

“Bill Whitley Outlaw”

Excerpts from the book by Bill S. Price aka Willie Mae Price

Forward by Delbert Cain

Difficult times took place in Burnet County in and after the War between the states. It is said that those years produced the "lawless years" or the "outlaw years". There is a recent movie which came out the end of 2020 called "News of the World". It stars Tom Hanks and gives a depiction of the "outlaw years".

This collection of excerpts will furnish bits and pieces about Bill Whitley, an outlaw who had ties to the area of what we call "Our Community". We'll be sharing excerpts from the book *Bill Whitley Outlaw* by Bill S. Price. The book is available at the Herman Brown Free Library in Burnet. The author was a resident of this community for many years.

The Author her Grampa Bill Whitley

Bill S. Price author of the book *Bill Whitley Outlaw* was known locally as **Willie Mae Price**. She celebrated her 100th birthday on August 1, 2018. She died August 7, 2018. Memorial services were held at the Joppa Community church on August 25, 2018. Her burial was at the nearby Mahomet Cemetery on FM 243, next to her grandfather, Bill Whitley, outlaw. She and her husband Raymond Dale Price were long time residents of this area.

Obituary for **Willie Mae “Bill” Smith Price**

<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/88903287/willie-mae-price>

Obituary for **William Henry Whitley**

<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/24727372/william-henry-whitley>

In the introduction of the book she wrote...

When I confronted Aunt Dee with the question, “Will you tell me about my grandpa?” She motioned me to one of the thirteen rocking chairs that her large, white two-story home in Sweetwater, Texas, was noted for. She pulled up her favorite rocker that was nearby. As we rocked, she related a love story, as well as the most daring adventure of the old west I have ever heard.

Mrs. Price in chapter 1 mentions that the 1870's were years filled with the blunders of reconstruction. How corruption took place, public money stolen, law and order disappeared. Of how things got worse even though an effort was made to deal with the lawlessness. Of how conflict and violence affected the young more than the old. That the babies conceived during

the conflict of the Civil War grew up to hate and mistrust the military law that was forced upon their parents.

William (Bill) Henry Whitley was a youth of that time and was caught up in those circumstances of the time and became a part of the history of the “outlaw years”.

In chapter 2, the author gives information about the grave markers at the Mahomet Cemetery, 12 miles east of Bertram on FM 243, and about Bill Whitley’s ancestors.

We will skip around in the book to provide some information within the book, Bill Whitley Outlaw, in a condensed version.

THE McNEIL TRAIN ROBBERY

ABOUT THE 12th OF May 1887, the men, with eight more friends, started out to rob the Southern Pacific train at Flatonia in Fayette County, Texas. Things didn’t go right, so they gave up and rode to McNeil Junction, about fourteen miles north of Austin. The country around McNeil was hilly and broken with limestone rocks, sparsely settled and heavily timbered---the perfect place for a holdup. The crossing of the Missouri Pacific and the Austin and Northwestern narrow gauge tracks was at McNeil. The Austin and Northwestern went north to Burnet County.

Some of the gang went to McNeil before the time for the train. They captured the telegraph operator, cut the wires, and knocked the telegraph instrument to pieces with a hammer. When the telegraph operator objected, he was hit over the head with a gun, which didn’t knock him down, although he said he saw sparks. A passenger who was waiting at McNeil Junction to get on the train was relieved of his gold watch by one of the robbers. When the Missouri Pacific pulled into McNeil, the waiting passenger and the telegraph operator were told to get on the train, and they did.

As the train pulled into the junction, Mr. Cook, the porter, jumped off and started forward to flag the crossing. He stumbled over some logs on the track, and about the same time saw the gang. He thought they were tramps trying to hitch a ride. He pulled his gun and told them to move out. One member of the gang drew his gun and told Mr. Cook to go back in the train or “I will shoot your lights out,” so he ran into the dark.

Six men were stationed on one side of the train and four on the other side to keep everybody in the cars. No attempt was made to rob the passengers. Bill (Whitley) and Barber (from Florence) talked leisurely with passengers.

The ten men after robbing the train waved farewell, mounted their horses, went down the tracks and divided the money then split up. Bill and Barber started back to Burnet County by way of the bat caves along the Colorado River. "The County they selected for their refuge is wilderness covered with an undergrowth of brush and cedar."

Attorney General Hogg and Detective Robinson were working up a case and reported about \$14,000 and \$600 in silver stolen. The railroad express companies offered a \$500 reward for each robber.

Bill and Barber came back to Burnet County after the McNeil hold up. They were on their way to Lampasas when they saw Mr. Jack Juby herding sheep on his sheep ranch at Briggs, Texas. They stopped to visit with him and he told them that while he was resting and his saddle horse had strayed off. Bill asked if Mr. Juby would like for him to look for it. Juby said yes, that he would appreciate it. Bill and Barber searched out the pasture until they found the horse and brought it back to Mr. Juby. When the grand jury met at Burnet, Mr. Juby was called to explain his association with Bill and Barber.

THE CISCO BANK ROBBERY

[Copied from Chapter 12, book Bill Whitley Outlaw]

AROUND FEBRUARY 11, 1888 Bill and Barber went to Cisco in Eastland County, Texas to visit Barber's sister. They had also planned to rob the bank there. They rode into Cisco and met two more men, Green and Foster (alias Stephens). The four men looked over the town and the First National Bank. They rode the route that would be used to make their escape and then sent word to the president of the First National Bank that they were going to rob his bank. Bill and Barber spent the night with Barber's sister, this being February 14, 1888.

One of the winter's worst spell hit Cisco during the night, dropping a few inches of snow. This would make their undertaking more dangerous, as a posse would have no trouble following their tracks. However, on February 15, 1888 after lunch, Bill and Barber rode into Cisco where Green and Stephens were waiting. They tethered their horses behind a fence along the bank in the wagon yard. Bill was riding a fine iron gray horse that he put a lot of value on. He carried a matched set of pearl handle pistols and a pair of Winchester rifles on his saddle. His pistols and rifles used the same ammunition, which made loading the guns convenient. He and Barber wore white cowboy hats.

About three-thirty P.M. in broad daylight, Bill entered the First National Bank and requested the cashier, Mr. E. C. Levaux, to change a bill. Mr. Levaux stepped to the front to do so. When he came back to the cashier's window, Barber, who had followed Bill into the room, drew his pistol and said to the cashier, "This is the sort of change we want." At this time Mr. M. B.

Owens, a customer, and the treasurer, Mr. T.R. Blake got up and started out of the bank. However, Barber and his two companions halted them.

The bank had iron enclosures about seven or eight feet high to the inside of the bank. The four robbers climbed over it as though it was a regular plank fence and made Mr. Blake do the same. Those in the bank reported that it was real amusing watching Mr. Blake scale the high enclosure, and many funny things were said they could have been laughed at had they not been so scared.

The three robbers guarded those in the bank while Bill cleaned out the vault of about six thousand dollars, a gold watch and other valuables. Six hundred dollars was in gold, six hundred was in silver, and the rest was in greenbacks. Barber kept saying, "Will, hurry up, people are coming by the bank."

Mr. Owens said the robbers knew him because they called him by name. They called Mr. Levaux "Captain Boss." When Bill collected the last dollar, he asked Mr. Levaux to pen the two doors that led into the back yard, and the bank employees accompanied the robbers into the yard. The bank employees were told to climb a high plank fence, which they did with ease and then landed in the alley. Bill and his gang went over another fence to the wagon year, got on their horses and sped down the street shooting their pistols so the town would be aroused.

Not one of the gang had worn a mask. The employees agreed they could recognize them the next time they saw them. The employees agreed that the bandits were "big rough-looking fellows, one was cross eyed, all had mustaches, three light, one black. The cross eyed man had the black mustache, he had dark complexion and was about forty years old."

In ten minutes Marshall J. I. Thomas and several citizens were in pursuit of the robbers. They trailed them in a north-western direction and passed the Wallace school located about three miles from town. The posse followed the gang until dark and got close enough to see them about four miles south of Putman in the direction of Cottonwood. The posse was in sight of the gang for four or five miles; the gang waved to them to come one, but the marshal and his group were armed with pistols and were afraid the gang would use Winchesters. Mr. Perry shot at them but they didn't return his fire. The posse and Marshall Thomas gave up, left the trail in the snow and went back to the town at dark to get shotguns and Winchesters and rest until day.

After the gang had rested their horses and fed them, Bill gave his horse his head and was loosely holding the reins. The horse and rider were enclosed in a heavy fog created by the melting of the sleet and snow. The winter darkness had closed in on them when to the surprise of Bill, his horse ran head-on into a barbed wire fence and threw him from the saddle. The iron gray horse was also knocked down by the sudden force of the fence. Bill couldn't remember just what had happened. He knew he had taken a bad fall, had lost his hat and one

of his pearl handled pistols. He had evidently crawled to some deep underbrush where he found himself with a terrible pain in his side. He didn't know how badly he was hurt. When he removed his gun belt, one of his guns was gone; the stock was broken from the other and the sharp end had punctured his side. He pressed the wound with his handkerchief that he always wore on his neck to stop the bleeding. He was worried more about the stock on his remaining gun being broken than about the pain in his side. His two trusted Winchesters were tied on the saddle of his horse. He dozed a time or two waiting for light of day. He nearly froze to death. He just hoped that his horse was all right and several miles from where they had hit the fence.

A hundred men were looking for him. They found the iron gray horse of Bill's, with the saddle, bridle, and two Winchesters tied to the saddle, about four miles from Rising Star. They also found Bill's white Stetson hat and the pearl handle six-shooter nearby.

When Barber, Green and Stephens got to Lampasas, they found the law after them, so they took off to the Indian Territory.

It took Bill two weeks to get home, and Cordelia was worried knowing that he must be sick.

The History of Eastland County stated that: "The bank at Cisco was robbed. As the robbers were leaving town they met some farmers coming in and sent word back that they were going to return to clean up the town. Lieutenant Governor Wheeler, who lived in Cisco wired Governor Ross substantially as follows: "Bank Robbed. Robbers threaten to return and rob town. What can be done?" To which the governor is said to have answered, "If not men enough in town to protect it, burn and evacuate."

THE FIGHT AT MAHOMET

[Copied from the book Bill Whitley Outlaw]

"Sycamore Springs"

After Barber thought things had calmed down in Texas, he came back to Lampasas County to see Bill. The Cox family told him that Bill, Cordelia, and the girls were visiting the kin at Mahomet. When Barber started to Mahomet, he was spotted by a citizen of Lampasas County and Sheriff Olive, of Williamson County, was notified.

Read the entire Austin Weekly Statesman article at:

https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/data/batches/txdn_audi_ver01/data/sn86088296/00200297684/1888050301/0220.pdf

The following article was sent from Bertram to the *Austin Weekly Statesman* May 3, 1888.

Fierce Fight

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The Bold Bandit Chief Escapes Whitley fought like a wild Comanche Bertram April 26, 1888

“Deputy Sheriff John Jamison came in this morning from Sycamore Springs on North Gabriel, where he and Bill Patton, a special deputy have been lying in ambush since day before yesterday with the endeavor of capturing Bill Whitley and John Barber charged with murder of Deputy Sheriff Stanley and alleged participants in the McNeil and Flatonia robberies and upon whose heads is a reward of fifteen hundred dollars each. Your reporter sought an interview with Mr. Jamison and obtained the following facts. Last night he and Patton were watching the house of Brice Smart as they had cause to believe Whitley and Barber would be at Smart’s house during the night. At 2 P.M. they saw a women come out of the house and walk all around the year, and go back in the house. In a few minutes two men came out and going to a small thicket got on their horses and came riding toward Jamison and Patton. When within a short distance, Barber spoke saying “There’s something!” and immediately put the spurs to his horse and was off like a bullet. Whitley to be a little more sociable unseated himself from his saddle in the old Comanche style and greeting them with a shot from his six-shooter from under his horse’s neck. They immediately replied with shot guns, Jamison shooting at the horse and Patton at Whitley. The horse was hit behind the shoulder with nine buckshot. He sprang off immediately running about two hundred yards falling several times, and at last fell dead. A small sapling shielded Whitley, which was nearly cut in two by the shots from Patton’s gun, he firing both barrels.

They think it probable that Whitley was wounded. The smoke so blinded them they could not see what the results was for a few minutes, and during this time Whitley made his escape, as the country is rough and brushy. He got a big roan horse out of Smart’s pasture, belonging to Smart to ride. In the skirmish Whitley lost his hat, a fine white one, which Jamison had with him. Jamison said they could have easily killed them both, but they knew that some of Sheriff Olive’s men were in the country and they did not want to fire until they knew who the parties were. Barber, who is said to be a very shrewd man, discovered them and the results was above mentioned. The horse killed was a very fine animal a very large bay stallion branded JA on the left shoulder and J on the jaw. Jamison said he needed the money offered for their capture but said he had rather caught the man than to have secured the reward after having come so near, which only failed in their waiting to ascertain who they were.

He took the eleven o'clock train for Burnet. The Lampasas reporter sent the Lampasas News to the Austin Weekly Statesman stating that "Barber and Whitley are still up to their old tricks and officers with a posse of men left here last night, May 11, to bring them in if possible. If both sides should meet there will be a desperate struggle with loss of life on one side or the other. The officer are well armed and fully determined to affect a capture."

Read this and other accounts:

https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/data/batches/txdn_audi_ver01/data/sn86088296/00200297684/1888050301/0220.pdf

BILL WHITLEY ASSASSINATED

[Copied from Chapter 20, book Bill Whitley Outlaw

RANKIN, VAN RIPER, WEST, and Ysidrio boarded the 2:20 P.M. passenger train on the Aransas Pass bound for Floresville on September 25. They went to Will Harrell's home as planned. The little two-room house was used by the Harrell family on weekends as a Sunday house. On September 25, the Harrells left the cabin in charge of a young black man who cooked for the family.

The house consisted of a large 16 X 16 front room and a 3 X 16 shed room used for a kitchen. Rankin and his bunch hid in the kitchen to wait for Bill. Rankin had a pair of creaking boots, so he pulled them off.

After a nerve-racking wait, Bill and his cousin, Will Harrell, rode in on their horses, dismounted and entered the front room. Harrell opened the door to the kitchen where Rankin and his bunch were hiding and gave them a signal. He went to the lamp shelf and lit an oil lamp.

Bill had spent more than one night at the Harrell cabin. He was accustomed to using the bed nearest the kitchen. He had slipped through the back kitchen door and caught a few hours of sleep on the same bed many times before this. He knew the room well enough to enter without a light and stretch out on the bed for a nap.

He came in with Will Harrell on the night of September 25, went to the bed he always used and sat on the foot of the bed with his back to the kitchen (or shed room) where he could see the front door in case he had been followed. While Harrell was lighting the lamp, Bill put his Winchester on the bed beside him and started to remove his boots.

As Harrell lit the lamp, Rankin stepped to the kitchen door and emptied his shotgun, shooting Bill in the back of his head. Bill automatically drew his pistol but never got in a good shot as he rolled under the bed for protection. The back of his head was jellied with buckshot.

Then Rankin's companions stepped out of the kitchen and emptied their guns at the dead body.

Will Harrell had heard Bill say many times that he would never be taken alive. Harrell told Rankin when he bargained with him to kill Bill that a surprise shot in the back would be the only way to get him without others being killed. Harrell stood in the corner of the room watching the scene knowing that he had killed his cousin to save himself and for a few hundred dollars.

The people of Floresville went to the Harrell cabin before the body was removed and witnessed the scene, then reported to the paper: "The opinion is not unanimous that Whitley ever had a chance to surrender, and we know that Will Harrell was not arrested on the occasion, notwithstanding numerous telegrams and reports that he was captured. He had been arrested long ago and is under a large bond on charges of harboring train robbers. Our people were not friends of Whitley, we didn't even know him, had no idea he was around here and do not regret his death." The manner of his taking off is all that some of them complained of.

On September 26 at 4:00 A.M., the officers brought Bill's body into San Antonio on a special train furnished for them by San Antonio Aransas Pass Railway Company. He was bathed, embalmed, and placed in the Federal Building in San Antonio; then people were called in to identify him.

The crowds that came to see him were so large that he was removed from the small room where he was first placed to the large main court auditorium of the Federal Building. The paper stated that the people were surprised to see a slender young man, twenty-four years old with very handsome features. His half smile was especially winning. His forehead was high and white. His hair was wavy and reddish in hue. A small, sandy mustache only partly hid his upper lip. His soft blue eyes were partly open. His broad brim Stetson hat, riddled with buckshot holes, was placed by someone on his chest, where his hands were decently folded.

BILL WHITLEY BURIED AT MAHOMET

[Copied from Chapter 21, book Bill Whitley Outlaw

AS THE TRAIN PULLED into the station at Liberty Hill, Andy Cox left the team, which had calmed down, in charge of his brother Jim and walked to the train and waited. Soon Tom waved to him from the door of the Pullman car, and he at once made his way over and took his sister, Cordelia, in his arms as Tom helped her from the train.

Andy admired his young sister with her great courage and thought how pretty she was with her dark brown hair piled high on her head with a stylish black velvet hat pinned on top. Her

ankle-length silk dress accentuated her small waist, black kid gloves, a small black purse with a chain handle, and black high top dress shoes, which were the order of the day, completed her ensemble.

The brothers had always been close to their sister and now felt her pain and sorrow. They all wished the next few hours were already over.

Andy took Cordelia to the surrey that their sister Dee and husband, Bolin Stewart, had brought over to pick her up. Cordelia fell into her sister Dee's arms and they both shed the tears that had built up over the last year. Dee told her sister that Bill's sister Allie had the girls, and his parents, brother and sister were also waiting there.

Andy went back to the wagon and motioned to Jim to back up to the baggage car where Tom was waiting with Bill's body. The coffin was loaded on the wagon and the Cox brothers pulled out on the road to Mahomet.

Bolin thought he should take Cordelia on to her sister-in-law Allie Johnson's house, as he could make better time in the surrey than the boys would make in the wagon; but Cordelia wanted to follow the corpse. This would be her last time with the one she loved.

Cordelia thought Bill should be buried at Mahomet because his parents, the William Taylor Whitleys, his sister Allie Whitley Johnson, and one of his brothers, Joe Whitley lived in that community.

However, Andy told Tom there was sure to be trouble at Mahomet. He had left his wife with her folks, the Greens, and they knew some folks were disturbed about an outlaw being buried in the Mahomet Cemetery. Dee and Bolin also had an inkling that there would be trouble at the cemetery but didn't mention it to Cordelia.

A large crowd of family and friends was waiting for Cordelia at Allie's house. After a bite to eat, they all followed the wagon with Bill's body to the cemetery. A large group of Bill's friends rode horseback alongside of the surrey that Cordelia was riding in.

When they got to the cemetery, a line of men stood hand-to-hand, blocking the way to the gate. Cordelia wanted to know the meaning of the line-up, and one man speaking for the group, said they didn't want an outlaw buried in their cemetery.

These saints didn't wish to rise Resurrection Morning with any sinners. However, they hadn't met a girl with Cordelia's determination. She asked the cowboys with her to hold their guns on the saints while the rock fence was torn down enough to bring Bill into the cemetery for burial. The story was told that the grave was fenced out later. But as long as I can remember, it had been in the same enclosure as the rest of the graves. As Bill's family were members of the Methodist church at Old Sycamore Springs, which is now Mahomet, perhaps they quoted Jesus, who wrote in the sand, "Let those without sin cast the first stone."