

8-16-2016

One of county's 'most notorious murders' remembered

Wendy Bradley Richter

Arkansas State Archives, wendy.richter@arkansas.gov

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarlycommons.obu.edu/articles>



Part of the [Public History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Richter, Wendy Bradley, "One of county's 'most notorious murders' remembered" (2016). *Articles*. 165.
<https://scholarlycommons.obu.edu/articles/165>

This News Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Faculty Publications at Scholarly Commons @ Ouachita. It has been accepted for inclusion in Articles by an authorized administrator of Scholarly Commons @ Ouachita. For more information, please contact mortensona@obu.edu.

One of county's 'most notorious murders' remembered

By Wendy Richter
For the Siftings

About a year ago, the Clark County Historical Association published a small booklet entitled "Wanted: Crooks, Scoundrels, Notorious Characters, and Other Legendary Figures in Clark County, Arkansas." Among the characters featured in the volume were the nationally-known outlaws Jesse James and Rube Burrow, who both have Clark County ties. However, another lesser-known criminal committed what some have termed "one of the most notorious murders in Clark County," and perhaps the only murder remembered with a place name---Clyburn's Leap. Originally researched by local historian Grace Benton Nelson, Clyburn's story is featured in the "Wanted" book.

The "Okolona Messenger" newspaper reported the murder: "In the public road, about five miles south of Okolona, near

the old town of Rome, Charles Clyburn shot and instantly killed Deputy Sheriff Sol W. Rollins, about 10 o'clock last Saturday morning, March 27, 1897." Coincidentally, about three months before the killing, the depot at Okolona was broken into and some valuable packages were stolen. Then, on March 24, the store of T.M. East & Son was robbed. The closeness of the robberies, the similarity of the tools used to break in, and the nature of some of the goods caused law enforcement officials to suspect Charles Clyburn, recently escaped from jail at Camden and staying at his father's, two miles west of Okolona.

Papers were issued for Clyburn's arrest after he was seen going from his father's barn to the dwelling carrying a pair of new shoes like those stolen from East's store. A posse went to the home to arrest Charles, but told that he had just left to go fishing. Confident that the stolen goods had been carried

away, Deputy Sol Rollins and his men left in pursuit.

Soon, they saw Charles and his younger brother coming toward them in a wagon. When Rollins rode up beside the wagon and commanded them to surrender, Charles raised a rifle from his lap and shot the officer through the heart. Rollins cried, "Oh! Oh!" fired his gun into the air, turned in his saddle, and fell to the ground, dead.

Deputy Joe Dickinson reported that his horse threw him when the firing began, and that while he was recovering, the wagon went so far that Clyburn was out of range for his revolver. Clyburn reached his father's house in the wagon, then went into hiding.

Excitement reached a fever pitch as people learned about the incident. Armed bodies of citizens, led by officers of Clark and Pike counties, searched the woods for miles around. A \$210 reward was offered for the delivery of Charles

Clyburn to the sheriff of Clark County.

Charles Clyburn's hideout was a cave on the east side of the Antoine River, five or six miles north of Antoine. One of his brothers worked on a freight train on the branch railroad that served the area. He arranged space for Charles to escape in a carload of stove bolts headed to New Orleans, and placed food and water there for the trip. Near Charles' hideout was a high bluff, overlooking the railroad that ran along the Antoine River. From the brink of this cliff, Clyburn leaped into the top of a large pine tree, climbed down, got in the carload of bolts, and made his way to New Orleans.

A short time later, law enforcement officers in New Orleans identified Clyburn's photograph as that of a man working there and notified Abraham, who set out for New Orleans. Accompanied by a New Orleans officer, he went by night in a skiff to the island where Clyburn's

boat was anchored.

When Clyburn saw them coming, he told his boss on the boat, "That's Abraham coming after me." Then he went to his bunk and lay down with his pistol beside him. Tradition says his hands were crossed on his chest ready for the handcuffs, and that his eyes were closed. He offered no resistance. Later, someone asked him why he did not shoot Abraham when he saw him coming. He replied, "Mr. Abraham has arrested me many times and he has always been very kind to me. I did not want to kill him."

Clyburn asked for a change of venue, and his case was transferred from Clark to Nevada County. Twenty-four witnesses for the State and fourteen for the defendant were named. Legend has it that Sheriff Abraham asked for the change of venue because he did not want to officiate at Charles Clyburn's hanging.

The Clyburn case, following Charles' not-guilty

plea, was tried in Prescott. The verdict read: "We, the jury, find the defendant guilty of murder in the first degree." A motion for a new trial was denied, and the sentence passed: "It is adjudged by the court that the defendant be taken to the jail. . .until the thirty-first day of March, 1898, on which day, between sunrise and sunset, the sheriff of Nevada County shall hang him by the neck until he is dead." A large number of people from Okolona attended Clyburn's execution. Charles Clyburn always maintained that he had killed Rollins in self-defense.

For additional information about Clark County history, or to purchase a copy of the book, "Wanted," visit or contact the Clark County Historical Museum (www.clark-countyhistory.org or 230-1360) or the Clark County Historical Association's Archives at the Ouachita Baptist University Library (www.obu.edu/archives or 245-5332).