

## Spring Grove Bank Robbed by George Nelson

**T**alk to any of the very long time residents of Spring Grove about the old Spring Grove State Bank on the corner of Main and Blivin Streets, and it is very likely that you'll hear them say, "You know, when that place was a bank, it was robbed by Baby Face Nelson." If you were to do a little research about Baby Face Nelson, you would most definitely find sources that hail the Spring Grove robbery as Nelson's first "big time" job. Indeed, the bank was robbed of \$2,000.50 by George Nelson in early November 1926, but was Spring Grove's George Nelson one in the same as history's murderous Baby Face Nelson?

The true story of the robbery of the Spring Grove State Bank is a rather remarkable account, chronicled in the local paper, the McHenry Plaindealer, on November 18, 1926. It was an otherwise peaceful Saturday in the small town, and the lone cashier, Floyd Foss, was getting ready to close the bank for the lunch hour (this was a standard practice in that time!). Floyd normally worked at West McHenry State Bank, but he was substituting for Spring Grove's Alfred Richardson, who was away on his honeymoon. Just after Floyd locked the vault, two strangers walked into the bank. Unbeknownst to Floyd, they were neophyte bandits who wasted little time before wielding a revolver and commanding, "Stick 'em up!" One of the bandits was George Nelson, and his cohort was John Such.

Forcing Floyd to lay on the floor, Nelson and Such took his keys and unlocked the vault. They took a bundle of currency from the vault before ordering Floyd back into the vault and locking him in it...or so they thought. The bandits had no sooner driven away from the crime scene than Floyd emerged from the vault and bank, announcing that the bank had just been robbed.

A Spring Grove resident named Paul Weber was standing across the street and had seen the strangers leave the bank. Nothing seemed out of the ordinary until Floyd emerged from the bank, frantically proclaiming that the bank had just been robbed. At that point, Paul Weber and Victor Siegler, who worked at the fish hatchery, took matters into their own hands. Believe it or not, they secured a high-powered rifle at John Brown's soft drink parlor, which was located on the corner opposite the bank. Jumping into Paul Weber's Chevrolet, the two young men took off after the crooks.

Nelson and Such were headed toward Fox Lake, where they could get onto a cement road and make good speed toward Chicago. Unfortunately for the bandits, they were unfamiliar with the roads between the two towns, and they made a wrong turn onto a dead end street before they were able to reach the cement road. As they attempted to reverse direction on the narrow road, the car slipped off the road and became helplessly stuck. The confused bandits abandoned their get away vehicle and headed on foot down the railroad tracks toward the Fox Lake train station.

In the meantime, Weber and Siegler reached Fox Lake and notified Marshall Joseph D. Riggs that the Spring Grove State Bank robbers were headed his way. The three men spotted the strangers walking along the railroad tracks, and Weber identified them as the

robbers. Anticipating that the men would try to catch the next train out of town, Weber, Siegler and Riggs got into position to nab the bandits. Riggs waited in the train station, and Siegler, with the rifle, hid behind a cement traffic post at a nearby corner. As the bandits' bad luck would have it, they headed straight toward the armed Siegler, who jumped out in front of the pair and ordered them to stop. Nelson and Such threw their hands up in the air in surrender, at which time they were promptly arrested and thrown in the village lockup, \$2,000.50 poorer.

Fortunately, the George Nelson who robbed Spring Grove State Bank at gunpoint was not Baby Face (or "Big George") Nelson. Baby Face Nelson was notorious for ending his robberies in a needless bloodbath, which was not the case in Spring Grove. The George Nelson who robbed Spring Grove State Bank was 36 years old in 1926, and he had served in World War I. Baby Face Nelson was born in 1908, which means he was only 18 years old in 1926, and he would have been much too young to serve in World War I. Baby Face Nelson didn't start robbing banks until 1930. He terrorized Illinois, Wisconsin and Indiana until he was killed in a shootout near Barrington, Illinois in 1934. The George Nelson who robbed Spring Grove State bank was captured and jailed as a result of the robbery. In fact, one month to the day after having robbed Spring Grove State Bank, George Nelson, 36, and John Such, 20, pleaded guilty of the crime and were sent to the state penitentiary at Joliet to serve a sentence of three to twenty years. Nelson was paroled in 1933, discharged in 1936, and he never returned to prison.