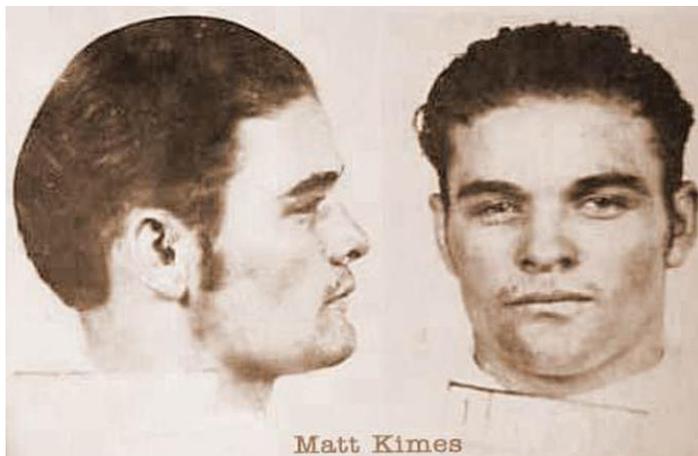


First State Bank Robbery, 1945, Morton, Texas

The Kimes Gang, also known as the Kimes-Terrill Gang of the 1920's, was notorious not only for their high profile bank heists, but also for their frequent escapes from prison. Matt Kimes, dubbed "The Kid Outlaw", loved the attention the headlines brought him. Kimes refused to wear a mask during bank heists often stating he wanted to be recognized. The gang would often pull off multiple heists in a single day, enjoying the daring, high-speed getaways. Newspapers across the nation compared Matthew Kimes and his gang to Jesse James, calling Kimes "a young James".



Matthew Kimes mugshot – c. 1927

After the robbery of the First State in Morton, Texas on September 5, 1945, Matt Kimes was considered the "last of the bandit chieftains"¹. Veteran peace officers, with "scores to settle" with Kimes "oiled their guns and took up the hunt"². J. Edgar Hoover called Kimes "one of the most viciously sought fugitives in the nation"³.

After serving 18 years of a life sentence for the murder of Beggs, Oklahoma Police Chief William J. McAnally, Matthew Kimes was granted a 60 day leave of absence on July 24, 1945 by the Oklahoma State Pardon and Parole Board to gather evidence to support his request for parole; he instead chose to escape.

Kimes made his way to Texas from Oklahoma with Oliver "Ollie" Melton and Olaf Alvin "Chick" Rogers and eventually they found themselves in Lubbock, where they managed to steal a 1941 convertible Pontiac coupe with Louisiana plates from Private Ray Carpenter at the Lubbock Army Air Field. The trio ended up in Morton on September 5, 1945 and at approximately 12:30 p.m., the coupe, maroon in color and missing the right headlight and right rear fender, was parked in front of the First State Bank. Rogers waited with the car while Kimes and Melton, one of which wore a mask, entered the bank announcing, "This is a hold up. All of you get over there and turn toward the wall." One customer, J. R. Roddy, thought it to be a joke and responded, "Go to hell." Roddy quickly complied when the duo informed him that he "would be blown in two". The two men herded the group of customers and employees, including bank president W. W. Williamson and his 14 year-old daughter, into the smaller of the two vaults. Williamson pleaded with Kimes and Melton to allow some of the group to be held in the larger vault; his pleas were met with threats.

Myrtle Ray, a cashier at the bank, was forced to open the safe and the duo snatched the money, totaling \$17,692.46⁴. Kimes and Melton threatened to kill anyone who came out of the vaults before thirty minutes had passed.

Bank President W. W. Williamson relayed the following account of the robbery: “I was returning from lunch. One door away from the bank I saw a red car, maybe a Pontiac. It had the right headlight missing. The engine was running. Three men were standing there near it, in rough clothes. I had a hunch, but didn’t think much more about it, for I got busy just as soon as I got into the bank and found it full of customers. I was waiting on J. R. Roddy when two of the men came in and said, ‘This is a hold up. All of you get over there and turn toward the wall.’ Roddy must have thought it was a joke. ‘Go to hell!’ he said. One of the men jammed a pistol into Roddy’s stomach and told him ‘I’ll blow you in two!’ and Roddy got his hands up quickly.”

“They locked us all into the little vault. There were four other bank officials: Myrtle Ray and Mozelle Hill, assistant cashiers; Geneva Famuliner and Mrs. Williamson, bookkeepers. And they herded us into the vault with us all the customers in the bank. All in all, there must have been 16 of us in there. We stayed about five minutes and the ventilation was bad. We couldn’t have stayed too long. But the vault door was only pushed to and, hearing a noise out in the lobby and deciding to take a chance – the men had told us ‘if anybody sounds the alarm in 30 minutes we’ll kill every damn one of you!’ – we went out and found that the robbers had gone. The sheriff was after them in five minutes after we’d been locked up. The red car went east, and then was reported right after that going south toward Bledsoe. The gunmen were the toughest I’ve ever seen. These fellows today cussed and raised the devil every time any of us even acted like we’d turn our heads around from the wall where they had us lined up. They forced Mrs. Ray to open the vault; the loss is insured. I only remember only some of those who were in the vault, except the bank officials. We were all pretty excited, as you can imagine. Clyde Gilbreth, Mrs. N. J. Russell, Roddy, Mrs. Otis D. Chessir, Otho Denny, Winford Patton, George P. Smith, Roy Jackson, and Billye Lee [Williamson’s 14 year old daughter]. I asked them to divide us up and some of us in the other vault and the gunman answered ‘By God, we’re giving the orders here’. One of the gunmen told Mrs. Ray to go to the phone in the vault ‘and tell the sheriff to come get us.’ Mrs. Ray apparently thought she had misunderstood, and asked what he said. ‘You know [Sheriff] Mac Hancock, don’t you?’ Not waiting for an answer the bandit poked his gun into Mrs. Ray’s side two or three times and forced her to open the safe. The gunplay continued when he demanded ‘the rest of the money’ and Mrs. Ray continued to tell him, ‘That’s all the money we have.’” Williamson referred to the men as “cool, detached and plenty rough”.⁵

Mozelle Hill was the last to enter the bank and one of the gunmen stuck his gun in her side and forced her to join the others in the vault.

Clayton Stokes saw the two men rush out of the bank carrying money sacks and join a third man in piling into a car with the motor running. Stokes ran to the office of Sheriff Mac W. Hancock and reported the crime. Sheriff Hancock stated: “Stokes came rushing into my office at 12:50 and said the bank had been robbed and that the hijackers had headed east. We got in my car and took off after them.” Two planes from Lubbock Army Air field and a private plane flown by Gordon Tolliver of Morton were searching the land between Texas and New Mexico for the men during the afternoon.⁵ Douglas Meador and Tyrus Williamson, Williamsons’ 22 year old son, were the first persons to enter the bank after the robbery and before those in the vault came out, the door of which was never locked. Williamson called Lubbock and reported the robbery.⁶ Meador borrowed a plane from Muleshoe and joined in the aerial search for the robbers.⁵

The masked man appeared to be around 40, about 5 feet 8 inches tall and weighing around 185 pounds. He was dressed in khaki and had a .32 or .38 caliber automatic. The description given of the other gunman was 35, 5 feet 11 inches and around 170 pounds with dark hair and dark complexion, using either a .38 or .45 revolver. The man standing guard outside was reported as “dark” and having “the appearance of a soldier.”⁵

The trio was last seen in the stolen Pontiac around 2:00 p.m. that day at the stock gate of the Bledsoe School. By nightfall the robbers were traced to the sandhills near Bledsoe where they had abandoned the Pontiac and fled on foot.

Sheriff Hancock stated, “[Texas Ranger] Redwine saw the glint of the car as we passed it. We stopped and found one track – only one. The theory is that the bandits, all three of them, doubled back after they had been seen at the Bledsoe School, two of them leaving the robbery car sometime before we found it abandoned. We started tracking when daylight broke, but we couldn’t pick up any signs in the shinnery brush. The bandit had an advantage over us; there had been a shower during the night and the wind blew up brisk. That would have the effect of shifting sand and otherwise helping disguise foot prints. He must have holed up [somewhere]. Lt. Van D. Chowson of the Lubbock Army Air Field cruised all over this country at about 140 miles an hour in an AT-6; he could see 50 miles away and flew down to take a look at everything suspicious. A Staff Sergeant Genger also flew with him. I surely appreciate that help and that from the private pilots who entered the search, not to mention all the officers who came from all directions.”⁷

Despite the search by numerous volunteers, including aerial searches by planes, the robbers had escaped, setting off “the biggest manhunt since the days of Pretty Boy Floyd.”³

At approximately 10:45 p.m. word was channeled through the Cochran County Sheriff’s office and Lubbock Police radio station KGZW that all available men were needed immediately with “plenty of flash and spot lights and flashlight batteries.” Two Lubbock FBI agents, Texas Ranger Captain Maney Gault and Rangers Norvell Redwine and Raymond Waters all joined Sheriff Hancock in working the case. Officers converged on an area 2 miles west of Bledsoe. Ranger Redwine estimated they were an hour and a half behind the trio of robbers. Officers speculated the robbers had a second car hidden somewhere in the sparsely populated area around Bledsoe.

The following day Cochran County Sheriff Mac Hancock stated “It looks like we’re up against a brick wall. It’s now a matter of picking up pieces and putting them together. We’ve been running down a storm of rumors and tips.”⁸

On September 6th three men were arrested in Carlsbad, New Mexico for auto theft and as suspects in the robbery of the First State Bank of Morton. Sheriff Hancock took eyewitnesses to the robbery to Carlsbad on September 7th for identification. Witnesses to the robbery determined the trio held in Carlsbad was not the trio sought in the robbery.⁹

Ollie Oliver Melton, one of the gunmen, escaped to Shawnee, Oklahoma where was arrested on October 23, 1945. Melton pleaded innocent and failed to make the \$50,000 bond and was bound to the U. S. Marshall until the next session of federal court at Lubbock. Melton had previously served time for robbing the Fort Cobb, Oklahoma bank 20 years before. He was sentenced to 20 years in 1934 for manslaughter and escaped from the McAlester State Prison on July 10, 1936 and was later apprehended in Atoka, Oklahoma. He had been released March 4, 1944.¹⁰

The following day, October 24, 1945, Fred Pair, Bledsoe rancher and former Dickens County Deputy Sheriff, was arrested for aiding the trio. Pair had been questioned in the earlier states of the investigation and at the time claimed no knowledge of the robbers, denying anyone had visited him before or after the robbery. Pair was questioned again after Melton’s arrest and stated the three individuals had arrived at his place on September 3, 1945 and advised him they were going to rob a bank. Pair furnished them with a Winchester rifle. Pair stated he took the three to Lubbock the night before where they stole the car and returned to his house. They remained with him until the morning of the robbery and returned to his place afterwards where they gave him \$1,000.00 for his assistance. Pair took officials to his ranch where he dug up a jar containing \$997.00 in one dollar bills.¹¹

The first definite sighting of Matt Kimes came on November 19, 1945 in Wewoka, Oklahoma when he robbed a movie theatre there of \$1,200. Witnesses to the robbery stated a woman drove the getaway car, which quickly outdistanced the one commandeered by an off-duty officer who identified Kimes as he ran out of the theatre.¹²

On December 1, 1945 in Little Rock, Arkansas, Kimes was struck by a poultry truck as he crossed the road. The presence of a pistol, which had fallen out of his pocket at during the accident, aroused suspicion at the scene but due to the extent of his facial injuries, Kimes was unrecognizable. Witnesses stated a companion had stayed with the injured man until the ambulance arrived and he disappeared. Police speculated the companion was Alvin “Chick” Rogers. Suspicions were raised again at Baptist State Hospital when he refused to identify himself and refused to have family notified of his accident. When presented with papers bearing the name Leo Woods of Miami, Oklahoma, Kimes claimed that was his name. The staff became further suspicious when it was discovered the man carried \$1,600 in his pockets. The hospital staff contacted the police who discovered Woods car, along with his registration papers, had been stolen in November. After hours of interrogation, the man confessed he was Matthew Kimes when officers prepared to take his fingerprints finally stating, “Yes, I’m him.” Kimes had suffered severe head, back, and internal injuries in addition to a fractured leg. Though wanted in Oklahoma, the Acting United States District Attorney denied Oklahoma’s request for custody of Kimes, stating Kimes would be returned to Texas to stand trial on charges of robbing the First State Bank of Morton once his condition permitted travel. The charge of reckless driving, placed against Joe Chamblee, driver of the truck that struck Kimes, was dropped upon learning Kimes identity. Kimes was placed under constant guard by the FBI who stated that, on the advice of physicians, further questioning would not take place until Kimes was free of the effects of all drugs.^{13, 14} The FBI was never able to get Kimes’ story of where he had been hiding. Kimes died following an operation to address his internal injuries on December 14, 1945 at the age of 39. At the time of his death Kimes was listed as “Public Enemy No. 1”^{15, 16}



MATT KIMES

Matt Kimes – Riverside Daily Press December 3, 1945

On December 4, 1945 Olaf Alvin “Chick” Rogers, accompanied by his attorney, walked in to the FBI office in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma and surrendered. Rogers pled innocent and bond was set at \$40,000.¹⁷

On January 30, 1946 Ollie Melton’s plans to break out of the Dallas County jail were discovered along with five saws, including three fine jeweler’s saws able to cut through steel, and two razors fashioned into weapons were removed from his cell. Melton admitted to planning to escape. Two of the bars leading from the corridor showed signs of file marks.¹⁸



Items removed from Melton’s cell – Dallas Morning News

The Melton-Rogers-Pair Trial began on May 28, 1946 and the two were transferred to Lubbock from the Dallas County Jail under heavy guard by United States Marshals without incident.¹⁹ All three men pled guilty and that same day sentences were handed down as follows:

Ollie Oliver Melton, 25 years in an institution to be selected by the U. S. Attorney General;

Olaf Alvin “Chick” Rogers, 15 years in an institution to be selected by the U. S. Attorney General.

Judge J. Whitfield Davidson, gave Fred Pair 18 months, on his “having told a straightforward account of the robbery to a federal grand jury impaneled in Dallas and in his generally helpful attitude toward federal, state, and county investigators.”²⁰

On June 21, 1946, 8 year old Dixon Lee Lowther, nephew of Ollie Melton, and a 10 year old friend in Shawnee, Oklahoma were digging a hole behind the Lowther garage to hide fireworks they had been forbidden. Dixon shouted to his mother, Faye (Melton) Lowther, "Mama, bring me a stew kettle, I've struck a gold mine!" Upon seeing the keg of dimes, nickels, quarters, and half dollars, Mrs. Lowther called the FBI. Upon examination, a coin wrapper bearing "First State Bank Morton, Texas" was found. The coins totaled \$1,201.40. Agents believed Ollie Melton had buried the money at his sister's house without knowledge.²¹



A nail keg full of coins, found buried behind a garage in Shawnee, Okla., by boys trying to hide firecrackers they had been forbidden to buy, was examined by D. A. Bryce, an FBI agent. He identified it from a coin wrapper as part of the \$19,883 taken in the robbery of the First State bank of Morton, Tex., Sept. 5, 1945.
—AP Wirephoto

Coins found by Ollie Melton's nephew – The Milwaukee Journal June 22, 1946

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