

ED REED, GONE RIGHT

Most of the citizens of Wagoner Switch knew that Ed Reed, a deputy marshal for “Hangin” Judge Parker, was school teacher Jeannie Cochran’s new husband. Quite a few were aware that Ed was the son of the infamous “Bandit Queen,” Belle Starr. However, there probably weren’t many, if any, who knew how Belle’s boy became a U.S. Marshall. All everyone knew for sure on this fall day, October 25, 1895, was that the city fathers had called upon Ed to enforce the law. The Crittendon brothers, Dick and Zeke were on one of their periodic drunken sprees and were terrorizing the town’s citizens. When approached to take care of the situation, Ed had told them “the Crittendons won’t be taken alive,” and sure enough Ed had killed them both in a gunfight near Cherokee and Main Streets. Ed Reed had taken a long, circuitous route from breaking the law to enforcing it.

Born in Los Nietos, California, February 27, 1871, the second child of Myra Maybelle Shirley and James Reed, Ed was introduced to the life of a criminal family early on. Less than a year after the family had settled in California, authorities recognized his father James as wanted for murder back in Indian Territory. While James fled back east, baby Ed his mother and older sister Pearl, returned by ship from California, around Cape Horn, the tip of South America. Shortly after their arrival back in Texas, Ed and Pearl were taken to Rich Hill, Missouri to live on their Grandmother Reed’s farm, while Maybelle, who now called herself Belle, took up residence near Dallas. Rich Hill was to be home for the children until after their father was murdered near Paris, Texas by an associate. Shortly, after a brief marriage to Bruce Younger, Belle married Sam Star, moved to Younger’s Bend near Eufaula in Indian Territory, and reclaimed the children, now nine and twelve. Belle doted on Pearl, making plans for her future either as a pianist or actress. In fact, both aspirations did serve Pearl well in her adult years, first as a prostitute at Miss Laura’s Social Club in Fort Smith and, later as madam of her own “business.” But there were no such plans for Ed. In fact, as he grew into his teen years, Ed tended to follow the avocation of the older males around him, minor theft and horse stealing. Belle’s attitude toward Ed mostly bordered on contempt and, when Ed, at the age of eighteen, took her prize horse to a dance and didn’t return for several days, Belle beat him so severely with her riding whip he was placed under a doctor’s care. Ed vowed to whoever would listen that “I’m going to kill her for this.” So, it was little wonder when Belle was murdered a few months later, February 3, 1889, that Ed would be one of those suspected, although eventually no one was every charged with his mother’s death.

All the while Belle was grooming Pearl for a better life inadvertently she was laying the groundwork for Ed’s future as a law man. During the last decade of her life, Belle had become an advocate for Indian rights, particularly in Judge Isaac Parker’s court where she frequently paid for the defense of the accused. This had attracted Parker’s attention and admiration, that and the fact that despite all the paperback novels describing crimes involving “The Bandit Queen,” she only served one year in the Detroit House of Corrections, for horse theft. So when the inevitable occurred, when Ed was arrested for stealing a horse, Parker’s admiration for Ed’s mother took an interesting twist. During May of 1889, Parker sentenced Ed to seven years in the Ohio State Penitentiary on very

flimsy evidence, but he also made arrangements for his release after serving just a few months. Returning Ed to Fort Smith, Judge Parker put him on probation, ordering him to serve as apprentice to the famed Bass Reeves. Reeves, who at one time had been a slave, was one of Parker's best, credited with over 3000 arrests during a stellar career. After working with Reeves a few years, in 1893 Parker appointed Ed as a U.S. Deputy Marshal. However, he was still associated with Reeves after the Wagoner gunfight, evidenced by the fact that the two worked together in capturing George Wilson near McCloud. Convicted of murder Wilson had the unenviable distinction of being the last man hung on Parker's gallows July 30, 1896. So, it appeared that Ed Reed had found his niche in life as a lawman under the superb tutelage of Bass Reeves, but unlike Reeves who was seldom wounded and died of old age in Muskogee, Ed would not be so fortunate.

Alec Cochran, his wife Jeannie's father, lived in Claremore and had been poisoned by bad whiskey served up at the Gibbs and Clark Saloon. Assuming he would die shortly, the owners had unceremoniously dumped him out back of the saloon, but he had survived. When Ed was advised of this situation he rode to Claremore determined to arrest the saloon owners. History does not record the details, but perhaps because the victim was his father-in-law and he was not cautious or maybe because Gibbs and Clark anticipated his arrival they ambushed him, Ed was gunned down by two shotgun blasts and died that winter night in Claremore, December 14, 1896.

Growing up in a family of outlaws with names like Reed, Younger and Starr and generally ignored by Belle, "The Bandit Queen," Ed Reed must be regarded as the quintessential example of one who took a different path. Buried in the Cochran Family Cemetery near Claremore, perhaps it would be most descriptive of his life if his epitaph simply read "Ed Reed, Gone Right."

