

The Bandera PROPHEET

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Frontier Tales

Will Carver and Butch Cassidy's Hole in the Wall Gang

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“Well boys, when you see me again, I’ll be wearing diamonds – or a ball and chain!” This was reportedly the final farewell of cowboy Will Carver to his cohorts on the Half-Circle Six ranch in Tom Green County. Carver was leaving to seek more lucrative adventures than his \$30 a month cowboy job. After a few years and numerous daring train, bank and post office hold-ups throughout the Southwest, Carver did indeed come back to his old Texas range wearing diamonds and city duds but by this time, he had a bounty on his head.

Born and raised in Bandera County, Carver learned to ride a horse, rope and shoot a gun. He felt confined by the hills around Bandera and dreamed of becoming a cowboy on the wide-open range of West Texas. He showed up at the Half Circle Six with a horse, a saddle, a six-gun, a bedroll, and a hankering for excitement. When he was hired on, he was far from the outlaw he would later become. It was affirmed that he came from a respectable family and was considered to be mild-mannered and courteous. There was nothing about him that would suggest a reckless and daredevil spirit – except for an ever-present restlessness.

It was here that he met Black Jack Ketchum, a fellow cowboy, who bullied the green horn the first night after supper around a chuckwagon. Their association was the start of a gang that would leave cowboying

behind to become infamous outlaws. For the next 10 years, they robbed and terrorized small towns and banks throughout the West.

Much speculation has been made as to why Carver so quickly embraced the outlaw life. J. Marvin Hunter, in his *Frontier Times* magazine, stated Carver was forced to kill a man in self-defense. Having no money and a way to defend himself, he was persuaded to seek sanctuary with the Ketchum gang. A fellow cowboy at the Half Circle Six said grief over the loss of his young wife caused Carver to go down a dark path. Others surmised it was not a deceased wife, but rather a faithless wife who darkened his heart.

Nevertheless, he rode with both the Ketchum gang and the better-known Butch Cassidy's Hole in the Wall Gang. He was part of Cassidy's gang when they successfully robbed a bank in Nevada of \$80,000 in gold coins. They rode back to Ft. Worth by relays on saddle horses which had previously been planted along the way. It was here, they enjoyed the loot by going on an epic spending spree and it was here the famous photograph showing the five gang members dressed as gentlemen was taken. The photograph may have cemented their future legacy in western history and lore, but at the time, it proved to be their undoing when a lawman recognized Carver in the photograph.

Carver and fellow gang member Ben Kirkpatrick left for San Antonio and after spending time in Bandera with his family, headed west, stopping at saloons in Kerrville and Mason, not realizing the law was pursuit. On April 1, 1901, the law caught up and his life came to an end after a bloody gunfight in a Sonora saloon.