

Outlaws and Lawmen

A slender man walked down a trail leading his horse. Moonlight danced through the trees revealing his grave face and the Winchester he carried in one hand. Suddenly another figure stepped onto the road and demanded that the man surrender. The traveler raised the rifle and shots cracked in the darkness, fire flashing. Moments later the attacker approached the figure lying on the ground. He was dead, hit by twenty-one buckshots from the deputy's shotgun. Such was the demise of Bill Doolin, Oklahoma outlaw, at the hands of U.S. Deputy Marshal Heck Thomas.



Bill Doolin was the leader of the Doolin Gang, sometimes called "The Wild Bunch." He had been a member of the Dalton Gang. Most of The Doolin gang died in Coffeyville, Kansas, on October 5, 1891, when their attempt to rob two local banks simultaneously was stopped by law officers and armed citizens. Doolin had

started on the trip to Coffeyville with the rest of the gang when his horse went lame. He was unable to secure a new mount in time to meet his partners and take part in the Coffeyville raid. When he learned of their fate, he returned to the gang's old hideout, a cave near Ingalls in the Creek Nation, and organized his own gang.

The members of the Wild Bunch were daring and reckless young men whose illicit deeds have survived them for so long and have been embellished (added to) by so many that it is sometimes hard for historians to determine the real facts of their lives.

Bill Dalton, one of the Dalton brothers, had not always participated in his brothers' activities. He was not at the Coffeyville raid, but he joined with Doolin and the Wild Bunch. George "Bitter Creek" Newcomb, also known as "Slaughter's Kid" (he had once worked for a man named Slaughter), was a member of the gang. George "Red Buck" Weightman joined the group after his release from prison, where he had spent four years for horse-stealing. Within seven days of his release in 1893, he had stolen seven prime saddle horses. He took the horses with him to Ingalls and with them obtained entry into the gang.

Charley Pierce joined the gang in 1894. He had come from Texas to Pawnee, was fond of race horses, and was considered "wild" even

among his outlaw friends. “Little Dick” West, a mild-mannered cowboy by appearance, was a member of the gang and one of the best with a six-shooter. “Little Bill,” “Tulsa Jack,” and “Dynamite Dick” made up the rest of the original Doolin Gang.

The Wild Bunch robbed banks and trains in Texas, Missouri, Arkansas, and the twin territories. They remained free because settlers kept them informed of the activities of the authorities. Some were frightened into giving the information. Others simply found it advantageous to keep the outlaws happy.

A host of deputy marshals were sent after the Doolin Gang, and many of them died trying to capture the outlaws. The three most *formidable* lawmen were known as “The Three Guardsmen” of Oklahoma Territory — Bill Tilghman, Chris Madsen, and Heck Thomas.

William Tilghman had served as a government scout during the Cheyenne-Arapaho War in 1874, and he had fought against Dull Knife, a chief of the Northern Cheyenne, in 1878. He was marshal of Dodge City for three years, and later he was the first city marshal of Perry, Oklahoma Territory. Tilghman was a perfect candidate for the job of bringing outlaws, and especially the Doolin Gang, to justice — or trying to.

One blustery, cold January night in 1895, the peace officer knew he was close on the trail of the Wild Bunch. He and Deputy Neal Brown drove in a wagon to a ranch that the outlaws were known to frequent. The main shelter on the ranch was a *dugout* bunkhouse from which smoke was rising through the chimney. There was no other sign of occupancy — no horses or other indications that anyone was around.

Tilghman left his rifle in the wagon, walked to the house, knocked on the door, and received no answer. He pushed the door open and stepped inside. In front of a roaring fire sat the rancher, a rifle lying across his knees. He was silent and unfriendly. On each side of the room were tiered rows of bunks, draped so that an onlooker could not tell if they were occupied.

The deputy marshal greeted the rancher and walked casually to the fire to warm his frosty hands. He turned and backed to the fire, his hands clasped behind him. It was then that he saw the tip-ends of several gun barrels peeking at him from beneath the bunk drapes. He counted eight of them.

Tilghman remained cool, as though he noticed nothing unusual, and inquired about directions to a quickly made up destination. Without hur-

Do You Know?

Springs, streams and lakes are the attractions at Chickasaw National Recreation Area, the first national park in the state of Oklahoma. Chickasaw lies in a transition zone where the Eastern deciduous forest and the Western prairies meet.

rying, he exchanged small talk with the rancher, walked leisurely to the door, tossed an informal goodbye, and walked unhurriedly to the wagon. Boarding, he said, “Drive on, not too fast, and don’t look around.”

Several months later, the rancher was arrested and Tilghman learned what happened when he left the *dugout* that night. Red Buck had wanted to kill him, but Bill Doolin physically *restrained* him and told him that “Bill Tilghman is too good a man to shoot in the back.”

Six other members of the Wild Bunch had trained their gun sights on Tilghman inside the *dugout*, including Little Dick, Tulsa Jack, and Charley Pierce. All had reason to kill the deputy, but no one pulled a trigger because Doolin thought him “too good a man.”

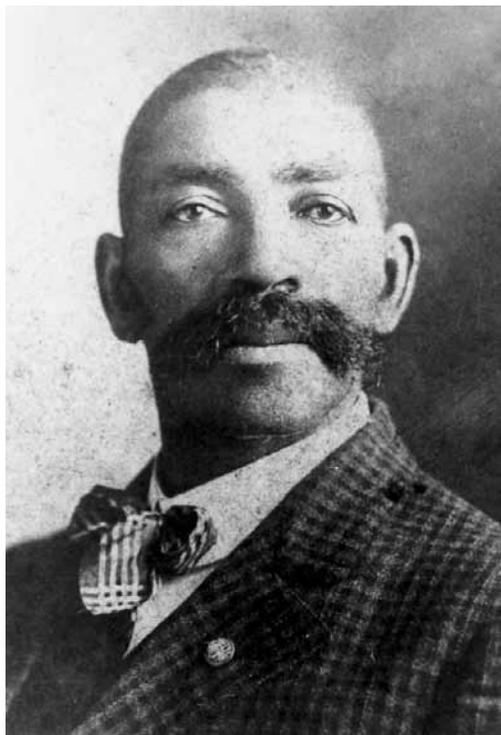
Sometime later Tilghman tracked Doolin to Eureka Springs, Arkansas, and surprised him in a bathhouse. Doolin went for his gun but Tilghman didn’t shoot. Instead, he pinned the struggling man to the wall, fighting to hold him, and pleaded, “Don’t make me kill you, Bill.” Although Doolin had sworn he would never be taken alive, he eventually gave up the struggle.

Tilghman transported Doolin to Guthrie to jail, but the outlaw escaped, only to be killed later by Heck Thomas.

Many good men wore the star in the territories. Lafe Shadley, W. M. Nix, Ed Kelley, Joe Severn, Bob Hutchins, Andrew “Frank” Clark, and Tom Houston were excellent examples of bravery and devotion to duty.

Several valiant lawmen were African-Americans — Ike Rogers, Eugene Walker, Bill Colbert, Zeke Miller, and Morgan Tucker, to name a few. Perhaps the best-known African-American U.S. Deputy marshal was Bass Reeves. Described as fearless, Reeves had several close calls. On various occasions, while engaged in gun battles, Reeves’s belt was severed by a bullet, his hat brim was shot off, the reins he held in his hand were cut, and a button was shot off his coat. Nevertheless, he continued to perform his duty without flinching. And Reeves, who was also a deacon in his church, would preach to the prisoners once they were in custody. He disliked sending a man to prison without giving him a chance to repent.

Not all the desperadoes were white, either. “Booly” was an African-American man who was feared in the Boggy River area. He was captured and taken to Fort Smith by Neely Factor.



**Deputy Marshal
Bass Reeves**
*Oklahoma Historical
Society*

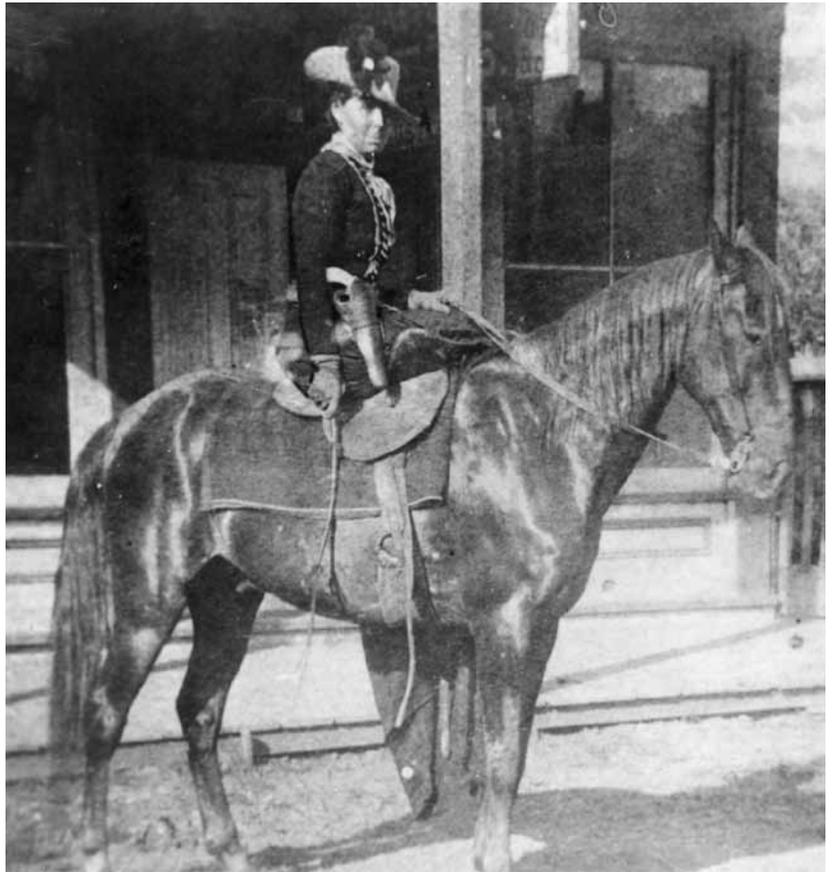
Crawford “Cherokee Bill” Goldsby, the son of a Buffalo Soldier and a woman who was white, African-American, and Indian, was a member of the Cook Gang. Several times he was captured but escaped. Cherokee Bill was eventually hanged at Fort Smith for killing a depot agent.

A notable Indian outlaw, Ned Christie, was wanted by the law for something he didn’t do. He was accused of getting drunk and killing U.S. Deputy Marshal Daniel Maples. Fearful of the types of treatment some tribesmen were subjected to in custody, Ned Christie refused to go to jail. He was killed by a group of deputy marshals on November 4, 1892. In 1921, an old man named Humphrey cleared Christie when he cleansed his conscience and admitted killing Marshal Maples.

Women were also not scarce among outlaws. “Cattle Annie” and “Little Breeches” were two young girls attracted to the members of the Doolin Gang. The two young women tended the outlaws’ wounds, mended their clothes, reported on the whereabouts of the marshals, and, when the Wild Bunch was away, sold whiskey to the Indians. They both spent time in a Michigan reformatory.

Flora Quick Mundis dressed as a man and called herself “Tom King,” as she rode around the countryside stealing horses. She was captured after a long and elusive career, but she was released on bail and disappeared from the country. There was a later report of the killing near Tombstone, Arizona, of a young boy who turned out to be a woman, but no one ever knew for sure if it was Flora.

Belle Starr may be the most famous female bandit in history, although she was probably guilty of less than 10 percent of all the crimes with which she has been credited. A remarkable horse thief, she reportedly carried on a long affair with Cole Younger of the Jesse James Gang. She had a daughter whom she named Pearl Younger. When she later *established* a homestead on Indian land that she received as an intermar-



Belle Starr was one of the most notorious outlaws in early Oklahoma. Oklahoma Historical Society



**Belle Star
and Blue Duck**
Photographed in 1876
by photographers
Harris and Ewing,
Oklahoma Historical
Society

ried tribal citizen, she called it “Younger’s Bend.”

Despite legends to the contrary, Belle Starr was not a beautiful woman. However, she was an excellent horsewoman and cut a striking figure dressed in riding habit and wide-brimmed hat, charging across the countryside riding sidesaddle on a spirited steed. She was also capable of drinking and carousing equally well with men.

Belle also seemed to have a certain charm that attracted a type of man — the daring, adventurous, lawless type. She and her first husband, Jim Reed, the father of her son Edward, escaped to California after Jim was involved in a vengeance killing. Reed was later killed in Paris, Texas, by a deputy sheriff.

Her second husband, Sam Starr, was a Cherokee Indian. Through the marriage, Belle obtained a headright — the right to claim an *allotment* as an intermarried citizen of the Cherokee Nation. Younger’s Bend became a stopping-off place for outlaws and fugitives in the area. Sam and Belle were convicted of horse-stealing

and served nine months of a one-year sentence. Sam was later killed in a gunfight in Fort Smith.

Belle’s third husband, somewhat younger than she, was Creek Indian Jim July. Belle asked him to change his name to Starr and he obliged. Jim Starr was proud that people would know he was Belle Starr’s man.

Jim Starr was wanted for stealing horses, and he made a trip to Fort Smith to try to clear the matter. While he was gone, Belle was killed. She was riding her horse when shot in the back by a shotgun blast. There were two major suspects — her son Ed, with whom she had quarreled, and a neighbor, Ed Watson, with whom she had disagreed about a property line. Watson was arrested, but the case was too weak and charges were dismissed. Watson claimed that Jim Starr had killed his own wife and had then gone on to Fort Smith to try to establish an alibi. Deputy Marshal Robert Hutchins believed that was guilty. He found circumstantial evidence that pointed to that possibility, and he tried to arrest the dead woman’s husband. A gunfight ensued and Jim Starr was wounded. He died of his wounds in a Fort Smith jail without confessing to the murder.

Ed Reed tried his hand at stealing horses and selling illegal whiskey, but he was caught, convicted, and sentenced to seven years in prison. He was pardoned, however, and deputized. He was killed three years later in a saloon in Wagoner.

When Pearl was growing up, Belle tried to “make a lady of her.” She had boarded her in town with people Belle felt were respectable. She had provided the child with dancing lessons, riding lessons, and piano lessons. It was important to Belle for Pearl to be a “lady.” But Pearl never quite made it.

The names of *numerous* other outlaws are engraved in history — Al and Frank Jennings, the Christian brothers, the O’Malley brothers, Henry Starr, John Murphy, the Black brothers, George Moran, the Casey Gang, the Sam Bass Gang, and the Lee brothers — the list seems endless. They thrived on excitement, although a few, such as Jesse James and Bill Doolin, tried briefly to “go straight.” Most died “with their boots on.” Some, like Ed Reed, were pardoned of minor crimes and then deputized in the hope that, because they knew the territory and the outlaws in it, they would be effective law *enforcement* officers. Some were.

The men who wore the deputy’s star were also adventurous. They were fearless men who rode daily into danger, knowing they could be ambushed at almost any time or any place and knowing that they were far outnumbered by the men who wished them dead.

Dime novels (books which usually cost ten cents) were written about these people and were popular all across the country. The stories were exaggerated and fanciful, but a few of them were based on truth.

Today, books and magazines are still peddling stories about outlaws and lawmen of the Old West. Looking back on it, it seems a time of adventure and romance, of heroism and danger, of independence and reckless abandon. Looking more closely, the pain and headache are visible, as are the shabbiness, the faithlessness, and, yes, even the fear — especially the fear.

For many, however, the fascination will always remain. Perhaps for all of us, it remains a little.

Do You Know?

Sequoyah’s Cabin in Akins is a frontier house of logs, once occupied (1829-44) by Sequoyah (George Gist), the teacher who, in 1821, invented a syllabary that made it possible to read and write the Cherokee language.