

Bank Incident Proves Swindling Not Unknown In Short Grass Area

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10-7-65

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MERTZON — Until recently I did not put much store in the multitude of written and vocal reports on the alarming increase of crime in this nation. Nor did I believe that the moral fiber of the jet age citizen was any weaker than that of the old tops who had to rely on horses and buggies to get to where the sinning was.

One reason I have given so little credence to news that we were nothing more than a bunch of gunpacking, thieving scoundrels rests in the fact that out here in the short grass country we often are left out of the thrilling developments affecting the rest of the populace. It is not unusual for a national fad to come and go while we are concerning ourselves with, say, clouds that float by without doing anything more than shading the ground or making us fall into a fit of disappointment.

Furthermore, we are not prone to becoming associated with criminal activities. Considering the manner in which the forage possibilities of the land have diminished, it is senseless to steal even one sheep to add to what we are generally feeding. As for grabbing up a six shooter and bumping off one of our fellow denizens, this would be most out of place because the population has already dropped to the point where, by 1970, the census taker can do his job in one morning, sitting up on the court house hill and counting the pickups that pass along the main street.

However, don't misunderstand me. I am not trying to tell you that we lack only a set of wings to become a community of angels.

I know full well that if pork chops remain at \$1.10 a pound, the cow outfit in the north end of the county will miss some hogs after frost, and the missing hogs will not have flown south for the winter. And if frying size chickens go to 40 or 50 cents a pound the local chicken owners who remain in the business may be composed solely of those who had the judgment to invest in locks and burglar alarms.

Nevertheless I fear all the foregoing is history. It looks as if our relatively remote location is no longer a buffer against the lawless element. When you've studied the remainder of my tale I believe you will understand why I've changed my mind.

What happened is that some time back a daring out-of-towner walked in our local bank and passed a forged instrument.

Unfortunately I am a bit fuzzy as to just who okayed the check, or what actually transpired. Even though a very reputable man claims the senior officer in charge was present when the stunt was pulled off, I hesitate to believe that the slickest fingered felon who ever stepped on Alcatraz Island could hook this chap out of worn-out ink eraser. Thus it behooves us to deal in generalities and not pinpoint the blame for whoever permitted the deed.

Regardless of who allowed the audacious act to occur, I can assure you that if, prior to this time, there had been book made on the possibilities of anybody putting the "old hocus pocus" to our local bank or the bankers therein, the odds would have been on the same order as those quoted on the probability of the John Birch society asking and getting Earl Warren to speak at their founding day banquet or on the Ladies Study Club hiring some tomato similar to Miss Zsa Zsa Gabor to be hostess for the Businessmen's Bible Class.

In other words, previous experience has taught the community that the bank chief guarded the money entrusted in his care with a tenacity which would make the death grip of a pit bulldog seem like the holding power of a sprung paper clip.

There wasn't a man in 50 miles of here who figured that a reincarnated Al Capone would have had the gall to try to beat this bank out of a dollar, much less the nerve to hang them with a forged check. Of course we were all stunned when the news spread across the country; even today many remain convinced that this was merely a rumor or the prank of a town wag.

So it all boils down to this: After what happened at the bank, I believe that Mr. Johnson indeed needs his committee to banish crime. Also, I guess old Barry Goldharp wasn't all wet when he carried on so long and loud about the abundance of crime in the country.

However, it is doubtful if this section, even after the spectacular affair at the bank, will ever be truly on guard. It could cloud up in the northeast before dark, and a desperado could carry off everything on the place while we were gazing at the heavens.