

## IOWA DESPERADOES CAPTURED AND LYNCHED IN 1883

By Joan Muyskens, Editor

Isaac (Ike) and William (Bill) Barber, accused of horse theft and murder, were captured on June 5, 1883, at a farm house about four miles southwest of Tripoli, Bremer County, Iowa; three days later the brothers were forcibly taken from their cell in the Waverly jail and lynched by a mob outside the city limits of Waverly, Iowa.

Ike Barber was born in Illinois in 1855. A few months after his birth, the Barber family moved to a farm about four miles southwest of Randalia, Iowa, and it was on this farm that Bill was born in 1859. Shortly after Bill's birth, the Barbers again moved, this time to a farm about two and a half miles west of Fayette, Iowa. This farm, located on Iowa Hiway 93, remained the family home until late 1882.

Ike and Bill were two of seven Barber children; they had one other brother and four sisters. Their father, Leafy E. Barber, was killed in action in the Civil War in 1861. He had been a member of the 38th Iowa Infantry, Co. A. The brothers had attended a private school near their home until after the Civil War, when their mother could no longer support her entire family and sent Ike and Bill to an orphans' home in Cedar Falls. The boys did not like the orphans' home; believing it for sissies, and after a few years they escaped, returning to the family farm. As by that time they were old enough to do farm work, their mother did not send them back to the Cedar Falls home.

Ike and Bill were said to be hard workers and the farm income increased notably during the period the boys worked it. However, the brothers enjoyment of gambling and liquor (they were frequent visitors to the local saloons) required quite a bit of money, more than their hard farm work yielded, and they soon left home for something offering higher compensation—mainly, horse theft. The territory they then "worked" consisted of northeastern Iowa and parts of Illinois.

The first crime attributed to the Brothers was the triple murder of a farmer and two of his hired hands. The Barber brothers were never tried for these murders which occurred in August, 1882, near Mount Pulaski, Ill., but the Illinois authorities were so sure that they were guilty of the crime that they offered a \$5,000 reward for their capture. The *Waukon* (Iowa) *Democrat* of June 13, 1883, gives the following account of the murders:

On Aug. 20, 1882, the bodies of Charles McMahon, a wealthy bachelor farmer, and two hired hands, John Carlock and Robert Matheny, were found a few miles east of Mount Pulaski, Ill., having been dead several days. McMahon's head was battered almost beyond recognition, and the heads of Carlock and Matheny had been nearly severed from their bodies. Matheny came from Hazel Dell, Wis. McMahon was evidently murdered for his money, and his men, presumably, because they interfered to save him. The Barber brothers were suspected of this triple butchery.

Ike and Bill claimed that they were innocent of these murders, stating simply that they were blamed for every crime that occurred in Illinois.

The Illinois authorities described Ike as 27 years of age; five feet, six inches tall; 170 pounds; dark hair. Ike was known to hold his head down and look away from people talking to him. Bill was described as 23; five feet, eleven inches tall; 185 pounds; light complexioned. He held his head erect and talked freely. Both brothers were married. Ike was married at the age of 23 to Hattie Slauter; he and Hattie had two sons, Fred and George. Bill was married at the age of 19 to Alice Slauter, a sister of Ike's wife. Bill and Alice had no children.

The first murder the brothers committed in Iowa (a murder to which the Barber brothers later claimed self-defense) was the shooting of Marion Shepherd, the Westfield township constable who had been deputized by the sheriff of Fayette county to arrest Ike and Bill for stealing a horse and cart. This shooting occurred Sept. 7, 1882, in a railroad construction camp just outside the Iowa town of Wadena. The Barber brothers were staying at a boarding house near the camp. They had just finished lunch and were leaving a store when the

constable spotted them. As they mounted their horses, Shepherd commanded them to halt and raise their hands. Ike, who knew horse theft was punishable by hanging, decided to shoot it out; he slipped down under his horse and shot at Shepherd, hoping to wound him so he and his brother would have time to escape. The shot killed Shepherd, but not until he fired a shot and wounded one of the brothers. Ike and Bill, however, managed to mount their horses and they sped away. (The Barber brothers did not learn of Shepherd's death until almost a year later.)

The pursuit which followed this shooting was recorded in the *Waukon Democrat*, June 13, 1883, as follows:

Hundreds of armed men, headed by Sheriff Farr, were soon scouring the country for the desperadoes. The next day their horses were seen grazing near a strip of woods, wherein the Barbers were undoubtedly concealed; but an accomplice informed the pursuers, and told them the men they were after had been seen near Fayette. The party then unwisely turned back, allowing the Barbers to escape. On that night (Friday, the 8th) the outlaws stole two horses from a widow near Strawberry Point, and rode off on them. The animals were found grazing the next day, but the Barbers had vanished. On the night of Sunday, Sept. 10, they were surrounded in the woods eight miles from Brush creek, but escaped through a cornfield. They rode with a farmer five miles from Hazleton, got out of the wagon and returned to the latter place. A stallion stolen by them was found near Independence. The pursuit was continued for two weeks with varying prospects of success, the posse and outlaws sometimes being within the sound of each others' voices; but the sheriff's party finally abandoned the chase as a futile task.

Other accounts of the chase stated that Fayette county offered a \$500 reward for the capture of the brothers and that the state added another \$500 reward, but the validity of this is unknown.

It is believed that after the brothers escaped the posse, they went to Missouri, where they worked on a railroad crew for a short time, after which they got a job on a farm near Clay Center, Kansas.

The Barber brothers were not seen in Iowa again until June 2, 1883, when they were spotted near West Union. Ike and Bill had gone to their mother's farm to visit, unaware that she had sold her home and moved (presumably out of the

state). When they called at the house, a young boy whom they asked for a drink of water recognized them. As soon as the brothers left, the boy got on a horse and notified the neighbors of the brothers' return. Sheriff Farr was also notified and a large posse was formed.

After Ike and Bill left their mother's old farm, they went to the home of one of their sisters, but stayed only a short while. They went from there to Wilson's grove where they decided to hold up in a nearby school house for the night. At 5:00 p.m., as the boys were resting with their coats and boots removed, they were surrounded by a posse headed by Deputy Sheriff A. H. Jarvis. Caught by surprise, the boys grabbed their guns and rushed outside—leaving their coats and boots behind. As the shooting began, both brothers aimed their shots at Jarvis, whom they hit in the shoulder. They then made a rush for the crowd, which scattered, and they escaped. (Legend says that the brothers never wore shoes again, having left them in the school house and, for this reason, they were often later referred to as the "Barefoot Outlaws" and the "Shoeless Thieves.") The Barber brothers were not spotted again until Tuesday evening, June 5, when they requested food from a German farmer living near Tripoli, Iowa. It was at this farm, later that evening that the brothers were captured. An account of the capture was sent from Waverly by special telegram to the *Waukon Democrat*. It read as follows:

The noted Barber boys were captured last night at a farm house about four miles southwest of Tripoli, a little town in Bremer county, about sixteen miles east of this place. During the day they had been concealed in a barn on the farm of a German farmer named August Tegtmeier, and about 8 o'clock in the evening they went to the house and asked for some supper. Henry Tegtmeier, a son of the farmer, met them and recognized them. He told them to wait till he went in the house and asked his mother. He then came in and told his father to take the children and to go to the neighbors and give the alarm, while he and his brother would stay and prepare supper. The old man did so, and as the Barber brothers were in the front door he passed out the back door and went to the neighbors and told them where the boys were. Several men, all of them Germans, went with Tegtmeier to his home. They had no arms except one shot gun, which it is claimed was not loaded. The intention was to surround the house, and when the boys came out

## SPRING UPON THEM

and secure them before their suspicions were aroused. This plan was baffled through the excitement of one of the men, who rushed into the house and said: "We are going to arrest you." At this both boys drew two revolvers each from their pockets. At this instant Henry Tegtmeier sprang upon Bill Barber, and knocked his hands away and caught him by the throat. The melee then became general and Bill was soon on the floor, but began shooting over his shoulder. When his brother went down Ike got loose from those who were holding him, jumped through the window and began firing through the window. By this time several of the attacking parties were wounded, and finally one named Henry Pope went outside and caught Ike by the arms. Henry Karsting at this time received a shot through the body and exclaimed, "Boys, I am going to die;" but he still continued to fight, and aided in tying both of the boys with a rope, which Mrs. Tegtmeier had gone to the barn and procured. Sixteen shots were fired by the outlaws, Bill using two 32-caliber double action Smith & Wesson revolvers, and Ike two Robin Hood's of the same caliber. The fight was over in a short time and the boys were vanquished, but at fearful cost to the attacking party.

All of the five men who attacked the Barber brothers, were wounded. Henry Karsting was shot through the body; he died the following morning. John H. Karsting was shot in the breast, hip and arms. Henry Pope was shot through the breast. Henry Tegtmeier was shot in the neck; his father, August Tegtmeier, has his finger bitten and crushed.

Word of the capture was sent to the Waverly authorities and the town's sheriff and deputy rode out to the Tegtmeier farm, got the brothers and took them to the Waverly jail. They arrived there at 6:00 a.m. Wednesday. A mob had threatened the law enforcers at the Tegtmeier farm but the officers, with the aid of their fast team, and managed to deter trouble.

According to a newspaperman from Waverly, who interviewed the Barber brothers in their cell June 6, neither Ike nor Bill had been injured in the fight of the previous evening, other than that they had received a few scratches and bruises. The interviewer, whose name is unknown, said that Bill claimed that Ike and he had never attacked anyone unless they had first been attacked but, Bill stated, if they were shot at first, they would shoot back as long as they could stand. When Bill was asked where Ike and he were going when they were

captured, he said that they were heading for Montana where their mother and one of their sisters lived.

The brothers said that their plea, when they had their trial, would be self-defense, that they were guilty only of justifiable homicide.

When the interviewer told the boys that they had quite a "newspaper notoriety," Bill said: "We are big men, are we? Well, I am tickled at that; but, by Judas, I would not like to get in here and have any one think that we were d--d fools."

With the news of the Barber brothers arrest, the people of Waverly and the surrounding area were in a state of feverish excitement. A large crowd formed in the streets of Waverly and it was rumored among them that the Brothers had recently committed murder in Kansas; they were considered outlaws of the worst kind—deserving the severest punishment. The general consensus of the crowd was, however, that nothing would be done to the brothers if their trial was held in Waverly. But, any attempt to take the boys to another county, was threatened.

At 9:00 p.m. June 6, a dispatch was received stating that a mob from West Union was headed toward Waverly, with the purpose of hanging the Barbers. With news of the dispatch, Sheriff Adair put Ike and Bill into a wagon and took them to Janesville where they were put on the Illinois Central and taken to Independence, for safe keeping.

Ike and Bill Barber were later returned to the Waverly jail and, it was from this jail that the boys were taken on June 8, to be lynched. The following account of the lynching appeared in the June 20, 1883, *Waukon Democrat*:

The Barber boys, who were brought back to this city from the Independence jail, were lynched in Murphy's grove, about half a mile east of the jail and just outside of the corporation limits of Waverly. The work was done by a crowd from Eastern Bremer and Fayette counties, led by Del Shepherd, the

brother of the deputy sheriff of Fayette county, whom they shot last fall, and August and Henry Tegtmeier, who were wounded at the time that the boys were captured last Tuesday evening. The crowd gathered around the jail shortly after dark. This evening about 9 o'clock the front door of the jail building was broken in, and they soon surrounded the cage in which the prisoners were confined, which is a chilled steel apartment, 12x16 feet in size, and containing a corridor and two cells. The boys were confined in the north cell. When the mob reached the cage the boys crawled into the dark corner, getting completely out of sight. In order to reach them it was necessary to get through two iron doors. About fifteen minutes to 10 o'clock the first blow was struck upon the cage by Dell Shepherd, the brother of the murdered deputy of Fayette county. The tools used were two crowbars and a sledge-hammer, which were obtained from a blacksmith shop. In the meantime several attempts were made to get the keys from the sheriff, but in vain. In about half an hour the outside door was broken in, and a few blows upon the lock of the second door broke it. The door was about two feet and a half wide. When this door being opened

#### ADMITTED THEM TO THE CELL

where the boys were, Ike Barber fought with the desperation of despair, but Bill quailed, and one man put the rope around his neck. The mob then seized the rope and dragged the boys through the hallways and down the stairs to the sidewalk in front of the jail. Here the boys were allowed to stand up, and the nooses around their necks were loosened. Here the crowd were influenced by talking councils. Some advised hanging to the trees in front of the court house, while others suggested a tree across the street. While here some of the enraged people struck the Barbers, but the leaders stopped this at once. The sheriff requested the mob for God's sake not to hang them in the jail yard, and it was agreed to take them to the front steps and allow them to speak. They were then brought together, and bid each other good bye. When they were got there the crowd, which numbered fully 1,000 people, became silent, and listened to their last words. As they stood looking down upon the upturned faces they could see in none of them a ray of hope, but they were prepared for their doom.

#### IKE'S LAST SPEECH

Ike was the first to speak, and after asking for a chew of tobacco, he said:

Gentlemen, I am going to tell you the truth, as I know I am going to die in a short time. I am going to tell you all about our deeds. We never killed any one until last fall and within the last two weeks. [A voice: That is enough.] This report in regard to what was done in Illinois is entirely false. It was told me in the jail at Independence that we confessed to killing a man in Illinois. That is a mistake. I am very thankful that you have allowed me to say these few words.

In answer to the question whether he wanted his body given to his family, he said: "No, bury me if you take the life out of my body; don't make any one any expense in burying it." Bill then stated that he knew nothing about the killing in Illinois and has never killed any one except, perhaps, last week's. He closed by saying, "Hang me dead and hang me right, and don't let my body be jerked to pieces." He then offered to shake hands with several persons, who did so, and finally offered his hand to Dell Shepherd, but it was refused. At this John Mack, city marshal, requested the mob, if they were bent on hanging the boys, to take them outside the corporate limits. The mob acquiesced, and the boys were led through the street eastward with their hands tied behind them, until a little grove just outside of the city was reached. Before starting, however, Bill took

#### A SILK HANDKERCHIEF

from his neck on which was a gold pin, and gave it to a bystander to give it to his little girl. Ike also took off his handkerchief, but did not give any directions as to its disposal. When the grove was reached the two were placed under a basswood tree, and then the crowd took off their hats to allow the boys to pray. Not a supplication passed from their lips, and when they were asked in regard to their folks they said they would like to have them informed of their doom, and they also requested that the money which was in their coats, which amounted to \$54, be

#### SENT TO THEIR WIVES AT FAYETTE.

They were informed that this had been already done, and then Bill said, "Well, that is about all I have to say, only don't let us be torn to pieces." He was assured that this request would be granted, and then a voice at his elbow sounded out above the hum of the crowd: "May God have mercy on your soul."

The article went on to say that both boys were then hanged, Bill first and then Ike. After the brothers were strung up, the majority of the people most active in the lynching left; however, a great number of people remained until both boys were dead. The bodies were left hanging in the grove until the next morning when the county coroner took charge of burying them. The graves are in the Randalia cemetery.

To what extent the Barber brothers, Ike and Bill, were guilty of the crimes of which they were accused, is unknown. Some of their friends referred to them as sorts of Robin Hoods, claiming that they robbed the rich and gave to the poor, but



this is most doubtful. However, as the July 21, 1948, *Oelwein Daily Register* stated: "The brothers were (soon) known throughout the midwest and a criminal record a mile long was attributed to them. They were hunted and blamed for every crime in the midwest that could not be laid on the Jesse James gang."

The mob lynching was regretful but the verdict that the crimes of which the brothers were guilty justified their punishment, was universal among the people of the area at that time.

Information for the above article was obtained from old newspapers located in the Newspaper Division of the State Historical Building, Des Moines. References included the June 13 & 20, 1883, *Waukon Democrat*, the Sept. 10, 1882, *Dubuque Herald*, and the July 25, 1946, and July 21, 1948, *Oelwein Daily Register*.

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## MARION NAMED IN 1839

By Grace Christie

The following article was taken from the *Cedar Rapids Republican*, Cedar Rapids, Iowa, May 9, 1926 issue. The article, here printed in part, was titled: "First Jail in Marion Cost \$635; Horse Thief 'Guest' Before Logs Were All Laid."

What did they talk about in the olden days, before there was any history?

That's what one wonders as he looks into the past of Marion, with its rich history and anecdote. Now it is seldom that any of the city's older residents get together but what they talk over the old days. So here's something to revive their memory:

The city was named "Marion" by the county commissioners at their first meeting, Sept. 9, 1839, in honor of Gen. Francis Marion.

Lumen M. Strong built the first house in 1839. It was located where the J. B. Michel home on Central avenue now stands, but at the time it was erected, was not included in the

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