

Denton County's Big Mob Hit

by Jim Morriss

If you asked some typical citizens of this area of south Denton County to describe the kind of place where they live, you'd probably hear that it is a peaceful, serene, bucolic place where nothing newsworthy ever happens. For the most part, that would be right but there are a few forgotten moments in our history when our area was the focus of the country's attention. We do not think of north central Texas as an epicenter of organized crime violence but if you look back sixty years or so, there was once a time when that was exactly what we were.

In order to tell the story of this less than idyllic part of our history, we have to go back to the first decade of the 20th century when two boys were born to different Texas families: **Lester Benny Binion** was born in 1904 in Pilot Grove, a little town close to Sherman, Texas. His father was a merchant in a "General Store," but later made a living by trading horses. Benny had little formal education and as a young man sold moonshine and gambled. **Herbert B. Noble** was born five years later in Gordon, Texas. Herbert's father worked in construction and at one time assembled iron bridges. The family moved east to Cement City. A few years later, when these Texas boys grew up they both migrated to the bustling city of Dallas.

In the 1930's America was experiencing what is often called "The Great Depression." However, things were not nearly so bleak in Dallas. The discovery of oil in East Texas made Dallas a "Boom Town." Oil money flowed into the city and into the pockets of the many individuals who worked in this new American industry. There was a general attitude, among the early Dallas Oilmen of free swinging, anything goes, risk taking. These were natural-born gamblers with money to spend. It represented great possibilities for clever opportunists like Herbert Noble and Benny Binion.

Binion and Noble must have had an abundance of "street smarts" as well as some gambling instincts of their own. They also had great leadership skills. As the 30's progressed into the 40's the two steadily increased their respective enterprises into larger and larger businesses.

They were professional gamblers and each was doing quite well in Dallas. Binion married a girl named Teddy Jane Henderson and the two started raising a family. Noble married Mildred Alice Bowens. The Nobles bought a house in Oak Cliff and they had a daughter. Under other conditions, the two might have become close friends but they were competitors, on a collision course, in a very rough environment.

In addition to being gamblers, these were two smart family men. They sought ways to invest their money into legitimate properties that could be passed on to their wives and children. Binion established contacts and started investing in the State of Nevada where gambling was legal. It would seem that Herbert Noble must have been privy to some sources of inside information. He got into the buying and selling of surplus airplane parts and started plans to buy and run his own airport in Fort Worth. In 1941 he bought a 208 acre farm in south Denton County that would one day be situated on the north shoreline of Grapevine Lake. This was long before there was any announcement that the Army was considering a dam on Denton Creek to create the lake but Noble "doubled down" on his investment and bought an adjoining 195 acre tract three years later.

No one can be certain about the details of the events that disrupted our serene community because the men, who operated gambling businesses, and their customers, were incredibly closed mouthed about everything. They were participating in all kinds of illegal activities but awareness of them was not likely to see the light of day. It was like magic; any insider who was willing to talk about it would disappear. Much of what we do know comes from public records that are available in the Emily Fowler Library where microfilmed newspaper accounts can be researched. In 1950 and 51 there was a special senate investigation on organized crime. The senate committee became known as the "Kefauver Hearings." Some of our knowledge of these events came to light because of the pressure that was exerted by the senate committee to extract the truth from high profile organized crime figures.

There were obviously more than just Mr. Binion and Mr. Noble vying for power in Dallas crime circles. But, at the end of World War II many of the shadier characters in Dallas seemed to be aligning with one or the other of these guys. It was said in the Kefauver Hearings that Binion became the top dog in Dallas and started to extort a 25% pay-off from all of the others. For a time, the demand for this protection money was accepted. Eventually he tried to increase his cut to 40% and Noble loudly refused. One thing that we can know for sure is that these two guys didn't like each other.

We do not know who else may have disliked him but on the evening of January 15, 1946, Mr. Noble was shot at, while in his car, by two assailants. After a wild chase he was shot in the back. It was a serious wound but Noble was taken to a hospital in Dallas and made a full recovery. On May 20, 1948 Noble was ambushed by a man hiding near a cattle guard at his Denton County ranch. The shotgun blast shredded his right arm but once again, Noble recovered. Then on Valentine's Day 1949 a bomb was found rigged to the starter of Noble's car. On September 8, 1949 Noble got into a wild car chase with two "unknown assailants." They tore up the back roads of Denton County, but this time Noble was armed and he shot back. The assailants' car overturned and the two came out shooting. Noble was hit in the leg and the two attackers got away on foot.

This was beginning to look like a cartoon fight between the Roadrunner and Wylie Coyote but it was a lot more serious than that. Real bullets and lethal high powered explosives were being used. Dallas Police and reporters began to refer to Herbert Noble as "The Cat" because he seemed to have at least nine lives. But, Noble's luck could not hold out forever. On November 29, 1949, Noble's wife, Mildred, got into his high powered Mercury which was parked at the curb of their home in Oak Cliff. She was about to drive to their ranch in south Denton County, but when she hit the starter; a crushing explosion blew the car to bits. It was an ugly and messy murder; small pieces of Noble's car and his wife's body were thrown as far as 100 feet away. The Dallas Police and Texas Rangers investigated and determined that the explosive

used was nitroglycerine. Of course no one they asked had any idea who might have blown up Mrs. Noble, but it was well known that the guy in Big D, who knew about and used nitro, was Hollis Delois Green.

Lois Green grew up in East Texas. Like Noble and Binion, Green gravitated to the City of Dallas but he lacked some of their refinements. It was said that he was brutish and just barely literate, but he had a small cluster of associates who did know how to blow stuff up. Whether Green was responsible for Mildred Noble's death was never determined. As he was leaving a Christmas Eve party, at a Dallas night club, someone ended Lois Green's life with a close up shot gun blast to the chest.

Just a week later, on New Years Eve, Herbert Noble was ambushed again. He was brought to a Dallas hospital with a bullet lodged in his left elbow. A month later on February 6, 1950, shots were fired through the window of his hospital room but Noble was not hit. Later in June of 1950 Noble's car was fired on as he neared his ranch in Denton County. This time the special armor that he had installed in his new Ford saved him from harm. Later in February of 1951 mechanics noticed that someone had placed a bomb in Noble's private airplane. It was harmlessly defused, but on March 3 when Noble got in his plane, a bomb went off. Noble was not harmed because he was protected by the engine and firewall of the aircraft. One night Noble encountered Jack Todd, who was an associate of the late Lois Green and known to also be proficient in the use of explosives. The two got into a fist fight which was eventually broken up by sheriff's deputies. Noble lost a chunk of his ear which was nearly bitten off. Whatever damage was sustained by Todd was not reported.

In all, the authorities had counted at least eleven times that someone tried to kill "The Cat." No one can be sure how many attempts were made that were never noted. The Denton Sheriff, Ed Davis, must have been overwhelmed by all of the activity on the north bank of Denton Creek. It was obvious that the attempts on the life of Herbert Noble were not likely to end. Noble had rigged up flood lights all around his house. He

had several guard dogs and noisy peacocks and he never went out without his carbine and large bore hand gun. He also had several small cabins behind his house in which he often hosted some of his old acquaintances from Dallas to discourage trespassing. Furthermore, Noble took steps to make it difficult for anyone to plant anything in his car. Even so, just before noon on August 7, 1951 Mr. Noble pulled his car up to his mailbox on the dirt road that would eventually be called "Wichita Trail." He did not notice that the ground around the box had been disturbed. Neither did he see the two wires leading away from whatever was buried or the new six-volt car battery placed in the bar ditch nearby. The explosion that finally ended his life was remotely detonated by someone hiding in a nearby stand of trees. It blew a four foot deep crater into the roadbed and scattered pieces of the gambler and his car over a hundred yard diameter circle. Fred Turner, a local resident, can still recall that he and his father heard the explosion from nearly a mile away. They were among the very first to arrive and view the gruesome scene.

The murder was big news in the area. The Dallas Morning News, Times Herald and the Denton Record Chronicle carried stories detailing the events in south Denton County. There was even a detailed account of it in the

August 20, 1951 issue of Time Magazine. The assassination was also discussed in the senate hearings that were televised. No one was ever arrested or tried for the murder of Herbert Noble; just as there were no trials for the murders of his wife or for Lois Green. They carted away the wrecked car, filled in the hole in the road and cleaned up the mess. Eventually the ranch was sold, the lake filled and some very nice houses were built there. Very few people are aware that there was once some violent gang activity in our area. We will never know who committed those murders or who paid them to do it. We will also never know whether Herbert Noble really did completely end all of his gambling activities after his wife's death, as he claimed. Mr. Noble was said to be very ruthless, tough and smart. No one can be sure what kind of airport or airline business he might have started or how successful it might have been. About the only tangible remnant of his brief citizenship here is Point Noble, a beautiful gated community in Flower Mound that sits on a ridge that juts down into Grapevine Lake. "Noble Way" is a street there which runs down to the lake that Herbert Noble never saw.

Jim Morriss
jmorriss@aol.com
817-491-4201



Point Noble is a gated subdivision on a part of the ranch that Herbert Noble once owned for 10 years



Noble Way is a Flower Mound road that leads to the north bank of Grapevine Lake