**Babe Cross Biography**

Despite his angelic name, Babe Cross was described by the local newspaper as a “notorious criminal” and by law enforcement officers as “one of the worst characters they have had to deal with for some time.”

Babe Cross was born in Tennessee to Henry Cross and his wife Lula Haskins Cross in 1873.  Descriptions of him are limited to stating that he was a large man.  The family probably lived near the state line and not far from Guthrie, Kentucky because he seems to have been very familiar with that area.  He was also very familiar with Russellville, Kentucky because his first mention in the local newspaper is on July 4, 1893 when a pistol was found that Babe had allegedly stolen in Russellville.  Babe next appears in the paper on 29 March 1894 when he is brought back from Evansville, KY where he was arrested after escaping from the Montgomery County Chain Gang.  The article does not say why he was on the chain gang, but the possibility exists that it was due to the pistol that was found the previous year.

August 1895 found Babe charged with robbery.  He and an accomplice held up Andrew Pollard and stole five dollars from him and beat him up.  They took his money in Tennessee but beat him up in Kentucky.  For this crime, Babe was sentenced to the rock pile in Guthrie for ten days.  This is the only incident on record that Babe actually hurt someone.

Babe was brought up on charges of stealing a saddle on August 10, 1896 but was released due to insufficient evidence.  This is the only dismissal of charges that Babe encountered.  He was unlucky enough in most of his career to be caught perpetrating the crime or with the stolen items in his possession.

Along with larceny, Babe seems to have a talent for escaping.  On November 9, 1896, Babe escaped from jail where he was being held on a larceny charge.  Six days later, he was arrested and charged with horse theft.  He was found in possession of John Meek’s horse which had been stolen from his home in South Clarksville.  He also had a saddle with a Texas tree and a lap robe which authorities believed were also stolen.  On December 16, 1896, Babe was convicted of horse stealing and sentenced to three years in the state penitentiary.  He was delivered to the Nashville Penitentiary on March 21, 1897.

He was back in Clarksville on May 21, 1900 when he was arrested on suspicion of stealing an overcoat.  He was out on the street late at night when two constables noticed he was carrying an overcoat that was much too small for him.  When questioned, Babe did not give them satisfactory answers so they arrested him on suspicion.  The overcoat actually belonged to Dr. Hughes.  He was sentenced to three years in the penitentiary.  He must have made bail or probation, because on September 6, 1900 Babe was convicted of house breaking and larceny.  He was again sentenced to three years in the penitentiary.  The next month the authorities attempted to transport him to the Nashville Penitentiary but on October 3, 1900, Babe had other ideas.  He was handcuffed to another prisoner but somehow managed to obtain a handcuff key.  When the train neared Edgefield Junction, Babe jumped from the fast-moving train.  A reward of twenty-five dollars was offered for him, but Babe managed to elude law enforcement for almost a year.

The authorities caught up with him on August 13, 1901 when he was arrested in Bowling Green for horse theft.  He gave a false name, Ed Cole, but they discovered his true identity.  This time he was caught with two stolen horses, and when tried on September 10th, he was given 8 years for one theft and 4 years for the other.  He would serve these twelve years after he completed his original Tennessee three-year term.  He completed his Tennessee time and returned to Kentucky to serve his twelve-year sentence on March 15, 1904.

Babe must have been released after five years because on November 16, 1909 in Bowling Green, he was caught stealing, depending on the newspaper, either a turkey or two chickens.  He was caught in the act by the farmer who owned the fowl and held for the authorities.  Based on his previous felony convictions, he was sentenced to sixteen years in the penitentiary.  The 1910 Kentucky census shows Babe in the Kentucky State Prison in Eddyville working as a collar maker.  In April 1911, Babe wrote to the Governor of Kentucky requesting a pardon based on the excessively long sentence for the crime of stealing two frying size chickens.  The request was denied due to “The character of the man does not entitle him to a pardon.”

Four years later on May 14, 1914, Babe was found in Clarksville sleeping on the seat of a wagon in front of Lassiter’s Livery Stable.  The wagon was full of liquor and a loaded pistol was found on the seat beside the sleeping man.

The next month, Babe was indited for stealing a hog from Lewis Johnson but fled to Kentucky before the hearing.  In 1917, Babe was sentenced to three years in the penitentiary for the theft of a horse blanket in Elkton, Kentucky.  The 1920 census lists him among the prisoners at the Kentucky State Prison in Eddyville working again as a collar maker.  This was his last stint in prison.  He was forty-four years old.

Babe was granted parole on July 30, 1920 and went to work for W. J. Manning whose home was on Searcy Ferry Road.  He was working as a butler for Mr. Manning, and Babe’s mother lived not far away.  On August 12, 1920, Babe was allowed to borrow a horse and buggy to visit his mother.  A pole carrying electricity had fallen and the wire was across the road a short distance above the surface of the road.  Babe did not know the wire was live and was electrocuted when he grabbed it to push it out of the way.

Babe Cross was buried in Mt. Olive Cemetery by Nace Dixon on August 13, 1920.  He has no head stone.  A policeman once said of him “he was raised on the chain gang.  Mr. Manning said he was a good house servant and a very good harness maker.  A freak accident deprived Babe Cross of rewriting the narrative of his life.

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