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RUBE BURROW, "KING OF OUTLAWS," AND HIS FLORIDA ADVENTURES

by WILLIAM WARREN ROGERS, JR.*

ALLEN AND MARTHA BURROW named their second son and fourth child Reuben Huston. Born in northwest Alabama's Lamar County sometime in 1854 or 1855, Rube, as he came to be called, grew up working on the family farm. He loved to hunt and fish, and reportedly had a quick wit about him. Burrow was not enthusiastic about attending school, and, for reasons unknown, about 1874 left for Texas. Besides the legitimate avocation of farming and the less respectable occupation of bartending, Burrow adopted another more dangerous way of making a livelihood—train robbing. When he returned to Alabama late in 1887, the record he and his brother James Buchanan, who had followed Rube west, left behind was hardly exemplary. The Burrow brothers were wanted in Texas for four train robberies and in Genoa, Arkansas, for another.¹ Rube became Alabama's most famous and notorious outlaw. He carved a record that spawned nine "dime novels" and many legends and folk tales. One of his most notorious adventures took place in Florida.²

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1. *Atlanta Constitution*, November 3, 1889; *Montgomery Advertiser*, February 26, 1888.
2. The most accurate of these dime novels is George W. Agee's *Rube Burrow, King Of Outlaws and His Band of Train Robbers, An Accurate and Faithful History of Their Exploits and Adventures* (Chicago, 1890). Agee was superintendent of the Western Division of the Southern Express Company and was instrumental in coordinating efforts to capture Burrow. The series of paperbacks that followed possessed distinctive features, but also borrowed prolifically from Agee's standard account. The life of the outlaw inspired at least nine of these typically melodramatic paperbacks: George Henry Barnum (Publisher), *Rube Burrows, [sic] the famous outlaw, murderer and train robber* (Chicago, 1890); Harry Hawkeye, *Rube Burrows [sic] The Outlaw, A Book of Thrilling Adventure And Desperate Deeds, Narrating Actual Facts And Obtained From Principals And Eyewitnesses* (Baltimore, 1908); Clarence E. Ray, *The Alabama Wolf* (Chicago, n.d.); *Rube Burrow King of outlaws and train robbers. A faithful history of his exploits and adventures* (Chicago, n.d.); F. E. Stout, *Rube Burrows [sic]: or, life, exploits and death of the bold train robber* (Aberdeen, Mississippi, 1890);

Early in 1888, Texas lawmen traced the Burrow brothers to Alabama, but failed to capture them. Cooperating with Alabama officials, they did succeed in driving the desperadoes out of Lamar County. During their flight, Jim was captured in Montgomery, but Rube escaped after shooting a newspaper employee and eluding Montgomery police officers.³ He returned to Lamar County where his family hid him. At Burrow's request, Leonard Culvert Brock, alias Joe Jackson, a Texas acquaintance, came to Lamar County.⁴ Together, they robbed a train at Duckhill, Mississippi, in December 1888. The following July, Rube killed a Lamar County postmaster who refused to deliver a mail order disguise—a wig and false whiskers—that the outlaw had ordered from Chicago. Two months later Burrow and Brock held up another train, this time at Buckatunna, Mississippi.⁵ Soon the publicity attendant to their crimes made north Alabama a precarious sanctuary. Burrow and Brock made plans to head south—to an unsettled, wild, and hopefully safer setting—the Panhandle of Florida. Burrow's adventures in Florida led to his final undoing and death.

In November 1889, Rube and Leonard were transported by Rube's father in a covered wagon across the state line to Columbus, Mississippi. At the same time, Jim Cash, Rube's brother-in-law, drove Rube's ox cart to Columbus where the two parties rendezvoused outside of town. Rube and Leonard departed the next morning. They headed almost due south, and by mid-December reached Flomaton, Alabama, a settlement just north of the Florida border. There the two outlaws separated, agreeing to meet again on February 20, 1890. Their plan was to rob a train at Dyer Station in southwest Alabama. For the present, Brock traveled by rail to a relative's home in Pleasant Hill, Louisiana, and Burrow crossed into Florida and into Santa Rosa County.

William Ward, *Rube Burrow of Sunny Alabama, The True Story of The Prince of Train Robbers* (Cleveland, n.d.); Marline Monley, *Rube Burrow, or Life, Exploits, and Death of the Bold Train Robber* (New York, 1898); *Complete official history of Rube Burrows [sic], and his celebrated gang. A study of his life and exploits, without a parallel in crime and adventure* (Birmingham, n.d.).

3. *Montgomery Advertiser*, January 16, 23, 24, 1888.
4. Leonard Culvert Brock, "Confessions of Leonard Culvert Brock," ed. by Agee, in *King of Outlaws*, 109-10.
5. Jackson *New Mississippian*, December 19, 1888, October 9, 1889; Birmingham *Age-Herald*, July 19, 1889.

When Rube, his brother, and another Texas companion had robbed the train at Genoa, Arkansas, the victim was the Southern Express Company. It was that company's private detectives, and those hired from the Pinkerton Detective Agency, even more than state lawmen, who maintained a relentless pursuit for the outlaws. Detectives who had kept the Burrow home under surveillance soon concluded that Rube and his partner had left Lamar County. In detective Thomas Jackson, Southern Express Company Superintendent George Agee had hired a diligent and competent man. Jackson's guess that Rube used Cash's wagon to make his escape was confirmed when the detective found no corroboration of Cash's story that the wagon had been sold at Columbus. Jackson and the lawmen reasoned that although the two men might start for Texas, their destination was probably south Alabama or northwest Florida. After several false starts, Jackson, about the middle of January 1890, picked up the outlaws' trail at Carrollton, Mississippi. He next heard of them at Gainestown, Alabama, where they had crossed the Alabama River. At Flomaton, the detective learned that men answering the descriptions of the train robbers had inquired about logging camps in northwest Florida. The persistent sleuth dropped the pursuit of one outlaw and concentrated on following the trail into Florida of a man calling himself "Ward" who answered the description of Rube.⁶

Santa Rosa County, the territory into which Rube had escaped, lay between Escambia and Okaloosa counties. Large parts of Santa Rosa County were wild and unsettled. Tangled canebrakes, hidden lagoons, and murky swamps, bisected by the Blackwater and Yellow rivers which emptied into the Gulf, made much of its 673,400 acres inaccessible marshland.⁷ It was a good place for a man trying to elude the law. Rube found employment two weeks before Christmas with W. B. Allen's logging company. He hauled feed from Broxson's Ferry to Allen's camp at the head of Doe Branch on Live Oak Creek, some eighteen miles distance.⁸

6. Abbeville (Alabama) *Times*, February 14, 1890; "Confessions of Leonard Brock," 109, 128-29.

7. Tallahassee *Floridian*, February 26, 1890; Martin Luther King, *History of Santa Rosa County, A King's Country* (Milton, Florida, 1972), 6.

8. Pensacola *Daily News*, February 19, 1890.

Rube, or Ward as the loggers knew him, was a likeable but mysterious figure. He claimed that he was from Georgia, but otherwise little was known or inquired of his background. Members of Florida's logging camps could remain as anonymous as they chose. The men noticed that work never seemed to interfere with Ward's love for hunting. To William Lowery, who later described the fugitive as a "good looking man . . . who liked a joke, and would take one," Rube once remarked that he did not care if he worked or not. For a while the job at Allen's logging camp allowed Burrow the seclusion and security that he needed.⁹

Detective Jackson's first dispatches to Superintendent Agee were guardedly optimistic. Eventually, his untiring efforts paid off. He asked questions in Milton, the county seat, and learned that a stranger fitting Rube's description had recently been engaged to haul feed for W. B. Allen. Jackson established further that the suspect showed up each Monday and Thursday at Broxson's Ferry (sometimes referred to as Faulk's Ferry) on the Yellow River to load the feed from a boat. Invariably, he and his yoke of steers-called Mack and Brandy by Rube-arrived between two and three o'clock in the afternoon. After loading the cargo, Rube backtracked several hundred yards to the home of Joseph R. Broxson, the ferryman. He spent the night there with the family before returning to the logging camp the next morning.¹⁰

Positive that the man described to him was Rube Burrow, and confident that he could capture the fugitive, Jackson wired a coded message from Milton to Superintendent Agee: "Expect to secure title to tract one, about ten miles south of here, Wednesday. The papers are in good shape."¹¹

Early on the morning of February 6, 1890, detectives Jackson, Vincent, and Shelton, accompanied by three citizens of Milton, started for Broxson's Ferry. The hack carrying the men soon abandoned the graded road near Milton for the more rutted path that led into the heart of Tighteye Swamp. There were

9. Ibid.

10. *Madison Recorder*, February 14, 1890; *Jacksonville Florida Times-Union*, February 8, 1890; *Pensacola Daily News*, February 8, 1890; *Abbeville Times*, February 14, 1890.

11. Agee, *King of Outlaws*, 98.

few signs of life at Broxson's Ferry. Broxson and his son Willie were there, and the detectives discovered a small boat loaded with supplies that Rube was scheduled to pick up. On either side of the river there was a narrow dirt road that cut through the dense jungle of bamboo stalks as it approached the landing. The men hid behind large fallen cypress trees and other foliage on either side of the road. Armed with double-barrelled shotguns, the posse planned to cover the outlaw as Jackson ordered him to surrender. They hoped to take Burrow alive, but were prepared for any contingency.

Broxson, like other Floridians who had contact with the outlaw, was ignorant of Rube's past. He wondered who the stranger he had befriended really was. Why were six grim and heavily armed men so determined to capture him? From their simple and direct business relationship the two men had developed an odd friendship. Over supper prepared by Mrs. Broxson, Rube often passed along what news he had heard. Later, warmed by Broxson's whisky, Rube would entertain the family with anecdotes and stories. Undoubtedly Broxson was shocked to learn that the talkative guest he had fed and housed was a train robber. Although reluctant to help trap the man detective Jackson had identified as the notorious Rube Burrow, Broxson was left with little choice. The posse sealed off the area and compelled Broxson and his son Willie to wait with them. Broxson was apprehensive about the safety of his son, and persuaded Jackson to let Willie go home.

Detective Jackson stationed Broxson at a point up the dirt road from where he and his men lay in ambush. The ferryman was to warn them of Rube's approach, but by mid-afternoon there was no sign of the outlaw. A black logger had appeared that morning from the logging camp with the information that Rube had been detained because of a sick ox. Having no other transportation, he might not come at all, or at least not until the following day. With approaching darkness the posse's hopes fell. Restless and tired, the detectives built a large fire and consumed, according to Broxson, a lot of whisky to keep warm. Detective Jackson proposed that they move up to an abandoned schoolhouse across from the ferryman's home. If Rube did finally appear, Jackson believed, he would plan to spend the night with the Broxsons and wait until morning to load supplies. Because



Rube Burrow.

All illustrations are from William James Wells, *Pioneering in the Panhandle*.

Rube might somehow discover the posse's presence or have some sense of his danger and escape, Jackson felt it imperative for the posse to intercept Rube.

Rube did arrive, it was almost dusk when he knocked on the Broxson cabin door. The detective and his group were then between the landing and the schoolhouse. Alerted by Broxson, they quickly found cover. The hack driver who was trailing behind turned off the road. Had Rube been warned by Mrs. Broxson? Perhaps the outlaw detected something unnatural in her tone of voice and actions when she told him that her husband was down at the ferry landing with some hunters. Or had some sense of danger warned him of the waiting entrapment? The

All previous reward circulars issued by this Agency, referring to this robbery are annulled.

ROBT. A. PINKERTON, CHIEF, CONN.

EASTERN DIVISION, NEW YORK

WESTERN DIVISION, CHICAGO, ILL.

FORMED BY WILLIAM PINKERTON, 1850

BY REVERALL

PHILADELPHIA: 46 SOUTH THIRD STREET, R. J. LINDER, Supt.

NEW YORK: 54 EXCHANGE PLACE, GEO. D. BARCS, Supt.

BOSTON: 42 & 44 COURT STREET, JOHN CORRIGAN, Supt.

ST. PAUL: 58 TO 55 UNION BLOCK, W. J. LOADER, Supt.

DENVER: 1 & 2 OPERA HOUSE BLOCK, CHAS. O. EAMES, Supt.

ATTORNEYS FOR THE AGENCY.

CLARENCE A. SEWARD, NEW YORK.

LEWIS C. CASSIDY, PHILADELPHIA.

\$700 REWARD.

REUBEN HOUSTON BURROW alias **RUBE BURROW** charged with highway robbery, having, with his brother, **JAMES BUCHANAN BURROW** and others, wearing masks on the night of **FRIDAY, DECEMBER 9, 1887**, boarded the north bound train on the St. Louis, Arkansas & Texas R. R. at Genoa Station, Ark., and compelled the messenger of the **SOUTHERN EXPRESS COMPANY** to surrender the keys of his safe, which they rifled of \$3,500. **James Buchanan Burrow** and three others of the robbers, have since been arrested.

In an attempt to arrest **Reuben Burrow** and **Jim Burrow** in **Montgomery, Alabama**, on January 23, 1888, **Reuben Burrow** shot Mr. Neil Bray, a compositor on the *Advertiser*, who had been called on and was aiding the officer in his arrest.

DESCRIPTION.

REUBEN HOUSTON BURROW is about 32 years of age, 6 feet in height, weighs about 160 pounds, blue eyes which do not look a person full in the face, round head, wears 7 1/2 hat, full forehead, face broad under the ears but thin near the mouth, short, inclined to pug-shaped nose, swarthy or sandy complexion, light sandy hair, thin light moustache, uses Hair Vigor to darken hair; left arm is a little shorter than the right, caused by having been broken at bend of arm; rather a lounging gait, carrying his hands in his pockets in a leisurely way.

Usually wears dark clothes and woolen shirts, a No. 8 boot, but no jewelry. Does not use tobacco; drinks, but not to excess; does not gamble, but can play the game of seven-up; is somewhat of a country story teller, relating stories of snake, dog and cat fights, etc. Is a good horseman, carries a 45-calibre pistol and is a good shot.

He was born in Lamar county, Alabama, is married, and has two children who are now with his father in Alabama. His wife is residing with her father, Mr. Hoover, at Alexandria, Alabama. He resided for 14 years in Wise and Erath counties, Texas; has worked for the Mexican Central R. R., and is a member of the Masonic fraternity.

The **Southern Express Company**, and the **St. Louis, Arkansas and Texas Railroad Co.** have jointly offered a reward of **Five Hundred Dollars (\$500)**, and in addition the **Governor of the State of Arkansas** has offered a reward of **Two Hundred Dollars (\$200)** for the arrest, delivery to the authorities of the State of Arkansas, and conviction of **Reuben Houston Burrow**

Send information to

Or to any Superintendent of

Pinkerton's National Detective Agency,

At Either of the Above Listed Offices.

WM. A. PINKERTON, General Superintendent Western Division, Chicago, Ill.

Chicago, February 20, 1888.

C. T. CAMPBELL,

Sup't Texas Express,

TEXARKANA, ARK.

answer cannot be known for sure, but Rube ventured no closer to the ferry. He unyoked his oxen and turned them loose, and he then quietly disappeared into the woods. Later, when questioned, Mrs. Broxson told the posse that she did not know which way Rube had gone.¹²

Without any other recourse, Jackson's posse stood guard over Rube's wagon and the oxen which were still in the area throughout the night. The vigil was in vain; the men did not really expect Rube to return. Broxson refused to drive Burrow's team down to the ferry because he feared that the outlaw, if he was still around, might shoot him from ambush. Finally, one of Jackson's men positioned himself on the tongue of the wagon between the two steers and drove the oxen to the river landing. Rube, alias Ward, returned to Allen's logging camp sometime during the night, claiming that the detectives were "getting \$6 a day to watch him, and he was getting \$3 per day to keep out of the way." Rube collected some provisions and left about eight o'clock the next morning.¹³

On Friday, the detectives returned to Milton where Rube's oxen and wagon were sold. That the outlaw's prize team brought \$80 was small consolation to Detective Jackson and Superintendent Agee. The buyer proudly promised that he would place the cart and the animals on exhibit at the upcoming Mardi Gras. As a sarcastic journalist concluded, the end result was that the Southern Express Company was "over a cart and yoke of oxen and short a train robber."¹⁴

For obvious reasons, Rube never bothered to collect the wages W. B. Allen owed him. Nor did he keep his February 20 date with Leonard Brock at Dyer Station. Instead, Rube retreated deeper into Santa Rosa County to an even more isolated location. Around East Bay, in the county's southernmost part, Rube found refuge with James H. Wells. Burrow paid Wells, who had four children and a wife, to hide him and to give him food. The hunted man may have represented himself as unjustly "out-

12. Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, February 8, 1890; Pensacola *Daily News*, February 8, 1890; Abbeville *Times*, February 14, 1890; William James Wells, *Pioneering in the Panhandle* (Fort Walton Beach, 1976), 73-75.

13. Pensacola *Daily News*, February 19, 1890; Abbeville *Times*, February 14, 1890.

14. Abbeville *Times*, February 14, 1890.

lawed," playing on the older man's sympathies. During the spring and summer of 1890 Rube stayed in close touch with the Wells family. The elderly and partially paralyzed man was glad to have his help, and if he had any suspicions, he kept them to himself.¹⁵ Rube was content to remain with the Wells family; he especially enjoyed the companionship of the two daughters, for whom he played "the part of the gay Lothario."¹⁶ Besides, the isolated home made an ideal hideout.

Detective Jackson's failure to capture Burrow disappointed Superintendent Agee, and may have shaken his confidence in the Pinkerton agent. In March 1890, Agee made a unique proposal to Governor Thomas Seay of Alabama. Agee was informed that ex-Sheriff John Penton of Covington County, Alabama, had offered to catch Rube Burrow in return for a grant of clemency for himself. Penton was wanted for murder in Alabama and had fled to Florida. Agee forwarded the proposal to Governor Seay. He saw nothing wrong in employing one criminal to catch another; justice would be served by rewarding Penton with his freedom in exchange for his services. As Agee wrote Seay, "the capture of so notorious an outlaw as Reuben Houston Burrow would be endorsed by the people."¹⁷ Governor Seay replied that while he shared Agee's concern and admired his "laudable zeal," he hoped to capture both criminals eventually and could not grant the pardon on such terms.¹⁸

In July 1890, Leonard Brock was captured in Mississippi near Lamar County. To avoid going to the gallows, the outlaw made a lengthy confession to Southern Express officials, providing them with a full account of his and Rube's experiences. Although not leading directly to the capture of Rube, Leonard's confession gave Southern Express officials a clearer understanding of the man they sought. Beyond that, Brock's testimony confirmed what Superintendent Agee, Detective Jackson, and others had

15. Jackson *Clarion Ledger*, November 12, 1890.

16. *Pensacola Daily News*, October 11, 1890; *Mobile Press Register*, October 10, 1890.

17. George W. Agee to Thomas Seay, March 23, 1890, Governor Thomas Seay Official Correspondence, Alabama State Department of Archives and History, Montgomery, Alabama, Book T, 113.

18. Seay to Agee, March 26, 1890, Seay Official Correspondence, Book T, 113.

already suspected-that Rube Burrow was not likely to be taken alive.¹⁹

Cheered by Brock's capture, Detective Jackson returned to Florida sometime around August 1. With the help of John Barnes, a part Indian who farmed near Castleberry, Jackson renewed the chase for Burrow. Barnes was a native of the region and a good guide. He had sawed logs with Burrow two years earlier, and would know the outlaw by sight. He was also familiar with the backpaths and trails that Rube might follow.

Inquiry for Rube led Jackson and Barnes to James Wells at Prairie Creek. Late in August, Barnes visited Wells, saying he was thinking about moving to Santa Rosa County, and asked to meet Rube. Wells agreed to set up a rendezvous, and through an intermediary, probably one of Wells's sons, word was sent to Rube. Barnes was to return in a week, August 31, for the meeting. Barnes then left to inform Detective Jackson of the latest developments.

Why Rube delayed puzzled the detective. Part of the answer-that Burrow suspected a trap and took pleasure in eluding those who harrassed him-was never suspected. Also, as Detective Jackson later realized, Rube hoped to create the false impression that he wanted to lie low. John Barnes arrived on the appointed date only to learn that Rube had left the area, crossing the state line into Alabama.²⁰

Events proved that Rube was still up to his old tricks. As the Louisville and Nashville train, the "Marion," Number 6, pulled out of the Flomaton station at 10:30 Sunday night, September 1, a dark-clad figure jumped aboard. Fireman John Duval, busy shoveling coal into the engine furnace, took little notice of the figure, but moments later the black fireman looked up when the stranger ordered him to move away from the furnace. A closer inspection of the tall intruder revealed that he wore a dark rubber jacket, grey trousers, and a black cap further draped by a felt hat. A red bandana was tied across his face. In the dark, Duval did not see the two large pistols that the robber was wearing, but Engineer Bob Sizer spotted them immediately. In fact, Duval mistook the outlaw for a freeloader and assumed

19. "Confessions of Leonard Brock," 107-34.

20. Agee, *King of Outlaws*, 144-46.

that he wore the bandana perhaps because he suffered from a toothache. But Sizer realized how dangerous the situation was, and told Duval to obey the robber.

Rube ordered Engineer Sizer to continue to Big Escambia Creek about a half mile down the track. The outlaw gave more explicit instructions as the train neared the creek: he told the engineer to stop the express car and engine just across the trestle. The passenger cars were left behind on the bridge and over the water. The trestle ploy neutralized any aid from people in the cars—a technique Rube had used successfully in the past.

At gunpoint, Rube forced the engineer and fireman down from the train. Before they reached the express car, Duval broke toward the passenger cars. The shots Rube fired at the fleeing black missed and alerted Express messenger Archie Johnson, who guessed that a robbery was underway and armed himself with a pistol.

Johnson's fears were quickly confirmed. From outside, Rube called to him to open the express car door. When he refused, Burrow handed Engineer Sizer a mallet (according to some reports, it was a crowbar) to break in the door. As Sizer slowly swung the heavy weapon, Rube ordered him to hurry or he would kill him. According to a news report, "as he pounded the door, the express messenger was heard to cock his gun, and Sizer cried: 'Don't shoot, Archie, it's me. He's making me do it.' " The entry was made, and Rube stepped into the car behind Sizer. Burrow leveled two pistols over Sizer's shoulders, placing the engineer directly in the line of fire. Understandably, Sizer pleaded with the express agent not to resist. Archie Johnson realized that "with the two pistols still lingering in close proximity to his [the engineer's] cranium" he had no choice but to surrender his gun.²¹

In the cars, Conductor James Smith was puzzled by the unscheduled stop. From an outside platform, he heard the report of two pistol shots and Duval's excited cry, "Robbers, Robbers, Robbers."²² He quickly got a gun, and joined Duval, hoping to organize resistance among the passengers. Instead, they started

21. Madison *Recorder*, September 5, 1890; Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, September 3, 1890; Pensacola *Daily News*, September 3, 1890; Brewton (Alabama) *Standard Gauge*, September 4, 1890.

22. Mobile *Press Register*, September 3, 1890.

a mad scramble back to comparative safety of the first-class car. One woman and her daughter demanded permission to walk back to the closest train station. In a frantic rush to conceal personal property, another passenger inadvertently locked himself in a closet where he remained a prisoner for the next half hour. Others huddled together, expecting what they thought was an outlaw gang to burst in at any moment.

In the meantime, inside the express car, Rube had thrown down a cloth sack and instructed Johnson to fill it with the vault's contents. As Sizer held the bag open, Johnson methodically emptied the safe. Rube resorted to his train robbing skill as the transfer went on. He fired his pistol first down one side of the train, then down the other, creating the impression that a gang of robbers was in action. The outlaw expended fifteen to twenty shots. After emptying one revolver, he held the six-shooter under his arm, deftly reloading with one hand, as he continued to shoot the other pistol. The ruse worked. Afterwards, passengers testified that the robbery had been the work of five or six men.²³ Engineer Sizer knew otherwise. He later commented: "There was only one robber and coming the way he did there was no need for any more."²⁴ Noticing that Johnson had placed a large and presumably worthless book in his sack, Rube noted that he was no bookkeeper, and gathered up the rest of his loot. With a loud cry, he jumped off the train and disappeared into the woods.²⁵ It was his seventh robbery, and the first he had staged alone.

After the Flomaton robbery, there was a furious reaction in Alabama and Florida, where Rube had found asylum at Prairie Creek. There seemed to be little doubt about the robber's identity. The *Mobile Press Register* reported that "the celebrated Rube Burrow was recently seen in Florida and there is a possibility that he ordered the assembling of his gang at Flomaton, and joined them there to superintend the proper conduct of the affair."²⁶ Engineer Sizer's description of the robber fit Burrow

23. *Ibid.*; Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, September 3, 1890; *Brewton Standard Gauge*, September 4, 1890.

24. *Mobile Press Register*, September 3, 1890.

25. *Madison Recorder*, September 5, 1890; *Pensacola Daily News*, September 3, 1890; *Mobile Press Register*, September 2, 1890.

26. *Mobile Press Register*, September 2, 1890.

exactly, and it was a profile that informed sources instantly recognized. Given Rube's known hideout in northwest Florida and his favorite criminal occupation, his involvement had to be assumed. The audacity of the robbery further suggested his complicity. In time, Rube's guilt became more certain. The *Pensacola News* claimed several days later that it is the "generally held opinion that Burrows [*sic*] is the man."²⁷

Florida remained one of the few southern states that had not experienced the depredations of train robbers, and the Jacksonville *Standard* hoped that the record could be maintained. The Jacksonville paper noted that the *Mobile Press Register's* boast that no train robbers would be tolerated in Alabama was hardly accurate. The *Standard* continued: "We wish Col. Burrow to understand that Floridians are making no brags about their immunity (which is but seeming) in the matter of railroad train robberies. They have too great a respect for the esprit de corps which ever characterizes the gentleman."²⁸

Pursuit was quickly organized. Early on the morning of September 2, only hours after the robbery, Detective Charles Kinsler was awakened at his home by William Stewart, a special agent for the Louisville and Nashville railroad. Before dawn, the officials left Mobile by train, and by ten o'clock that morning they were at Flomaton. A day was lost waiting to confer with various Southern Express officials, including Superintendent Agee who had arrived from Memphis.

In the meantime, local posses had been organized at Flomaton, and mounted men combed the adjoining territory to the north and south. Escambia County Deputy Sheriff Tom Cusachs, at the insistence of Superintendent Saltmarsh, strategically placed nine men along the Escambia River. Officials hoped that the river could be sealed off as a southern avenue of escape.²⁹

Rube Burrow's name was mentioned in most accounts of the hold up. But at least one Florida paper, the Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, thought that sensation seeking journalists had reached a hasty conclusion! "If Rube Burrows [*sic*] has to suffer punishment for half the sins laid at his door, the keeper of the

27. *Pensacola Daily News*, September 3, 1890.

28. Jacksonville *Standard*, cited in *Pensacola Daily News*, September 6, 1890.

29. Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, September 4, 1890; *Pensacola Daily News*, September 4, 1890; *Mobile Press Register*, October 12, 1890.



"King of Outlaws"

infernal regions will have to devise some new method of torture to make the punishment fit the crime in Rube's case." ³⁰ But the detectives certainly did not believe that Burrow was innocent in this case. Superintendent Agee, and detectives Thomas Jackson and Charles Fischer, agreed that the Louisville and Nashville robber had been Rube Burrow.

The authorities assumed that Rube had retreated into the swamps of west Florida. Two search parties were organized at Flomaton. Agee, Jackson, and Fischer went directly to Milton where they set up a base of operations. Deputy sheriffs John Johnson and G. K. McCloud joined detectives Kinsler and Stewart to form another posse. This second group ventured on foot down the Escambia River to a point twelve miles below Flomaton. There they discovered that a skiff had been stolen from its moorings-the small boat was found concealed in some brush across the river. This theft seemed to validate earlier deductions that after the robbery, Burrow had followed the Escambia River south, crossed it, and headed for the wilds of Santa Rosa County.

Pursuit led by Detective Kinsler pressed for thirty-five miles through heavy canebrakes and swamps before finding any sign of Rube. Finally, on one of the area's few public roads, they encountered a traveling minister, who remembered seeing a man who answered the outlaw's description. The meeting had occurred a day and a half earlier at Black Water Creek. The posse quickly pushed on to Milton to secure horses and follow the trail. There the pursuit suddenly ended when Superintendent Agee called a temporary halt to the activities with the plan of going back into action later. ³¹

This temporary halt in the search for Rube did not stop speculation. In Selma, Alabama, a traveling doctor was mistaken for Rube Burrow and was arrested, but embarrassed authorities quickly released him. Rumors circulated in Santa Rosa County that Rube and Burrell Martin, another desperado, had joined forces. ³² Several sources reported that Rube and Captain Eugene Bunch, an outlaw Burrow had been mistaken for on occasion,

30. Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, September 4, 1890.

31. Pensacola *Daily News*, September 3, 1890; Brewton *Standard Gauge*, September 4, 1890; Mobile *Press Register*, September 4, October 10, 1890.

32. Pensacola *Daily News*, September 3, 1890; Eufaula, Alabama, *Daily Times*, September 7, 1890.

were bivouacked in a dense swamp near Mississippi City, Mississippi. Detective Fischer left Florida and rushed to that vicinity. Sources convinced him that Rube meant to rob a train out of New Orleans on the night of September 11. The Southern Express agent anticipated Rube: he placed three detectives armed with Winchester rifles in the express car of the Mobile-bound train. Fischer's carefully laid plans proved unproductive. "The train went through without a ripple of disturbance, and at Mobile the detectives crawled out of their hiding place sore and stiff, while Mr. Burrows [*sic*] was probably laughing in his sleeve."³³ The detective ruefully admitted that the reports of Rube's presence in the Mississippi City area were "more sensational than truthful."³⁴ Besides, the Pensacola *Daily News* believed that if his safety was threatened in Mississippi, Rube could always "make a sea voyage to the hospitable shores of Santa Rosa county."³⁵

Although in monetary terms the Flomaton robbery had not netted much for Rube, he got only \$224, the Southern Express Company was embarrassed at the ease with which a single man could hold up the train. Detective Fischer issued a circular letter to law enforcement officers in surrounding states. His note described Rube as a man with "the habit of telling funny stories, and also of quoting and ridiculing the Bible." A \$2,000 reward was placed on the outlaw's head.³⁶

The search for Rube was joined again on September 13, when Jackson, Kinsler, Stewart, and Johnson, led by John Barnes, departed by rail from Flomaton. At Good Range, Florida, they disembarked and turned south. The posse's destination was the isolated home of James Wells where Rube was thought to be hiding. Anxious to surprise the outlaw, the party traveled at night over countryside Kinsler described as "a marshy wilderness almost impassable in the day."³⁷ Yet, Barnes's sense of direction was sure, and about four o'clock several mornings later the party reached Wells's house. He and Kinsler moved up to within 400 yards of the house. Through marine glasses they spotted Rube sitting at a table surrounded by the Wells family.

33. Pensacola *Daily News*, September 14, 1890.

34. Montgomery *Advertiser*, September 19, 1890.

35. Pensacola *Daily News*, September 14, 1890.

36. *Ibid.*, October 3, 1890.

37. Mobile *Press Register*, October 12, 1890.

About that time Wells's two sons walked out carrying ox whips which they cracked loudly. Jackson, Stewart, and Johnson were unable to see the boys in the dense foilage and mistook the crack of the whips for rifle fire. Abandoning all caution, they crashed through the brush toward the cabin. Their hurried approach immediately alerted Rube, and he slipped into the swamps and was quickly lost from sight. Once again an uncanny mixture of luck and premonition had saved the outlaw.

The confused posse decided to camp within sight of the Wells's place and surprise its occupants the next morning. To try to follow the outlaw would have been an impossible task. Besides, Rube might conceivably return. At 7:30 the six men walked unannounced into the house and confronted Wells. Resenting their abrupt entry, he denied accusations that he was harboring a criminal and refused to cooperate in any way. The only other person there at the time was Wells's daughter, and she reluctantly served the intruders breakfast when they said that otherwise the food would be taken. Shortly, Mrs. Wells arrived carrying a sack which she tried to conceal, but in which the men found bread crumbs. They believed that someone had taken food to Rube sometime during the night or early morning. Mrs. Wells's objections did not prevent the men from searching the house, which yielded notes with W. R. Ward's signature. There was also \$40, clothes, and a suit purchased by Rube after an earlier robbery-items left behind by the outlaw in his hasty exit. The money was identified as part of the loot taken at Flomaton. Mrs. Wells at first claimed that the clothes belonged to her sons, but later admitted that they were the property of the man she knew as Ward.³⁸

Rube Burrow fled Florida in late September 1890. The bandit's Florida interlude had been a dramatic one, and the wilds of Santa Rosa County had well served the needs of Rube's untamed spirit. He never reached his destination in Lamar County. Instead, his pursuers caught up with him in the little community of Myrtlewood in Marengo County, Alabama. Ironically, Rube was not captured by the express company detectives, but by two black sharecroppers. Rube was taken to

38. Pensacola *Daily News*, October 11, 1890; Mobile *Press Register*, October 10, 12, 1890.

the jail at Linden, the seat of Marengo County, and heavy irons were placed on his legs. His hands were tied, but at supper they were freed and never retied. He convinced his guards to bring him his grub sack; he was hungry and he said that there was food in it. As it turned out, there was also a gun in the bag, which he aimed at the guards, forcing them to release him. However, his escape was short-lived; Burrow was killed in a pre-dawn shootout in Linden on October 9, 1890.

After an inquest at Demopolis, Alabama, Rube's body was unceremoniously placed in a rough pine coffin and shipped by rail to Birmingham. Despite the prohibitive 3:00 a.m. hour, a crowd of several hundred gathered at Birmingham to view the corpse before it was shipped home to Lamar County. On the afternoon of October 10, 1890, Rube's family prepared a grave for the thirty-four year old outlaw and the "remains of Rube Burrow were consigned to the only perfect rest they had ever known."³⁹ The "King of Outlaws" lives on in the legends of west Florida, Alabama, and Mississippi.

39. New Orleans *Times Picayune*, October 11, 1890.