

"Union Mills Bank Robbed in 1957"

Carroll County Times article for 18 February 2001

By Jay A. Graybeal

Residents in the Union Mills area were shaken by an armed robbery of their bank on February 5, 1957. The robbery, the first in the area since 1929, made front-page news in the February 7 issue of the Democratic Advocate newspaper under the headline of "Union Mills Citizens Put in Nervous State Over Bank Robbery In Their Town":

"The officials in the Westminster Trust Co.'s branch bank in Union Mills experienced their first bank hold up Tuesday afternoon when two masked bandits entered and demanded the cash they had. Mr. Smeak, the treasurer, handed over \$7,010 at the point of a gun. The bandits made a hasty retreat in a parked car and was last seen on the old Hanover road.

Maryland and Pennsylvania State Police, along with the FBI, sent swarms of investigators into the area. They blocked roads, checking cars on main highways and side roads in all directions, but Monday night a Maryland trooper said they had "no real clues."

An hour after the holdup, a car fitting the description of the getaway vehicle was found abandoned about seven miles south of Hanover, but Pennsylvania troopers found the owner of the car nearby, which eliminated him as the victim.

The holdup men, both waving snub nosed revolvers, strode into the bank at 2:25 p.m. Two persons, Calvin E. Bankert, 84, who managed the branch himself for 54 years, and Rev. Edward Hamme, 74, who lives about a mile away along the Hanover road, was leaving after cashing a check.

The gunmen made them go inside. One of them poked a gun at G. Leroy Smeak, assistant treasurer of the bank. When the gunman asked for cash, Mr. Smeak pushed some through a counter window. He asked for more, and forced Mr. Smeak to go inside the vault to get it. Mr. Smeak handed the bandit all visible cash leaving a larger amount, he said.

Then the robbers forced all three of their victims to sit on the floor of the Bank.

The shorter of the intruders, who seemed drunk or "hopped up", waved his revolver and said, "Let's shoot him now."

His companion said, "Put that gun away," and fled from the bank.

A woman who drove past the bank at about the time of the crime told police she had seen two men come out, get into a dirty, light-colored car and speed south.

She said the car turned left on Route 140 into the Old Hanover road, a hilly and good way to escape or make it troublesome to follow.

Police made a check at taverns in the area on the possibility the unsteady gunman might have been drinking nearby before the crime.

State police issued this description of the two robbers:

No. 1 – About five feet eight inches tall, between 35 and 40 years of age, wearing a red jacket, white trousers and a slouch hat.

No. 2 – About five feet nine inches tall, same age, wearing a dark suit and a slouch hat. Capt. John Doud, troop commander of Maryland State Police, said that the steady snowfall was hindering police efforts to locate the bandits.

The robbers wore skintight masks over their faces as disguises. One of the robbers dropped some of his loot on the floor, and as a courtesy, Rev. Hamme reached down to help him but was soon stopped by the gangster pointing a gun at him.

We recall the only other recent bank robbery in the area. That was April 5, 1929, when three unmasked men walked into the Farmers and Mechanics National Bank of East Main street. They walked out with \$14,000.

The men left in one car which they parked in front of the home of John Cunningham, West Green street, bank cashier, and then switched to another auto for their get away. They were not apprehended until May 15 that year when they were stopped for a traffic violation in St. Louis, Mo. Most of the loot was still in their car.

They were Rawlings V. Whittemore, Robert Miner and August Beyers, who were returned here to stand trial. They were sentenced to 20 years in the Maryland Penitentiary by the late Chief Judge Francis Neal Parke.

The three broke out of jail and subsequently were recaptured and Whittemore was given an additional year for assault for hitting the sheriff over the head in their escape.”

As noted in the article, bank robberies were few relatively unusual events in Carroll’s history. When one happened, however, it rocked a community and immediately became a notable occurrence in the town’s recent history.

The former Union Mills Savings Bank, shown here in c.1925, was robbed at gunpoint on February 5, 1957. Historical Society of Carroll County Collection.