

Other Brothers of American Crime, Chapter Fourteen

by strannikov

The other brother of Clyde and Buck Barrow largely has been forgotten by historians of American crime owing to his failure to follow his older siblings into their brief lives of robbery, theft, and murder. Chroniclers of American journalism (when observing the latter's criminal regard for truth) are aware, however, that Emiliano Barrow's main career obstacle was his polysyllabic first name: lacking the monosyllabic verve, zip, and urgency his brothers enjoyed in feverish news accounts of the day, Emiliano's career of crime seemed destined to go nowhere in one great hurry.

Abandoning all ambition for a criminal career in journalism at a tender age, Emiliano Barrow's aspiration for a career in some other equally lucrative criminal domain was blunted by his short stature, although his homicidal demeanor was manifest from the age of nine, when he shoved to the bottom of a dry twenty-foot well a cousin who thought erroneously to give Emiliano some nominative appeal by dubbing him "Runt". Attaining his full height of four-foot-ten by age eleven, a full inch shorter than Bonnie Parker ever grew to be, Emiliano at least attempted to contribute to the family's ill-starred criminal enterprise.

A tad more industrious than either older sibling, Emiliano by age twelve had fashioned orthopedic fittings for accelerator, brake, and clutch pedals which permitted him to drive while peeking just over dashboard and hood of whatever make and model of car he proposed to drive (as a quick afterthought, he devised an orthopedic cushion affording enhanced visibility): thus equipped, he embarked on a brief but successful career as a fearless and skilled getaway driver. Though his brothers deigned to dub him "Leadfoot" Barrow,

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the unfortunate sobriquet that stuck was that supplied by a Missouri bootlegging and smuggling fraternity, viz., "Wheel". To his undying consternation, it was this latter appellation that endeared him to the criminal Midwestern journalistic fraternity of the period.

An extended account of his criminal exploits for a criminal syndicate of Midwestern newspapers and radio stations hastened a change of career plans. Following capture in one of the two Kansas Cities, "Wheel" found his juvenile escapades the subject of an engaging twenty-three hundred word account by some journalist with an unmemorable byline, who nevertheless made so much of the name "'Wheel' Barrow" that an idea struck the young hoodlum as he languished in a Federal penitentiary two weeks shy of his sixteenth birthday. The youngest Barrow appealed for and received a pardon from each of the governors of the handful of adjacent Midwestern states where his crimes of velocity, smuggling, and law evasion had occurred: these events all transpired as first one brother then the other was accosted by scores of shotgun pellets and numerous lead slugs of a stunning variety of calibers.

Upon release, "Wheel" determined to embark on a career as a high-wire unicyclist. His skill with mechanical tinkering and his unfaltering sense of balance contributed to such acclaim that he soon launched the routine that immortalized him in the annals of criminal circus enterprise, that of rolling scantily-clad lovelies along the high-wire in a wheelbarrow of his own construction. Once Will Rogers had been dispatched in Alaska courtesy of "Wall-Eye" Post, "Wheel" next became a star of Depression- and Dust Bowl-era newsreels as a wisecracking comic acrobat: unfortunately, this visionary entertainer undermined his own career prospects as soon as he insisted on delivering his best lines from the high-wire itself, long before the advent of wireless microphone technology.

Having resisted migration to California at the height or depth of the Dust Bowl, but as another world war began to encroach upon horizons all around, "Wheel" left Goodland, Kansas, in April 1939 pedaling to Hollywood on a shiny unicycle he bought from the infamous Gnash the Saber-Toothed Clown, fugitive from a criminal

circus bound for the two Kansas Cities, St. Lou, and Indianapolis. Impatient to make California by the end of summer, "Wheel" neglected to fit the unicycle with headlamp, tail-lamp, or reflectors, and he was struck and killed on the upslope just west of Salida, Colorado, by a heavily-sauced miner whose truck's brakes failed just as miserably as his steering on his easterly descent from Monarch Pass on 5 July 1939.

Although born in Texas, but because he had nourished a lifelong appreciation for Alexander Pope, the entire text of "Ode on Solitude" graced "Wheel's" original grave marker on a Salida hillside, stolen unaccountably by criminal circus enthusiasts on or about 30 May 1944, the two hundredth anniversary of the immortal poet's death.

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