

October 16, 1909 - Bank robber Earl Ross Bullock becomes a murderer - On the night of October 8, 1909, someone broke out the front window of Albert Noller's second-hand store and pawnshop on Massachusetts Street in Lawrence, Kansas, and stole two revolvers. Several days later, police received information that Earl Ross Bullock, known as Ross to his intimates, had been seen showing off two revolvers that he said had been given to him. His age was variously reported as 17 or 18 years old, and he was described as "a rather good looking young man." Police became suspicious that Bullock was the culprit in the Noller theft and began looking for him. T. Wilson Pringle, a 41 year-old Lawrence police officer, visited the home of Ed Dockson at 1201 Haskell Avenue, where Bullock was known to have been rooming at the time, to see if he was there. Pringle was unsuccessful. Douglas County, Kansas, Deputy Sheriff E.F. Woods got word that Bullock might be going to Eudora, Kansas, a small town approximately seven miles southeast of Lawrence, and took a train there on the afternoon of October 11, 1909. Deputy Woods walked around town trying to pick up information on Bullock. About 4:00 pm, he stepped into the State Bank of Eudora to see a friend of his, the bank's Cashier, Edward A. Wilson. To Woods' surprise, Bullock was sitting in a chair in the bank. He told the young man that he was there to arrest him for robbing the store in Lawrence. Bullock said that there must have been some mistake, and that his boss, who was expected to be in the bank that afternoon, would be able to clear things up. Woods said that he would wait a while, and the three men, Woods, Wilson, and Bullock sat around and chatted. As the time for the train back to Lawrence approached, Woods decided not to wait any longer and moved to take Bullock into custody. He stood up, and when he looked at Bullock, the young man was pointing two revolvers at him. Bullock forced the Deputy and the Cashier into the bank vault at gunpoint and locked them in. He picked up all the loose cash he could find, at least \$800 worth, and left, closing the front door behind him. He went to the station and took the train back to Lawrence. Woods and Wilson yelled for help for about two hours before they were heard and someone was summoned to open the vault door. Upon leaving the confines of the vault, the Deputy realized that Bullock had taken money, and telephoned to the Sheriff's Office in Lawrence with a report on the bank robbery. The news from Eudora was quickly followed by more serious news from Haskell Avenue. When Bullock had arrived back in Lawrence, he called a taxi, and had the driver take him to a local store to buy some clothes. He then had the driver take him to Ed Dockson's house. Officer Pringle, who had earlier come to the house at 1201 Haskell Avenue looking for Bullock, was visiting next door, accompanied by his wife and three grown children. Pringle, who was off duty at the time, saw the taxi pull up and Bullock get out. Bullock went inside the house and Pringle went up to the taxi driver and asked him if he knew who the boy was that had just gotten out of the cab. When the driver said, "No," Pringle was quoted as saying "He is the fellow I have been looking for." Pringle, who had not heard of the bank robbery in Eudora and was intending to question Bullock about the store robbery, headed for the back door. Someone was heard to yell, "Run! Run!" Bullock started for the back door, saw Pringle, and ran back through the house towards the front. Pringle saw this and ran around to the front of the house. When Pringle rounded the corner, Bullock was on the front porch. He immediately fired a revolver at Pringle, hitting him in the neck, the bullet lodging near the spinal cord. He collapsed, being seriously wounded. Horrified neighbors ran over to the fallen officer. The taxi driver reported that Bullock stood and looked at the fallen man for nearly half a minute, and then walked over to the cab. He tossed the driver a dollar, saying, "Here's your pay cabby," and made his unhurried get-away through a nearby pasture. Officer Pringle was conscious and able to talk. He said, "I thought he was just a kid. He took a drop on me and fired before I knew what he was about. He was just a kid." Officer Pringle was eventually taken by ambulance in grave condition to the hospital that Dr. Charles J. Simmons ran at 805 Ohio Street in Lawrence. Police officers notified farmers in the area to be on the lookout for Bullock, to watch every road, and to shoot him on sight. The next day, October 12th, a man who said he knew Bullock from having worked with him, told police that he saw the fugitive come out of a cornfield and walk in the direction of the Santa Fe Railroad line that went to Ottawa, Kansas. On the morning of the

13th, a report came in that Willie McKay, a 15 year-old friend of Bullock's, had been seen carrying food into a cornfield. When questioned, McKay denied having done so. Numerous other possible sightings were reported. City Marshall Sidney E. Herd, Deputy Woods, and other officers were kept busy checking leads that went nowhere. There was speculation that Bullock saw himself as a desperado, and had been influenced to commit these crimes by reading too many "Diamond Dick" stories in dime novels, the popular genre that many at the time believed to be destroying the morals of the county's youth. It was discovered that Bullock had previously been arrested in Kansas City for a petty crime, and had walked away from his parole. People began talking about the possibility that Bullock had been responsible for the burglary of Weavers Dry Goods Store in Lawrence a month earlier. The October 14, 1909, issue of the *Lawrence Daily World* reported that a young man fitting the description of Earl Bullock had been arrested in Guthrie, Oklahoma, and that officers there believed they had the man being sought in Douglas County. Douglas County Sheriff William H. Banning was reported as awaiting more word with great interest, but did not think that they had the right man. News reported in the newspaper the following day confirmed the Sheriff's doubts, as the man arrested in Oklahoma was determined not to be Bullock. More reports of local sightings had come in, including one that morning. Bullocks' father visited Lawrence, and was "completely broken up over his son's deeds and said he could give no explanation whatever as to what sent him to the bad." After learning the details of the crimes, he left town brokenhearted and returned to Sedalia, Missouri, where he had work picking apples. Bullock's mother was reported to have trouble thinking that her boy was a murderer. She blamed his actions on a local girl named Amie Blankenship, who when questioned, admitted that she and Bullock had been sweethearts, and that she had turned down a marriage proposal from him in mid July, but that there was nothing in their relationship that would excite him to life as a bandit. Young men who had known him when he was a boy reported that Bullock would take an air rifle and shoot neighborhood children with it. Lawrence Mayor Sam Bishop visited Officer Pringle in the hospital, and found him worried about the future of his family. The Mayor promised that the City would see to it that his wife and children were "properly taken care of." On October 16th, Bullock became a murderer when Officer Pringle died of his wounds. The City Council voted to give the officer's family his full salary for the month, and to pay all the hospital and funeral expenses. A collection was being taken up in the community for the Pringle family. The newspaper reported that rewards were being set up for the capture of the fugitive. Officer Pringle was buried on Sunday the 17th. On the 18th, a corn knife was found in a field east of town bearing the inscription, "I am the desperado--Ross Bullock." By the 19th, a reward of \$650 was being offered for the capture of the fugitive. The month of October ended with Bullock still at large and authorities having no solid information on his whereabouts. (From: Lawrence Daily World, v. 18, issue 200 (October 12, 1909), issue 201 (October 13, 1909), issue 202 (October 14, 1909), issue 203 (October 15, 1909), issue 204 (October 16, 1909), issue 205 (October 18, 1909), and issue 206 (October 19, 1909), Lawrence, Kansas; [Lawrence Historic Resources Commission, Item No. 3: L-08-01-07, Staff Report](#); and, the United States Census, 1910, Douglas County, Kansas. Published 10/10.) [Back to top of page](#)

November 13, 1909 - Earl Ross Bullock's crime spree comes to an end - On October 11, 1909, Earl Ross Bullock robbed the State Bank of Eudora in Eudora, Kansas, of around \$800, and later that evening shot and mortally wounded Lawrence, Kansas, Police officer T. Wilson Pringle, who was trying to apprehend Bullock for an earlier burglary of a second-hand store and pawnshop in Lawrence. At the time, authorities had no solid evidence on the activities and whereabouts of the bank robber and murderer, but were later able to piece together his subsequent movements. Bullock made his escape from the area, presumably by train, and began going by the alias of James Donaldson. He eventually worked his way down to Jacksonville, Florida. He was spending the loot he had stolen from the bank in Eudora, making a number of purchases including two expensive diamond rings. He was also making arrangements to buy a boat. Somewhere around November 1, 1909, he met and befriended a 14-year-old native of Jacksonville named William

"Willie" McKay. Bullock, himself being barely 18 years of age, told Willie McKay that he was from New York and that his parents were both dead, all of which was untrue. He said that they had both died of grief because he had robbed a dry goods store when he was a little boy, which was also untrue, his crimes being much more recent than that. The two began to hang out with each other, on one occasion taking a boat up a river to an orange grove where Bullock practiced shooting pistols. One day, Bullock told McKay that his name was not really Donaldson, but that he would not tell the boy his real name because there was a reward out for him. He told McKay that he knew of a place near Kansas City where they could get some easy money, a bank where only one man worked. He asked McKay to go along with him, offering to pay his fare. Although Bullock refused to tell McKay exactly where they would be going, the boy agreed to accompany the fugitive. They first made their way to Montgomery, Alabama. On November 8, they took a train from Montgomery to Memphis, Tennessee, where Bullock pawned one of his rings. The next day, November 9, Willie McKay's 15th birthday, they left Memphis on a train bound for Kansas City, arriving there the morning of Wednesday, November 10. They spent the day hanging around the freight yards and then caught the evening Union Pacific train approximately twelve miles southwest to Bonner Spring, Kansas, where they spent the night in a hotel. They got up the next morning and walked to Linwood, Kansas, nine miles southwest of Bonner Springs, arriving there around 5:00pm. They got something to eat, and then took the evening train to Lenape, Kansas, about eight miles east of Linwood, again spending the night in a hotel. They got up the morning of Thursday, November 12, and took the train back to Linwood, arriving around 1:00pm. They ate, and then began walking towards Eudora, covering the seven-mile distance in around two hours. They arrived in Eudora around 3:00pm, and immediately went to the State Bank of Eudora, the same bank Bullock had robbed just a month earlier on October 11. McKay was carrying two .38 caliber revolvers. Bullock was armed with two more revolvers. When the two young men entered the bank, there were three men inside, Edward A. Wilson, the bank's cashier who, along with Deputy Sheriff E.F. Woods, had been locked in the vault during the previous month's robbery, Harry Wilson, the cashier's sixteen year-old son, who was working the teller window, and Fred Starr, a twenty year-old assistant cashier at the Kaw Valley State Bank in Eudora, who was there to clear the day's transactions between the two banks. As he entered the bank, Bullock shouted, "Throw up your hands!" The two Wilsons did not react. They thought it was just another jester making what by that time had become a tired old joke. Edward Wilson said later that "I had got so sick of having the old gag sprang[sp] on me after the robbery that I paid no attention to it." Starr saw Bullock and McKay's guns, and put his hands up immediately saying, "Why certainly I will." Without provocation, Bullock fired one of the revolvers, hitting Starr in the jaw. The wounded man staggered over against a wall and then fell to the floor, bleeding profusely. When the shot rang out, the two Wilsons realized that this was no joke and both raised their hands. McKay was shocked. They had earlier discussed just forcing whoever was in the bank into the vault, locking them in as Bullock had done the previous month, taking the money, and escaping. There was a passenger train due in town shortly, and they were to get on it and leave town before the alarm could be sounded. Bullock's shooting of Starr changed all that. After firing the shot, Bullock told McKay to guard the front door and to shoot anyone who tried to come in. With McKay standing by the front door, Bullock went into the open vault. He came out after several minutes and went over to the cash drawers, emptying their contents into his coat pockets. After he had cleaned out the drawers, he asked Harry Wilson where the back door key was. Wilson told him that the door was unlocked. Bullock opened the back door and broke through the screen door to get outside. McKay followed as Bullock ran towards the Wakarusa River at the north end of town. Avoiding the bridge, they initially tried to swim the river, but were unable to make it across. They fled on foot southwest from town along the south side of the river. As soon as the two bandits left through the bank's back door, Harry Wilson ran out the front and into Charles Pilla's dry goods store next door. In addition to being the owner of the store, Pilla was the president of the bank that had just been robbed for the second time in a month. Harry dashed in the front door, shouting "The bank's

robbed! Ross Bullock has shot Fred Starr!" There was a sale going on and the store was crowded, and after a momentary pause, all the men in the store grabbed shotguns, revolvers, and whatever other weapons they could lay their hands on and went off in pursuit of the fleeing bandits. The two telephone companies in town connected to every phone on their lines asking townspeople and farmers to arm themselves and help hunt down the bank robbers. Men poured out of town to help in the pursuit. About three-quarters of a mile from town on the farm of Al Smith, a band of about ten or twelve men caught up to the fugitives. The men began shooting at Bullock and McKay. McKay was terrified and told Bullock that he was going to surrender. Bullock said "Give me the guns and stand right there." He took the two revolvers that McKay had been carrying and ran off, saying "I won't give up, I'll die first," as he left. McKay put his hands high up over his head and shouted "I surrender, I surrender, don't shoot, please don't shoot." The pursuing men took McKay into custody and continued after Bullock. Bullock turned and fired six shots at Clyde Hughes, who was at the head of the men, but missed every time. The gunfire momentarily stopped the pursuit, and Bullock ran on. He entered a small patch of woods near the river and the pursuers lost sight of him. Bullock saw John Miller on the opposite bank and fired twice at him. Miller had crossed the river and was trying to get downstream and head Bullock off when he was seen and fired upon by the gunman. Bullock's aim was poor, and Miller managed to dodge behind a tree and was not hit. Miller said that Bullock was standing beside a large log when the fugitive fired at him, and that after firing the two shots, Bullock had stepped behind the log. Miller heard a single shot. He thought that Bullock had shot himself. A minute later, the men pursuing the young desperado came up and discovered that Miller had guessed right. Bullock was lying on the ground in his shirtsleeves, breathing heavily. The whole right side of his head was blackened with gunpowder, and he was bleeding from a bullet hole in his right temple. His coat was found about 150 yards from where he lay, the pockets stuffed with money taken in the bank robbery that afternoon. One man was left to guard Bullock while the rest of the men dealt with McKay. The boy was extremely frightened as the angry men took him back to Eudora. The town was in an uproar, full of more angry armed men. At least forty farmers had ridden into town on horseback carrying their shotguns, adding their numbers to the aroused citizens of Eudora. As McKay was brought into town, someone shouted, "Lynch him, string him up, string him up!" A general cry to hang McKay went up, and the crowd moved towards the frightened boy. Three men, Steve Joy, Dug Smith, and Frank Williams took McKay and ran with him out of town on the road to Lawrence, seven long miles away. The angry crowd followed, but at some distance behind. As the four ran along the road, they saw a large car approaching them at a high rate of speed. The men blocked the road, waving and yelling for the car to stop. As it slowed to a stop, McKay broke away from his guards and ran up to the car, pleading "Let me in, for God's sake take me somewhere. They are going to kill me. They are going to lynch me. For God's sake do something." As it turned out, the car was coming from Lawrence where it had been hired by the *Lawrence Daily World* to get its reporters to Eudora to cover the bank robbery. When the car stopped, Steve Joy pulled the reporters out of the car bodily and threw McKay into the back seat. Joy and the other two guards jumped in next to him. The driver backed around and sped off toward Lawrence and safety. The pursuing crowd, cheated of its chance for vengeance on McKay, turned its attention to Bullock, who had been taken to the Eudora City Hall. He was lying on a cot in the building that was eventually surrounded by hundreds of people, eager to be allowed in to see the dying bandit. As the authorities were waiting for an ambulance to arrive from Lawrence to take Bullock back to the larger town, a line of people moved through the building to view the injured man. He was finally put in an open wagon, covered by an oil cloth, and driven in the pouring rain to the office of Doctor Edmund R. Keith in Lawrence, arriving about 10:00pm. Despite the rain, there was a large crowd surrounding the building where Doctor Keith's office was located. The *Lawrence Daily World* reported that while Bullock lay dying, a small boy was standing outside the newspaper's office, denying that he was in jail or had taken part in the Eudora bank robbery. In a strange coincidence, his name was also Willie McKay. Known as "Pug," he had been a friend of Bullock's before the first bank robbery, and

had at one time been under suspicion of having brought food to the fugitive in the days following the shooting of Officer Pringle. At 2:25am on November 13, 1909, without ever gaining consciousness, Earl Ross Bullock was pronounced dead, thus ending his short but violent career as a desperado. Bullock's body was taken on the evening Santa Fe train to Kansas City, where there was a secret funeral and interment at a cemetery there. As his mother had done after the robbery and murder the month before, Bullock's father blamed his son's descent into crime on Amie Blankenship, a local woman. He said all the trouble had been caused by her having broken off her engagement to his son earlier in the year, and on her not having returned the deep love that his son had felt for her. It was reported that after Bullock had disappeared in October, Ms. Blankenship feared that Bullock would come back and harm her, and so had been working with local attorney Edward Riling and Lawrence Mayor Sam Bishop, trying to get information from Bullock's family on the fugitive's whereabouts. Riling had dictated a series of letters that Ms. Blankenship had sent to Bullock's mother and sister, saying that she still loved him and intimating that she wanted to know where he was. Several examples were published in the *Lawrence Daily World*. This subterfuge failed to gain any information on Bullock or his movements. On November 16, 1909, McKay was arraigned in Juvenile Court before Judge Hugh Means on charges of bank robbery and intent to kill. As reported in the November 17, 1909, issue of the *Lawrence Daily Journal*, Fred Starr sent word to Judge Means that McKay was obviously terrified during the robbery, and that he did not think that the boy would have shot him. He wanted leniency for McKay. On November 23, 1909, Starr was discharged from the hospital with the bullet from Bullock's revolver still lodged in his jaw. Doctors were not going to try to remove it unless it caused him trouble. On November 27, 1909, Judge Means paroled Willie McKay. He had received a number of favorable letters from people who knew the boy and the boy's family. The Judge assigned Marshall Gorrill, the boy's attorney, the responsibility for finding McKay a suitable place to work in good surroundings. Until such work was found, McKay would be free from confinement. If no suitable work were found, McKay would be sent to the State Industrial School for Boys in Topeka. The bank in Eudora eventually got back \$579.65 of the money stolen by Bullock and McKay on November 12, only twenty cents shy of what the two had made off with. The men who had tracked down Bullock along the Wakarusa River were to be given the \$650 reward that had been offered in response to the robbery and murder he had committed in October. (From: Lawrence Daily Journal, v. 53: issue 274 (November 16, 1909), and issue 275 (November 17, 1909), Lawrence, Kansas; Lawrence Daily World, v. 18: issue 22[8] (November 13, 1909), Special issue (November 13, 1909), issue 229 (November 15, 1909), issue 230 (November 16, 1909), issue 236 (November 23, 1909), and issue 240 (November 27, 1909), Lawrence, Kansas; and, the United States Census, 1910, Douglas County, Kansas. Published 11/10.)