

The story of bonnie and clyde in oklahoma: an introduction

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Bonnie And Clyde In Oklahoma

Two of the Southwest's more noted desperados during the early 1930's were Clyde Barrow and Bonnie Parker. Bonnie and Clyde (or the Bloody Barrows, as they were then commonly called) terrorized the country, from Texas to Iowa and back, for two years, slaughtering at least a dozen men, most of whom were peace officers. They regularly visited Oklahoma in the course of their depredations.

Raised in the slums of West Dallas, Clyde Chestnut Barrow (or Clyde Champion, as he preferred to be called) and Bonnie Parker Thornton apparently met in early 1930. He was the son of a former sharecropper who now ran a gas station in West Dallas. Both Clyde and his older brother, Buck, then in Huntsville Prison, had been arrested several times for burglary and car theft. Bonnie, as yet, had no record, but did have a husband, Roy Thornton, who was doing 99 years at Huntsville as an habitual criminal. She briefly found solace with Clyde Barrow but their budding romance was interrupted by police, who hauled Barrow off to Waco, where he was wanted for a series of burglaries and car thefts.

Clyde pleaded guilty to two burglaries and five car thefts and was sentenced to two years, with 12 years probation. On March 11, 1930, he escaped from the Waco jail, with two other men, William Turner and Emory Abernathy. The suspicion was that Marvin Buck Barrow, having escaped three days earlier from Huntsville, arranged Clyde's jailbreak. According to Bonnie's relatives and Clyde's fellow escapee, William Turner, it was Bonnie who smuggled the

a gun into Clyde's cell. At any rate, Barrow, Turner, and Abernathy left Bonnie behind and lit out for Middleton, Ohio, where they were arrested on March 18, after robbing a railroad depot of \$57. 97. The three were soon returned to Texas in chains, accompanied by Sheriff Leslie Stegall of Waco.

CLYDE IN PRISON

Clyde's probation was revoked and, on April 21, 1930, as Clyde Champion Barrow, #63527, he was received at the State Penitentiary at Huntsville, to begin serving a 14-year sentence. Nevertheless, he was paroled, on February 2, 1932. While in prison he chopped two toes from his left foot to avoid a work detail.

Reunited with Bonnie, Barrow resumed his petty criminal career. They bungled a robbery at Kaufman, Texas and Bonnie was arrested, spending three months in the Kaufman jail. Clyde teamed up with another young criminal named Raymond Hamilton on a series of small holdups, one of which resulted in the murder of John Bucher at Hillsboro, in April 1932. This was the Barrow Gang's first known killing.

SHERIFF MURDERED

On August 5, 1932, Clyde and Hamilton turned up at a country dance in Stringtown, Oklahoma, near Atoka. They were accompanied by a third man, never certainly identified but said by Hamilton's brother Floyd to have been one Ross Dyer. Contrary to later popular accounts, Bonnie was not present. The third man entered the dance hall and joined in the festivities, while Barrow and Hamilton remained in their stolen car, sharing a bottle of whiskey. This attracted the attention of Sheriff C. G. Maxwell and Deputy

Eugene Moore, who approached the car, to question its occupants. Clyde and Hamilton responded with gunfire, killing Deputy Moore outright and seriously wounding Sheriff Maxwell. They then roared off, with townspeople in pursuit.

They wrecked their car a short distance away in a railway culvert, then fled on foot to another road. They flagged down a motorist, a local man named Cleve Brady, then took his car at gunpoint. Fifteen miles out of town, Brady's car lost a wheel. Barrow and Hamilton made their way to John Redden's farmhouse and told Redden they'd had a wreck and had an injured man. Redden's nephew, Haskell Owens, offered to drive them to a doctor. They took him hostage and stole his car. At Clayton, they set Owens free and stole another car from Frank Smith of Seminole. Smith's car was found two days later at Grandview, Texas.

Atoka County lawmen and citizens scoured the countryside, looking for the murderers. Bloodhounds were brought in from McAlester Prison and the State Bureau of Identification was called in. An ex-con named James Acker, who had a gunshot wound, was arrested as a suspect. Acker claimed he had been robbed by bandits. According to Floyd Hamilton, Ross Dyer was arrested in McKinney, Texas and may have put the finger on Clyde and Hamilton.

Clyde and Hamilton picked up Bonnie Parker in Dallas and the wave of violent holdups continued. Clyde Barrow killed three more men in Texas in 1932.

Hamilton, by this time also a notorious outlaw, soon split from Clyde and Bonnie and was captured in Michigan. Bonnie and Clyde picked up a new partner named William Daniel Jones, commonly called W. D. or Deacon. Jones, a sixteen-year-old car thief, later claimed that he joined the gang willingly but tried to leave after the first murder. He would insist later to have been a captive of Clyde and Bonnie.

Buck Barrow, in the meantime, had married Blanche Caldwell, at McCurtain, Oklahoma, on July 3, 1930. The daughter of Mr. and Mrs. M. F. Caldwell, of Goodwater, Blanche had no criminal record and was unaware at the time of their marriage that Buck was an escaped con. When she found out, she talked him into returning to prison. He surrendered at Huntsville, December 27, 1931. Buck was pardoned on March 22, 1933. He and Blanche, over the latter's protests, soon left Dallas to join Bonnie and Clyde.

BARROW GANG FORMED

This was the real start of the Barrow Gang. On April 13, they shot their way out of a Joplin house, killing two law officers. Nationwide attention focused on the gang as they committed a wave of holdups in the Midwest. They were suspected of bank robberies in Lucerne, Indiana, Okabena, Minnesota, and Alma, Arkansas, and they murdered the Alma town marshal, Henry Humphrey, near Fayetteville.

They were also now wanted by the U. S. Justice Department's Division of Investigation, as the FBI was then known. A federal complaint, filed at Dallas on May 20, 1933, charged Clyde Barrow and Bonnie Parker with violating the

National Motor Vehicle Theft Act, by transporting a stolen car from Dallas to Pawhuska, Oklahoma, on or about September 16, 1932.

In June, Bonnie was badly burned in a car wreck near Wellington, Texas. Clyde, or Jones, repaid the kindness of the farmers who helped her out of the burning car by shooting the hand off a woman of the household. They then kidnapped two law officers, stole their car, and fled with the burned woman to a point near Erick, Oklahoma, to meet Buck and Blanche. The officers, Sheriff George Corry and Marshal Paul Hardy, were left tied to a tree with barbed wire.

The gang holed up for a short time at a tourist camp in Ft. Smith, Arkansas, where they were briefly joined by Bonnie's sister, Billie. On July 8, Clyde, Buck and Jones apparently raided a National Guard armory at Enid, Oklahoma, where they stole some Browning Automatic Rifles, forty-six Colt .45 automatics and several thousand rounds of ammunition (on his deathbed at Perry, Iowa, Buck Barrow would later claim to have bought the guns and ammunition, for \$150, from a soldier at Ft. Sill). They may have also taken two Thompson submachine guns, according to newspaper accounts, though this writer, as yet, has found no evidence the gang ever carried Thompsons. Billie Parker would later say that they threw several boxes, containing only parts of guns, into a lake.

At Enid, they also stole the car of Dr. Julian Field, containing his medical supplies. After sending Billie Parker home, the gang traveled to Ft. Dodge, Iowa and robbed three gas stations, then went to Platte City, Missouri.

Police surrounded the Barrows at a Platte City motel. They shot their way out but Buck was badly wounded. Five days later, on July 24, 1933, the gang was again surrounded in the woods north of Dexter, Iowa. Buck and Blanche were captured. Clyde, Bonnie and Jones made their escape. Buck died five days later and Blanche went to prison in Missouri, being paroled in 1939.

Jones soon deserted Clyde and Bonnie and was captured in Houston. He got 15 years for complicity in the murder of a deputy in West Dallas and was later sentenced to a 2-year federal term for harboring Bonnie and Clyde.

Clyde and Bonnie dropped out of the limelight for a time but surfaced again in Texas. They robbed a refinery in Overton Township on November 15, then on November 22 were ambushed by Dallas County deputies, while meeting their mothers in Wise County, Texas. Bonnie and Clyde were both wounded but escaped. Years later, interviewed by Jud Collins, Billie Parker would say that Clyde and Bonnie then fled to Oklahoma, where their wounds were tended by some of Pretty Boy Floyd's people.

PRISON BREAKOUT

The Barrow Gang was resurrected on January 16, 1934. Accompanied by James Mullen, Clyde and Bonnie drove to the Eastham, Texas prison farm, where Raymond Hamilton was serving a 263-year sentence for murder and robbery. They had earlier planted pistols on the farm for Hamilton and Joe Palmer. Hamilton and Palmer killed one guard, wounded another, then fled in the direction of the getaway car, whose horn was being tooted by Bonnie Parker. Clyde Barrow and Mullen covered their getaway with B. A. R. fire.

Three other convicts followed: Henry Methvin; J. B. French; and Hilton Bybee. French and Bybee soon split from the group and were recaptured.

On January 19, another prison break occurred, and Bonnie and Clyde were suspected of involvement in this as well, though they actually had nothing to do with it. Seven convicts, led by Oklahoma outlaws Big Bob Brady and Jim Clark, escaped from the State Penitentiary at Lansing, Kansas. The group separated after the break. Brady was killed on January 22 and most of the others recaptured. Clark and Frank Delmar, however, had taken a teacher named Louis Dresser hostage and stolen his car. They released him in Oklahoma, where they were met by Clark's girlfriend, Goldie Bates, driving a car with Texas license plates. Dresser subsequently identified the woman as Bonnie Parker, as reported in Time, January 29, 1934. This probably formed the basis for later stories that the Barrow Gang joined Pretty Boy Floyd in the Cookson Hills, following the Eastham break.

On February 18, a massive dragnet was launched in the Cookson Hills by lawmen, augmented by four companies of the Oklahoma National Guard. Nineteen people were arrested but the main objects of the search, the Barrow Gang and Pretty Boy Floyd, were nowhere to be found. The FBI would later insist, rightly or not, that Floyd and his partner, Adam Richetti, were then in hiding in Buffalo, New York. As for Bonnie and Clyde, there is no real evidence they were in the vicinity at this time.

On February 19, the Barrow Gang robbed a national Guard armory at Ranger, Texas. On February 27, they robbed a bank in Lancaster, Texas. They then

drove to Terra Haute, Indiana, where Barrow and Hamilton fell into a violent dispute over the Lancaster bank loot and split up. Soon after this, Joe Palmer also left the gang.

TEXAS LAWMEN MURDERED

Clyde and Bonnie carried on their violent ways, accompanied by Henry Methvin. On April 1, the trio murdered two highway patrolmen, near Grapevine, Texas. On April 6, their car bogged down on a muddy road near Commerce, Oklahoma. Clyde tried to flag down a passing motorist but the man was frightened by the guns he saw stacked in their car and drove on into town to notify the law. Police chief Percy Boyd and Constable Cal Campbell drove out to investigate and were greeted with gunfire. Campbell was mortally wounded. Boyd was also struck, though not seriously, and taken hostage by the gang. He was released in Ft. Scott, Kansas, with instructions from Bonnie Parker to Tell the public I don't smoke cigars. It's the bunk. Bonnie had been labeled as a cigar-smoking gun moll ever since Joplin police had found a photo of her smoking a cigar in April 1933.

The Eastham prison break turned out to be a fatal error for the Barrow Gang. Lee Simmons, head of the Texas Prison System, was so enraged over the killing of one of his guards, that he persuaded Frank Hamer, a legendary ex-Texas Ranger, to come out of retirement and track down Bonnie and Clyde. The break also brought Henry Methvin into the gang. Hamer and Methvin would contribute heavily to the downfall of Bonnie and Clyde.

DAY OF RECKONING

Clyde and Bonnie Parker were slain in an ambush near Sailes, Louisiana, on May 23, 1934. Accounts vary as to the circumstances and how it came to be. Six officers were involved in the actual ambush (Frank Hamer and Manny Gault, employees of the Texas Prison System, Sheriff Henderson Jordan and Deputy Prentiss Oakley, of Bienville Parish, Louisiana, and Deputies Bob Alcorn and Ted Hinton, of Dallas County, Texas Sheriffs Office) and a seventh (Special Agent L. A. Kindell of the FBI) was apparently involved in the negotiations with informers. All who talked about it gave different versions but what seems to have happened is that Henry Methvin and his parents sold out Bonnie and Clyde, in exchange for immunity for Henry from Texas and Louisiana.

Henry Methvin was not prosecuted in Texas, in spite of the facts that he was an escaped convict and had also participated in the murders of two highway patrolmen. He was later convicted in Oklahoma, however, of the murder of Constable Cal Campbell. At the conclusion of two trials, Henry was sentenced to death. On appeal, this was reduced to life imprisonment, under the mitigating circumstances that he had betrayed Bonnie and Clyde. He was paroled ten years later and was killed by a train in Sulphur, Louisiana in 1948.

The car in which Bonnie and Clyde were killed (a Desert Sand 1934 Ford V-8, once owned by Jesse and Ruth Warren of Topeka, Kansas) is now owned by Whiskey Pete's hotel-casino, at Stateline, Nevada, and is on display in the hotel lobby, complete with shattered windshield and 167 bullet holes, along

with a letter, which may or may not be genuine, mailed to Henry Ford from Tulsa, April 10, 1934:

Dear Sir:

While I still have got breath in my lungs I will tell you what a dandy car you make. I have drove Fords exclusively when I could get away with one. For sustained speed and freedom from trouble the Ford has got ever other car skinned and even if my business hasn't been strickly legal it don't hurt eny thing to tell you what a fine car you got in the V8. Yours truly, Clyde
Champion Barrow.