



The Great Waynesville Bank Robbery

By Gary Knehans

KA-BOOM!

A sharp explosion rocked the sleepy Waynesville community in the early morning hours of Friday, June 22, 1917. Its rumbling reverberations echoed throughout the three-sided valley in which the village was situated and woke up many residents with a start.

But not everybody had been sleeping. Fred L. Scott, Charles H. Colley, and Dr. J. H. Dawe were talking on the porch of the Black Hotel when the nearby explosion punctuated the night. They quickly dove for cover after a shotgun flashed in their direction.

Hearing the explosion, J. R. Burchard lighted a lamp in the front room of his home and stepped out on his porch to see what was afoot. He was greeted by loud voice coming from the back of the Bank of Waynesville, warning him to get back into the house. This command was punctuated by the blast from a high-powered rifle that just missed the curious resident and shattered the front window just above his head. The flying glass fell inside the house upon the Burchard's daughter, who was lying in bed near the window.

Meanwhile, Tess Degraffenreid had started down the hill on the street running by the bank. Flashlight and revolver in hand, he mistakenly thought the explosion had started a fire. He was determined to find out where it was. As he approached the bank, he heard the report of a rifle fired at him and heard Mr. Burchard yell out that the bank was being robbed. Degraffenreid retreated quickly to the house he had left only moments before.

J. J. Dake and family, residing in a house about 25 feet in back of the bank building, nearly jumped out of their beds when they heard the explosion. Before any in the household could explore what was going on, a shout from the direction of the bank ordered them to stay inside the house. They wisely took the warning.

"One of the bandits hearing the night bell of the switch board stepped to the window of the central office and ordered Mrs. W. L. Anderson, who attends to the office, to answer no calls," reported the Pulaski County Democrat.

"People near the town hearing the explosions began to ring in to find

what was the matter. One of the bandits came to the window again and rammed a revolver thru the pane and informed Mrs. Anderson, more emphatically this time, that she must answer no more calls. She then started out at the back door but was ordered to get back in the house.

"J. M. Long stepped out on his porch and yelled to the men on the street to get their guns and come up the ditch in front of the bank. Then one of the bandits standing at the north west corner of the bank ordered Mr. Long to go back to bed or he would cut him into with a bullet.

"Sam T. Rollins, cashier of the bank; Fred L. Scott, John C. Rollins, Leonard Crismon, Dr. L. Tice and

Each shot he made was returned by the bandits. Tom Rollins came out of his father's hardware store where he had been to get ammunition and was walking across the street to the court house, loading his gun, when two shots were fired at him. He took shelter behind a telephone post in the street and opened fire on the bandits, several shots being exchanged by him and the robbers. She. If Lee Baker went through G. W. Gan's yard and through the back yards to the ditch in front of the bank, and fired on the robbers until his ammunition gave out. They made it too hot for him owing to the close range. John Rollins went down the walk in front of the business row and when he got

the vault door. Tom Rollins and Leonard Crismon then started across the street to the Rollins Hardware to get more ammunition and were kept back by the bandits' fire.

"A louder explosion than any of the others was heard and the heavy plate glass shattered and the doors of the vault and safe were blown out, \$1300 of the bank's money was taken, placed into a grip, and carried away. As the bandit came out of the bank with the booty, he shouted to his companions to come on and they started in a run down the street toward the creek. When they got in front of the Frank Manes home they slackened their gait to a walk. As they passed down the street they yelled to the residents along the street: 'Get back in the house or we'll blow your d--- heads off.' One of them asked one of his companions, 'What in the h---'s your hurry? We've got plenty of time.' They continued on down the street talking as unconcerned as if nothing strange had happened. The citizens that had been firing on them had exhausted their small supply of ammunition during the 45 minute battle in which there was at least 150 shots fired and as the bandits walked out of town they were not molested by a single shot. They waded the creek and walked out the Richland road about one-fourth of a mile, where their automobile that they had left with their chauffeur, was awaiting them.

"The excited citizens of town hurried to the bank to view the damage. The telephone wires running out of town had all been cut and automobile loads of citizens hurried to Crocker and Richland to send telegrams all over the country. J. T. Burchard, W. J. O'Hare, of St. Louis, James A. Clark, and James Locker left here in a car for Bloodland and Big Piney to phone back south and notify the people to watch for the robbers. They left here just about an hour after the bandits had gone and when they got to Lee Hobb's they were informed that a car with four men in it had passed about an hour ahead of them. The tracks of the car they were chasing were easily detected, so they followed it to Bloodland where Dr. Mallette told them that a car came into Bloodland just at daylight from towards Waynesville, drove up to the cross roads near the public well and seemed puzzled for a few moments as to which road to go, but finally turning towards Big Piney, they went on at high speed. The



Tom Rollins slipped to the court house with guns. Sam Rollins stationed himself behind a large tree in front of the court house and fired several shots into the bank in direction of the vault that was being blown. Each shot was returned by the bandits, one of the shots striking the center of the tree about four feet from the ground. John Rollins stood behind a tree near the well in front of the court house and shot a few times into the front of the bank. He got a shot at the bandits that came out at the side window to wait for a charge of nitroglycerine to explode.

in front of J. B. Christensen's store he saw a man standing near the central office and thought it was one of the citizens, but it was one of the bandits and he fired at Rollins with a shot gun, the shot scattering all over the walk near him and striking the Dr. L. Tice Drug store and the J. R. Burchard store. So, Mr. Rollins had to make a retreat. When Leonard Crismon got into the court house, Sam Rollins grabbed the high powered Winchester that Crismon was carrying and fired the three shots he had for the gun into the bank in the direction of the vault, which left their mark in the wall near



Waynesville car was then about an hour behind them.

"Sheriff Baker returned from Richland about 6:30 and was informed of the direction that the bandits had gone and accompanied by J. J. Dake, S. G. Ballard and Leonard Crismon he started in search of them. Ex-Sheriff G. M. Laquey and W. H. Smith, of Laquey, came in and accompanied by Lucian Christeson and Ray Jones, joined the chase. The two last cars started about four hours behind the first bunch who continued their chase through Big Piney, Success, and on south. Inquiring of people along the road of the car on ahead, they learned that they were gaining on the bandits. They also phoned to towns ahead to form posses and come to meet the fugitives. About 10 a.m. they made inquiry from a party they met as to how far they were ahead and they were informed that they were away down the road at a little creek. The boys drove on and as they came around a sharp curve they sighted the bandits not more than 50 yards ahead of them, out of their car filling their radiator with water. The emergency brakes were thrown on and the car came to a sudden stop. Burchard jumped out and got behind the car

and fired at them with a pistol. O'Hare jumped from the car, ran back up the road, and shot once with a rifle as one of the bandits that was reaching into the car for his rifle which he fired at the pursuers, and the fugitives took shelter in the woods near the creek. Locker jumped out of the car and into an oats field where he hugged the ground for protection. Clark dropped down in the car, but later ran off up the road and hid behind a telephone post. The boys fearing the fugitives were concealed in the wood nearby were afraid to go to either of the cars standing in the road. In about a half hour a mail carrier came along and the boys asked him to stop the engine of their car as he went by. The engine of the other car was stopped when they run upon them. In a short time farmers of the neighborhood with guns were along the road and a car of men from Mountain Grove. The boys then went out to the car abandoned by the robbers and found that they had left the grip of silver, their suit cases, tools and a coat. The boys then abandoned the chase that was taken up by the posse formed in that neighborhood and started for home with their captured property. They met Sheriff Baker and his crowd and Ex-Sheriff

Laquey and his crowd, who went on to continue the search for the men.

The money the boys captured and returned to the bank amounted to \$764.25, of this amount \$547.21 was silver, \$112 currency, and \$5 gold. The car was a 1917 model 5-passenger Ford, had the motor number filed off, and bore an Oklahoma license tag. Dr. Ingraham, of Monett, had stolen from his garage on the night of June the 9th, a car he described, convinced that the car abandoned by the robbers was his. The boys turned the car over to him Monday morning and received their \$50.00 reward for the car. The remainder of the posse from this place returned home Saturday evening. They failed to get any trace of the fugitives.

"The bank carried burglar insurance to the amount of \$5000, also insurance on their safe and fixtures that was greatly damaged by the awful jar and by pieces of the safe blown across the building. The bank building is not the only place that bears marks of the bandits. A slab of steel 5x15 inches was blown through the bank window, across the street, striking the side of the central office and tearing a great hole through the wall and breaking a picture hanging in the room. Bullets from the bandits'

guns have left their marks on store buildings along the business row, in the trees of the court lawn and in the front of the court house. Hundreds of citizens of the county and adjoining counties were here Friday, Saturday, and Sunday to view the damages.

"From all appearances the gang was familiar with the lay of the town and the streets leading in to it. It is thought that they came into town from the east side, down the Dixon road. G. W. Gan returned home from a fox chase about 12:30, and while sitting on his front porch he saw a car come into town on the Dixon road. We learned later that four men camped on the Big Piney river, near Hooker, Thursday night in their Ford car, and headed this way. Parties living near Hooker that saw the men were able to give a good description of them that will probably be a great assistance in identifying the fugitives if captured."

The suspects were described as follows:

No. 1. Tall, slim, dark complected, dark trimmed mustache, dark clothing, bare shirt, no necktie, looked to be 42 years old.

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No. 2. Low, heavy set, light complected, about 40 years old, light shirt, dark pants, tan English walking shoes.

No. 3. About 30 or 32 years old, gray flannel shirt, bow tie, black crusher hat, light complected.

No. 4. Light complected, nearly bald, hair cut short, about 5 feet and 8 inches tall, dark pants, light shirt, 25 to 28 years old.

The four men were subsequently overtaken 7 miles north of Mountain Grove. All the bills recovered earlier

by the Waynesville boys curiously had one corner mutilated at an angle of about 40 degrees and some were split crossways near the corner.

One of the men--J. J. Starling--was tried on charges of burglary and larceny. A jury composed of Ed Allen, Marion Tutt, Rom Robinson, P. S. Ogle, Gordon Shelton, A. J. Decker, W. T. Decker, B. E. Stites, James Haley, James O'Halloran, G. W. Payne, and A. C. Traw found Starling guilty of the charges. The defendant was sentenced on March 22, 1918 to serve 15 years in the state pen for burglary and 5 years for larceny.



V. V. Long of Waynesville became a publisher of the "Pulaski County Democrat" and apostmaster of the community. Courtesy of Bob and Geneva Goodrich.

NEW CIVIL WAR BOOK

The only memoir written by a Union guerilla in the Civil War is finally being reprinted after 97 years of being out of print. William Monks, once a Union patriot and skilled guerilla fighter, wrote this account in 1907. The manuscript was discovered by John F. Bradbury, Jr., senior manuscript specialist at the University of Missouri Western Historical Manuscript Collection branch at the University of Missouri-Rolla.

Bradbury teamed up with Lou Wehmer, chair of the South Central Missouri/North Central Arkansas Civil War Roundtable and chief telecommunications engineer for the Missouri Highway Patrol, to edit Monk's account and secure a publisher.

"Monks had such an unusual career," Bradbury says. "There were many people who wanted to shoot Monks. During the war, he was fighting even against people he knew. This memoir was, in a way, his last stand. His writing was intriguing, but since he wrote the memoir fairly late in life, some dates and chronological information needed to be changed and explained."

Bradbury and Wehmer worked for nearly three years editing Monk's memoirs, which will be published in October by the University of Arkansas Press under the title of "A History of Southern Missouri and Northern Arkansas: Being an Account of the Early Settlements, the Civil War, the Ku-Klux, and Times of Peace."

More information about the book is available online at www.uapress.com.

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