

Detroit's Time of Trouble: It Began with a Raid Here . . .



Bill Scott: A cop crashed his party

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Meet William Scott. Call him Bill.

He doesn't look like a bad guy. He is really a regular fellow, easy come, easy go.

He even likes to toss a party now and then, and it was just two weeks ago Sunday that he threw his last one. A couple of servicemen friends were back from Vietnam, and another was maybe going to go. And if there's one thing Bill Scott likes to do, it's be friendly to the men in uniform.

AT LEAST, Scott calls the shindig a party. The police say otherwise. They say Bill Scott is actually a businessman, and was working late. They say he was running a blind pig.

Be that as it may, about 3:45 a.m. that Sunday, Patrolman Charles Henry, a Negro in plainclothes, gained admittance to Scott's party and obtained a beer.

Scott says it was on the house. Henry says he paid 50 cents.

Ten minutes later, officers from the Tenth Precinct, led by Sgt. Arthur Howison, a putty-faced pro, raided the party, upstairs in the old Economy Printing Co., at 9125 Twelfth St.

The 50 cents was supposed to be the raid's only cost. It wasn't.

Before the next five days

had ended, the raid had cost the city at least 41 dead, more than \$250 million in property damage and an estimated \$10.5 million to the city in extra costs and lost revenues.

The wisdom of the raid is, of course, suspect in light of the climate of Negro violence that had been sweeping the country and the fact that Twelfth St. is one of the most volatile Negro streets in Detroit.

STILL, Howison could no doubt have pulled it off without incident, had it not been for two circumstances: It was an exceedingly hot, muggy night, perhaps the worst of the year, and the Negroes on Twelfth St. really had their throats up, and had jammed the hall far in excess of Howison's estimates.

The last time Howison had raided the place, in August, 1966, he had picked up 14 revelers. This time, he found 85.

He was dumbfounded. He picked up a telephone and called for two more paddy wagons to join the one parked outside.

Scott was also up in the air. It was unconstitutional, he said, the fuzz crashing his little get-together.

It is fruitless to hit a speak-easy unless it can be proved that alcohol is being sold illegally. The accepted way of providing the proof is to make

a plant: Slip in a ringer, and have him buy a drink.

GETTING a ringer into Scott's parties had always been difficult.

Howison had tried it at least five times before, but was always unsuccessful. This time, Henry had been forced to show real professionalism, to complete his mission.

He had already been turned away from the party about 10:30 p.m. He had walked up to a doorman with fellow Patrolman Joseph Brown, also a Negro in plainclothes, and said that Brown was a basketball player from Cincinnati looking for some action. The doorman told them to split.

But about 3:45 (Henry and Brown had spent the intervening hours unsuccessfully trying to gain admittance to other Twelfth St. speaks), Henry spotted three Negro females, all bent on wetting their whistles. He joined up, and the four got through the doorman.

They walked up to the second floor. A peephole was opened and an eye surveyed them. They were passed again, so easily, in fact, that the second doorman didn't even ask Henry for the membership card in the United Civic League for Community Action that Howison had provided.

The raid came exactly in accordance with Tenth Precinct standard operating procedures: If the plant doesn't

come out in 10 minutes, it's assumed the purchase has been made.

HOWISON and three men stormed the building, giving no stories about basketball players from Cincinnati. They broke the glass in the downstairs door, charged up the stairs and broke open the second door with a sledgehammer.

According to Scott and Mrs. Bernice Jones, a fellow Civic League official, it was all like a George Ratt Prohibition movie on late TV.

"We heard these noises," Mrs. Jones said — "Pow, pow, pow. We thought it was gunshots (it apparently was the sledgehammer). Then we heard glass breaking. Then somebody shouted: 'It's a raid.'"

Scott adds: "Everybody was cowed. You couldn't hardly move for everybody getting under the tables."

Then, according to Scott and Mrs. Jones, some police guarded the front door while others nailed up two doors in the rear.

Then Howison's reinforcements arrived and the 85 persons were hauled to the Tenth Precinct, on Livernois.

As it turned out, only three were charged: Scott, 60, of 8342 Twelfth (no more; it was burned in the riot); Billy O'Neal, 27, of 2258 W. Grand Blvd.; and Douglas Hill, 29, of 2517 W. Grand Blvd. All were cited for violation of state liquor laws.

The 82 persons arrested as loiterers were set free.

FOR THREE arrests, the raid may have been the most expensive pinch in history. Scott, free on \$100 cash bond, is plainly piqued by the whole affair.

At 60, mustached, his head shaved tight, he thinks of himself more as politician than party-giver.

Chartered in 1964, the Civic League is set up to work on a grass-roots level to help Negroes achieve their due. Scott is its director.

More than a handful of Detroit politicians know of its existence, says Scott, and have spent professional time in the hall, stumping for Negro support.

Folks in the neighborhood call it simply "The Democratic Club." And Scott says the league sent 15 precinct delegates to the Democratic State Convention in Grand Rapids in 1966.

"A lot of politicians know me," Scott says. "And they don't call me Charles or Jim or Tom. They call me Bill."

But that, he admits, is mostly at election time.

"Try to get them after election," he says, "and they are always busy. If you want a street blocked off and a fire hydrant turned on for the kids, you might as well whistle up a tree."

CIVIC League's offices, in a room just off the

party hall, are a shambles, corporate papers scattered on the floor, desks upended. The party hall also fared badly in the raid and subsequent looting: The bar is on its side, the juke box smashed. Among the papers is a mimeographed broadside spelling out what Scott would specifically like to do with the Civic League. Among the goals:

- "To use our headquarters as . . . referral centers for persons seeking . . . ADC and welfare assistance."
- To fight . . . for "increased job upgrading."
- "To fight . . . for housing for disadvantaged people."

But the league was consuming strong water the night of the raid.

The wisdom of the raid remains questionable.

Looking back, Howison says he has no second guesses about his action. Under the same circumstances, he says, he'd pull it off again.

He says it was conducted neither for spite, nor for the exercise. It was just another pig, he says. It needed knocking, so he knocked it.

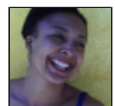
Economy Printing is a landmark now, a genuine American curio, even if no plans have been made to move it to Greenfield Village.

"Yeah," said a National Guardsman one day last week, M-1 over one shoulder, transistor radio in his hand: "That's where it all started."

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