

Anti-German Hysteria In Wisconsin

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Newspaper Article

"Former Fall Creek School Head Jailed on Espionage Act Warrant," *Eau Claire Leader*, 10/20/1918



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FORMER 'FALL CREEK SCHOOL HEAD JAILED ON ESPIONAGE ACT WARRANT

ASSAULT ON JOHN B. FLEMING. LIBERTY BOND SALES- MAN, CHARGE.

Henry A. Degner of Fall Creek, former postmaster and former school principal in that village, was arrested yesterday on a federal warrant charging violation of the espionage act, Sheriff George Garman, deputized as a federal marshal, bringing him to the county jail.

The complaint upon which the warrant was issued sets forth that on Wednesday last Degner assaulted John B. Fleming, Eau Claire corporation counsel, while Mr. Fleming was engaged with others of a committee in attempting to prevail upon Degner to buy liberty bonds. The complaint was made by J. C. Gilbertson before United States Court Commissioner A. J. Sutherland, and on receiving it United States District Attorney Wolfe, at La Crosse, caused a warrant to be issued and forwarded here for service. Bonds had not been fixed last night.

The contention in the prosecution of Degner will be that he violated Section 3 of the espionage act in "assaulting a Liberty Bond salesman regularly engaged in the performance of his duty as such a salesman," thus "interfering with and obstructing the sale of government bonds." The complaint alleges that Degner further violated the same section of the espionage act by uttering words amounting in substance to: "The government of the United States is dishonest." The utterance is alleged

to have been made on the same occasion.

An investigating committee delegated to interview persons who had failed to take bonds allotted to them went to Fall Creek last Wednesday and met some forty persons summoned to the village hall by a letter from the committee. Degner, allotted \$500 worth of bonds, did not put in appearance in response to a letter sent to him, so Mr. Fleming, Frank R. Farr, George L. Blum, J. C. Gilbertson, O. W. Moehle, Otto Niebuhr, and J. R. Garaghan motored to Degner's farm home about six miles out of the village. Herman Degner, brother of Henry, admitted the committee. They tried vainly to sell him a bond while waiting for Henry to appear. When the latter came in he presented a rather formidable appearance, carrying a shotgun. He had been hunting rabbits, he explained.

Mr. Fleming and others of the committee urged Henry to take his allotment of bonds and he declared that he would not. Mr. Fleming acted as principal spokesman in efforts to change Degner's decision. Degner, it is alleged, assaulted Mr. Fleming during the interchange. Both men struggling fell to the floor of the cabin, witnesses said, with Degner on top of Mr. Fleming. The latter, they said, hurled Degner down in a flash and got the ascendancy. Mr. Gilbertson pulled the struggling men apart.

Bond committeemen referred to the experience last evening as the "siege of Beaver Creek."

DEGNER GIVEN HEARING; HELD TO GRAND JURY

WITNESSES TELL OF ATTACK
ON JOHN B. FLEMING WAR
BOND SALESMAN

The hearing of Henry A. Degner of Fall Creek, charged with violation of the espionage act, took place before United States Court Commissioner A. J. Sutherland yesterday.

The defendant was specifically accused of having declared the United States government was dishonest and with having assaulted John B. Fleming while Mr. Fleming was endeavoring to sell him a liberty bond.

During the hearing, which lasted from 10 in the morning till 4 in the afternoon, the defendant denied that he had said the government was dishonest, but admitted saying that the espionage act abridged free speech and freedom of the press. He admitted having circulated literature opposing the war. He denied having begun the quarrel with the liberty bond salesman the week before. Testimony was given by witnesses, among whom were J. C. Gilbertson, George L. Blum and O. W. Moehle that Mr. Degner struck Mr. Fleming knocking him down.

Bonds were fixed at \$15,000 and the accused was returned to the county jail to await grand jury action.

"Degner Given Hearing; Held to Grand Jury,"
Eau Claire Leader, 10/23/1918

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