

Pearl Hart

Pearl was known as the "Lady Bandit of Arizona," as the "Bandit Queen" and was also called the "Lady Bandit." She was a petite and attractive young girl who would grow up to become one of the only female stagecoach robbers in the American West. She was born as Pearl Taylor in Lindsay, Ontario, Canada, to a civil engineer named James Taylor on November 13, 1876. James moved his family to Toledo, Ohio, in 1878. One of several children, Pearl was brought up in a respectable middle-class family and received a good education.



Pearl dressed up

However, when she was 17 years old she fell for a swaggering and seductive gambler named Frederick Hart. Pearl soon eloped with Hart, who would occasionally work as a bartender, but more often, lost whatever he earned at the gambling table. He was also a heavy drinker and sometimes very abusive to his wife.

In 1893, the couple attended the Colombian Exposition in Chicago, Illinois, where Hart worked as a sideshow barker and Pearl found a number of odd jobs. While she was there, she became enchanted with the Wild West show and was especially enamored by Annie Oakley who she saw performing. Inspired by the strong women she saw performing and by the legends of the Wild West, she soon gained the courage to leave her shiftless husband. Pearl boarded a train for Trinidad, Colorado, and became a popular saloon singer. However, she soon learned that she was pregnant with Hart's child and returned to her family in Canada.

After giving birth to a son, Pearl left him with her mother and went to Phoenix, Arizona, where instead of finding glamour and heroes, she ended up working as a cafe cook and taking in laundry. Hart found her in Phoenix and begged her to come back to him and she relented. This time it was a little bit better, but soon the pair began to live the wild life. Pearl learned to smoke, drink and use other hard drugs including marijuana and morphine.

The marital problems begin anew and after Pearl gave birth to a daughter, Hart told her he was bored with the family life and knocked Pearl unconscious. He left her and rode off with Teddy Roosevelt's Rough Riders in Cuba. Pearl again returned home, was unable to rid herself of the taste of the West, and left her second child as well.

She was back in Arizona again, but this time working odd jobs in the mining camps. Life was not easy, it was difficult to survive and she became very depressed. She made several attempts at suicide that were unsuccessful.

Pearl hooked up with a miner named Joe Boot in 1899. She learned that her mother was ill and needed money for medical bills and the kids. She looked to Boot for some advice. He had long been planning a train robbery and had lots of ideas for Pearl to make some quick cash. One of his not so good ideas, was for Pearl to lure men to her room, Boot would knock them out and steal their money. This was not making money fast enough, so they planned to rob the stage that ran between Florence and Globe, Arizona.

Pearl cut off her hair and dressed as a man on May 30, 1899, and they carried out their plan. They jumped in front of the stage with their guns drawn and ordered the driver to stop. While Boot covered the driver, Pearl invited the passengers of the coach to step out and she emptied their pockets and wallets. After taking about \$450 and a revolver they ordered the passengers back into the coach and Joe fired his gun in the air and told the driver to take off.

Their preparation for the robbery was pretty good, not so for their escape. They forgot they did not know the area and riding off on their horses they became totally lost. After a couple of days the pair

made camp in a grove of trees and fell asleep. They awoke to find themselves surrounded by a Sheriff's posse.

At the Globe jail, Pearl played the part of the lady bandit by signing autographs and entertaining those who wanted to get a look at the "bandit queen." On October 12, 1899, she escaped jail with the help of a fellow prisoner by the name of Ed Hogan. Freedom for Pearl was short-lived but her legend was growing.

At her trial in November, 1899, she insisted that the court had no right to put her on trial, saying: "I shall not consent to be tried under a law in which my sex had no voice in making." She then admitted her guilt and the jury acquitted her, maybe because the money from the robbery was for her mother. The judge was furious and claimed that Pearl "... flirted with the jury, bending them to her will." Upon replacing the jury, Pearl was tried for unlawfully carrying a gun. This time her charm did not work and she was sentenced to five years in the Yuma Territorial Prison. Boot, tried separately, was not so lucky and received 30 years at Yuma where he escaped in 1901 and has never been heard from since.



Pearl while in Yuma Prison

Pearl's celebrity status gained ground while she was in prison and the Warden, who liked the attention accommodated her with a larger than usual cell as well as other perks. She "entertained" visitors and reporters and often posed for pictures. After only 18 months, she was paroled on December 19, 1902, and moved to Kansas City. Rumors had become a way of life for Pearl and her parole was no different. Officially, she was paroled in order to star in a play called "Lady Bandit" which was written by her sister. Unofficially, she was pregnant again and that was an embarrassment as only a few people, perhaps the Warden, the prison chaplain and the governor, had access to her in privacy.

The end of her life is also shrouded in mystery. Some say that she died in 1925 in Kansas City where she operated a cigar store. Others say she was living in San Francisco and died in 1952. Most people believe that she returned to Arizona and married a rancher named George Calvin Bywater in a little place called Dripping Springs. There she lived out the rest of her life going by the name of Pearl Bywater and died on December 28, 1956.

Since we have a tombstone showing the couple buried side-by-side in the Pinal Cemetery in Central Heights, Arizona, that is the scenario we are going with.

She is often credited with the last stagecoach holdup, but it's not true. The last occurred in Jarbridge, Nevada in 1916. Some say she was the only woman to ever hold up a stagecoach. Also not true. Jane Kirkham was killed robbing the stage in Colorado on March 7, 1879, 20 years before the "Lady Bandit of Arizona." Maybe she was the first to do it sort of successfully.

