



12-15-1988

The Dover Train Robbery

Chrystabel Poteet

Follow this and additional works at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/westview>

Recommended Citation

Poteet, Chrystabel (1988) "The Dover Train Robbery," *Westview*: Vol. 8 : Iss. 2 , Article 7.
Available at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/westview/vol8/iss2/7>

This Fiction is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at SWOSU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Westview by an authorized administrator of SWOSU Digital Commons. For more information, please contact phillip.fitzsimmons@swosu.edu.



HISTORY

unsolved mystery

The Dover Train Robbery



Illustration by Tony Neely

By Chrystabel Poteet

Steam hissed wildly and brakes screeched violently as engineer Gallagher brought the midnight south-bound Rock Island train to an abrupt halt before the blazing barrier set upon the track ahead of him. Into the cab jumped two undisguised bandits carrying Winchester's to hold both the engineer and fireman at gunpoint. While back at the mail coach three shots rang out simultaneously, shattering each of the three small glasses in the car door.

"Open up!" demanded a raucous voice from outside, "or we'll fill your coach with hot lead."

But not until 20 or more shots were fired around, underneath and into the mail car with one shot wounding express messenger Joe Jones of Kansas City, did the second mail clerk roll back the heavy door on the west side of the car. As the door slid back this lone man found himself facing three unmasked desperadoes on horseback, their guns pointed directly at him.

"Hand over that box of gold that's goin' to the Fort and be quick about it," called out the burly fellow with an oath stiff enough to cut the chilly April breeze.

And because there was no alternative, this helpless clerk meekly handed over the box that was going to the Fort.

While the other two bandits stood guard, the big fellow, much larger than his companions, fastened the box of gold coin securely to his saddle, wheeled his horse around and galloped off to the west into the blackness of the night. Not more than two minutes later he was followed by his buddies who kept hurling jibes at the mail clerk until they rode out of sight. Back at the engine the other two members of this bold undisguised gang released their captives and after firing a shot into the air — the signal for

the engineer to start the train — mounted their horses and rode off in the same direction the others had taken.

The box which was addressed to Fort Sill, a fort in the military reservation of the Kiowa, Comanche and Apache Indian lands in southwestern Oklahoma, contained a large federal payroll for the soldiers stationed there. Ordinarily the quarterly shipment which had to be transported across this Indian land by stage after it was taken from the train, was not nearly so large as this one. But because of a change in government regulations that year — 1895 — there had been a long delay in shipment. It was this delay which caused the box to be so valuable.

The box, heavy enough to attract the attention of any clerk along the line, rode unmolested from Washington, D.C., through all the eastern states and it was not until the shipment had been transferred to a train at Caldwell, Kan., (a railroad division point) that the two frightening words "holdup" and "outlaws" were used in the clerk's conversation.

"Joe," spoke the elder clerk as he sorted the southbound mail, "this is sure a heavy package that's going to the Fort. If you remember it's been a long time since the boys down there had a payday so the package must have great value."

"Yes, I do remember," answered Joe, "and I hope those roving bandits don't hear about this big prize. I've never met up with any but I've heard many stories about them," concluded Joe with a shrug of his shoulders as he looked at the box.

The conversation of these two clerks changed so many times as the train stopped and started at every town along the line, that the thought of train robbers was quite forgotten. It was 11:45 by Joe's watch when the train, made up of the usual mail and baggage cars and five coaches, pulled out of Dover. The coaches filled with passengers consisted of a smoker, daycoach, chair car, sleeper and

tourist car, the latter occupied by a party going to California.

As the train hurried on through the blackness of the night the whistle suddenly sounded out loud and clear. "That's the engineer blowing for the Cimarron River bridge," said the veteran clerk in a reminiscent mood. "Once across that bridge we're deep in bandit country. Fellows have told me many times as I've gone up and down this line that bandits have hideouts in the gyp hills west of here. They also say that these bandits have a secret code which alerts them whenever a big shipment is coming down the line. Anyway," he continued, "with this valuable shipment on board, I'll be glad when we get as far south as El Reno."

No sooner had the clerk finished speaking than both men were thrown forward by the sudden stopping of the train. Not easily frightened by the shattered glass falling around them the two mail-clerks at first refused to comply with the demands of the gunmen outside. But when bullets came whizzing through the car, one of them wounding Joe in the shoulder, the older clerk pulled back the door and handed over the box as the bandits had ordered.

As the place of the holdup was only six miles north of the next town, the engineer, after the bandits released him, soon brought the train into Kingfisher, the county seat. There an alarm was given and a posse started at once in pursuit of the robbers. Joe Jones, who was taken off the train and given medical aid, was found not to be seriously wounded. Both Joe and the older clerk were asked to tell the story of the daring mail robbery over and over again in the short time they remained in the town.

The next day, which was Friday, April 5, The Daily Oklahoman told the story of the robbery on its front page. The account of the affair was given by a passenger on the train — Bion Cole of the Western Newspaper Union — who told how the

two desperadoes from the engine not only held the engineer and fireman but also had the conductor and porter of the train in charge while they relieved the passengers of their cash and valuables. As there was no attempt at disguise, these two gunmen were recognized by ex-United States Marshal William Grimes, who was a passenger in the chair car. Both these men, Gyp Wyatt (known as the bad man of western Kansas) and Charlie Gibson, had been arrested at Kingfisher while Grimes served as U.S. marshal.

Because of the double feature employed by the daring bandits, this affair became known as Oklahoma's boldest train robbery, and because a federal payroll had been stolen, a posse of United States marshals was sent into the Territory to help catch the robbers.

For the next two or three weeks people living around Kingfisher and Dover were kept in a state of terror while the officers searched every barn and cave in their communities. Deputy Marshal Madsen believed the gunmen to be a part of the Doolin gang, with headquarters at Mrs. Dalton's farm, but after careful search this idea had to be abandoned and the officers moved farther away from the scene of the crime in their search for the bandits.

On May 10, the posse of U.S. marshals surrounded part of the gang at the home of the Dunn brothers in Pawnee County. Two of the desperadoes, Dynamite Dick and Bitter Creek — also known as "Slaughter Kid" — were killed.

Although wounded seriously in the first round of the fight these two bandits lived long enough for each to tell the officers the same story. In understandably ill-tempered tones they told that the big fellow who rode away from the train eluded all four of their gang in the darkness of night and made good his escape with the box of gold.

On July 26 Wyatt and Gibson were killed and their bodies were hauled into Guthrie in a wagon. The marshals had already learned that the same Wyatt and Gibson had been seen around saloons in Kingfisher the day before the robbery, talking with suspicious characters. It was believed that the big fellow was selected not only because of his size and rough manners but for his fast running horse as well.

The only clue the officers ever had, came from a young woman living on a ranch south of Bridgeport who told the marshals that a big tall man wearing a large white hat and riding a dark bay horse had stopped and asked her for a drink. This posse of U.S. marshals, chagrined at their failure to capture one lone bandit, was recalled and the Kingfisher officers were left in charge. "Just who was this big man?" the officers asked each other, "And where could he have gone?"

The failure of all the officers to capture the bandit and retrieve the gold caused a legend to develop which has been kept alive for more than a century. The old-timers who told the story many times believed that the big man became

so frightened over the immensity of his crime that he hid the box of gold by burying it in some out-of-the-way place. It is a fact, however, that not a single piece of gold coin bearing that date was ever put back into circulation.

Throughout the years men have hunted in many strange places for this box of gold. During the depression years 1929-1932 they began searching in canyons and creek-beds of Caddo County. Some even carried old maps supposed to show where the gold had been hidden.

As late as 1948 an old man carrying a crumpled map in one hand and a divining rod in the other, was found searching for this gold in a dry creek-bed five or six miles southwest of Hinton. This attempt, like those made by gold-seekers of previous years, failed miserably.

Every few years, someone tries to locate this hidden treasure. Now in this year — 1988 — Oklahomans still ask the same two questions that have been asked so many times before. "What became of the big bold bandit? And, where did he hide the gold?" ■

CHRYSTABEL BERRONG PO-TEET, 95 years old, lived for sixty-seven years three miles west of Hinton and now resides in the Geary Nursing Home. Still an active writer, her works are published in GEARY TIMES and GEARY STAR. Previously, her articles have appeared in ORBIT, OKLAHOMA CHRONICLES, and the HINTON RECORD.

WESTVIEW PATRONS

WEATHERFORD NEW CAR AUTO DEALERS ASSOCIATION
SOUTHWEST STATE BANK. SENTINEL
KELLEY JEWELERS. WEATHERFORD
ALLEN PHARMACY, INC., WEATHERFORD
UNITED COMMUNITY BANK. WEATHERFORD, FDIC