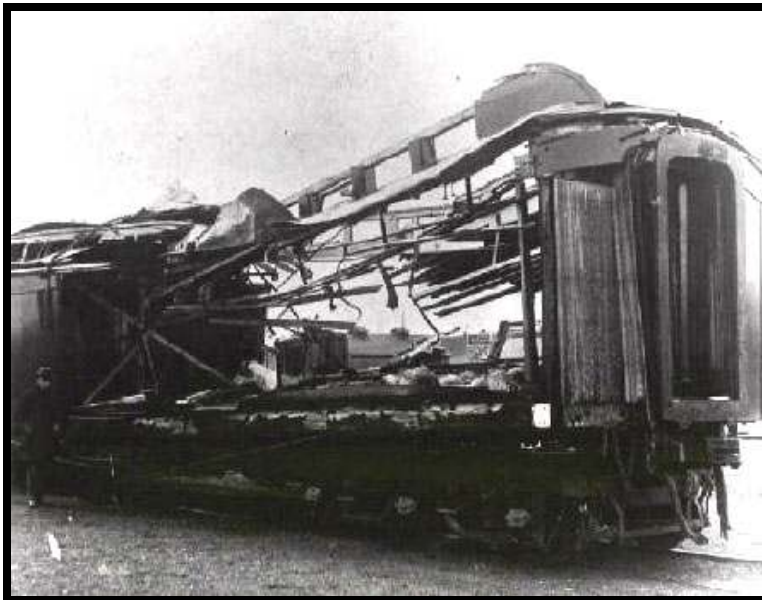


Dove Creek's 'Rose of the Wild Bunch'

By Tom Ashmore

Holding the horses during a train robbery was not the most exciting job of Butch Cassidy's Wild Bunch gang, but it was possibly one of the most important. Without those horses nobody was getting away with the all-important payroll from the train's express car.

It was August 29th, 1900 and Robert Leroy Parker (Butch Cassidy), Harry Longbaugh (Sundance Kid), Harvey Logan (Kid Curry), Ben Kilpatrick (the Tall Texan), and Will Carver (News Carver) were following a now well-worked pattern of relieving the railroad of whatever money was being transported in its express car. The plan was for Kid Curry and Butch Cassidy to jump into each side of the locomotive as the train was slowly leaving a coal station at Tipton, in southern Wyoming. They forced the engineer to unhitch the passenger cars and pull the train up to a campfire burning a mile or so up the tracks where the others were waiting. Next, the job was to get the express man to open the door, blow the safe with dynamite and make off with the money. This particular job came off without a hitch and they got away with \$55,000.



Express car from the Wild Bunch's Wilcox job prior to the Tipton robbery

So who was holding the horses? It was a petite 5-foot young woman named Laura Bullion, originally from Dove Creek, just outside of San Angelo, Texas. She was 24 years old at the time.

Laura Bullion was born in Washington County, Arkansas in 1876 to Henry Bullion and Fereby (Byler) Bullion. She was the oldest of three children. Little is known of her father other than he was a bank robber and an outlaw. He must have left his wife or something happened in his career of crime because Fereby ended up moving her three daughters back to Dove Creek where her family lived. Apparently, Fereby was not a very good mother, leaving Laura with her parents as she continued a life of promiscuity. She remarried in 1888 and died of an illness three years later when Laura was just fourteen.

After her mother's death Laura lived with her grandparents, but soon decided to strike out on her own at the age of fifteen, ending up in San Antonio as a prostitute in Fannie Porter's famous brothel. In addition to being the most popular brothel in San Antonio, and possibly in the entire West, Fannie catered to outlaws with a no-questions-asked policy. It was a favorite stop for Butch Cassidy and his Wild Bunch at the time. The women of Fannie's brothel were often taken with the handsome men of the Wild Bunch with several ended up as girlfriends, helping to spend their newly gotten fortunes.

About this time Will Carver, who eventually ended up running with the Ketchem brothers and later Butch Cassidy, was working at the Half Circle Six ranch at the head of Dove Creek. Many young men from the Knickerbocker and San Angelo area ended up working for this large ranch, including Tom and Sam Ketchem, Ben Kilpatrick (later another Wild Bunch member), and some of Laura's uncles. While working at the ranch Will met Laura's aunt, 17-year-old Viana Byler. They fell in love and were married soon thereafter. But tragedy quickly struck Viana down when she died of illness 5 months after marriage. Will was devastated. It must

have cut a black hole in his heart because he soon turned to a life of crime with the Ketchem brothers.

Sam Ketchem and Will Carver first started a gambling business in San Angelo, but got drawn into a scheme with a local rancher's wife to kill her husband so she could be with the ranch foreman. The husband owed Will and Sam money from gambling debts and the wife was offering them money. Will, Sam, Dave Atkins, and Tom Ketchem lured the rancher into a pasture looking for a wayward cow. They lured him with a cowbell from the brush and shot him down. With money in pocket they closed up the gambling hall and took off for New Mexico and their new life of crime. Later the rancher's wife and her lover were convicted of the crime and Will and the rest could return to the area without worrying about a warrant hanging over their heads. It was on one of these return trips that Will met Laura Bullion, also having returned to the area from San Antonio.



Will Carver



Laura Bullion

(booking picture at 25 years old)

Will courted Laura between trips to New Mexico and various robberies from 1897 to 1898. She knew about his robberies and was anxious to join him in his exciting life of crime. The next year Will and the Ketchem gang's luck started to run out. Will was one of the few outlaws not captured or killed in 1899 after a posse found he and Sam Ketchem's hideout in Turkey Creek Canyon, New Mexico. He dropped off a wounded Elzy Lay (Butch Cassidy's best

friend) at a rancher's house and headed back to Texas and Laura Bullion. The next time he left the Dove Creek area Laura followed him.

Carver was next seen in eastern Arizona with Harvey Logan, which probably was the beginning of his career with the Wild Bunch. From Arizona they went to Wyoming. By one report Laura was working as a dance hall girl in Sheridan, Wyoming around this time, but other reports indicate she stayed with the gang, enduring the hardships of extended camp life. She often used the alias Della Rose. She may have picked it up when working as a prostitute in San Antonio or she may have liked the sound of it when she met Kid Curry's girlfriend named Della. However it happened, the gang members soon began referring to her as the "Rose of the Wild Bunch."

The next robbery for the Wild Bunch after the Tipton train robbery was a short 21 days later on September 21st, 1900. This time it was the First National Bank of Winnemucca, Nevada. Some historians speculate that Butch Cassidy was not involved in this robbery due to the distance and the time. It is approximately 500 miles between the two locations. However, there is a very convincing book by Larry Pointer called 'In Search of Butch Cassidy' that has very strong evidence that Butch Cassidy did not die in South America, came back to live out a secret life and wrote an unpublished manuscript, 'Bandit Invincible,' of his exploits. According to this now published manuscript Butch and his gang traveled 100 miles in 24 hours before stopping after the Tipton train robbery. They continued on to a point 25 miles south of Salt Lake City and 200 miles from Tipton before stopping again to rest for two days. They then traveled across the Salt Lake Desert to make camp outside of Huntington, Nevada. This would have been around a 200-mile trip. They rested there for another two days and then headed to Winnemucca, another 100-mile trip. Reports indicated the gang was camped in the Winnemucca area for 10 days before the bank holdup. If you add it all up from the manuscript account and give a reasonable

pace of 50 miles per day (except the first 100 mile day) they would have arrived in Winnemucca 11 to 12 days after the Tipton train robbery and 9 – 10 days before the bank robbery.

Will Carver again participated in this holdup and once again Laura held the horses. The take was \$32,640. In a matter of two weeks the gang grabbed more than \$76,000. In today's valuation this would be equal to over \$1,500,000.



Winnemucca, Nevada 1905. Winnemucca Bank is the first brick building on left

After the posse chased the gang north into southern Oregon they decided to split up. At this point it appears Carver went with Butch Cassidy, but Laura did not. This may be where Laura began a new romance with Ben Kilpatrick, the other gang member from the Dove Creek area.

Ben grew up around Eden, Texas and then worked at the Dove Creek's Half Circle Six Ranch before beginning his life of crime first with Will Carver and the Ketchum brothers and later Butch Cassidy.

The gang had no particular plan at this point for getting back together. They were to send letters to an intermediary in Wyoming who would then pass information back and forth to the new addresses.

Ben and Laura disappeared from the scene for a while, but Will ended up heading to San Antonio and back to Fannie Porter's brothel the next month. This time he hooked up with another of Fannie's girls, Callie May Hunt (aka Lillie Davis) and they decided to get married. The word went out to the gang and everyone decided to meet in Fort Worth in November. The festivities went on through the month where money flowed freely and everyone lived the high life. This was when a Wells Fargo detective discovered the now famous "Fort Worth Five" picture in a photography studio window showing the Wild Bunch, dressed to the tee.



Left to right: Harry Longbaugh (alias Sundance Kid), Will Carver (alias News Carver), Ben Kilpatrick (alias Tall Texan), Harvey Logan (alias Kid Curry), Robert LeRoy Parker (alias Butch Cassidy). Note Will Carver showing off his new diamond ring on his pinky finger.

By some accounts Laura Bullion accompanied Ben Kilpatrick to Forth Worth as Mrs. Della Rose. Given this was to be a wedding of sorts and each of the gang had girlfriends from Fannie Porter's establishment it is likely they were all there at the time. There was some kind of wedding on December 1st, but there is no record of it. Will, Callie May Hunt, Harvey Logan, and his brothel girlfriend, Annie Rogers departed soon thereafter on a type of honeymoon trip. It didn't last long though and in less than a month Callie May Hunt was sent packing to her parents.

The next time anyone from the gang surfaced was three months later in March, 1901. Will Carver, Ben Kilpatrick, and a man fitting the description of Harvey Logan were seen camping near Ben Kilpatrick's brother's place just northwest of Eden, Texas. Laura returned to Knickerbocker to visit relatives during this time. It appears the boys were just loafing around while Ben visited his two brothers. While minding their own business a neighbor's hired hand came over to complain about the Kilpatrick hogs getting into the neighbor's property. He carried a Winchester and apparently threatened them with it. Of all the Wild Bunch gang members, Harvey Logan was truly a cold-blooded killer. He must have decided he didn't like the way things were going and shot the man dead. Suddenly they were on the run again. Ben's brother, Ed, stayed home and waited for them to get a head start before reporting the shooting to the local sheriff. Ben's other brother, George Kilpatrick, ended up riding with the other three. They first went to Knickerbocker and later down to Sonora, Texas to a hideout close to what is now the Sonora Caverns. Unfortunately for Carver the sheriff's dispatch throughout the territory named him as the shooter. A week later Will and George Kilpatrick were cornered in a Sonora bakery and Will was shot dead, bringing his career of crime to an end on April 2nd at the age of thirty two.

Ben Kilpatrick and Harvey Logan were waiting outside of town and realizing things had gone awry decided it was time to leave. Ben picked Laura up in Knickerbocker and they headed back to Montana to meet back up with Butch Cassidy.

Two months later, with the remaining members of the gang back together, a plan was set for July 1st to rob another train. This time it would be the Great Northern as it passed through northern Montana near the town of Malta. Once again the plan was for someone to climb on the train during a water stop and take over the locomotive. Kid Curry did the honors this time while everyone waited under a trestle

where Curry forced the engineer to stop. Laura took a more active role in the robbery this time. She and Ben climbed out from under the trestle and using Winchesters kept a barrage of bullets flying by the passenger cars while the train was being uncoupled. They pulled the train a short ways up the track and blew the safe in the express car. This time they found \$40,000 in unsigned bank notes for the Bank of Helena. In those days in order for a bank note to be complete the bank officer had to sign it after receiving it from the U.S. Treasury. Once again they outran the posse, making it to eastern Montana before splitting up into pairs to go various directions. The bank notes were stashed until everything cooled down.

In the fall of 1901 they met up again for the last time. This time they worked together to make the money look legitimate and work on forging the signatures required for them to be cashed. They split it up and again went their separate ways. Cassidy, Sundance, and Etta Place went on their now famous trip to South America. We know that Ben and Laura first went back to the San Angelo area because some of the bank notes were found circulating in San Angelo. They then decided to go to St Louis to start living the good life again.

Jewelry stores and saloons - that's where the bills started showing up first. Detectives were all over the city as soon as the money started hitting the banks. They quickly started following the trail through the city's red light district. It wasn't long before they found Ben surrounded by women and liquor. On Ben they found a hotel key, but the name of the hotel and room number was removed. More detective work found the hotel and the next morning they caught Laura who, sensing something was wrong, was trying to make a quick getaway. They caught her with a trunk full of unsigned notes. Their life at the top had only lasted a few days.

Both Ben and Laura pleaded guilty at their trial to forgery on national bank notes in order to keep from going back to Montana and being tried for train robbery. Ben received 10 years and Laura received 5 years.



Prison mug shot of Ben Kilpatrick

Laura's love for Ben was strong and she hoped for them to be back together after his release. They corresponded during their incarceration and she often spoke of her dreams of them being together again. She was released in four years for good behavior. Ben, on the other hand, was anything but a model prisoner. He constantly found trouble due to his temper. Laura waited for him the entire time, but after his release he was immediately whisked away to Texas to stand trial for the murder of the Kilpatrick neighbor's hired hand back in 1901. She still was not able to see Ben until he was acquitted. They finally were reunited after the trial and Ben moved out to his brother's ranch on the Pecos River in West Texas.

Ben's brother also hired one of Ben's former prison mates for his ranch work. The two of them could not seem to go straight and together they planned another train robbery. This one would be a familiar train, the Southern Pacific, which Ben had previously hit with the Ketchem brothers. The town of Dryden, Texas was chosen as the place to hit the train. They used similar techniques as with the Ketchems and Butch Cassidy of getting the train stopped, separating it from the passenger cars, and moving it up the tracks to blow the safe. This time things went terribly wrong though. While Ben was searching through the express car the express man found an ice hammer and bashed his head in. He then took his guns and lured the other man to look into the car and shot him dead. When the railroad police and county sheriffs went to the site of the holdup the next day they found two saddle horses, two pack horses, and tracks from a fifth horse ridden away from the location. Could it have been Laura Bullion holding the horses again? Probably. However, she was never implicated and soon disappeared from Texas forever.



Photo of dead Ben Kilpatrick and partner

Laura ended up in Nashville under the assumed name of Freda (her mother's given name) Lincoln. She led a secretive and secluded life, claiming to be a war widow and becoming a seamstress and dressmaker. She never went back to the life of crime and never married. She died in Memphis in 1961 at the age of eight five with nobody knowing she had been a train robber and gang member of the famous Butch Cassidy's Wild Bunch.

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