

Murder, rape trial set for Oct. 22

After two years of legal maneuvering, a Kansas City man will stand trial for the murder of a Platte City man and the rape of his wife.

The Platte County Prosecutor's Office said Jacob McGinnis, 27, is set to appear in Platte County Division 1 Circuit Court at 9 a.m. Oct. 22 to face murder and rape charges stemming from events which took place in Platte City on Sept. 10, 2005. McGinnis is charged with murdering Steven Sandoval and raping the victim's wife. He is also charged with two counts of armed criminal action.

According to the prosecutor's office, McGinnis has entered a plea of not guilty by reason of insanity to the charges. Last week, his attorney waived McGinnis' right to a jury trial. The case will be heard and ruled on by Judge Abe Shafer.

During the past two years, McGinnis has undergone court-ordered mental evaluations and has been determined able to stand trial.

Fleet of vintage autos retraces Barrow Gang's escape from Platte County

For a select group of people who were at the right (or wrong, depending on the circumstances) place at the right time, history includes actual memories from an event which eventually becomes part of the record.

For everyone else, history involves the imagination. How well an event can be recreated often determines the level of interest, as does proximity to where the event occurred. Both elements were evident at the Bonnie and Clyde Symposium, held Saturday at the Ambassador Building in the back yard of where the Red Crown Tavern used to stand. It was also evident through the back roads of Platte County, where a vintage car tour of nearly 100 vehicles snaked through the countryside while following the escape route the Barrow Gang supposedly took in their own shot-up, bloody vehicle many years ago.

There was certainly no lack of interest with the inaugural event, as over 300 people spilled out into an overflow conference room. A large number of the symposium attendees were relatives of persons involved with the infamous shootout at the Red Crown Tavern, which occurred July 19, 1933. Based on the success of this year's event, organizer Jim Spawn is already planning a second event in conjunction with the 75-year anniversary for next summer.

"I am elated with a capital E at the number of people who showed up today," Spawn said. "To look across this room full of people shows there is a real thirst for this kind of local history."

Spawn emceed the presentation, which lasted for almost three hours, and organized the symposium with the support and sponsorship of the Heart of America Model A Ford Club, whose members made up the majority of the Model A's in the Escape from Platte County vintage car tour.

After interviewing Spawn for a preview article I wrote the week before July 19 this year, I decided to attend the symposium, and even managed to obtain a ride in a Model A. It turned out to be a delightful day, with a number of highlights that sparked my imagination, including:

- While it has been almost 20 years since my best friend since high school gave me frequent rides over most of the gravel roads in Grundy County in his 1972 Camaro, I don't think that is quite far enough in the past to be considered as an actual ride in a vintage car. So before Saturday, the closest I had ever come to actually riding in a vintage car like the Model A was as a young child at Disney World, when my sister and I hopped into a vehicle about a quarter the size of an actual Model A and rode it around a winding track. The amusement park car, with only stop and go pedals, would bounce from side to side along a metal rail which kept us from going off-road, which was almost as much fun as honking the sick-goose sounding horn.

I was reminded of that almost-forgotten vacation while riding in Milton and Sharon Hessefort's Model A Ford from the symposium, north to Ferrelview and up Interurban Road to Hoover, north past Basswood Resort over the river and through the woods before circling back south to Hwy. 92. We then went north again past Shiloh Springs Golf Course, with a brief stop at Platte County Historical Society President Bill Brown's house before finally finishing our tour at the Platte County Courthouse in Platte City. Perhaps most telling about the circuitous ride through the beautiful Saturday afternoon countryside was Milt's statement about the Barrow Gang's travels in 1933: "Man, they must have really been lost!"

Along the way, we passed several residents who stopped what they were doing briefly to wave at the parade of vehicles which had not been a common sight on these roads for well more than half a century, and I could not help but imagine the curious looks given to the Barrow gang vehicle as it sped by, filled with bullet holes and bloody gangsters. I also could not help but think that while the Hessefort's Model A does not have many of the creature comforts of the current car such as air conditioning — unless you include the wing windows — and power steering, our ride over Platte County blacktops was much more comfortable than the Barrow Gangs' harrowing escape over strange roads almost as likely to be traversed at that time by horse and buggy as by car.

As we traveled, I filled in some of the details about Platte County to Milt, who lives in Blue Springs and spends much of his time working on his Model A, which he restored to pristine beauty, and other Model A's, of which two more were in the tour. In return, Milt shared some historical tidbits about his car and other Model A's, including: he bought and rebuilt his Model A from "not quite a pile of parts" in 2004. He said his Model A is one of approximately 2-300,000 Model A's on the road today out of almost five million built between 1928-31, and that he originally built his car for a cross country trip to a vintage car convention in Portland, Ore. Milt's car had been previously owned by a man in Oklahoma who owned several Model A's, and had been rented to actor David Carradine, who drove the car in three movies, two of which were "Around" and "21 Miles." Hessefort also said he is a member of two of the three Model A clubs in the Kansas City area, one near his home and a new one that was recently formed in Smithville.

- A dramatic 16-minute film portraying an injured Bonnie Parker and her accomplice, Clyde Barrow, was presented at the symposium. The independent film, which included some salty language, discussion of Clyde's rape by another convict in prison and his plans for revenge, showed the gritty reality of Bonnie and Clyde — while often portrayed in a glamorous light, the life of the Barrow Gang was anything but.

- An article from the July 20, 1933 edition of the Kansas City Journal-Post read during the symposium demonstrated many of the differences between journalism then and now, particularly in the dramatic flowering writing style of the time. Spawn noted the wide discrepancies between accounts of the shootout, but also said those differences in opinion added historical flavor and promoted discussion.

"This article shows that even the next day there were errors reported in what happened, and they start in the headline when it said four people were involved instead of five," Spawn said. "There were 15-20 accounts of the shootout made soon after in newspapers and they were riddled with inconsistencies."

In the article are numerous references to women attired only in nightclothes, a bullet that went through the "bullet-proof" windshield glass of the getaway vehicle and an account of "where 19 persons had assembled to watch the assault," including Platte County Sheriff Holt Coffey's son, Clarence Coffey, who may or may not have been deputized by his father, depending upon which source is believed.

- To conclude the presentation, Spawn brought up an excellent point: the need for some kind of marker in Platte County (he suggested it be at the Red Crown site) to commemorate the event. Next year, with the 75-year anniversary of the shootout, is a perfect time to take advantage of the timing and get such a remembrance done. Included in every bag of goodies given to symposium attendees was an addressed envelope for such donations.

“Dexfield Park, Iowa (where the Barrow Gang fled to after leaving Platte County and near where Buck Barrow died and Blanche Barrow was captured and returned to Platte City) spent \$36,000 for its marker, and we have nothing here,” Spawn said.

- Spawn’s suggestion got me to thinking: wouldn’t a Bonnie and Clyde event make a perfect tie-in for an event in Platte City, which has recently been debating festivals — and the lack thereof — in downtown Platte City?

Besides being just a few miles from the site of the shootout and the escape route, Platte City has several other connections with the Barrow Gang saga. Platte County law enforcement officials plotted the assault from the sheriff’s office on Main Street, and Blanche Barrow was held in the jail, and tried and sentenced to prison at the courthouse. Before the shootout, Blanche reportedly bought bandages and other supplies for Bonnie (who was injured in an automobile accident a couple of weeks before and was the reason the Gang stopped at the Red Crown) at the Platte City Drug Company, located on Main Street at the current location of the Lyle Odo law office.

Being the county seat and the stopping point of the vintage car tour doesn’t hurt, either. So here’s what I’m suggesting to Platte City officials: first of all, keep the motorcycle rally in September; it’s been a nice event for downtown and doesn’t deserve to be tossed aside just when it is gaining consistency. Then develop an event in conjunction with the Bonnie and Clyde event and the vintage car tour’s finish in downtown Platte City.

Imagine this: a street dance with people in period outfits, a car show, a reenactment of the shootout and a serious historical tie to other Kansas City history such as the Union Station Massacre, which occurred just a few weeks before the Red Crown shootout. The Friends of the Arts could get involved with big band and symphonic music from that era, as could high school bands and barbershop groups, jazz bands and more.

At first, the July 19 date of the 75th anniversary of the Red Crown shootout gave me pause because of its timing and possible competition with the Platte County Fair scheduled to begin the following Wednesday. However, I really think it could be a good advance event to help bring people to the Platte City area (and therefore benefiting Platte City businesses) and help promote the Fair, with plenty of opportunities for crossover events. After all, while there are some people who believe Bonnie and Clyde — as the hardened criminals and outlaws they were — receive too much attention for their deeds, the shootout at the Red Crown is perhaps Platte County’s biggest historical claim to fame.

“I was really impressed with the number of people who came here today, and I’m excited about the potential for a similar event next year,” Spawn said when I suggested a Platte City event in connection with next year’s symposium. “As it (the symposium) grows and more people get involved, there are plenty of options available for other correlating events in the area.”

Farley still looking at disbanding

The Board of Trustees of the Village of Farley is still considering the possibility of unincorporating the Village due to lack of revenue.

At its regular meeting Monday, the Board again discussed unincorporation, which was first suggested at an August board meeting.

Board of Trustee Chair Teresa Bing said many residents had heard about the issue from newspaper articles, and the board welcomed input and opinions. She asked the dozen people in attendance for public comment, but received none. A list of questions compiled by board members was distributed, and Bing suggested any additional questions citizens may have on the consequences of unincorporation could be added to the list.

“It’s not that the board is trying to push this through,” she said. “A citizen brought it up. It’s not something we take lightly, or even something that would be done by the board. It’d be done by the people, and we encourage input from the people.”

After receiving that input, Bing said the list would be sent to Platte County Director of Planning and Zoning Daniel Erickson. The list contains questions ranging from how the post office, school district boundaries and city park would be affected, to general questions on life under County jurisdiction.

If the Village decided to pursue unincorporation, a state-mandated process would have to followed. Steps would include, among other actions, a public hearing, a petition and a public vote.

The board first considered the option after learning it may cost the Village up to \$150,000 to repair Platte River Road, which was closed after the Platte River flood in May. For a municipality with an operating budget of approximately \$35-40,000 per year, such a road repair bill was unfeasible.

An attempt to get assistance from the Federal Emergency Management Administration was denied because the Village would need to complete a geophysical study costing \$10-12,000 before any repairs could be made. Since, Village officials learned from the Missouri State Emergency Management Administration (SEMA) that the study may not be required, or SEMA itself may assist with the study cost.

The board contacted the Missouri Municipal League for advice, and to see if any other municipalities had considered this option recently. The fourth-class city of Mack Creek near Camdenton, attempted to unincorporate after its city hall burned to the ground and the city government itself was forced to file for bankruptcy. While the petition made it as far as a public ballot issue, the 124 residents voted it down and Mack Creek remains a city.

The Village of Farley boasts a long history in Platte County. It was incorporated in 1850, when Josiah Farley filed the first town plat. It is also the birthplace of Farley State Bank, a business that still retains a location in the Village.