



EPISODE 10, 2004: PRETTY BOY'S GUN , LaVERNE, CALIFORNIA

Wes: Our first story gives a different twist to the career of one of America's most notorious outlaws. It's the 1930's. The Great Depression. Across the Midwest, as factories close and banks foreclose, the rural poor feel cheated. Bankers are seen as crooks and bank robbers heroes. Across the nation, criminals capture the headlines - John Dillinger, Bonnie and Clyde and Charles Arthur Floyd, better known as "Pretty Boy." Modeling himself on the outlaws of the Wild West, Pretty Boy Floyd becomes one of the most infamous bank robbers of the 20th century. For decades writers and folk singers romanticize his legacy. We've heard about a weapon believed to have been used by Pretty Boy on his final flight from the law. Richard Kee of LaVerne, California owns this gun, which he believes belonged to the legendary bandit.

Richard Kee: From what I've heard, my Uncle Ted had received the gun from Pretty Boy Floyd. My uncle was only 17 and my father didn't want him to get into any more trouble than he was already in so he took the weapon away from him. And that's how it's come down to me. So this has been in my family since 1934.

Wes: I'm Wes Cowan. I've come to LaVerne, California to help Richard uncover the truth about the gun. Well, let's take a look.

Richard: Well, here it is. .32 Colt automatic.

Wes: Wow. You ever shoot it?

Richard: I shot it as a child when my father taught me how to use it when I was about ten. But it hasn't been fired over half a dozen times, I believe, in the last 40 years.

Wes: Wow. Well what do you know about this history of this gun?

Richard: Well, as the family story goes, Pretty Boy Floyd's car had broken down in Bolivar, Missouri, while he was on the run and it was being repaired in the local garage. My family lived in that area. My Uncle Ted was there when Pretty Boy Floyd's car broke down and kept a lookout during this period, and as a way of saying thank you for having done a good job, Pretty Boy gave this gun to him. And it ultimately has come down to me.

Wes: Well, what is it exactly you want me to find out about this?

Richard: Is the family story true? Did this gun in fact belong to Pretty Boy Floyd and was it given to my Uncle Ted?

Wes: Is there anyone around who can tell us more about Ted?

Richard: There is one surviving sister, my aunt Mildred. She could probably tell you a lot about Uncle Ted. They were very close.

Wes: Well this is a great story. I think you've given me enough to start the investigation. I'm anxious to get going.

Wes: According to the Kee family story, Ted encountered Pretty Boy Floyd in 1934, just days before he was hunted down and killed. I remember reading stories about Floyd's legendary life, and death. Charles Arthur Floyd was born February 3, 1904. One of eight children, he was raised on a farm in a poor rural community in the Cookson Hills of Oklahoma. Floyd's life of crime began at age 18 when he robbed the local post office. As a reckless criminal, he was credited with holding up more banks than anyone else in Oklahoma's history. By the time Charlie was 30, J. Edgar Hoover had named him Public Enemy Number One and on October 22, 1934, Hoover's G-men tracked Floyd down to East Liverpool, Ohio and shot to death. If this really is Pretty Boy's gun, it's quite a find. Richard's Uncle Ted died in 1996 at the age of 79. So to learn more about him I've come to see his sister Mildred Ward, who now lives in Southern California. Mildred tells me she does have vague memories of Pretty Boy being in Bolivar.

Mildred: My dad owned the store and I remember the old timers in the store talking about Pretty Boy Floyd. Pretty Boy was living nearby and a lady came in the store one day with two little boys and they said it was Pretty Boy Floyd's wife or girlfriend or what.

Wes: But what about Ted? Was he the kind of kid who would help an outlaw on the run?

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Mildred: Well, Ted was a sweet little kid, but he was a mischievous little guy and he was always getting into scrapes and dad was upset with him but that was Ted.

Wes: What kind of trouble would Ted get into?

Mildred: I remember he had a rifle at the time and their thing was to get behind the chicken house and shoot the legs off the chickens. Not ours but our neighbors.

Wes: Oh my heavens. Did he ever tell you about getting this pistol from Pretty Boy Floyd?

Mildred: No, I don't remember Ted ever telling – having one like that. He never told me about it if he did have it.

Wes: That's not good. I was hoping that Mildred could tell me more. I wonder if the gun itself could hold a clue. I'm visiting the J.M. Davis Firearms Museum in Claremore, Oklahoma. They have an extensive collection of outlaw guns including some that belonged to Pretty Boy Floyd. I'm hoping the Executive Director, Duane Kyler, can tell me if Richard's gun could have been one of Floyd's. My first step is to find out if Colt automatics were readily available in small towns back then.

Duane: In the '30s, you could buy a weapon through your local hardware store or you could order it through a catalog kinda like the one I'm holding in my hand. It's a 1908 Sears Roebuck catalog.

Wes: Oh yeah.

Duane: These guns of that time frame or from the '30s would probably run you around \$20.

Wes: Yeah, and there's a .32 caliber Colt automatic which is like the one that we brought. Now how difficult would it have been for a 17 year old kid to buy that .32 automatic.

Duane: Well, he certainly could buy a gun back in those days. I think the difficulty would be in having that kind of money. You gotta remember in that time frame that 50 cents could feed a family for a day. So I think it would be very difficult for a 17 year old.

Wes: If Ted didn't buy the gun, did he really get it from Pretty Boy? I asked Duane to show me the museum's collection. Duane: This is our gallery of outlaw guns actually taken from gangsters and bandits by the Kansas City Police Department. This is Pretty Boy Floyd. We have three of his guns but these were one of probably several that he had available.

Wes: You know, I would never consider myself a firearms expert but just looking at the cold automatics, they look pretty beat up. Is this typical of outlaw guns? Duane, let's go take a look at the gun I brought.

Duane: Good. Let's also take these two down and take them with us.

Wes: Well, let's take a look at this. Do you know that Pretty Boy Floyd would have even carried a .32 Colt?

Duane: Well, I don't know for sure. I do know that Pretty Boy Floyd was partial to the Colt automatic pistol so I would say that yes, he could have carried a .32.

Wes: So it's the right kind of gun but I need to confirm it's old enough to have been owned by Pretty Boy. By checking the serial number, Duane can tell me when it was produced. Between 1904 and 1905.

Wes: Well, that's great news because that means that this gun was in circulation at the time Pretty Boy Fold was operating.



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Duane: Correct.

Wes: Is there anything that you can see on this gun that would help to tell if Pretty Boy Floyd would have used this gun?

Duane: Well, just looking at it at first glance on the exterior, Wes, I don't see anything that would show any identifiable marks. On the .38 caliber that we had that was belonged to Pretty Boy, we did find some identifying marking in there that seemed to be a map. In that you could see the tree line and the roads.

Wes: Oh yeah, look at that.

Wes: If there are similar marks on Richard's gun, it would really help our case.

Duane: I don't see any markings at first glance that would show me anything unusual.

Wes: Nothing on that one, huh?

Duane: No, I really just don't see anything that would distinguish this.

Wes: Well, that's obviously disappointing. I had hoped to find a map or you know, something --

Duane: Like what we found on the other one.

Wes: --like this belongs to Pretty Boy Floyd, of course. So Richard's gun is the right type and from the right period but there's still no proof it was Floyd's. I need a different approach. I've brought the gun to ballistics expert John Cayton for a closer inspection. John's been examining the guns of outlaws since the 1960's. I'm counting on him to tell me if this really is a gun that was handled by Pretty Boy. What do you think? First John removes the grips. He's looking for fingerprints he can compare with Floyd's prints on file with the police. Why would you check under the grips first?

Cayton: Underneath the grips is an area that normally is not in contact with people handling it. Information can be trapped there from sweat. Sometimes there's hairs or fibers or other biological things that could be collected.

Wes: Sure.

Wes: To process the gun for prints, John puts the gun in a fume box. A few drops of superglue, once heated, will cause fumes to collect on any area that might contain a latent fingerprint. So that's it. Well, see anything? Oh yeah, yeah, right there.

Cayton: I'm going to go print a photograph.

Wes: So what's the photograph show?

Cayton: Well, looking at this, you can see some little artifacts here, but I don't really think there's enough there that's usable. It's insufficient amount for comparison.

Wes: Obviously, that's not what I was hoping for. Is there anything else we can look at?

Cayton: Sure.

Wes: If Richard's gun was used by an outlaw like Pretty Boy, John would expect it to show signs of extensive wear. He compares Richard's gun to an average .32 automatic.

Cayton: There is some looseness in the slide. The slide stop doesn't hardly catch and when you do catch it, it bumps off real easy. And the magazine, compared to the other one, you can see --

Wes: Oh yeah

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Cayton: --the heavy pressure from the magazine catch here.

Wes: Next we take the guns apart to examine the internal wear.

Cayton: So what we see on the frame here, we can see on the locking lugs a lot of indications of wear.

Wes: John shows me the hammer on his automatic for comparison.

Cayton: This one's what you'd expect to find with somebody shooting an occasional target practice or whatever.

Wes: Mm-hmm

Cayton: This one there's a pitting, a cratering from the peening where it hits the firing pin. Whoever carried it found the need to shoot it a lot. Which would be expensive. Most policemen at that period of time couldn't afford the ammunition to shoot this. This is not a military or police cartridge so the person who owned this would have to buy their own, or obtain their own ammunition. So whoever had this had a reason to shoot it a lot.

Wes: Knowing what you know about the gun now, do you think this gun could have been used by Pretty Boy Floyd?

Cayton: In all the 35 years that I've been looking at firearms, I've looked at thousands of guns, this is the most extensive wear that I've seen on a .32 auto. This is something that somebody's depended on, and then practiced with a lot. So yes, this could have been Pretty Boy Floyd's.

Wes: So there is evidence that this gun could have belonged to an outlaw but for Pretty Boy to have given it to Ted, I need to prove Charlie was actually in Bolivar in 1934? Michael Wallis, an historian and Floyd biographer, lives in Pretty Boy's home state of Oklahoma. If anyone can confirm this Kee family story, it will be him. First he tells me it's very likely a teenager like Ted would have helped Charlie Floyd.

Wallis: The people themselves honored Charlie. He was one of them. He was a guy that they could count on. He would rob banks that were foreclosing on them. He would tear up mortgages. He would give them money. And he did, in fact, do some of those things. But he did it to get along and to survive and he did it very well.

Wes: You know, I've got this gun supposedly given by Charlie Floyd to this 17 year old kid in Bolivar, Missouri in 1934, just days before Pretty Boy met his end. Have you ever heard of this possibility?

Wallis: Charlie Floyd spent a lot of time in Missouri. All of his life really, especially as a big time criminal. He passed to and fro all over that state and he certainly knew the Bolivar area very well. The thing about it is, in 1934, Charlie Floyd and his then-lieutenant, Adam Richetti, and their girlfriends, spent almost an entire year in Buffalo, New York, hiding out, trying to get the heat off them. October 22, 1934, he was killed near East Liverpool, Ohio, in a cornfield. I doubt if Charlie Floyd was anywhere near the Show Me State, near Bolivar, Missouri or anyplace in the state during that year.

Wes: So Floyd couldn't have given the gun to Ted in 1934. But, what about before that? To find out if the incident could have taken place on a different date, I've come to the Polk County Genealogical Society and Library in Bolivar, Missouri. I'm searching backwards through the archives of the Bolivar Herald starting with the year 1933 looking for any incident that might match Ted's story. All kinds of great ads but nothing about Floyd. Oh, wait a minute, what's this? This is it. This is what I've been looking for. Listen to this:

"FLOYD TAKES SHERIFF FOR BUGGY RIDE"

Pretty Boy Floyd kidnaps the local sheriff. This is mid-June, 1933. This is fantastic. Floyd was in Bolivar. But it's a year before the story that Richard gave us. There's got to be something to this. I'm going to print it out and read it more carefully. Well, I can tell you one thing. This kidnapping in Bolivar was a big deal. I've found tremendous amount of



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information about it. It was even a big enough story that the New York Times picked it up. Listen to this:

"Bolivar, Missouri, June 16. Charles Pretty Boy Floyd, notorious Oklahoma outlaw and a companion, Adam Ricchetti, kidnapped sheriff, Jack Killingsworth, here today and drove away in a stolen automobile, eluding pursuit. The sheriff strolled into a garage where Floyd and Ricchetti had lined bystanders against the wall at the point of revolvers.

Wes: Then I found the one piece of evidence I really needed. I can't wait to tell Richard. He looked at this gun and told us flat out that this fits the pattern for the kind of gun that an outlaw would carry.

Richard: Wow. That's interesting.

Wes: But the big news was what I found in the newspaper in Bolivar. It said that Floyd and Ricchetti had lined bystanders against the wall at the point of revolvers while their disabled automobile was being repaired. So the story that your uncle told you that has been passed down checks out. Pretty Boy Floyd really was in Bolivar, Missouri, with a car broken down in a garage.

Richard: No kidding.

Wes: So you add them all together and the circumstantial evidence is pretty strong.

Richard: I know that my uncle and father were honest men and so for me, what you've told me, it tells me that it all plays together. That this is fact, at least as far as I'm concerned, was Pretty Boy Floyd's gun and I thank you very much for all you've done.

Wes: Richard, I've had a lot of fun doing this. You know, Aunt Mildred told us that Uncle Ted liked to read detective magazines and so we got you this copy of "True Detective" magazine –

Richard: True Detective!

Wes: --November 1933. Flip through there and see if there's something there that might be of interest to you.

Richard: Wow. "Stalking Pretty Boy Floyd: The Man of 100 Crimes." This is fantastic. Thank you very much. This is great. Thank you.

Wes: It's been my pleasure.

ENDS