

American History...

Who were Bonnie & Clyde?

Outlaws Bonnie and Clyde had spent over two years together on the run, but they only earned national attention after photos of the couple were discovered at a crime scene in 1933. In the depths of the Great Depression, many Americans became transfixed by the couple's criminal exploits and illicit romance.

At just four years old, Bonnie's father died unexpectedly, leaving her mother Emma to raise Bonnie and her two siblings on her own. The family relocated from Rowena, Texas to Eagle Ford outside of Dallas.

Bonnie Parker was a good student who enjoyed singing, dancing and writing poetry. Just before her 16th birthday, however, Bonnie dropped out of high school and married her boyfriend Roy Thornton. Roy often left home for long stretches of time, and his marriage to Bonnie was rocky from the beginning. In 1929, Roy was arrested for murder and sentenced to five years in prison. Bonnie, still living with her mother, worked at a Dallas café.

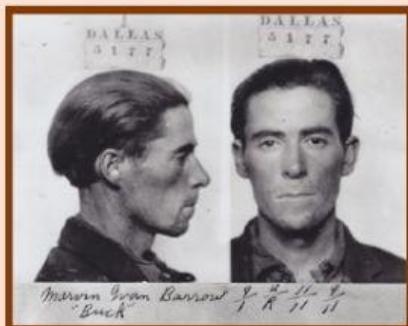


Figure 1. Clyde's older brother

Clyde Barrow was born on March 24, 1909 in Telico, Texas. His parents were the itinerant farmers Henry and Cumie Barrow. After Clyde's birth, the family later moved to a West Dallas neighbourhood known as "the Devil's back porch."

Clyde's older brother, Marvin Ivan 'Buck' Barrow was a significant influence in Clyde's life. Clyde began his life of crime stealing local poultry and cars with Buck, eventually escalating to jailbreaks and raids, robbery, abduction, and even murder.

By the time Clyde was 17, he had his first official arrest record for failing to return a rental car.

Bonnie and Clyde met in January of 1930. Just weeks after they started dating, Clyde was arrested for burglary and car theft. At Clyde's request, Bonnie smuggled a gun into the jail, aiding in Clyde's and two other inmates' escape. A week after escaping prison, Clyde and the other two escapees were apprehended. Clyde was sentenced to 14 years in Eastham Prison farm. Finally, Clyde was released in February 1932 after his mother successfully petitioned for his parole.

Two months after Clyde's release from prison, Bonnie joins the Barrow gang on a crime spree in Tyler, TX. Both Clyde and Bonnie's family try to convince Bonnie to leave the life of crime, but she refuses.

Despite common popular culture depictions of Bonnie and Clyde, the reality of their life on the run was far from glamorous. They often ate sardines from the can, bathed in rivers, and drove through the night, taking shifts sleeping and driving, all to evade capture.

By 1933, the Barrow gang's crimes had escalated from robbery to murder, attracting the attention of local authorities.



On May 23, 1934, former Texas Ranger Frank Hamer and his posse of officers were tasked with tracking down Bonnie and Clyde. They set a trap along Highway 154 in Gibsland, Louisiana. It was the only road leading to Henry Methvin's parents' house, a friend of theirs. When Bonnie and Clyde drove down the road on May 23, 1934, they came upon Henry Methvin's father, who appeared to have crashed on the side of the highway. When Bonnie and Clyde's car slowed down, authorities opened fire, killing the couple in seconds.

For decades after Bonnie and Clyde's deaths, their legend has continued to resonate in dozens of movies, documentaries and television series glamorizing the criminal exploits and illicit romance of the notorious couple.



Figure 2. Bonnie and Clyde's car after being murdered

1. After reading the text and discussing it, answer the following questions:

- When did their names become famous? _____

- How long were they on the run? _____

- Had Bonnie and Clyde always been criminals? Explain.

- Who introduced Clyde to crime? _____

- What was Clyde arrested for when he was 17?

- How was life for them?

- How were they caught? Who caught them?

2. Vocabulary: crime and law

- Can you guess the meaning of these words? Match them to their definitions.

(to be) on the run – poultry – parole – burglary – (an) outlaw – drop out - smuggle

_____ (n): someone who is outside the law; a criminal.

_____ (phrase): escaping from the authorities.

_____ (phrasal v): stop going (to school).

_____ (n, uncountable): chicken, turkey, etc. Birds that humans eat.

_____ (n): stealing from a house.

_____ (v): buy and sell things illegally.

_____ (n): prisoner release on condition of good behaviour.