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Burrow Gang in Clark County

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Burrow Gang in Clark County

Clark County has seen its share of crime in the years since it became a part of Arkansas Territory in 1819. One of the Territory's five original counties, the county covered a large geographical area in the earliest years. And, the Military Road (later called the Southwest Trail) passed through the heart of the area, carrying people of all sorts on their way to the West and Southwest. Later, the railroad crossed the county, too, somewhat paralleling the road.

Among those who made their way to Clark County was Rube Burrow, a nationally-known train robber and outlaw in southern and southwestern United States. As the region's frontier days neared an end in the latter 1880s, he came to be one of the most hunted in the Southwest since Jesse James. From 1886 to 1890, he and his gang robbed trains in numerous states in the region, all the while being pursued by lawmen throughout the country, including the famed Pinkerton Detective Agency. Rube came to Arkadelphia and Clark County in an attempt to free his brother Jim from authorities following Jim's arrest for a bank robbery in Genoa, Arkansas, committed with the rest of the gang.

A train out of Texarkana fell victim to Burrow's gang in December of 1887, and a huge manhunt began for the robbers. Then, in January of 1888, Jim Burrow was captured in Alabama and transported to the State Penitentiary in Little Rock to await trial for the Genoa crime. His trial date was set for September 5, 1888, in Texarkana. At the time, Arkansas's state penitentiary was located at the site of the current state capitol building. During the early years of the Civil War, the jail had served as a prison for Federal soldiers captured by Confederate forces. Then, after Union troops occupied Little Rock in September of 1863, the penitentiary served in the same capacity for the Union by holding Confederate prisoners there until the end of the war. After the war was over, the prison returned to its former role.

Rube Burrow decided to free Jim from his captors. He headed to Arkansas on horseback with his friend and cohort in crime, Joe Jackson. Rube's plan was two-fold—to hold up the train on which Jim was to be taken to Texarkana for trial; and most importantly, rescue his brother.

On the day Jim Burrow was scheduled for transport to Texarkana, Rube Burrow and Joe Jackson boarded trains with their guns when the cars stopped at Donaldson, Malvern, and adjacent stations, looking for Jim. They finally made their way to Curtis. There, the pair learned that a later train was not scheduled to stop at Curtis, and that they needed to go back to Arkadelphia to meet the day's last southbound train. With only an hour to ride, the two reached Arkadelphia just in time to see the train pull out of the station. They were too late.