

Willie Sutton



Willie Sutton was a bank robber, and a darned good one. Over the course of a career that spanned from the late 1920s until 1952, he robbed nearly a hundred banks. Oh sure, he was arrested every so often and spent more than half his adult life in prison. But he was also amazingly adept at escaping incarceration. The FBI nicknamed him “The Actor” because of his prodigious talent for impersonating, among others, a prison masseuse, an electric chair repairman, the electric chair itself, even the singing warden of Sing Sing Prison who appeared on the Tommy Dorsey Orchestra radio show in 1939. Each “role” afforded him instant – albeit temporary – freedom. Although many critics rate his best disguise as a link in an immense charm bracelet while a member of a Florida chain gang, Sutton himself preferred his breakout from the Bung Hollow, West Virginia County Jail. Commandeering the sheriff’s zebra, he blended in perfectly with the prison wall. Unfortunately, police presence was so great that he was unable to move from his camouflaged spot. Finally, the zebra sneezed, and an alert on-the-scene reporter spotted the nasaline spew as it seemingly materialized out of thin air. Closer scrutiny by the newsman led to Sutton’s recapture. But, while he got an exclusive story of the arrest, the reporter also contracted *zebrontitis*, a virulent respiratory disease of striped mammals that rendered him insensate for ten years. Served him right!