

Trio of teenage fugitives caught following sensational jail break

STOLEN CARS, ARSON, ARMED ESCAPE AND A HIGH-SPEED CHASE

Sept. 15, 1944

Blue Mountain Eagle

Last Friday witnessed a rather sensational jail break at Canyon City, which was staged by three boys awaiting sentence for larceny of automobiles and other articles. They were Robert Duane Briggs, 17, Clifford Elwood Robinson, 16, and Albert De Lonzo Wyatt, 15.

The would-be Baby Face Nelsons first attempted to dig through the stone wall of the jail corridor using a 20p nail and stick of stove wood, and they had a rather large opening almost through the wall. However, they decided this too slow a procedure, so they piled some bread wrappers and other papers and stove wood around

one of the wooden posts supporting the ceiling of the jail, and started a fire. When it was blazing almost to the ceiling, they called the janitor and jailer, James Finlayson. He opened the jail door, threw in a section of hose and, as he went to turn on the water, the boys escaped, whooping like school kids. The break occurred at about 8:30 p.m., just after dusk.

Sheriff I.B. Hazeltine and State Police H.C. Snyder were on a larceny case in the northern part of the county and did not arrive until about 11 p.m. The boys were seen climbing the hill toward the golf course and local officers had searched the area. These officers immediately notified all outside points where roads left Grant

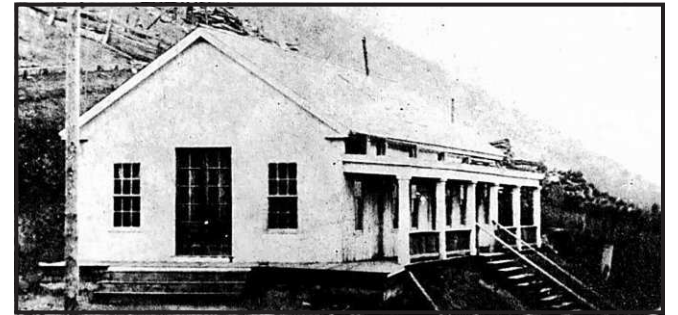


Contributed photos/Grant County Historical Museum

A newer courthouse in Canyon City, circa 1900.



The present day courthouse, shown here circa 1960s.



The first courthouse built in Canyon City in 1864.

County, and local deputy sheriffs placed road blocks within the county.

State Police officers Larson and Zumwalt of Burns came over to offer assistance, as they had heard of the break over short-wave radio. It was thought that the fugitives might have gone east or toward Prairie City, so the sheriff and police officers started patrol of this area.

Oliver gives first real clue

The first real clue as to the whereabouts of the escaped prisoners was furnished by Herman Oliver, who was at his ranch home 5 miles east of John Day and, upon hearing his dogs bark at about 11:45 p.m., went out to look around. He saw a car on the highway headed west and headlights' beam showed the three boys walking toward Prairie City. They jumped over a fence to avoid the light and, after the car had

passed by, continued on their way up the highway. The sheriff and Police Officer Snyder were informed by radio of this clue and, a few minutes later, they contacted Oliver, then patrolled the highway until they were called to Bates to investigate a fire, which had destroyed the mercantile store at Bates.

Car containing guns stolen

At about 8:10 a.m. Saturday, the officers were notified that L.D. Fleming's car had been stolen at Prairie City, that it contained three rifles, a 30-30 carbine, .25 Remington automatic and a .22 repeater.

The deputy sheriff and the city marshal at Prairie City had noted a car leaving there at excessive speed at about 3 a.m. and gave chase, but could not overtake it. The sheriff and police officer decided to follow after having notified officers at Ontario, Baker and Vale of the license, serial number,

etc., of Fleming's car.

Chase Ends After Car is Wrecked

On Dixie Mountain, they received a radio message to the effect that the Fleming car had been found wrecked about 1 1/2 miles east of Austin Junction, that no one was apparently hurt and that the guns were missing. The officers were joined by two State Police from Baker, and they found the tracks of the trio and commenced to follow them, finally apprehending them at about 11:45 a.m., some 7 miles east of the wrecked car.

The escapees had been surrounded in a clump of second growth pine and, when taken had the stolen guns loaded, with two of them cocked and ready for action. They admitted that it was their first intention to resist arrest and that they had taken a bead on the sheriff and another member

of the posse, but as they had but little ammunition and the officers were armed with high power rifles, they decided that to surrender was the safest action.

The Fleming car was the second automobile stolen by this trio in Grant County. They have now added arson and armed escape to their list of criminal offenses.

Sheriff Hazeltine has previously warned people through these columns to remove the ignition keys when leaving their cars out at night, or at any other time.

"To leave loaded guns in a car and the ignition key, too, might result in the killing of arresting officers as well as innocent persons who might resist giving up their cars or valuables," the sheriff stated. "A car with the key left in ignition lock only invites larceny and a gun murder."

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In 1912, men could stop in at R.A. Clark's barbershop in Canyon City for a haircut or a shave, and a drink. In the front chair, Lewis Allen is being shaved by Clark, and in back, Guy Durham is shaved by Henry Guernsey. To the left, Calcite Kid is at the door. Information by Charles Brown.

Eagle owner's son commits barbershop prank

Blue Mountain Eagle

Clint, who grew up here.

R.A Clark owned a barbershop in Canyon City in the early 1900s.

He was known for wearing a derby hat. He also wore a toupee.

Clint Haight owned the newspaper, the Blue Mountain Eagle. He had a son, also named

One afternoon, Clint stole into Clark's barbershop and removed the derby hat from the hat rack and applied a circle of glue to the hat's crown. The next time Clark took off his hat, along came his toupee.

Story shared by the Grant County Historical Museum.

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