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Symposium revisits Bonnie and Clyde's 1933 shootout

By MIKE RICE
The Kansas City Star

About 400 Bonnie and Clyde aficionados — some driving Model A's — spent part of the weekend revisiting a shootout that put Platte County on the map 74 years ago.

The gun battle with more than a dozen law enforcement officials was the subject of a symposium at the Ambassador Building at Kansas City International Airport, which now stands in place of the Red Crown Tavern and Tourist Cabins.

That lodge, near present-day Interstate 29 and Cookingham Drive, was where Clyde Barrow, Bonnie Parker and their gang of outlaws were holed up in July 1933 — until the law, alerted by suspicious employees at the Red Crown, arrived.

After the Saturday symposium, those who brought their 1930s-era cars took a road tour of what historians think might have been the getaway route that the Barrow gang took through the county that evening in a stolen Ford V-8 sedan.

"This is wild country," said Delores Weller, 77, of De Soto as her husband Dean, 82, drove his 1930 Ford Model A town sedan on the narrow winding Interurban Road.

Dean Weller honked his horn with its distinctive "oohnga" sound at some children and then some cows. But Clyde Barrow was probably not honking any horns on those same roads that evening more than 70 years ago.

"They probably weren't thinking of anything at all," Delores Weller said. "As cold-blooded as they were, I'll bet that they were always living in fear."

The shootout left Clyde's brother Buck with a severe head wound. He died a few days later, and his wife, Blanche, was arrested and brought back to Platte County to face trial.

The road tour ended at the Platte County Courthouse, where Blanche was sentenced to 10 years in prison.

A few relatives of the Barrow gang attended the symposium.

"The interest in Bonnie and Clyde just amazes me," said Rhea Leen Linder, a niece of Bonnie Parker. "But I realize that it is history."

Jim Spawn, an antique car collector who organized the symposium, showed slides of the Barrow gang.

The symposium also paid homage to the law enforcement officials who were in the shootout. Several of them, including the Platte County sheriff and his son, were wounded.

Several relatives of those law enforcement officials attended the symposium.

"Bonnie and Clyde were some messed-up people, and they got what they deserved," Spawn said. "But the 13 lawmen were regular people. They got no banquets or ticker-tape parades. So 74 years later, why don't we give them a hand?"

And the crowd applauded.

To reach Mike Rice, call 816-234-5903 or send e-mail to mrice@kcstar.com.



The Red Crown Symposium and Road Tour on Saturday took attendees along the Platte County roads through which the Barrow gang is thought to have made its escape after a gunfight with law enforcement officials.

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