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Interview with Nathaniel Reed
Tulsa, Oklahoma
109 1/2 South Cincinnati

My early life was not unlike the lives of lots of other boys of my time and locality. It is true I had very few advantages while young, as my father, Mason H. Reed, a Union Soldier, was killed in action on November 14, 1863, when I was a baby.

I was born on March 22, 1862, in Madison County, Arkansas. I was shunted about among my relatives with no permanent home and I suppose no one was very much interested in me. I grew up without much education and lived around in Madison County, Arkansas, until I was twenty-one years of age, when I went up into Kansas, stopping at Caldwell. Here I got a job as a cowhand on a ranch belonging to Mr. Torrey.

Mr. Torrey handled large numbers of cattle, having as high as 20,000 head sometimes.

There were thirteen of us boys employed there and we worked under a foreman named William Coffee. I was employed here for five years, and it was here under the leadership of Coffee that I took part in my

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first train robbery. I had been working there three years and it was on June 28, 1886, that we pulled the first job.

The Santa Fe Express train was at La Junta on the Colorado line when we "pulled this job." Coffee did all the planning and we boys helped carry out the plans. My part usually was holding the horses. This first time though, I stood on the rear platform of the last coach and kicked the door, fired my pistol in the air and kept the passengers from coming out that way. There had been nothing said to me about my part of the loot, and I did not receive anything until September 1886, three months after our first job. When Coffee gave me a sack of money amounting to over \$3,600.00, telling me that that was my part of the money. In the three years prior to that, I had saved up and had on deposit in the bank at Caldwell, something over \$400.00. Coffee, knowing there might be some questions asked at the bank when I deposited the money, told me to tell them that I had won the money gambling. They, however, did not question me about it, even though they

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might have suspected something unusual, for cowhands usually did not make such large deposits.

So from then on I was active with this gang and with others, for eight years holding up banks, trains and robbing stage coaches. However while still in Kansas I joined up with Buffalo Bill, who had started a Wild West Show. He first opened up in the Spring of 1887 and made the second attempt in 1888. However each of his three attempts were unsuccessful from a financial standpoint so he gave up the idea. I was a "bronco buster" with his Wild West Show.

The train robbery was our only job in 1886. From then on, for eight years I was with this gang and with other gangs and we operated in Kansas, Texas, Oklahoma and Arizona.

I will list the major jobs we pulled and the ones I later confessed to have participated in:

- 1886--Santa Fe Express-----Colorado.
- 1887--Bank at Harper-----Kansas.
- 1888--Bank at Riverside-----Texas.
- 1889--Stage at Canyon Gap-----Colorado.

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1889--Express at Brownsville-----Texas.

1890--Train near Phoenix-----Arizona.

1891--Stage Coach-----Colorado.

1891--Train at El Paso-----Texas.

1891--Had rather a hard fight with the Texas Rangers,
but escaped.

1892--Bank at Coffeyville-----Kansas.

At Coffeyville most of the gang was killed. I was holding the horses here so got away. The two Daltons were killed here, and Emmett Dalton was seriously wounded.

1893--I was at Ingalls, Oklahoma at the famous fight with the United States Marshal and deputies.

1893--Train robbery near Collinsville---Oklahoma.

1894--Blackstone train robbery, eight miles north of Muskogee, where I was seriously wounded and where my outlaw career ended.

I could go into the details of all the jobs but it is not necessary to do so. The bank robbery in Coffeyville was the most noted and that ended the career of the Daltons, who were once peace officers.

The train robbery at Blackstone switch was planned by Jim Dyer our leader at that time. He had learned through "Sheb" Williams, a deputy marshal of Texas, of a shipment of \$170,000.00 that was to be made from Dallas. The time of the departure

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and the train it was to be shipped on were made known to Dyer, so four of us, besides Dyer made our plans.

I filed off the lock to the switch and opened it, so the train ran onto the switch and had to stop. The money was in the baggage car in three pine boxes. When the train stopped, two men took charge of the engine and I went to the baggage car and demanded that it be opened. The baggage-men refused. I placed some sticks of dynamite by one of the doors and blew it open, and again demanded that they come out; they did not come out but began shooting.

It was so "hot" that we decided it would be better ^{to} not push that part of the robbery any further, so I went into the coaches and began to take up a Sunday School collection, and things were going well, and quietly until Bud Ledbetter, United States Marshal who had been placed in the train to guard the money, came into the coach with a gun in each hand. He was shooting both guns and he got me then and there and I am still a cripple from the wound which he gave me. I, however managed to get away and hide out.

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The first medical attention I got was in the Federal Jail at Ft. Smith, March 18, 1895, after I had surrendered to Judge Parker. During these months when I had hidden out wounded and suffering, I had plenty of time to think of the past and to wonder what the future held for me, and I decided to make a clean breast of it all.

I wrote to Judge Parker from Madison County, Arkansas, where I was living with my brother who did not know of my outlaw record at all.

Judge Parker sent Bill Smith, Burl Cox and Peyton Tolbert, all deputies to get me. I was taken to jail and placed in the hospital. This was on March 18, 1895, and this was the first time I had the care of a doctor.

I was put on a parole for five years; but since then, forty-two years, I have never violated the law, or run afoul of the officers. I received the light and when I quit, it was for eternity.

Others of the gang were tried and given various terms. Jim Dyer received a sentence of fifteen years

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in the Federal penitentiary in Ohio.

I bear the scars from wounds given by twenty-seven bullets.