



G. Brett Lytle, Professor of Languages

By Phil Reader

The comic opera bandit, Dick Fellows, holds a special place in the literature of California outlawry, nay, American outlawry. The uniqueness of his position can be summed up in one word—unsuccessful. His career, also, can easily be described using one word—folly. He could quite rightly lay claim to being the original Captain Jinks of the Horse Marines.

Not only was he a dismal flop at his chosen profession, that of a stage robber, but horses of all breeds seem to hold him in utter contempt. The horse was never born that would allow Dick Fellows to ride it and his equestrian endeavors led him directly to San Quentin on two occasions.

A contemporary analogy would be a bank robber who successfully loots the vault, but during his escape, he falls, breaks his leg, and drags himself to his getaway car only to find that it has run out of gas. After which he attempts to get away by hobbling down a busy sidewalk lugging a large sack bearing the bank's label and containing his booty. That scenario best describes Dick Fellows, the legendary outlaw.



Dick's first attempt at larceny came in 1869, when he unsuccessfully attempted to hold up the Coast Line stage on the outskirts of Santa Barbara. He was promptly arrested and sent to prison. While at San Quentin he was given a job at the library which enabled him to educate himself. He helped organize bible study classes and set himself up as a religious spokesman for the prisoners.

Fellows convinced the prison officials that he was a changed man who had seen the error of his ways. On April 4, 1874, he was granted a pardon after serving less than half of his original sentence and for the next year or so, he managed to stay out of trouble.

During the early part of December, 1875, he learned of a shipment of gold coin, totaling \$240,000, which would be carried by stage through Kern County on the 4th of the month. The temptation was too great for the born-again Mr. Fellows, so in the company of an unnamed companion, he hatched a plan to stop the stage.

*Dick Fellows,
a.k.a. G. Brett Lytle*

It was on this occasion that Dick had his first falling out with a horse. He rented a docile looking mare from a livery stable at Caliente and set out in pursuit of the stage. As they

pulled within sight of the coach, he urged the horse on to greater and greater speed. The mare was only too happy to oblige him, as a matter of fact she galloped so fast that she ran right out from under the rider leaving Dick suspended in mid-air for a brief moment before he plummeted groundward. He sat there in the dust watching his fortune ride off into the sunset, but the gallant bandit just picked himself up and walked back into town where he found that the mare had returned to her stable.

But Dick Fellows was not the type of man to be easily discouraged. He had another idea: he would rob the northbound stage out of Los Angeles, which was to pass through Caliente shortly. In order to accomplish this, he needed the assistance of another horse. So the optimistic brigand stole a saddle-horse from the hitching post in front of a mercantile store and rode quietly out of town.

About a mile and a half up the road he met the stage coach. Pulling out his pistol, he ordered the driver to halt and throw down the Wells Fargo treasure box. After the man complied with his demands, Fellows motioned the driver on his way.

The robber dismounted and began to drag the heavy box back towards the horse. But this unnerved the beast which also had a will of his own. Upon seeing the man hunched over his burden, it bolted and sped for home at a gallop.

This left Dick afoot for a second time in one day. By now it was growing dark, so he shouldered the chest and set off in search of a hiding place. He shuffled along in the darkness until suddenly he fell headlong into a fifteen foot ditch and broke his left foot and ankle. He managed to pull himself out of the ditch and pushed the box along in front of him until he found a soft spot in the ground where he dug a hole and buried the chest after stuffing the contents into his pockets.

Dick stumbled onward until he came to a nearby farm, where he managed to steal yet another horse. But by the following morning a well mounted and well rested posse caught up to him and he was arrested and placed in the Kern county jail at Bakersfield.

He was tried and sentenced once again to a term at San Quentin. As Dick was waiting to be transported to the prison, he managed to break out of the jail and effect his escape sporting a new pair of crutches which the county of Kern had so graciously provided for him.

After hiding in the willows along the Kern River for two days he crept into a farmer's corral and once again stole a horse. He threw a lead rope around the beast's neck and tied it to the corral while he went into the barn to get a saddle. But this horse, too, must have been repelled by the way he looked because it bolted and ran, leaving the stunned outlaw to stare after it in disbelief. Later that afternoon two posses converged upon the escapee and clapped him back into jail where he was held under continuous guard until he was returned to San Quentin.

Dick Fellows' second prison term expired in May of 1881. After two months of trying to go straight he was back at robbing stages, this time he operated in the central coast region between San Luis Obispo and San Jose. By now he was well known to local lawmen as well as Wells Fargo detectives.

They followed him from holdup to holdup until they finally caught him hiding at a ranch near Mayfield in Santa Clara County. They put him in the county jail, but the slippery desperado once again managed to escape. However shortly thereafter he was recaptured at a cabin in the Santa Cruz Mountains and returned to jail.

He was sent to Santa Barbara where he was tried for a number of crimes and found guilty on all counts. He received a sentence of life in prison.

But Dick Fellows was to have one last hurrah with the four-legged bane of his existence, the horse. As a prelude to this dreaded event, he made good his escape from the Santa Barbara jail and darted up the street for a couple of blocks until he came upon a horse that was staked out in the middle of a field, placidly grazing.

In one fell swoop he pulled up the stake, coiled up the rope, and leapt gracefully upon the animal's back. But it was not meant to be that easy, for unbeknownst to the luckless rider, the beast upon which he now set was suffering from the effects of locoweed which it had ingested earlier.

Old Dobbin immediately went into action, bucking and thrashing about in a narcotic fit and once again the curse was visited upon Dick Fellows as he hung suspended in the air for a brief moment prior to plunging back down into the dust, prostrate and unconscious.

He was taken back to the jail and spent the rest of his natural life in prison; far, far away from Equus Caballus, the hooved devils that were to help put his name in the history books.

One might rightfully ask just what has any of this to do with Mr. G. Brett Lytle, Professor of Languages?

Well, in May of 1881, Mr. Lytle rode into Santa Cruz and put up at a local hotel. A few days later he found a job as solicitor on the staff of the Santa Cruz Daily Echo, a journal published by B. A. Stephens. From its offices on Pacific Avenue at the Flatiron building, Lytle visited the local merchants securing advertisers for the newspaper.

He was later remembered as a likable fellow, intelligent and witty. In lieu of payment he was allowed to place an advertisement in the paper reading

"G. BRETT LYITLE, PROFESSOR OF LANGUAGES, SEEKING PUPILS IN SPANISH."

The endeavor proved ill-advised and fruitless as no one appears to have answered the ad. The reason being, of course, was that Spaniards made up such a large percentage of the local population and anyone who wanted to speak Spanish already did.

On July 19, 1881, a stage coach was robbed near Gonzales in the Salinas Valley. Lytle, who happened to be in the area, telegraphed a detailed account to the Daily Echo. At this point in time, Mr. G. Brett Lytle disappears, but the stage robberies in the central coast continued for the next several months.

The following year, bandit Dick Fellows was captured by a posse deep in the Santa Cruz Mountains near Boulder Creek while he was trying to make an escape to the coast. Local residents were surprised to learn that G. Brett Lytle, their would-be Spanish teacher, and the infamous Dick Fellows were one and the same man. The only attempt that the outlaw ever made to go straight was on the streets of Santa Cruz.

Sources

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