

Banghart Led Colorful Life Among North and South Carolina Mountains

The following interesting story was written by a member of The Columbia (S. C.) Record staff, and deals with Basil Banghart, whose case has been watched with interest in this section. Banghart is now facing a 99-year sentence for kidnaping, while his paramour, Mae Blalock, is being held in Asheville jail and will stand trial for her part in the Charlotte mail robbery.

The \$25,000 robbery of the South Carolina State bank at Pickens July 21, 1932, was plotted in the federal penitentiary at Atlanta, and Basil Banghart, the "Owl," lived in the mountains nearby for a year before he and four others swooped down on the unsuspecting little community to perpetuate the daring crime.

South Carolina officers definitely link Banghart with the robbery and since his arrest in Baltimore, Md., on February 12 for the \$105,000 Charlotte mail robbery they are willing to bring to light the inside story of the Pickens looting.

Banghart, although he faces trial for the Charlotte hold-up, and probably for his alleged part in the Roger Touhy gang kidnaping of John ("Jake the Barber") Factor, may some day be brought to South Carolina to be tried.

Banghart Denies
He admitted in Baltimore that authorities had "enough to send me up for 25 years," but he denied to State Constable W. Fred Newman that he had any part in the Pickens robbery. Newman, who identified Banghart as the same "Kelly" who served in the penitentiary and lived in the mountain home of B. B. "Bunk" Hendricks, went to Baltimore to question him when he was arrested there.

The Pickens bank was looted near noon of a hot summer's day by five men who descended in a high-powered automobile from their mountain retreat. One man remained at the wheel and another in the rear seat holding a machine gun while three of the party held up bank employees. They took \$26,000 but over looked \$9,000 in the vault.

Banghart was the gangster who wielded the machine gun in the rear seat, officers are fairly certain. One man was arrested for taking part in the crime Robert McGill, of Greenville, but later released on bond after being held for a time in the state penitentiary for safe keeping. He was identified by several Pickens citizens as the driver of the car.

Pickens Bank Case
McGill is a relative of "Bunk" Hendricks, at whose home Banghart lived under the name of "Kelly" but the story of the Pickens bank robbery goes back even further. Officers at the time of the robbery expressed the belief that the bandits "were professionals who came from outside the state to hold up the bank."

Banghart was not originally a "Carolina" mountaineer, but an adopted son of the wild coves in the country north of Pickens. Lieutenant Joel D. Townsend, of the state highway patrol, who knows the Carolina mountains and was one of the officers assigned to investigate the case, knows better of the "Owl's" early history.

"Bunk" Hendricks, a typical mountain boy, six feet tall and weighing close to 200 pounds, served a five-year term in the Atlanta penitentiary for the illegal manufacture of whiskey and his relative McGill,

spent some time there too. They became acquainted with a shady fellow named Kelly from the Tennessee mountains and formed a friendship. Kelly had been convicted of a post-office robbery.

Soon after Hendricks left the penitentiary, Kelly escaped and came to live with him at his home in Table Rock cove. And soon after that Kelly began importing G. M. C. trucks and a Packard automobile over the mountain trails. He was arrested under the national motor vehicle theft act, regulating the moving of stolen vehicles from one state to another, tried in United States district court at Anderson but acquitted on a flaw in the indictment.

Knew the Roads
About this time Hendricks moved from this state to Reedy Cove in Transylvania county, North Carolina.

The bandits who robbed the bank at Pickens knew their highways and mountain trails. They first made a stop around Pickens, traveling down the Punkintown road to its intersection with the Greer highway and took that road towards Greenville. Near Cleveland they made another loop on the Jones Gap road and came back into the Greer highway near the North Carolina line. From here they went directly to Hendricks' home in Reedy Cove, across the North-South Carolina line.

The trail of the bandits was not definitely mapped out until later, but officers under the direction of Sheriff John B. Craig, of Pickens, moved on the road leading from the Greer highway to Rosman, N. C., sure as to the destination of the robbers. State Constable Newman, who was in charge of patrolmen and detectives on duty at Arcadia Mills in Spartanburg, where a strike was in progress, and other South Carolina officers joined in the chase and joined forces with Sheriff Ed Patton, Jr., of Transylvania county.

The combined forces held a brief conference near the state line after night fall and then moved in the direction of the small road leading into Reedy Cove. When they arrived there about 1 o'clock they found a "read of new tires on the road."

Had Machine Gun
By this time the officers knew that the bandits had a machine gun. Roy Jones, highway maintenance superintendent, had observed the

group for several minutes when they stopped where he and his forces were repairing a bridge.

Sheriffs Patton and Craig declined to let the men enter the cove unless they were armed to combat the gang. So part of the group returned to Greenville to get a machine gun. The remainder blocked the road.

When Sheriff Craig, Lieutenant Kinsey of the highway patrol, and Chief Powers of the Hendersonville police, returned with the machine gun, reinforced by Sheriff Cliff Bramlett, of Greenville, the group laid plans to enter the mountain stronghold. They drew up to a position near "Bunk" Hendricks' blocking the road completely with two of the automobiles. They lay in wait for dawn.

"It was 2 o'clock in the morning and we nearly froze although it was the middle of July," Townsend relates. Our teeth chattered and our nerves were on edge as we waited for daybreak."

Officers Deploy
When the sun began to peep over the hills, the group, deployed into squads, anxiously watched Hendricks' house as the crowing of game chickens echoed through the hills. Twenty-five sawed-off shot-guns bristled through the brush for the machine gun was primed for action.

"Bunk" Hendricks opened his front door, yawning, with leggings and shoes under his arm. He sat down on the edge of the porch to put them on.

The indomitable Sheriff Craig was determined to advance on the house and he called for volunteers to accompany him. Seven men joined him, everyone aware that perhaps within the house were five desperate men armed with a machine gun, rifles and pistols who wouldn't hesitate to shoot to kill.

Highway Patrol Lieutenants Kinsey and Townsend, Patrolman Boyles and J. W. Coleman, Deputy Sheriffs Clio Findley and Henry Cureton of Pickens county, and Deputy Sheriff Tom Wood of Transylvania county, now the sheriff, were ready. They pleaded with Sheriff Craig not to go himself but the sheriff said "Hell, no."

"Just as Hendricks finished, we raised up under the direction of Sheriff Craig," Lieut. Townsend tells, "There were 25 shotguns and a machine gun staring Hendricks in the face. Very coolly and deliberately he spoke to Sheriff Craig.

Officers Ready
"Hello, John," he said.
"Bunk," said Sheriff Craig.
"Stand still and don't move. Tell

those fellows in the house not to make any move as I have them completely surrounded, and if they refuse to do that, call your wife and children out of the house as I came for the men and would just as soon take them dead as alive, but I don't want to hurt your wife or children."

"John, I'll tell you they've gone," Hendricks answered. "They ate supper and left between 9:30 and 10 o'clock. My wife fixed supper for them."

"It was just 10 o'clock when we blocked the road. The gang had left just before we arrived," Lieut. Townsend added.

The officers made a thorough search of Hendricks' home and out-buildings and the surrounding terrain but failed to find a trace of the stolen money. They did find hidden in cut pine boughs an almost new automobile, which had been stolen from Tennessee and had been left there by Kelly, Hendricks said.

"No names were mentioned when Sheriff Craig and Hendricks talked," said Townsend, "but each knew whom the other was talking about, Banghart was known as Kelly until then but later records in the penitentiary revealed his real name. Hendricks said the men stayed there the night before the robbery and had supper and breakfast the next morning."

Immediately after completing their search for any money that might have been hidden, the officers again spread out to scour the highways. Returning to the road leading into Reedy Cove, the morning revealed an outgoing track hidden in the grass in the darkness.

They had missed the bandit gang by only a few minutes.

All that day and into the night the search continued. The 25 officers picked up the trail again but lost it at Highlands, N. C. They continued to scour the surrounding country but the bandit gang had too long a lead. For four long days and nights the officers never once removed their clothes and slept only in restless snatches.

The slim, fair-haired "Owl" had escaped. Banghart, Basil Hugh, to be exact is described in a recent bulletin of the department of justice's bureau of investigation as 5 feet, 8 7-8 inches tall, and weighing 138 pounds. He has blue eyes, light brown hair and a fair complexion. The federal government at the time the bulletin was issued wanted him for kidnaping and motor vehicle theft.

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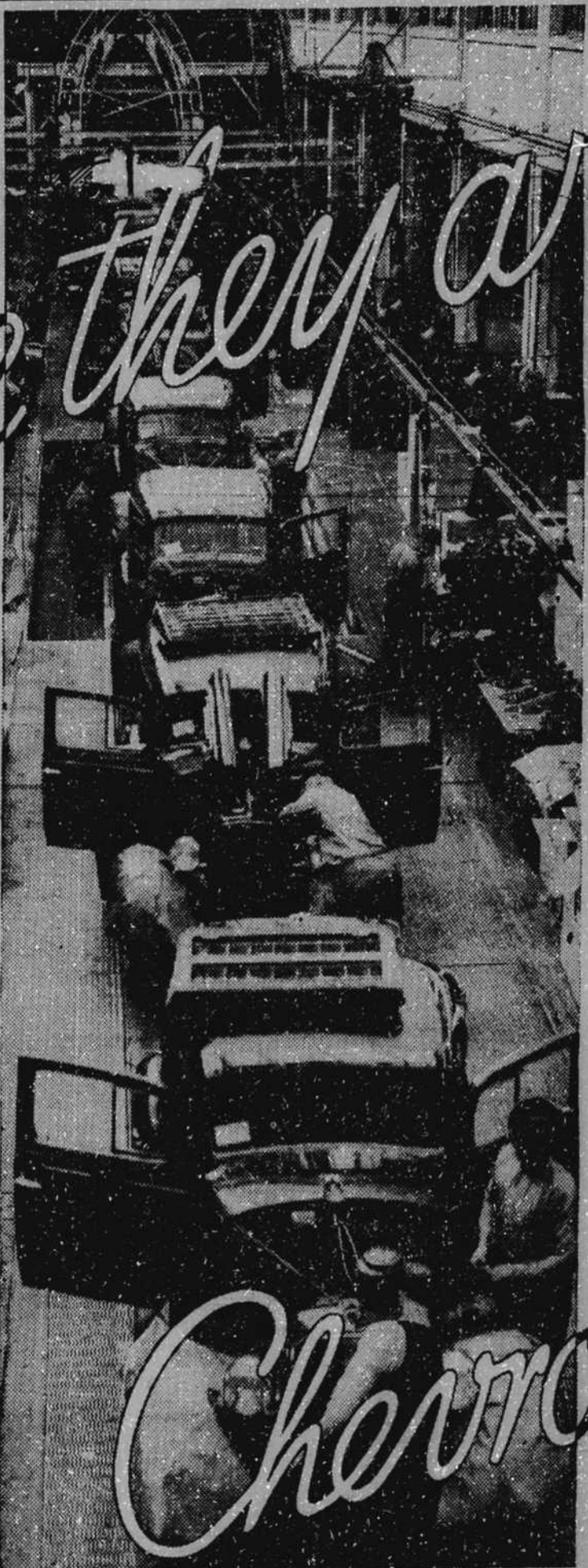
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NOTICE OF SALE OF LAND

Under and by virtue of the authority conferred by deed of trust executed by Hazel Scott Stokes and husband, Robert L. Stokes, dated the 1st day of August, 1929, and recorded in Book 27 Sec. 2, Page 19, in the office of the Register of Deeds for Transylvania County, Jefferson E. Owens, Substituted Trustee, will at twelve o'clock Noon on

MONDAY, APRIL 16th, 1934 at the Court House Door of Transylvania County in Brevard, North Carolina sell at public auction for cash to the highest bidder the following land, to-wit:

A certain lot or parcel of land in or near the Town of Brevard, North Carolina.

BEGINNING on an iron stake on the East margin of South Broad Street, R. R. Deaver's Northwest corner, and runs thence with said R. R. Deaver's line North 87 degrees East 512 feet to a stake in Jumping Branch; thence with said Jumping Branch, North 45 degrees West 190 feet to a stake in said Branch, Osie Minor's Southeast corner; thence with said Osie Minor's line, South 87 degrees West 277 feet to a stake in the East margin of South Broad Street, Osie Minor's Southwest corner; thence with said East margin of South Broad Street, South 3 degrees East 135 1-2 feet to the BEGINNING.

And being all of that certain lot of land described in deed from Jennie E. Godfrey and Elizabeth A. Godfrey to Hazel Scott Stokes, dated the 2nd day of April, 1929, and recorded in Book 61, Page 240 of the records of deeds for Transylvania County, N. C.

This sale is made on account of default in payment of the indebtedness secured by said deed of trust.

A five percent (5%) cash deposit will be required of the highest bidder at the sale.

This the 8th day of March, 1934. JEFFERSON E. OWENS, Substituted Trustee.

IOAN No. 3530. March, 22-29 Apr. 5-12.