

Bonnie and Clyde

It's been 80 years since that early morning of May 23, 1934, when a hail of bullets ripped through their car on a rural road about an hour east of Shreveport, Louisiana, and ended their lives. But just as the lives of other bad guys such as the James brothers and Billy the Kid have been romanticized, so too have been the lives of Bonnie and Clyde.

What made their story so romantic? Was it their youth and the love they shared? Or the dangerous life they lived? Or that they robbed wealthy banks when so many were so poor? Perhaps all of the above.

Bonnie Parker and Clyde Barrow grew up in the slums of West Dallas. They met in 1930 when Parker, a waitress, was approximately 20 and Barrow, a petty thief who had graduated to stealing cars, was a year older. Soon after, Barrow did a two year stint in the Eastham Prison Farm. He came out of prison a hardened criminal who had already committed one murder, that of the inmate who had sexually abused him. He soon turned to a life of crime, and Parker followed him.

The Barrow gang consisted of family members and friends. They drove fast cars and wore fancy clothes, thanks to the money they took from the banks they robbed. Their crime spree lasted two years and was spread over five states: Texas, Louisiana, Arkansas, Oklahoma and Missouri. They are credited with 13 killings, mostly law enforcement officers.

For a while, Parker and Barrow were just petty thieves with a penchant for cars and guns. Then they left a camera at one hideout with pictures they had taken of themselves. When the pictures were published, the good looking couple caught the public's eye and imagination and the legend began.

But the police were closing in. Gun battles, wounds and close escapes ensued. Barrow's brother Buck was mortally wounded and he and his wife Blanche were caught. Another member left the gang for a safer lifestyle. Hideouts became just that—places to hide for short periods of time before moving on to the next one, at times just one step ahead of the law. Then their luck ran out. Going on a tip from a member of the gang, Henry Methvin, a posse of five officers from Dallas and Louisiana led by Texas Ranger Frank Hamer waited on that road outside Gibsland, Louisiana, for the couple to drive their way. The trap was sprung and approximately 150 bullets were pumped into the car. Bonnie and Clyde died together, as they had wanted.

Bonnie and Clyde were products of their time—the Great Depression—who chose a life of crime, and they died as they had lived, by the gun. Yet in the public's eye they were folk heroes. Books were written, a major movie was made in 1967 and a miniseries was filmed in 2014 in time for the 80th anniversary of their death. And so the legend continues.