

EXCITING TIMES IN WESTERN BEAVER COUNTY

Frank Steele was born about 1900 and grew up on a farm just southwest of the intersection of Georgetown Road and State Route 251 in South Beaver Township. Sometime during the 1970s, Frank wrote his memoirs in longhand and my late cousin Peg Townsend acquired a copy and reproduced parts of it and sent them to me. Mr. Steele had an excellent memory and most of his stories are quite interesting. This one was probably pretty exciting to the young Frank Steele and his father William.

"On October 24, 1919, my father and I were going after a load of corn with the horses and wagon to the McDermott farm where the Black Hawk golf course is now. He farmed this place on the shares.

And at the place on the road [now State Route 251] directly in front of where Ronie Bradshaw's house is, there was a red Paige touring car passed us with four men in it and they were changing their clothes. And we wondered just what was the occasion.

"On out the road by where John McKenna lives, Jocko Brown, a Beaver Falls policeman on a motorcycle stopped and asked us if we'd seen the red car. And he told us the State Bank had been robbed and Mr. Sakraida had been killed. We told him we'd seen them about five minutes ago and he went on his way.

"The driver of the car [who had turned south on Georgetown Road] stopped in Blackhawk and asked John McNickle, who was working in the garden, where the roads went. John told them he'd lived there a long time and had never seen them go anywhere. They told him they didn't want any smart answers and drove on up through the town and in the direction of Salem Church.

They turned left past John Cunningham's farm [on what is now Windover Road] and left the car near a coal mine that the police thought they had used for a hiding place. Forrest Cook and I were there along with a posse of about three hundred men. The police went into the mine but there were no robbers. They had escaped and were never captured. \$9,000 had been stolen from the bank."

An account of the event was later written by the late Paul Rossomme of Ohio Township, whose father's farm was near where the abandoned

getaway car was found. The robbers were from Pittsburgh and had hired the Paige car and a driver to bring them to Beaver Falls and the State Bank which was on 5th Avenue. John and Vincent Sakraida [brothers?] were working in the bank and after John was forced to turn over the money he grabbed one of the robbers and was shot in the shoulder. At this time Vincent grabbed for another of the criminals and was shot and killed. The robbers fled toward Chippewa, abandoning the hired driver along the way, turned toward Ohio on what is now Route 251, and then passed the Steeles in their wagon.

Rossomme does point out that in 1921, one of the bank's money bags was found in a boarding house in Reading, PA, and two men were arrested and returned to Beaver Falls for trial. Unfortunately, he doesn't say what the results were.