Young Girl Is Said to Have Stolen Horse

PARKERSBURG, W. Va., Oct. 12.—Veneida Smith, 16 year old girl, was indicted by the grand jury in session Wednesday, on a charge of stealing a horse. She was immediately arrested and is being held in the county jail. The girl is accused of taking a horse belonging to F. E. Mixer, Valley Mills, an oil operator. Mixer left his horse standing along the road and on his return from an errand found only the harness and buggy.
Posse Captures Daring Tomboy

Girl, 16, Imprisoned After Jail Break and All Night Pursuit

Parkersburg, W. Va., Oct. 13.—(By Universal Service.)—After a sensational escape from the county jail here and a wild ride on horseback, pursued by officers, Veneida Smith, age 16, alleged horse thief and holy terror tomboy, is again behind iron bars. After an all night search, the girl was found sitting in her home on the outskirts of the city today.

The girl, whose Wild West stunts and other escapades have gotten her into trouble numerous times, was arrested a week ago, accused of stealing a horse. Yesterday the grand jury indicted her on that charge.

About that time the girl, finding an iron bar in her cell, used it as a lever and sprung the bars sufficiently to permit her to slip through. She made her way into the warden's quarters and slipped out through a side door. Going to her home, she mounted one of her riding horses and sped away from town.

Neighbors who saw her fleeing notified the warden and several officers immediately gave chase in an automobile. Catching up with her about six miles from the city, they commanded her to halt.

"Go to Hell!" she shrieked as she wheeled and doubled on her tracks.

When the officers tried to pursue her further she turned into a narrow lane, where the machine could not follow. A moment later horse and rider disappeared from view over hilltop. The hills were searched for her all night.
Tomboy of 16 Starts Riot in Jail; Demands Cigars But Is Content With Chew

By Universal Service.

PARKERSBURG, W. Va., Oct. 19.—Miss Veneida Smith, 16, Parkersburg’s “Holy Terror Tomboy,” who is being held in the county jail here on a charge of horse stealing, went on a rampage in the jail and created such a disturbance that Warden Callahan was forced to place a special guard over her. He says the guard will be maintained as long as the girl remains a prisoner.

When the girl went on the rampage, she tore the padding from her cell and punched a hole in the ceiling over her cell. Her explanation of her actions was that she wanted to go home.

The girl then demanded cigars to smoke, but had to be satisfied with tobacco to chew, as the warden feared that if allowed to smoke, she would set the building on fire. She also threatened to commit suicide, it is said.

The girl made a sensational escape from the jail last week. Finding an iron bar she bent the cell bars sufficiently to permit her to squeeze through. She then made her way down the corridor and slipped out a side door of the warden’s office. Going to her home, she mounted a horse and galloped away. Persons who saw her fleing on the horse notified the warden and several officers gave chase in an automobile. She was captured the next day.
“Holy Terror” Girl Of 16 Again Escapes From Jail

Veneida Smith, Parkersburg, Saws Bars Of Cell And Slides To Ground.

Parkersburg, W. Va., Nov. 9.—Veneida Smith, Parkersburg’s 16-year-old “Holy Terror. Tomboy” and alleged horse thief, who several weeks ago made a sensational escape from the Wood County Jail, has again left the bastile behind her. By this time she is safely hidden in the mountain fastnesses somewhere about Cairo, it is believed.

Removing a thin flat blade of steel from the sole of her shoe the girl improvised a crude saw with which she cut through the bars of the window in her cell. With bed coverings, fashioned into a ropé, she lowered herself to a veranda and then slid down a wooden pillar to the ground.

Going to her home on the outskirts of the city she obtained her favorite pony and galloped away. At last reports she was seen hurrying into the mountain recesses near Cairo. Leaving the jail Miss Smith carried her violin, which she plays brilliantly, although it is said she has never taken a lesson.

additional: “Veneida Smith ... several weeks ago escaped from the Wood County Jail here, only to be recaptured the following day after officers in an automobile had pursued her on horseback, miles over mountainous roads...”
HOLY TERROR TOMBOY
AGAIN FLEES PRISON

Veneida Smith Cuts Bars of
Cell in Jail at Parkersburg.

[SPECIAL TELEGRAM TO THE GAZETTE TIMES]

PARKERSBURG, W. VA., Nov. 9.
—Veneida Smith, Parkersburg's 16-year-old 'holy terror, tomboy' and alleged horse thief, who several weeks ago escaped from the Wood County Jail here, only to be recaptured the following day, after officers in an automobile had pursued her, on horseback, miles over mountainous roads, broke from jail again last night.

Removing a thin blade of steel from the sole of her shoe, the girl fashioned a crude saw and severed the window bars in her cell, which was on the third floor of the jail. With blankets and quilts from her bed, the girl made a rope which reached nearly from her cell window to a veranda roof many feet below. She then slid down the rope and dropped the remainder of the distance to the veranda roof.

Clear of the jail, the girl made her way to her home on the outskirts of Parkersburg and mounting her favorite pony galloped toward the mountains.
Girl Horse Thief Makes Second Prison Escape

(By Associated Press)

Parkerburg, W. Va., Nov. 9.—A sheriff's posse was searching tonight for a 16-year-old girl, indicted for horse stealing, who has made her second escape from the county jail.

The fugitive is Veneida Smith. Since she first came into conflict with the authorities, because of incorrigibility, the girl has defied the efforts of the jailers and industrial school guards to keep her in custody.

After having slipped away from two industrial schools she was arrested several weeks ago on a charge of unhitching a horse from a wagon at Valley Mills and riding away. She promptly pried the cell bars loose with an iron slat and escaped to Ohio on a pony. She was arrested when she returned to the home of a relative.

Today jail deputies noticed a rope of bed clothes hanging from her cell on the third story. The girl had obtained a saw and cut the bars.
'HOLY TERROR TOMBOY' ESCAPES


By International News Service.

PARKERSBURG, W. Va., Nov. 10.—Veneida Smith, 16, Parkersburg's "holy terror tomboy" and alleged horse thief, who several weeks ago made a sensational escape from the Wood County Jail here only to be recaptured the following day after officers in an automobile had pursued her many miles, is gone again. She is "somewhere in West Virginia." The girl sawed the bars of her window cell on the third floor of the jail. She tied blankets and quilts together and slid down the improvised rope. To the veranda roof and jumped the remaining 12 feet. The exact time of her departure is unknown but it was during the night or early today.

After leaving the jail, the girl hustled to her home on the outskirts of the city, quickly saddled her favorite pony and then went lickety split toward the mountains. Folks 15 miles away later reported a second edition of Paul Revere going by at great speed.

The girl was being held in the jail awaiting trial at the January term of Court on the horse stealing charge. During her stay in jail church people and social workers have tried to "reform" her but she said "the devil put me in here and he will get me out."

The girl claims to possess supernatural powers and women who visited her in jail say she gave them a demonstration of her powers. In the corner of her cell were a number of paper bags filled with air and tied. After a certain amount of "hocus pocus," the women said, the girl commanded the bags to rise from the floor and they did so and floated about the cell at her command, floating back to their corner when she commanded them to do so.

The girl is described by those who know her—and there are few hereabouts who do not know her—as being "pretty as a picture" wild as a deer, hardy as a mountain goat and as had as nails and as sassy as a minx but good natured. She is a marvel as a horseback rider. Before she ran afoul of the law she took great pleasure in stirring up this dignified old city by donning brilliant riding garb of the cowboy style and galloping about the streets, "whooping it up," a pistol stuck in the top of each riding boot or flourishing in the air in her hand.

Twice the girl has been committed to a reform school and each time she escaped and "hoboed" her way home.
AUTHORITIES WON'T HUNT GIRL AMAZON

By United Press.

Parkersburg, W. Va., Nov. 10.—Parkersburg authorities refused to pursue Venieda Smith, pretty 16-year-old girl, an alleged horse thief and jail breaker, into her mountain hiding places today.

The high sheriff and his deputies opined "there ain't no jail that'll hold her," following the last escape when she sawed the bars in her cell window with a tiny blade of steel smuggled into the jail in her shoe.
Southern Sheriff Says No Jail Can Hold Fair Tomboy of Mountains

Parkersburg authorities refused to pursue Veneida Smith, pretty 16-year-old girl, an alleged horse thief and jail breaker, into her mountain hiding places today. The sheriff and his deputies, opined “There ain’t no jail that’ll hold her,” following the last escape when she sawed the bars in her cell window with a tiny blade of steel smuggled into the jail in her shoe. Sliding to the ground on a rope made with bed clothes, the “Holy Terror Tomboy,” as she is known to authorities, evaded pursuit to outskirts of town where she secured her pony and galloped away in the direction of Cairo. Veneida is the veteran of a long string of jail breaks, according to authorities. Once she wrecked her cell with an iron bar because the sheriff refused to give her cigars to smoke. Previously she had broken out of a reform school, and numerous efforts of social workers to reform her were met with this reply: “The devil got me into it, let him get me out.” Parkersburg authorities describe the girl as “pretty as a picture, wild as a deer, hardy as a mountain goat, as hard as nails, and able to care for herself anywhere.”

Pittsburgh Daily Post
September 27, 1923

GIRL PRIMED FOR THIRD ESCAPE
PARKERSBURG, W. Va., Sept. 26.—Veneida Smith, whose two sensational escapes from the Wood county jail about a year ago, when she was held there on a charge of horse stealing, attracted attention and who was locked in the same prison a few nights ago on a disorderly conduct charge, was found to have a saw and a file concealed in her shoes today. Sheriff W. T. Cochran has sworn out a warrant charging her with breaking jail last year. She was never tried on the horse-stealing charge.

Charleston Daily Mail
October 25, 1923

VENEIDA SMITH GUILTY
PARKERSBURG, Oct. 25.—Veneida Smith, heroine of two sensational escapes from Wood county jail a year ago, in one of which she fled on horseback and outdistanced officers pursuing in an automobile, was yesterday found guilty by a jury in circuit court on a misdemeanor indictment charging unlawful escape by force, one of the few times this West Virginia statute has been enforced. She is subject to from one day to a year in jail, but has not yet been sentenced.
PARKERSBURG, W. VA., March 2.—(A. P.)—A bold attempt to escape from the county jail was made today by Veneida Smith and Roxie Starcher, who occupy the same cell, when they sawed some of the bars across one of the windows in two and were about ready to take their departure when the conditions were discovered by Turnkey Ed Callihan.
The rest of the story ...
Katie Henry (twitter - @KT_NRE) received information from a woman named Francine Thompson (twitter - @frandande) who knew Veneida and sent new information to be added to this PDF.

note: Veneida’s name is actually spelled wrong in the news articles. Her proper name is Vernieda Serenus Smith (married name - Roberts) and she was born August 20th, 1906

Francine writes:

“In the 1980’s, my husband was vice-president for Wendell’s Piano and Organs in Parkersburg, WV. An older woman lived nearby the store named Vernieda (my husband knew her last name as “Roberts”). She would often stop in with a male companion who was called “Slim.” We now believe this was her son. They would frequently come in, basically just to hang out and chat.

My husband remembers her as pretty spunky and ornery. Slim would play the piano and Vernieda did a couple of times. Vernieda was also known for riding a bicycle around town. She would tell “colorful” stories about her life, that I will not share here, but no recall of the stories back when she was age sixteen.

The stories were from when she was a young woman. It was probably not an easy life, but certainly not dull. One day my husband and his friend, were riding bikes and went by her house. She was sitting out on an upper porch. They stopped to say hello and began having a conversation, all the while she remained on the upper porch. She mentioned that she had won ribbons for “fiddle” playing and went inside to retrieve them to show my husband and his friend. She also brought out her violin and began playing several songs for them. They were completely blown away by her playing. Shocked that this woman who was probably considered quirky and possibly had been made fun of, had this talent. We wanted to do our best to establish that Vernieda Roberts was the same as the Venieda Smith (I’m sure misspellings of names in newspapers were not uncommon) mentioned in the previous news stories of the sixteen year old “wild child.”

Therefore, I have included documentation of what we found, and believe it is one in the same. Note that her birth certificate was a delayed birth certificate. This was the year (1953), that her husband had died and Vernieda’s mother was handling her affairs for insurance purposes while Vernieda was in the hospital at Spencer. I believe the “Roberts” grave is hers at Cedar Grove Cemetery, as we know she was buried there and have notified “findagrave” of this.

As I said in my previous comment on Facebook: “What a life, one that could have been so forgotten and sad, but here we are. She is living on in thought provoking conversation, where people are calling her a hero. Personally, I think anyone who overcomes great obstacles is exactly that.”

We all should remember when we walk by a homeless person, they all had/have a life and a story to tell.”
Vernieda’s “delayed” birth certificate

[Image of the birth certificate]

**Vernieda Serenus Smith**

**Date of birth** Aug. 20, 1906

**Sex** Female

**Birthplace** Parkersburg, Wood County, W. Va.

**Father** (Full name)

**Mother (Maiden name)** Ida Smith Dotson

**Birthplace** Gallian Co., Ohio.

I hereby declare upon oath that the above statements are true to the best of my knowledge and belief. (To be signed if possible by the person whose birth is to be registered.) NOTE: No changes will be made on this certificate after it has been filed except on the order of a circuit or higher court.

**Signature**

**Committee Address** 1501 Garfield Ave.

PARKERSBURG, W. VA.

**By** Deputy

**Committee** CWCC

Applicant—Do not write below this line.

**Abstract of Supporting Evidence**

1. Affidavit of Mother, Ida Smith Johnson, age 72 yrs. June 30, 1953
2. Metropolitan Life Ins. Policy #5972397, examined by August 18, 1939
4. Marriage License record, Book #22, page #313, Waitsel Co., Nov. 4, 1927

**Information Concerning Registrant as Stated in Document**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Birth Date or Age</th>
<th>Birthplace</th>
<th>Name of Father</th>
<th>Full Name of Mother</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age 13 yrs.</td>
<td></td>
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Statement of Reviewing Official

I hereby certify that I have reviewed the evidence recorded above and that the information contained therein is as noted in the preceding abstract and there was no previous registration found for this person in the Division of Vital Statistics.

**Signature**

**Date** July 16, 1953
Vernieda's marriage license
Killed In Traffic Accident

An elderly Parkersburg woman was killed yesterday in a traffic accident in the parking lot of the Salvation Army on Fifth Street, police reported.

The woman, whose name was being withheld pending notification of relatives, was apparently killed instantly when the van backed over her. Sgt. R.W. Modesitt said the 82-year-old woman was either sitting behind the van or was sitting on the vehicle's bumper and the driver, Gary C. swell of Vienna, was unable to stop when he backed out of parking space.

No charges were filed although investigation into the 4:57 p.m. accident is continuing. Modesitt said the police are looking for any witnesses. They are asking contact Sgt. McCullough or Harvey at the Parkersburg Police Department.

NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE FORECAST TO 7 PM EST 11-27-88

50, 40, 20

Police Release Dead Woman’s Name

Police released the name of a Parkersburg woman killed Saturday when a van she was leaning on in the Salvation Army lot backed over her.

Police said Verneda Sernus Roberts, 82, 1501 Garfield Ave. was apparently leaning against a van driven by Dean Creswell, 32, Vienna, in the lot at Fifth Street. Creswell did not see the woman and began backing the van but stopped when he heard screams. However, Mrs. Roberts died at the scene, police said.
Vernieda S. Roberts

Vernieda Serenus Roberts, 82, of 1501 Garfield Ave., Parkersburg, died Saturday in Camden-Clark Memorial Hospital following a car-pedestrian accident in the Salvation Army Thrift Store parking lot. She was born in Parkersburg, a daughter of the late Herman Joseph and Ida Mae Johnson Saunders. She is survived by one son, Eugene Roberts of Parkersburg. She was preceded in death by her husband, James R. Roberts, in 1953; and one daughter.

Services will be 11 a.m. Thursday at the Franklin Funeral Chapel with the Rev. Connie Dickens officiating. Burial will be in Cedar Grove Cemetery.

Friends may call at the funeral home after 4 p.m. today.

Vernieda’s gravesite and that of her son.