

Bonnie and Clyde : Hide-out in Dexter

"They wasn't fooling!" That was a remark made by a man from Dexter, Iowa, who was captured by Bonnie and Clyde, July 24, 1933. Most people have heard of Bonnie and Clyde, but not everyone knows what happened to the Barrow gang in Dexter. We knew little about this amazing story till just recently. We had three interviews with people who had had an encounter with Bonnie and Clyde.

Our first interview was with Mr. John Love, of Dexter, Iowa. John was the Dexter town marshall from 1933 to 1965. When the Barrow gang visited the Dexter area he was a special deputy sheriff for the state of Iowa. We also interviewed Georgia Clark of Adel, Iowa. Georgia worked at the courthouse in the Clerk of the District Court office. Our last interview was with Marvelle Feller of Redfield. Marvelle recounts how he was captured by Bonnie and Clyde when they were in the state.

The Barrow gang consisted of Bonnie, Clyde, Buck, Blanche, and their mechanic. They had been in Missouri and they were wounded. They needed a place to hide and Clyde knew of Dexfield Park because he used to ride in rodeos there. Everyone in the gang had been wounded in a shootout in Missouri.

In July, 1933, the Barrow gang came to Dexter, Iowa. They camped at Dexfield Park, a deserted park halfway between Dexter and Redfield. John Love, a vigilante special deputy sheriff, received a call on a Sunday evening from Henry Nye, who had come upon a camp on his property. He had found a partly burned up car map that had blood on it and a shirt that had bullet holes in the back and blood stains all over it. John went out to the park with Henry and from the driveway they could see the tops of two cars. Henry didn't like the looks of things and wanted to tell the campers to leave, but John didn't think it would be a very good idea. John went back to Dexter and called the sheriff, Clint Knee, in Adel. He told about the campers and asked if he knew of any outlaws around. The sheriff said it was probably the Barrow gang. He said there were supposed to be five of them and they were killers. He said they would be right over.

Sheriff Knee, Deputy Evan Burger, Deputy Pat Chase, and Mr. Place (another vigilante) all came over and went with John out near the camp site. There, the men spent the night. John and Pat Chase stayed along the road at the outlet of the lane. John says, "We had been listening to

noises all night, pounding and one thing and another. Along about 1:00 that night I heard a motor start. They never did come out that night. I don't know whether they were lucky, or we were, that time.

The Barrow gang had been going into Dexter quite frequently. One night about 1:00, John was sitting on a bench. A car pulled up and a man asked if the grocery store was open for business. John said, "I never even thought anything about a stranger coming into town that time of night. I didn't know him. He was kind of a small-like fella with just a little limp to his step. The man said he wanted stuff for breakfast because he was going out to a camp. I looked at his car and it had a Texas license. I never thought anything about that, either."

The next day John was working in his shoe shop which was in the back of a clothing store. The same man whom John had seen the night before came in. John recalls, "He looked about twenty-five and he had quite a southern accent to his speech. He wanted a couple of white shirts. He bought a couple pair of socks and a pair of oxfords, the four-eyelet kind which were the most expensive shoes then. He wanted to know how much he owed. I figured it up but he didn't even wait to get 'em wrapped before he left. The guy sure looked at me strange all the time. I figured it out later. My deputy sheriff badge was sticking out of my pocket. I don't think he liked deputy sheriffs too good!"

When asked if he was scared when he found out it was Bonnie and Clyde John replied, "Well I didn't really know too much about them. After it was all over with the next day, if somebody had yelled 'scat', I'da probably shot 'em, that was the way I felt."

"We weren't very organized when we went after them," said John. "They were up the hill from the park and I'd never really been out there. Bill Arthur and Rags Riley came out from the State Department and a couple of other guys that worked for the state came, too. There were forty-some Des Moines police, also. I had charge of eight policemen along the road. I thought that Clint Knee was in charge till I found out that he turned it over to the State Department."

"What burned me up was several of the stories that came out years later," says John. "There was a dentist in Des Moines who supposedly shot at Buck Barrow. He never did. The only one hit out at the park was the boy with Barrow. He was hit across the chest with a bullet. I never had the chance to fire a gun. Buck was down, but that was because he had been shot three times in the back in Missouri and through the head once with a tommy gun."

"One part of the story got greatly enlarged," John continues. "Contrary to what some people thought, we didn't have any idea who was camping out there. People thought we knew all the time. We didn't know for sure that it was the Barrow gang for awhile. We just knew when we found the camp that whoever it was had been in a gun battle somewhere. They never bothered anyone around here. I didn't know until after we faced them, out at the park, that we had captured this Blanche and her husband Buck Barrow. He had been shot. I know that he wasn't hit out here because the shirt (that we had found earlier) was his, with the bullet holes in it. You wouldn't believe it if you saw how Buck was shot in the head. He was shot in Missouri with a tommy gun. The bullet went in right under

the skull and came out. I helped Dr. Chapler dress his wound. You could see his brain and that guy was still talking. Buck was doped up pretty well. They had tried to buy dope for him but all they could get was aspirin.

"I had seen this Blanche before," John adds. "One night about the first week in June before this all happened I was out on the highway. A car came in from the east and pulled into a gas station. Steam just rolled up from the car. I told Mr. Walsh, 'That car's hot!' It was two different ways," laughs John. "It had a hot motor, and it was stolen, too. So I went over and helped them get some water. When I went by the car, Blanche was riding in front. She had real bushy, wooly hair. She had her feet stuck out and I told her she had a pretty pair of boots. She said, 'Yes, but they're pretty tired.'"

Then John returned to his story. "When we got them (Blanche and Buck) to the doctor's office, the first thing I noticed was her boots. I said, 'You were here about a month or two ago, weren't you?' She said, 'No I wasn't. That night they had trouble with their car, they were just passing by.'"

Next I talked to Marvelle Feller. He had a very interesting story to tell Bonnie and Clyde had been trapped on three sides at Dexfield Park. The river to the north allowed them to cross to the Feller farm. Marvelle remembers, "One morning in July, 1933, about a quarter till six, my dad and uncle and I were down at the feed lot getting ready to round up the cattle. We noticed the cattle were acting scared. We found out later that Clyde was waiting for all three of us to get into one spot so he could put the gun on us. A few minutes before this, my mom had come running out saying she had heard on the phone there were outlaws close by. We sent her back to the house and about that time our police dog started acting up. Clyde hollered and said to call the dog off or he would shoot. I jumped over the fence and got ahold of the dog and Clyde marched us all over by the fence. Clyde whistled through his fingers and up came a man (the mechanic) carrying Bonnie. (She had been shot twice in the abdomen, in Missouri.) My dad asked Clyde what he wanted from us. Clyde said, 'We want a car because the law is shooting the devil out of us.' Dad said we had one car that was running. Clyde helped lift Bonnie over the fence. Dad and I picked her up and she put her arms around our necks. We started for the house.

Marvelle Feller



Clyde Barrow. Photo courtesy of Des Moines Sunday Register.

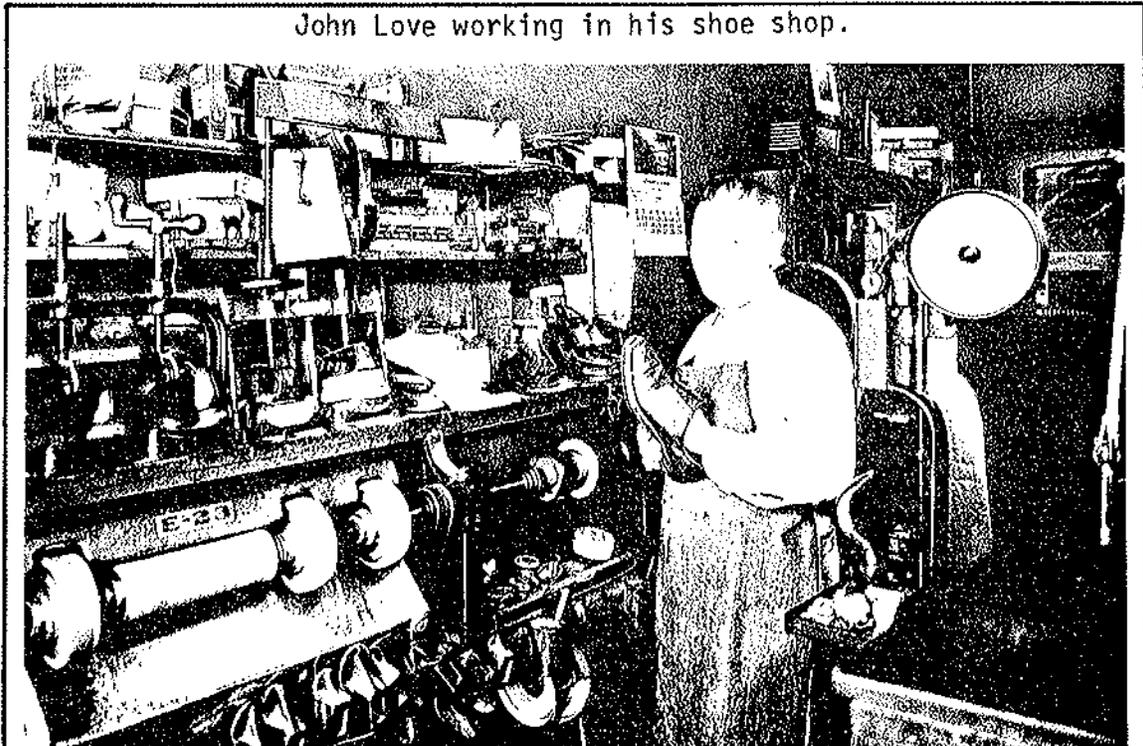


"While we were being marched up around the corncrib, my mother saw us and whirled around and started running. Clyde said to Dad, 'You stop her and we won't hurt anyone.' Dad got Mom calmed down and told her nobody would get hurt. So we got to the car and Dad backed it out for them. Bonnie and this fella got in the back and Clyde did the driving. When he got ready to leave he couldn't get the car started. He'd been used to stealing Model A roadsters or Model A Fords. Ours was a '29 blue Plymouth. Clyde said to my dad, 'Now don't shoot.' Dad said, 'Well, I've only got one shotgun shell in the house and I'm not going to start shooting you with one shotgun shell.' The law was parked out here on the highway. The law turned the other way and I've often thought I don't blame them. I probably would have turned the other way, too.

"When the gang was back in the park they had two Fords," said Marvelle. "They were taking the tires off one and putting them on the other one. When the law came, Bonnie got on the fender of one car and Clyde tried to drive out of there. They were trapped in there and couldn't get out. They shot off limbs in that timber as big as their wrists. They had a sub-machine gun and Bonnie just held it steady enough that limbs fell over. If she had had that machine gun lowered two or three inches there'd o' been about twenty killed. They wasn't fooling, I'll say that. They couldn't get out of the park because the back end of their car got hooked over a stump. So they got out and started walking down through the woods across the river. There was a log down in our pasture and afterwards we went down and tried to track 'em or find out where they had come up through. There were spots of blood where they had set Bonnie down to rest on the log."

After leaving the Feller farm, Bonnie, Clyde, and the mechanic headed on up to Polk City, Iowa. There they dumped Feller's Plymouth and stole another car. Marvelle recalls, "They had sideswiped a telephone pole with our car down at Polk City. When we had put Bonnie in the car she'd been shot in the abdomen twice, yet she was still able to hold up a gas station and they stole another car." Marvelle's dad did get their Plymouth back, but not without paying \$15.00 for towing charges.

John Love working in his shoe shop.



"I didn't mind getting publicity. Several lawmen came out and wanted me to show them where it all happened. They had it in their mind one person wasn't captured yet. In the corner of our corncrib there was a dark cat. I said there he is right there. They pulled out their machine guns and I thought they were going to blow the corner of the corncrib off. They didn't shoot but I'm telling you they were looking for him. I was eighteen when this all happened and it was something I won't forget. I'd never want to match up with them again."

My last interview was with Georgia Clark. She worked at the Clerk's office in the courthouse. Georgia says, "One morning when I went to work I just got the feeling that something was wrong. Then later I heard that there had been this Barrow gang over at Dexfield Park. Sheriff Knee had gone over there in the middle of the night. A little later I heard some commotion and I looked over and they were bringing some man (Buck) and a woman (Blanche) into the jail. She was handcuffed and I remember it so well. She was kicking, fighting, and scratching. She didn't want to be taken. Then quite late in the morning we saw Sheriff Knee and some of the men come back. When we found out it was the Barrow gang who had done so much devilment around the country, we felt like we had been picked out to be robbed or as a hiding place."

"This got quite a lot of publicity," says Georgia. "It was in our paper as well as the Perry and Des Moines papers. Men from Des Moines tried to claim the glory but it was men from our county that had been out there sweating it out all night. We got publicity because they were a gang that had robbed and murdered all over the country. We were all pretty excited. Sheriff Knee was great to go around and get the thing done and not say too much about it. It made quite an impression at the time. It's something we won't forget."

When asked if he knew what happened to the Barrow gang John Love replied, "I think they were caught the next spring (in Louisiana, May 23, 1934). They'd been up in Iowa again. The bank over at Stuart had been robbed but there was no proof the Barrows did it. Frank Hammer, a Texas ranger, had kept on their trail as much as possible. When I talked to Frank he told me he was one of the six men that shot the hell out of them. There were so many stories about how many bullets had been shot into their car. Frank told me there were six of 'em with automatic rifles that shot five shots heavy caliber. That makes thirty shots that went into that car."

John said, "I kinda enjoyed the whole experience. I never wanted to hurt anybody and I didn't want to get hurt either. When we were out at the park I was about a hundred yards away from some shooting. Some bark from a tree fell down my neck and I hit the ground pretty quick. Many things like that happened and I'll never forget this experience."

-DIANE HUTZELL

CHERI RUPP



This issue is dedicated to the memory of John Love, who passed away shortly before this issue went to press. We first met John this spring while preparing the article about Bonnie and Clyde. He is shown holding a plaque that reads: John Love, Dexter Town Marshall, 1933-1965. It was presented to him by the town of Dexter upon his retirement. Don't get the impression that John was a typical senior citizen - far from it. His colorful stories of the past could certainly capture the spirit of those days, as only a true storyteller could. As he allowed us to interview him, he shared the excitement of a memorable event in his life, and made a historical event come alive. John was quite a man. The news of his death had an impact upon all of us. He will be missed.