

# The Trial

In 1932, Dennison, Nesselhaus, and 57 other defendants were indicted in the United States District Court for the District of Nebraska on charges of conspiracy to violate the National Prohibition Act. The indictment listed 168 overt acts in furtherance of the conspiracy. United States District Judge Joseph Woodrough presided over the two-month trial, and Assistant United States Attorney Edson Smith prosecuted. Omaha attorney Ed Shafton represented Dennison.

The Omaha World-Herald covered the trial on its front page every day. National media, including the New York Times, also took an interest in the trial. The testimony shed light on the methods used by crime syndicates and political machines of the Prohibition era to rig elections and trials, bribe judges and public officials, extort and launder money, and commit murder.

The jurors deliberated for five days and then informed the judge they were deadlocked. Judge Woodrough ordered them to continue deliberating. After two more days of deliberation, the jurors were in hopeless disagreement, and Judge Woodrough declared a mistrial. Interviews conducted 50 years after the trial by University of Nebraska at Omaha Professor Orville Menard revealed that the defendants' pretrial contact with the jurors ensured there would be a holdout.

Publicity generated by the trial raised Omahans' awareness of the nature of gangland activities, the crime syndicate, and its political machine. A bi-partisan anti-Dennison ticket swept Omaha's city elections the year after the trial, and the machine met its demise.



Defendants and their attorneys. Attorney Ed Shafton represented Dennison.



Assistant United States Attorney Edson Smith enforced Prohibition in Omaha.