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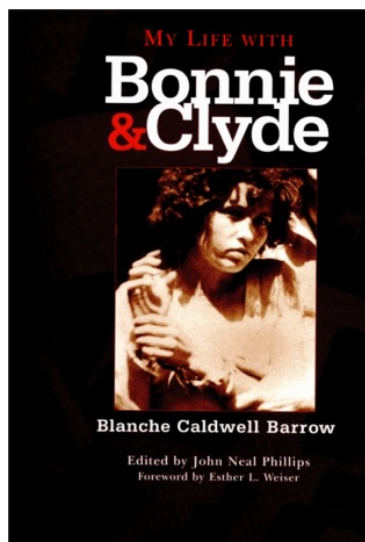
Technical Editor, Layout, and Design

Pam S. Baird



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Book Review

My Life with Bonnie and Clyde

By **Blanche Caldwell Barrow**
John Neal Phillips (editor)

Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 2005. 81 photos, 320 pages. \$19.95 paperback. ISBN 0-8061-3715-0.

Had it not been for the 1967 movie *Bonnie and Clyde*, this murderous duo would be, at best, no more than a footnote in 1930s outlaw history. But there was a movie, and the names of Bonnie and Clyde are as familiar as those of Billy the Kid or Jesse James. One person we met via the movie was Clyde's sister-in-law Blanche Barrow, played by Estelle Parsons. As is common in reality versus Hollywood, the real Blanche Barrow bore little resemblance to Estelle Parsons' version.

In 1931, Blanche married escaped convict Marvin (Buck) Barrow, though she claimed not to know he was a criminal at the time. Six months after their marriage, she convinced Buck to surrender himself to the authorities and finish his sentence, knowing they would never live anything resembling a normal life as long as he was on the run. On March 22, 1933, Governor Miriam "Ma" Ferguson issued Buck a pardon. This was fifteen months after his surrender.

Returning to their hometown of Dallas, Buck and Blanche were together only a few days when they were visited by Buck's brother Clyde and his girlfriend Bonnie Parker. It didn't take long for Buck and Blanche to join the couple and head for Oklahoma and then Joplin, Missouri, where a desperate shootout with the police left two policemen dead. A little over three months later, it all ended for Buck and Blanche in an abandoned amusement park in Dexter, Iowa. Buck was dead, and Blanche was on her way to a Missouri prison. On a lonely, rural, Louisiana road ten months later, the end came for Bonnie and Clyde.

While in that Missouri prison, Blanche wrote a memoir of her time with her beloved Daddy (Buck), her brother-in-law Clyde, and Bonnie Parker. After her release, it seems that she put the manuscript in a box and stuffed it in a corner of her closet. In the



ensuing years, Blanche shared the existence of the manuscript with only her close friend Esther Weister.

Twelve years after Blanche's death in 1988, Weiser remembered the memoir. Weiser, who was the executor of Blanche's will, placed the manuscript with editor John Phillips. He had interviewed Blanche before her death and had written *Running with Bonnie and Clyde: The Ten Fast Years of Ralph Fults*. (Fults was a one-time running buddy with Bonnie and Clyde.)

Phillips does a very good job of annotating Blanche's writing and does not try to excuse her actions. He also does not attempt to paint Buck and Blanche into a black corner. Obviously, Blanche is not a subjective observer of Buck's actions or of her own. In fairness, though, she does not try to paint herself or Buck as saints.

Phillips proves himself a superb historical authority on this subject. This book is highly recommended by the *Dispatch* to any student of Bonnie and Clyde.

Review by Robert Nieman