

By Kathryn Dodd

So I have detailed the 1918 murder of Otis Myers and Krum bank robbery by Yancy Story and the 1925 murder of Fred Crane by Nathan Story. I think this article (2 parts) by Mike Cochran from 1977 and his days at NTSU on W.A. Martin and the Story Gang and is quite interesting.

W.A. Martin and the Story Gang;
The Shootout on Oakland Street
by Mike Cochran

(Authors note and apology: I wrote this article when I was a freshman at NTSU, too many years ago. It was lost for at least 25 years and only a few years ago surfaced from deep in my files. I have not edited it nor updated it and though I am still responsible for any errors that might be contained herein, I ask your tolerance in that I was just a beardless lad when I wrote it.)

The Gang

On August 6, 1925, R. L. Parsons, a deputy sheriff of Denton County, was shot to death on Hickory Street, two blocks east of the courthouse. W.A. Martin was charged with this crime and was arrested in his home after a gun battle with the Sheriff's posse. This was not an isolated case of murder.

Denton County in the twenties was not the tame place we know it to be today. With Bonnie and Clyde yet a decade away and the Wild West not a generation past, lawlessness was not at all an uncommon phenomenon. Many of the customs of the western American frontier, experiencing cultural lag, were still in evidence here.

During this period a group of Denton toughs, under the leadership of Nathan A. and Yancy Story evolved from small-time thieves into a well-organized gang of burglars and bank robbers. Headquartered on the Story ranch, 7 miles south of Argyle, they rifled Denton County for booty. Key members of the gang were men like Shelby Stiff, Ben Collier and W.A. Martin.

In 1923 and 1924, with W.M. Swinney as sheriff, the gang had pretty much a free reign on the county involving relatively small crimes, car thefts and burglary. Herman Shifflett, a minor member of the gang, was even Deputy under Sheriff Swinney, and W. A. Martin acted as his campaign director in a bid for re-election. It seemed as if Swinney and the Story's might have had an agreement, though it is certainly feasible that Swinney, like everyone else in town, was just plain intimidated into inactivity.

Swinney lost the election of 1924 and on January 1, 1925, W. S. (Bill) Fry took over as sheriff of Denton County. Fry had worked on and off for the city and county Denton since 1870 when at 19 he was appointed City Manager of Denton. This was the second time for Fill Fry to serve as Sheriff and he was 74 years old when he took office for the second time.

With Fry in office, the security that the Story's and Martin had enjoyed during Swinney's tenure was severely threatened. Shortly after Fry took over he brought one Bill Johnson to Denton as a deputy. Martin believed that Johnson was in fact William S. Poe and was in Denton to kill him. Martin also claimed that Johnson, after refusing to kill him, had told him, "Bill Fry will bring a man named Parsons here from Grayson County and he will kill you".

In February of 1925 Yancey Story came upon Sheriff Fry sitting on the east steps of the Denton County Courthouse. It is reported that he circled the square twice slowly and then fired two pistol shots at the Sheriff, who turned and fired back knocking out the windows of a shop on the east side of the square. Chips remain where Story's bullets hit the soft sandstone column base. A rumor going around at the time was every member

of Story gang had drawn the name from a hat of the law enforcement officer he would kill. Story reportedly drew Fry's name.

On March 11, 1925, Yancy Story, Shelby Stiff, Herman Shifflett and W. A. Martin abducted Pack Hampton, night watchman of the Sanger National Bank. They tied him up and then dropped him off near Clear Creek just south of Sanger. They then returned to the bank and tried unsuccessfully to burn through the safe with their torch.

On March 19, 1925, Story, Martin and Cal Wilkerson broke into the First State Bank of Holland, Texas, in Bell County. They netted about \$40 in pennies from that job. Martin and Story were suspected of having pulled the Holland bank Job and Sheriff Bingham of Bell County had made a trip to Denton to consult with Sheriff Fry, but they decided that there wasn't enough evidence to indict them on. By this time, Tom Hickman, Captain of the Texas Rangers, was also secretly investigating the goings on in Denton and was in communication with Bill Fry.

Wiburn A. Martin was a family man. Together with his wife and two children he lived in the 1000 block of Oakland Street in Denton. Born in Lee County in 1884, he was a farmer until 1918 when he moved to Denton and entered the tire and tube business. Bad health, he said, forced him from the tire business and he took up raising bird dogs. It is not known when exactly he joined the Storys' and started stealing, but neighbors say it had been going on for quite some time in 1925. He was described as a "good neighbor he'd rob and steal, but he'd be good to you.

The Lawman

In May of 1925, R. B. Parsons came to Denton and was sworn in as a deputy by Sheriff Fry. He had known Fry for 30 years and had a reputation for being a "Cool, fearless officer" His reputation as a daring officer was established while serving on the police force of Sherman, Texas in the early 1890's, when he led a raid on the Frisco Saloon. During the battle that ensued, two notorious men were killed and after the event, the wave of crime, gambling and bootlegging in that town abated, it was said." No one had ever heard him cuss or take a drink of liquor. "Olé man Parsons was pretty good fellow and he was a good officer" So Sheriff Fry had a problem and R. F. Parsons was the solution.

Time and events were closing in on Martin and the Story gang. Deputy Parsons had come to clean up the town, but instead of slacking off, they robbed more banks and though increasingly bold, Martin got more nervous. Speaking of this period, Martin said, "W.M. Swinney told me that Fry had brought Parsons there to kill me and if I didn't look out, Parsons would shoot me out of my automobile some night. Pete Simmons, peace officer employed by the City of Denton, and Tom Price, a night watchman also told me that Parsons had been brought here to kill me."

On June 9, 1925, Martin and Story robbed the First State Bank of Krum in a daylight holdup. Daylight robberies being more successful than their previous nocturnal forays, they decided to return to the First State Bank of Holland. This time they fared better with an \$1,885 haul.

After the Krum robbery it is reported that Martin went to the Rayzor Ice Company and talked with Sam B. . Rayzor stated "I was on the platform to put ice in Martin's car. He had the gun pointed at me. He said he had been fishing in Oklahoma and he had heard the officers say he had robbed the Bank at Krum. 'If you see any of those damned officers, tell them to come and get me.' He showed me another gun and said he knew how to use them."

