blair's ford, then filled with dense thickets and clumps of briars, where he was stripped and soundly thrashed with hickory "gads" and released on a promise to leave the country for that country's good. From this circumstance the ravine was long called "Jack's Hollow." Smith, the jail burner, was soon afterward recaptured by Sheriff Maxwell and a posse, brought back, and chained to an iron staple in the court-house, where he was

carefully guarded until his trial and conviction, when he was taken to the penitentiary at Jeffersonville to serve a term of three years at hard labor. "

NOTE: Well, looks like I may find more on Jack's Hollow than the jail :(Okay, here's another notation on that

From the Sept 2 1858 Crawfordsville Weekly Journal – "Jack's Hollow" was once quite a familiar term in the county, but now, perhaps few know what it means and few yet, how that locality came to have that name or in fact where it is. Well, it is situated in the northwest part of Crawfordsville, and is occupied by the graded roads that leads down by Sperry's Mills; and it received its name from the fact that the sentence of Judge Lynch was there administered to Allen Jack. In the settlement of new counties, courthouses and jails seem to be among the first improvements needful for the public, and they generally precede the church and the school house, and the want of them is frequently the cause of appeals being had to Lynch Law. Such was the case here. A jail had been constructed entirely of wood, but had been burned down. Smith called for his breakfast on Sunday morning about three miles above town, and while breakfast was preparing, he slipped a watch into his pocket and carried it off with him. He was followed, brought back and committed to prison to await his trial. By some means, he got out, set fire to the jail and decamped. He was followed this time by Old Tom Curry and J. Scott, after (four) or five days, was again taken. He was brought back, and the jail being burned down, he was chained in the court house and was guarded day and night while in this situation. Allen Jack, a jour (?) Shoemaker was seen to give Smith a file – Jack was arrested, and after an examination, was chained by the side of Smith. Now here was some of a job until the next term of the court. Some four months was rather an expensive business – something must be done – Jack was taken before Judge Stitt, on a writ of habeus corpus, and the only positive evidence against him, being a colored man, the case was so managed, that he set at liberty. In the evening, he was invited into a grocery to drink; and with him went Kurts, another jour Shoemaker, a very large and stout man but drunken. Jack was quite a small man, and there was not much fear of him; but Kurts it was thought, might hurt somebody; and it was necessary to prepare for him. J. Scott was about as large and as drunken as Kurts; and was perfectly willing to aid and assist. He was therefore placed on the walk with a good club, and when Jack and Kurts emerged from

the grocery and went upon the street, Jack was picked up and carried off; whereup Kurts stooped and raised a brick-bat, but when he arose, the club was beside him and he had orders to drop it (the brick) which he did quickly, and left. How the sentence was executed upon Jack, but few ever knew, but the hollow was named, and he was seen no more.

During the time there was no jail in this county, some other cases of lynch occurred. Brown got drunk and abused his wife cruelly. He was taken to the point where the railroad shop now stands, and a dose of beech freely administered. But the most important case of the kind, was McCarty, who came to this county with another man's wife, whose husband followed and caught them here; and as it happened during the session of the Circuit Court, he was therefore, brought to trial, found guilty and fined some two or three hundred dollars, but he defied the court and the county. He had nothing and the county had no jail. He was saucy – swore he could whip ten of the best men in town and all he wanted as to be "let loose." Now here was trouble. What was to be done with him? Was the question with everybody; and a very general opinion seemed to be that Judge Lynch would have to take the case. The prison was even told that the "black boys" would get him; but he defied black boys, as well as everything else. An evening or two after the trial, several men were seen laying around the court house – some time after dark – and the next morning when the Sheriff came down and had equired (?) for his pet, he was heard to say, that he was in hopes, "that the black boys would have got him last night!" These things still increased the public feeling, that it was necessary to dispose of the case. Accordingly, the next evening, there might have been seen some ten or fifteen men collected quietly in a certain office. Everything remained quiet however, till between nine and ten o'clock at night, when they issued forth and went towards the court house. When they arrived there, one of their number went around to the back of the house to ascertain the position of the parties within. When he returned he reported that the prisoner was lying on a bench apparently asleep, and that two men acting as guards were sitting by a candle reading. One man who lived near by now left for home and the rest went up to the door; when one of the knocked the guard came to the door and asked: "Who's there?" He was answered, "A friend." Turning the key the guard again asked, "Who is it?"

Again, "A friend," was the reply; when he cautiously commenced opening the door, but his movements were hurried from the outside and in the midst of his exclamations Old Rosin sprang upon him and he was taken down. Two men tied each one of the guard, and four or five carried out the prisoner, who was so completely surprised, that he made no noise until he was nearly across the street when he attempted to cry murder but Old John had him by the throat and prevented much noise. He was taken into the hollow near the crossing of Walnut and Market streets, drawn up to a big log and received some sixty or seventy stripes of beech – charged to leave this county now and forever and dismissed. In the meantime the man who had started home to go to bed, heard some noise when about half stripped and running over to the Court House, he found the guard both tied and their charge gone. He made many enquiries of them whether they knew any of the men or not? One of them knew nobody the other rather thought that the one that tied him was S, by the way he laughed; but their prisoner was gone, so they covered up the fire shut the door and left. Mr. Editor, the above has been jotted down merely as a reminiscence of the past, and not with any view of justifying Judge Lynch R