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# TRUE WEST

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THE TRAVELING WAKE OF

# Billy The Kid

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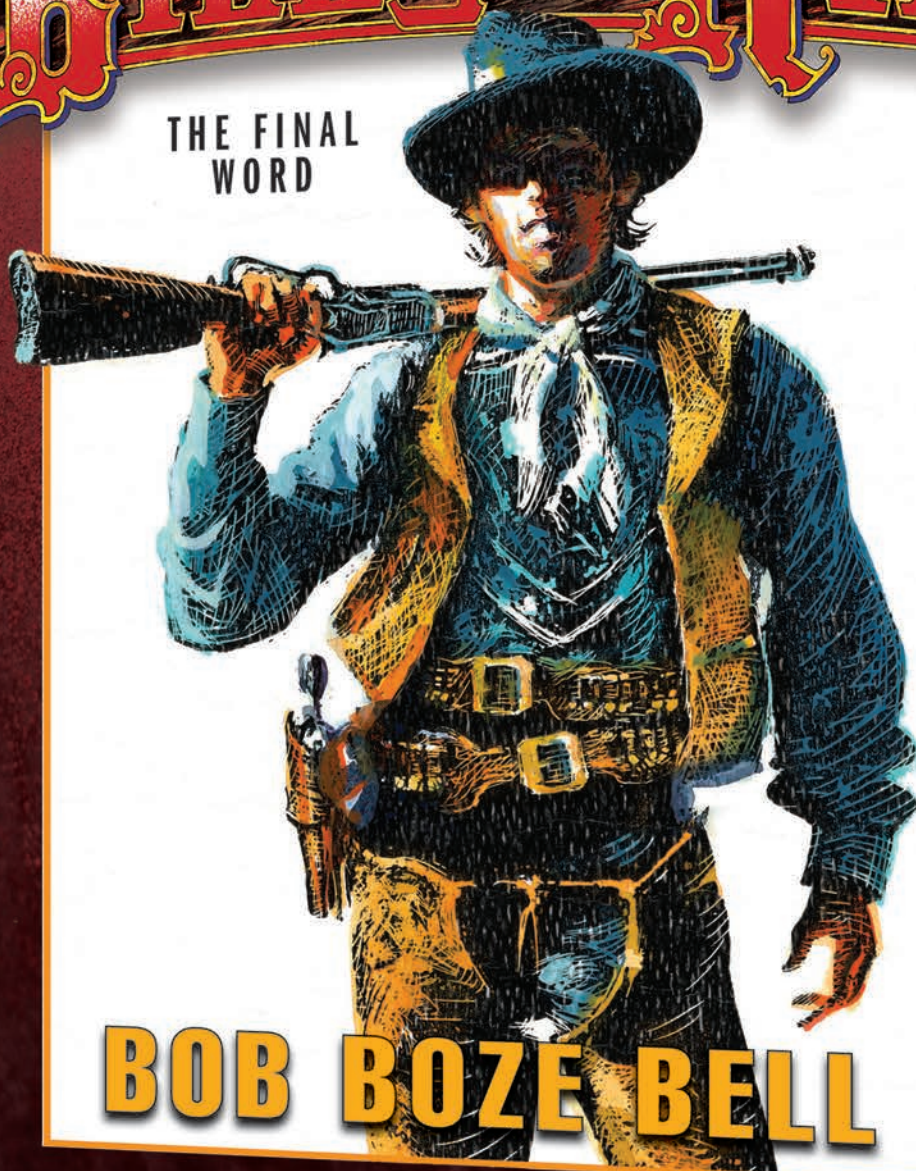
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THE FINAL  
WORD



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## THE GOLDEN SPIKE CEREMONY AT PROMONTORY SUMMIT, UTAH TERRITORY

Union Pacific Railroad photographer Andrew J. Russell took a series of photographs, including this image of the mixed crowd of railroad dignitaries, engineers, workers and families gathered between the Central Pacific and Union Pacific locomotives just before the rail workers' champagne toast, laying of the last rail and the hammering of the Golden Spike.

Courtesy Oakland Museum of California







True West captures the spirit of the West with authenticity, personality and humor by providing a necessary link from our history to our present.

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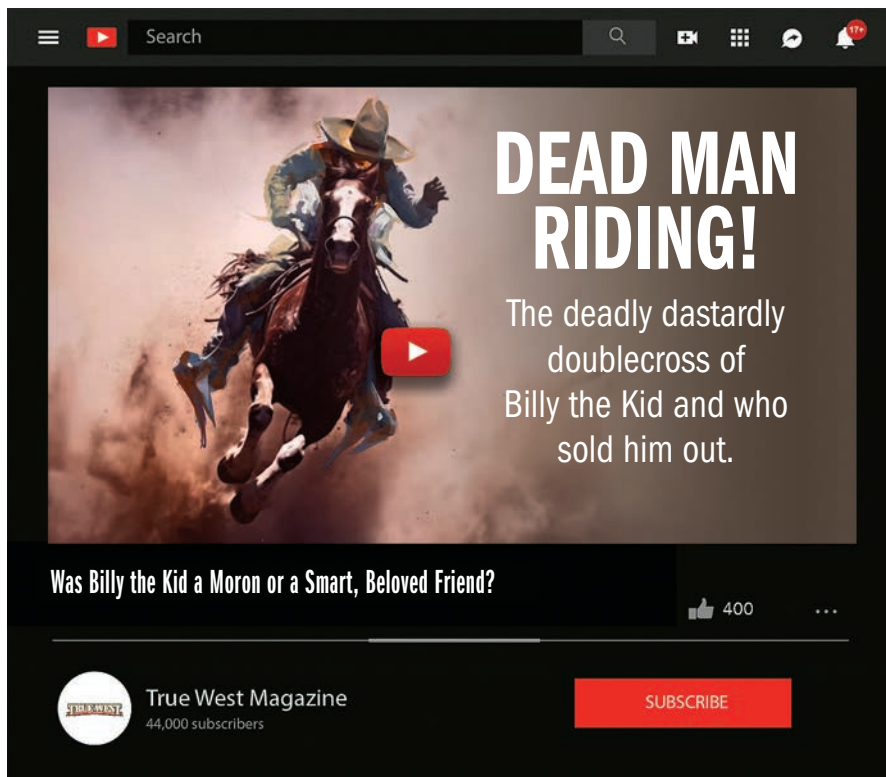
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20 THE RESURRECTION OF BILLY THE KID

Denied for years, Buckeye Blake’s vision to properly honor Billy the Kid is finally realized. A new graveside tribute restores dignity to the outlaw’s burial, bridging history, memory and a community’s enduring reverence.

—By Buckeye Blake, Thom Ross and Bob Boze Bell

30



30 BILLY BEFORE BURNS

Long before Walter Noble Burns’s *The Saga of Billy the Kid* appeared in 1926, Billy was already a cultural icon. Burns didn’t resurrect the legend—he refined and spread an already thriving American myth.

—By James B. Mills

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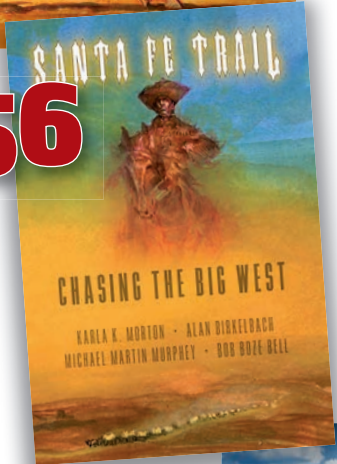


36 MARTÍN CHÁVEZ: FORGOTTEN HOMBRE OF THE LINCOLN COUNTY WAR

Once a key McSween ally and respected Lincoln County leader, Martín Chávez has faded from memory. This deep profile restores the legacy of a Hispano orphan who became a central, yet forgotten, figure of the Lincoln County War.

—By James B. Mills

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56 THE WAY WEST—SUMMER BOOK REVIEW

A lifelong journey through the landscapes and literature of the American West becomes a powerful meditation on memory, identity and the urgent need to sustain Western storytelling amid shifting tides in publishing and culture.

—By Stuart Rosebrook

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70 RIDE THE RAILS OF HISTORY

A True Westerner’s guide to America’s most historic train rides—where frontier lore, breathtaking landscapes and iron-horse grit meet on the tracks.

—By the Heritage Travel Team at True West



Sculpture by Buckeye Blake  
Cover Design by Dan Harshberger

# Old Vaquero Sayings



*"If you realize you are a fool, you are halfway to not being a fool."*

## QUOTES

"James B. Mills is what I always hoped my 'Young Guns' might ignite. He's gone deep into the caliche."

—John Fusco,  
praising Mills' recent books on the hispanic connections to Billy the Kid

**"What is Billy the Kid's least favorite coffee?"**

Maxwell House

**"The only thing more expensive than education is ignorance."**

—Benjamin Franklin

"The hardest thing to learn in life is which bridge to cross and which to burn."

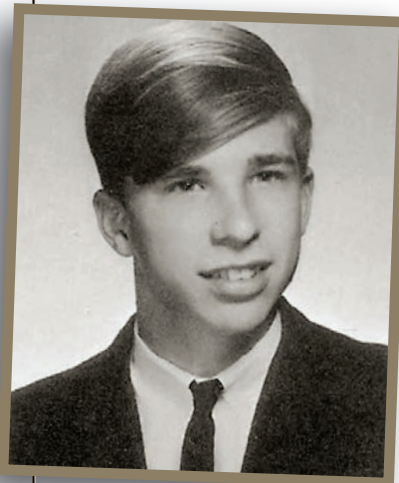
—Bertrand Russell

**"I've never made plans. I'm too busy."**

—Bob Weir

**"Opposition is necessary. Anger is natural. Courage is indispensable."**

—David French



"Michael Antrim, the grandson of Claude Louis Antrim, who is suspected of having been Joseph McCarty-Antrim's son. This could be the face of Billy the Kid's great grandnephew. Those top front teeth certainly bear some resemblance."

—Researched and found by Susan Stevenson and James Townsend

**"Everything an Indian does is in a circle because the power of the world always works in circles."**

—Black Elk (Hekaka Sapa)

"I'll never forget my grandfather's last words to me: *Are you still holding the ladder?*"

—Old Gen Z nugget

# Buckeye's Dream

*A fitting wake for Billy the Kid*

**S**ome 20 years ago, Buckeye Blake wanted to give Billy the Kid a proper graveside crypt, and he went to the powers that be in Fort Sumner who flat turned him down.

And so, angry and sad, Buckeye went home to Texas and destroyed his clay sculpture.

Our cover story in this issue is about how that defeat turned into a win for all of us who love history. Here is the backstory.

After Buckeye struck out with the town council in Old Fort Sumner, he started again, this time with a sponsor. Says Buckeye, "I've got to give thanks to Mama Elliott (wife of the late, great Tex Elliot aka El Mustachio). Her heart is in it. She still has a big cattle ranch in Fort Sumner, and she was on the board that made it happen."

From there, Buckeye pitched the Fort Sumner chamber of commerce. The president of the chamber at the time, Mary Ann Cortese totally got behind the project, and she brought in Mayor Louis Gallegos and the entire city council, who then approached Tim Roberts at the State of New Mexico about collaborating on something that would honor the Kid without opening old controversies.

This led to an interpretive exhibit concept floated by Tim Roberts who brought on his friend Billy Roberts along with Scott Smith and the late Drew Gomer to develop the concept. They, in turn contacted me and I worked with Dan "The Man" Harshberger on creating a courtyard view capturing the moment when the Kid walked across the parade ground, along the picket fence and on the way to his doom.

The city then pursued and won grant money to fund the project. So Buckeye's old idea has been dusted off and approved. What was dead has been resurrected. That is why we are calling our forthcoming art show "The Resurrection of Billy the Kid."



## Buckeye Blake Bounces Back

He was angry and depressed when the town council in Fort Sumner turned him down for his proposed crypt lid for Billy the Kid's grave. Thanks to new blood in an old town, his historic sculpture on The Wake of Billy the Kid is now going to happen.

*Photo by Ken Amorosano*



*For a behind-the-scenes look at running this magazine, check out BBB's daily blog at [TWMag.com](http://TWMag.com)*



Dan Harshberger designed this portico entry montage outside of a simulated Pete Maxwell bedroom to get museum visitors in the mood for Buckeye's sculpture.

OUR READERS REMIND US OF THE VARIABLES AND VAGARIES OF HISTORIC TRUTHS, "WELL-ESTABLISHED" FACTS, HEADLINES AND HISTORICAL PHOTOGRAPHS.

## MOUNTAIN MEADOWS MUSINGS

Henry Parke's review of *American Primeval* is totally out of character with *True West's* historical focus on event accuracy. Everything about the Netflix garbage is enough to make me want to cancel my cable subscription. The only thing the script left out was Billy the Kid being one of the children spared in the massacre. Parke's love for Hollywood gore puts him on par with Quentin Tarantino but without QT's sense of humor. Parke's drooling should have been in the *National Enquirer*, not *TW*. The rest of the related stories are excellent. Especially Hutton's and the Bagley, Walker debate.

—Allen Fossenkemper  
Fountain Hills, Arizona

I must commend your big cajones for even tackling the Mountain Meadows subject. I thought your entire staff did a great job.

—Mort Mortensen  
Atlanta, Georgia

In your May-June 2025 issue there is an error near the beginning of your *Classic True West*, titled "Did Brigham Young Order A Massacre?" It states that "John Lee was tried twice and was hanged in 1877." Lee was clearly shot by a firing squad from concealed, circled wagons. How did that one get by you?

—Charlie Thompson  
La Plata, Missouri

**Ed Note:** Yes, that was not a good day in our Proofing Department, and you are correct.

First, in Paul Andrew Hutton's "The Ghosts of Mountain Meadows," the author emphasizes that Jacob Hamblin was instructed to rally the Southern Paiutes "against the American Enemy." That request has been clearly documented as seeking support against the Union Army and it is not related to the Mountain Meadows Massacre. It should not be interpreted as Hamblin trying to convince Southern Paiutes to participate in the horrific event.

Secondly, in Forrest Cuch's article, "The Battle Axe and a Raw Deal," there was a misquote from a Southern Paiute leader, Tut-se-gav-its.

Tut-se-gav-its (?-1871) was a lead member of the Santa Clara band who lived outside of present-day St. George, Utah. That was about 32 miles away from the Mountain Meadows Massacre site. Tut-se-gav-its, called a "chief" in some literature, had established a positive relationship with Jacob Hamblin, who acted as Indian Agent at Fort Harmony starting in 1854. This Indian mission was established in 1852 by John D. Lee (of the Massacre). It was also an important way station and trading point for Mormon travelers.

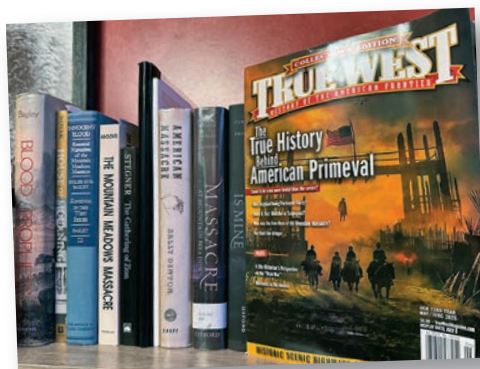
In one of the first encounters Hamblin had with the Santa Clara band, a fellow Mormon aimed a weapon at a tribal member. Hamblin immediately put himself between the shooter and the Indian and threatened that the bullet would have to go through him first.

Tut-se-gav-its joined the LDS church and acted as an intermediary between other Southern Paiutes and Whites while the church taught his people how to farm, dress and speak their way. Over the next three years, promising cotton crops, introduced to the band by the colonizers, and the damming and redirecting of the river pretty much ruined the band's previously sustainable system of horticulture. At this point, Tut-se-gav-its' people, the Yanawant, resented that they had become dependent on the White man's resources and been stripped of their culture.

In 1856, an unidentified member of the band communicated to Hamblin their feelings on the disenfranchisement: "We cannot be good, we must be Piutes (sic). We want you to be kind to us. It may be that some of our children will be good, but we want to follow our old customs." This quote is found in John D. Lee's report from the Saint George Stake, held in the LDS Church manuscript collection. It cannot be artificially ascribed to the band leader. Also, it is in response to the continued pressure on the band to abandon their traditions. Like the misapplication in Hutton's article, it too, is unrelated to the Mountain Meadows Massacre.

As for Cuch naming Tut-se-gav-its as a participant in the Massacre... that claim has long been tossed out because the Yanawant band leader was with Jacob Hamblin, in Salt Lake City, for the duration of the events. He was being ordained as an elder in the church. Hamblin recorded in his journal that they passed the Arkansas Company on their way up there. Besides Hamblin, three other first-person accounts (D. B. Huntington, G. A. Smith, and W. Woodruff) support the date range of Tut-se-gav-its' ordination and, simultaneously, the impossibility of him being implicated in the Massacre.

—Janelle Molony  
Phoenix, Arizona



The latest issue is so important to Mountain Meadows studies, it earned a place among my books on the subject.

—Erik J. Wright, assistant editor,  
Tombstone Epitaph



# The Toll of the Bell

*Billy the Kid's jailer had a sordid past.*



Above is the Whitney double barrel hammer shotgun that Billy took from Olinger.

Courtesy True West Archives



The landing where the Kid and Deputy J.W. Bell struggled before Bell fled down the stairs and was shot before he reached the bottom.

Courtesy Paul Seydor

**N**ew Mexico lawman J.W. Bell is best known for guarding (and being killed by) Billy the Kid in 1881. Usually, Bell is portrayed as a kind man, at least toward Billy, and a solid officer. But until recently, not much else was known about him.

Until Billy the Kid's Historical Coalition board member James Townsend looked into Bell's story—and found a blot on the record.

Bell was born in Maryland in 1853; at what point he moved to Texas is unknown. But somewhere in the early 1870s, Bell fell in with bad company in Montague County, Texas (north of Fort Worth). Led by the Brown family, the group called itself a "vigilance committee." In reality, according to Townsend, it was a violent gang that used murder and intimidation to gain power in the region.

And Bell was part of at least one killing.

In the early morning of September 5, 1873, Bell approached a sheep's pen on the property of Brown enemy Ratliff "Rat" Morrow. He let the sheep out. When Morrow began looking for the animals, the Browns gunned him down.

For whatever reason, it took law enforcement two years to arrest the shooters. Bell was among them—temporarily. One report says he bailed out and walked away. Others say he was released since he didn't pull a trigger in

the shooting. In any case, Bell never faced justice.

Just what happened to Bell after he walked away from the murder charge is unknown. The Brown outfit was involved in at least another dozen killings over the next three years (including Mrs. Rat Morrow). But Bell apparently wasn't suspected in any of those cases; newspaper accounts don't mention him. Two of the Browns would hang in 1879; two others did serious jail time into the 1890s.

By the late 1870s, Bell moved to New Mexico Territory to be a miner. It's not clear if he found much—but he did find an enemy. On November 22, 1880, somebody tried to steal Bell's horses; he and a posse went in pursuit. Among the alleged thieves: Dave Rudabaugh, Billy Wilson and William H. Bonney (aka Billy the Kid).

When posseman Jim Carlyle was killed in a confrontation, Bell retreated.

The next year, he became a Lincoln County deputy sheriff (and a deputy U.S. marshal).

For James Bell, the end came in a staircase of the Lincoln County Courthouse on April 28, 1881. Billy the Kid—who'd somehow gotten a gun—put two bullets into him. The Kid then killed Deputy Bob Olinger and escaped. He was free for less than three months, until he was gunned down himself.

But Billy took others with him into the mists of myth, including J.W. Bell, who is forever painted as a nice guy. But his past included an act of violence, and who knows what events additional research might turn up.



BY CANDY MOULTON

# Cowboy Al's Wild West Museum

*One man's collection brings the Wild West East.*

**W**ho could imagine a Wild West museum in Connecticut? Cowboy Al Singer, that's who. A lifelong collector, he has developed Cowboy Al's Wild West Museum in Litchfield, that has so many posters, pictures and other memorabilia about the Old West the items are literally attached to the ceiling.

Located on his 42-acre Top-O-World Farm at 61 Chestnut Hill Road in the hills of Litchfield, the museum is in two buildings and each one is bulging at the seams. Cowboy Al was just a youngster when he started collecting posters and photos and pasting them into scrapbooks. The subjects are stills from *Gunfight at the O.K. Corral*, *Hopalong Cassidy* and *Red Ryder* comic books.

But Al expanded his interests: bookshelves filled with Wyatt Earp, outlaws, cowboys, Custer and lawmen. Plus "little fat books"—on such favorites as *Red Ryder*, *Tom Mix*, *Buck Jones*, *Tex Thorn*, *Kit Carson* and *Ken Maynard*—scratch a reader's itch.

Action figures, ceramic plates, brass and ceramic cowboy boots, Lone Ranger snow globes and even a Western figure and Indian chess set are among the eclectic collection.

And everywhere there is an inch of space is plastered with posters, photos and comics. Walking through Al's Cowboy Museum is a blast to the senses and a complete immersion into all things Western. Best of all, it's free.

Al just opened his 19th room of memorabilia, filling it with a new knife collection, some bronzes and other materials all related to cowboy and Old West heroes, chief among them *The Lone*

**Top:** Al Singer stands in one of his 19 rooms (soon to be 20!) filled with Old West treasures.

**Middle:** Every inch of Cowboy Al's museum tells a story.

**Bottom:** Cowboy Al Singer

Courtesy Cowboy Al

Ranger. He is passionate about these Old West characters. "The heroes of the West protected each and everyone," he said. "They gave no consideration to race and color. Instead, they cared about people who were down on their luck, being bullied, or otherwise having a tough time.

"That is what made the heroes of the West so popular," Al says, and adds that they tried to live by the Code of the West—to help people in need.

As people come to visit his museum, Al recognizes that there is great interest in the stories and characters he has collected for more than 80 years. "The West is being reborn," he said. "It adds to all my dreams of growing up and doing what is right."

Singer wants to bring back more and more of the cowboy heroes, to rekindle memories and to inspire youthful visitors.

Even with the 19th room at his museum completed, Al is not ready to stop—or even slow down—on his passion for collecting. He's already preparing a 20th room and says his barn has plenty of space for expansion.

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Litchfield, CT 06759  
201-888-9353



Candy Moulton was named True Westerner in 2023. She makes her home near Encampment, Wyoming.



# Discover Where History Happened in the Old West

True West magazine has inspired travelers to take the road less traveled and explore the historic sites and towns of the American West. The Third Edition of the True West Ultimate Historic Travel Guide has been carefully updated with recommendations on the essential museums of the Old West. Anyone who wants to discover a region from the ground up—and immerse in its local history—will be inspired to visit a Western museum and experience the dynamic, enthralling history of the American West.

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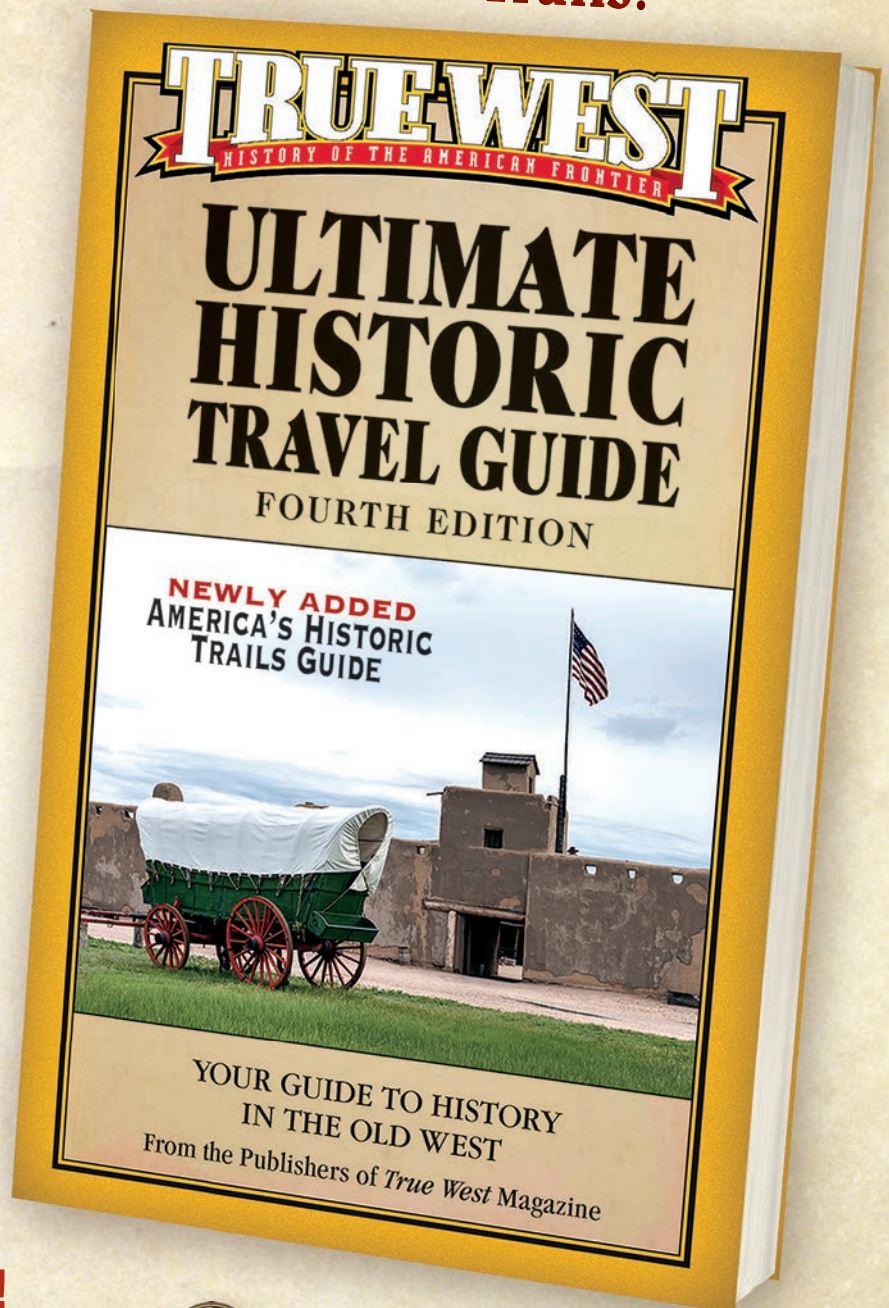
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BY STEVE FRIESEN

# Springtime in the West

*Storms, sunsets and art auctions.*

**F**ollowing the quiet of winter, springtime is the most exuberant season in the West. The rivers are full, and flowers bloom. There are vibrant sunrises and sunsets, fearsome thunderstorms and breathtaking night skies. Springtime in the West was very evident in the contemporary art sold at the spring Scottsdale Art Auction on April 11 and 12.

Bidding at the auction was enthusiastic, perhaps encouraged by spring fever. Mark Maggiori's *Entering Utah*, a colorful and highly detailed depiction of a group of cowboys and a wagon in red rocks country fetched \$117,000, considerably higher than the projected high bid of \$75,000. The foreground offers a display of high desert flowers. Logan Maxwell Hagege also effectively captured the colors of the Southwest, and its people, with *After the Storm Clears*, which sold for \$105,300, gathering \$15,000 more than expected.

Ed Mell illustrated the full fury of a thunderstorm in *Eye of the Storm*. It sold for \$117,000, twice the projected price. A 1991 painting, it is more realistic than his later cubistic landscapes. *Eye of the Storm* strongly contrasts with his later *Western Gap I*, an abstracted landscape. That sold for \$64,350, versus the projected high of \$38,000. Another of Mell's pieces in the auction, *Clouds and Cacti*, which depicted a saguaro cactus in the Arizona desert, also sold for twice its estimated price. Mell, whose work has grown greatly in popularity since 1991, passed away in 2024, accounting for the high bids on all seven of his pieces in the auction.

Like Mell's, Phil Epp's paintings have grown in popularity over the last several years. *Looking Back*, with a giant moon silhouetting the small figures of five horses on the Plains, sold for \$38,025. Colt Idol's nighttime scene *Prairie Stories*, which captured and contrasted the glow



*Clouds and Cacti* by Ed Mell is dominated by a central saguaro cactus. The cactus and the landscape around it are verging on the abstract, enabling Mell to represent a stark desert landscape.

of tepee fires with the last moments of sunset, also sold for \$38,025. Both paintings sold for more than twice their estimated price. Dominated by bold colors, flowers and whimsy, Kim Douglas Wiggins' *Voice of Jealousy* calls to mind the work of the 1930s regionalists. It sold for \$35,100, twice its anticipated price.

Martin Grelle's *Wolves in Yellowstone Country*, was one of the highest sellers among the contemporary art pieces at

the auction. Also exceeding expectations, it brought \$222,300. The quality of the artwork at the Scottsdale Art Auction and the exuberant response from bidders showed that this year it was an appropriate place to welcome springtime in the American West.



Steve Friesen comes to "Collecting the West" with over 40 years of experience in collecting for museums, including evaluating and acquiring artifacts from the American West.



Mark Maggiori presents a group of cowboys traveling through a timeless Southwestern landscape in his painting *Entering Utah*. Above them, cumulus clouds are forming, suggesting that a spring storm might disrupt the tranquil scene.



In *After the Storm Clears* by Logan Maxwell Hagege, three Navajo men are still wrapped in the colorful blankets they used for protection during a rainstorm. Dark clouds still linger above them, almost obscuring the men.



Kim Douglas Wiggins' painting *Voice of Jealousy* is so active that one almost misses the frowning figure hiding behind a tree, the reason for the title. Like the paintings of regionalist Thomas Hart Benton, Wiggins uses bold colors and a rural theme in this contemporary piece.

All images courtesy Scottsdale Art Auction



*Looking Back* by Phil Epp draws its title from one of five horses in front of the moon. Nearly imperceptible in the left of the painting are the lights of a town toward which the five horses are headed. Perhaps the one horse is reluctant to return to the stable?



Colt Idol's *Prairie Stories* plays with light, effectively depicting both a vibrant sunset and the newly lit teepee fires below. While using the "rule of three" to group the teepees, Idol also reveals that one of these is unlike the others.

## UPCOMING AUCTIONS

**August 15–17, 2025**

August Premiere Firearms Auction,  
Rock Island Auctions (Bedford, Texas)  
[rockislandauction.com](http://rockislandauction.com) • 800-238-8022

**August 23, 2025**

Scottsdale Art Auction (Scottsdale, Arizona)  
[info@scottsdaleartauction.com](mailto:info@scottsdaleartauction.com)  
480-945-0225

**September 9–11, 2025**

Firearms and Militaria Auction,  
Morphy Auctions (Denver, Colorado)  
[info@morphyauctions.com](mailto:info@morphyauctions.com) • 877-968-8880

**September 19, 2025**

Buffalo Bill Art Show and Sale,  
Rendezvous Royale (Cody, Wyoming)  
[rendezvousroyale.org](http://rendezvousroyale.org) • 307-587-2777

BY BOB BOZE BELL

## The \$6 Million Shot

*The Real Story Behind the Gun that Killed Billy the Kid*

**T**hey say history is written by the victors, but sometimes it's pawned, litigated, forgotten—and eventually sold for over \$6 million at auction.

That's the real story behind the most infamous pistol in Western lore: the one Pat Garrett used to kill Billy the Kid.

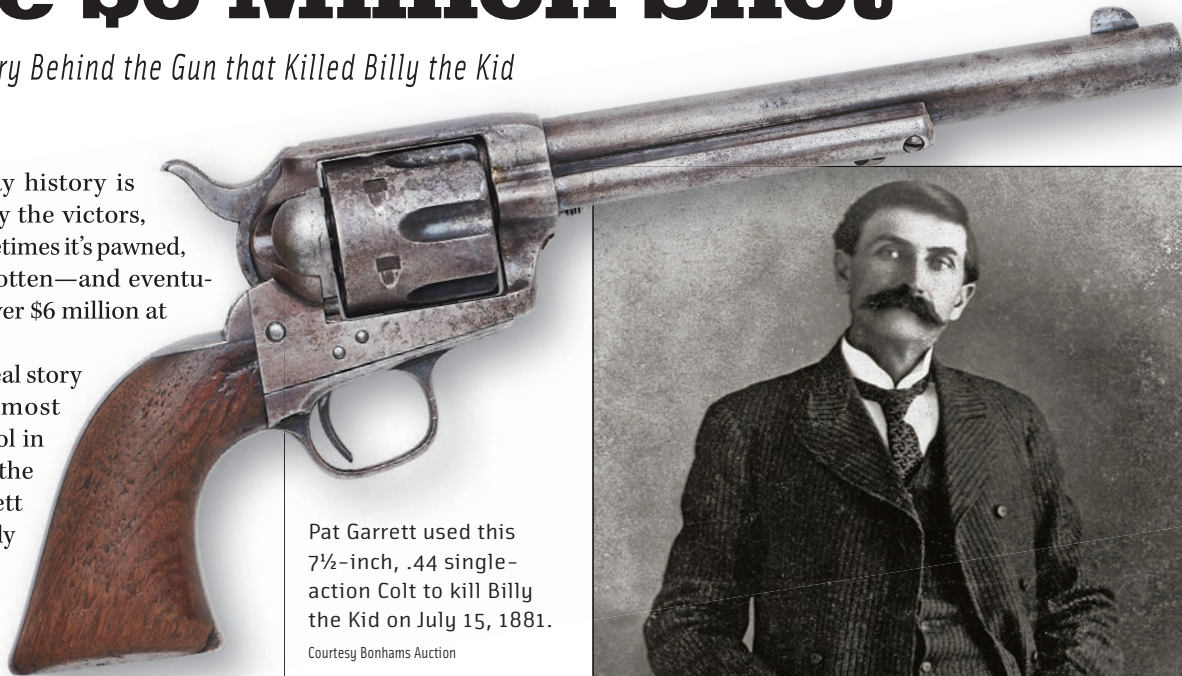
It started not in a saloon or a dusty street duel, but in a frozen standoff at Stinking Spring, New Mexico, on December 23, 1880. Garrett, newly elected sheriff and backed by Texas cowboys hired by cattleman John Chisum, had cornered Billy the Kid and his gang inside a rock house.

At dawn, the posse gunned down Charlie Bowdre, mistaking him for the Kid. With Tom Folliard already dead, the gang's luck had run out. Billy, along with Dave Rudabaugh, Tom Pickett and Billy Wilson, surrendered after the siege. Somewhere in the aftermath, Garrett helped himself to Wilson's Winchester rifle and Colt revolver—a common practice among lawmen of the era.

As for Billy's own arms, they were scattered. His Winchester went to Beaver Smith, his horse to Frank Stewart, and his pistol, according to legend, was gifted to Mike Cosgrove, the brother of the mail carrier.

By the time the Kid escaped jail, killed two deputies, and fled back to Fort Sumner, Garrett still had Wilson's pistol—a 7½-inch, .44 caliber Colt Single Action Army revolver.

On July 14, 1881, Garrett used that very gun to shoot Billy in a darkened room at Pete Maxwell's house. One shot to the

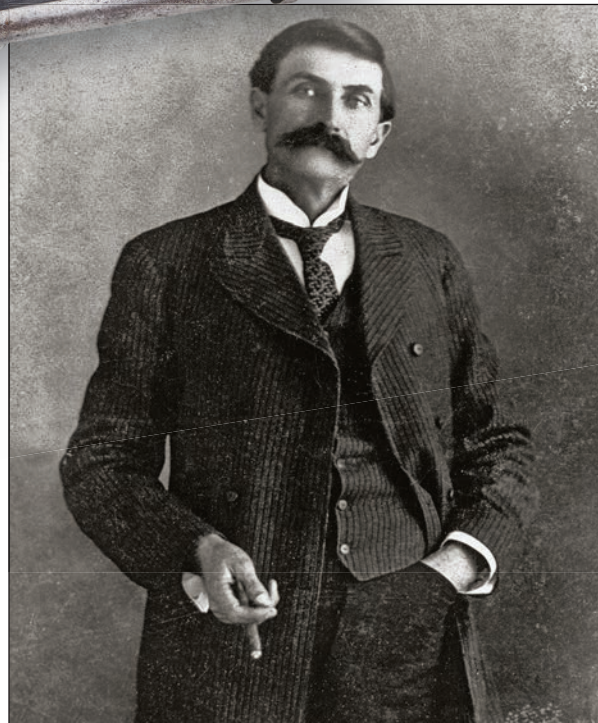


Pat Garrett used this 7½-inch, .44 single-action Colt to kill Billy the Kid on July 15, 1881.

Courtesy Bonhams Auction

Customs Collector Pat Garrett in El Paso, 1901

All images courtesy True West Archives unless otherwise noted



chest ended the legend in real-time—but began one of the longest-running sagas in Western history.

Fast forward 141 years: how do we know the pistol Garrett used to kill Billy the Kid is the same one that sold at Bonhams Auction in Los Angeles for \$6,030,313 in 2021?

It's all about provenance—and a bit of courtroom drama.

First, we have Garrett's own habits. Like many lawmen, he kept souvenirs. Wilson's revolver stayed with him for decades, until his own fortunes turned south.

After being fired from a prestigious federal post—Collector of Customs in El Paso, appointed by President



Historians believe Billy the Kid and his fellow Regulators were hiding in this rock house at Stinking Spring on December 23, 1880, when Pat Garrett and his posse attacked them, killing Charlie Bowdre and capturing The Kid, Billy Wilson, Tom Pickett and Dave Rudabaugh.

Theodore Roosevelt—Garrett's life began to unravel. The final straw? Introducing his saloon-owning friend

# TEXAS GUN COLLECTORS ASSOCIATION



## *Fine & Historic Arms Annual*

SPONSORED BY THE TEXAS GUN COLLECTORS ASSOCIATION & ROCK ISLAND AUCTION COMPANY  
(A 2<sup>ND</sup> EDITION OF THE ANTIQUE ARMS ANNUAL OF 1971)



Known as "The Annual" to TGCA members and other collectors, the Antique Arms Annual made our association known throughout firearms collector's circles all across the country and in many foreign countries.

In 2021, 50 years after the original publication, members of the TGCA and the Rock Island Auction Company began the task of creating a second edition. We knew there were many high quality, collectible firearms that were not antique but should be included in the new book. We acknowledged the original book really wasn't an annual volume but the name "Annual" had an established value that made it worth repeating. We quickly agreed the new book title should be The Fine & Historic Arms Annual, (A Second Edition to the Antique Arms Annual of 1971).

**IN 1971**, *The Texas Gun Collectors Association* published the first edition of the *Antique Arms Annual*, showcasing some of the finest firearms in the world. It quickly became an indispensable reference book in the libraries of arms collectors everywhere, with beautiful color photographs and informative technical information.

In October of 2024, the *Fine & Historic Arms Annual* was born. It includes 360 pages of the finest collectible weapons on the planet. It is now available in a soft cover version and a hard bound, deluxe version. All members of the TGCA receive a complimentary, soft cover copy of the new Annual. Join the Texas Gun Collectors Association today and get your complimentary copy.

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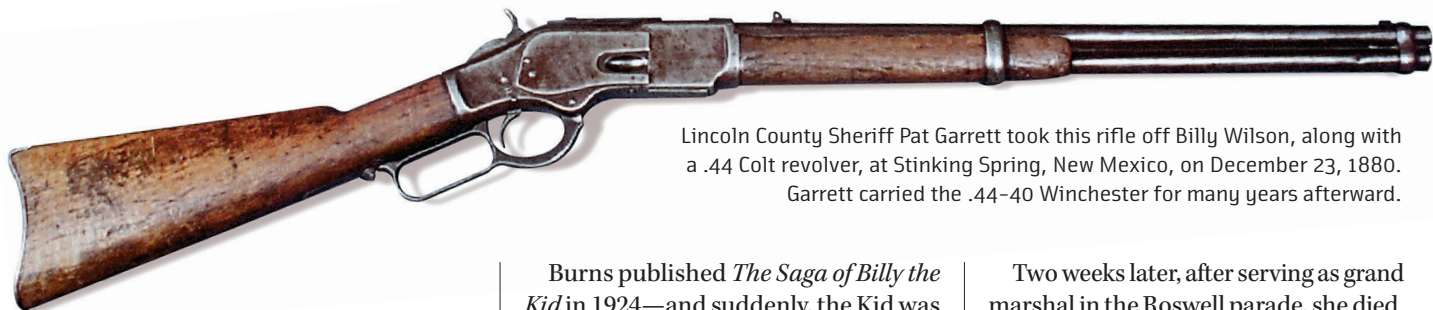
## JOIN THE TGCA!

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- ✪ "The Texas Gun Collector" is a high quality magazine published twice a year (in the Spring and the Fall).
- ✪ Our two annual shows where you will find the guns and other tools of the cowboy's trade, the weapons and memorabilia of the American Civil War, WW1, WW2 and other major events in American, and even world, history.

- ✪ You will find antique firearms and related items as well as curio & relic category items such as early Colt or Smith & Wesson double action revolvers and early semi-autos.
- ✪ You won't find any modern guns or modern ammo at our shows.
- ✪ For more information please visit our website: [TGCA.org](http://TGCA.org).
- ✪ Join the TGCA! [TGCA.org/TGCA\\_form.php](http://TGCA.org/TGCA_form.php)



Lincoln County Sheriff Pat Garrett took this rifle off Billy Wilson, along with a .44 Colt revolver, at Stinking Spring, New Mexico, on December 23, 1880. Garrett carried the .44-40 Winchester for many years afterward.

Tom Powers as a “cattleman” during a luncheon with Roosevelt. The press had a field day. The President, feeling duped, never forgave him.

Garrett, drinking more and spending less wisely, eventually turned to Powers for money. The Colt revolver was either put up as collateral, loaned or sold outright to Powers, who displayed it in his Coney Island Saloon in El Paso.

Here’s where the tale takes a twist worthy of pulp fiction. In 1915, reporter Walter Noble Burns, covering the Pancho Villa raid in Columbus, New Mexico, visited the Coney Island Saloon. He asked about the old pistol behind the bar. The bartender casually said it was the gun that killed Billy the Kid.

Burns published *The Saga of Billy the Kid* in 1924—and suddenly, the Kid was back on the map. Garrett’s gun wasn’t just a relic; it was a legend.

By 1930, Powers—now rich but ailing from cancer—shot himself in the heart. Amazingly, he survived for three months before dying in 1931.

Then came the lawsuit. Apolinaria Garrett, Pat’s widow, sued the Powers estate to get the pistol back. Powers’ heirs claimed it had been payment for a loan. The case dragged on until the Texas Supreme Court ruled in Apolinaria’s favor on October 7, 1934, noting her husband couldn’t legally transfer the pistol without her consent.

She posed with the revolver on her front porch in Las Cruces, comforted by a friend’s remark that it could be worth as much as \$500.

Two weeks later, after serving as grand marshal in the Roswell parade, she died.

The Colt stayed in the Garrett family until 1983, when it was sold by Jarvis Garrett to a private collector. Eventually, it ended up in the hands of Jim and Theresa Earle of College Station, Texas—also owners of the Wilson Winchester rifle.

Upon Jim’s passing, his daughters placed both firearms up for auction. On August 27, 2021, history was made: Garrett’s Colt hammered for over \$6 million, setting a world record for the sale of a firearm.

That part is still a mystery. The buyer, bidding by phone, requested anonymity.

But those in Western history circles have their suspicions. One name consistently surfaces—a high-profile collector known to own the only confirmed

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On October 7, 1934, Texas courts sided with Mrs. Apolinaria Garrett on the ownership of the controversial Colt .44 that her husband used to kill Billy the Kid.



photo of Billy the Kid (another multi-million-dollar artifact). If he now owns both the photo and the gun, the collection becomes not just iconic, but unmatched.

And, yes, we hope it's him. Because in a world flooded with counterfeit "Billy the Kid" pistols, this one stands tall—backed by history, paper trails and a curious little bartender's story more than a century ago.

Garrett may have killed Billy with a single bullet, but it took a posse of decades, lawsuits, barroom storytellers, reporters and collectors to bring the full truth of that shot to light. And while the Kid didn't live long enough to cash in on his notoriety, the gun that ended his life did—with a million-dollar muzzle flash heard round the world.

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# THE RESURRECTION OF BILLY THE KID

It all starts with that only known photo of Billy the Kid. He is standing there with a rifle, right? That's what everyone's seen from the start—old newspaper clippings, whatever. But even when that photo was first taken, they doctored it. Tried to fix it right out of the gate. They botched it. It was badly done. So instead of seeing this smart little Irish kid, America saw a moron.

And that's what stuck. "Dirty little Billy killer." And "Look at him—he's a moron." Well, that was total B.S. Nothing could be further from the truth. So, right then I thought, oh my God, an entire country got fed this false picture. Doesn't matter if it's important or not—it's American history. Western history. It's valid. You don't have to be proud of it, but it's there. And that kid was not a moron. So, I got into it. Read everything I could. Turns out that Billy was really likable.



"Billy the Moron"

A good-looking young Irish kid. There was this whole other side nobody talks about. All the Mexicans held him in high esteem—he was their guy—a folk hero—and none of that shows up. It's just, "Oh, he was some dirty outlaw." So that got me thinking: what was he really like? Why'd he become who he was? And all those little misfortunes and accidents—niche things that shaped the guy. That's what intrigued me and that's what set me out on this path.

—Buckeye Blake



**Saint Billy**

From moron to saint.  
Not a bad stretch for  
anyone, outlaw or not.

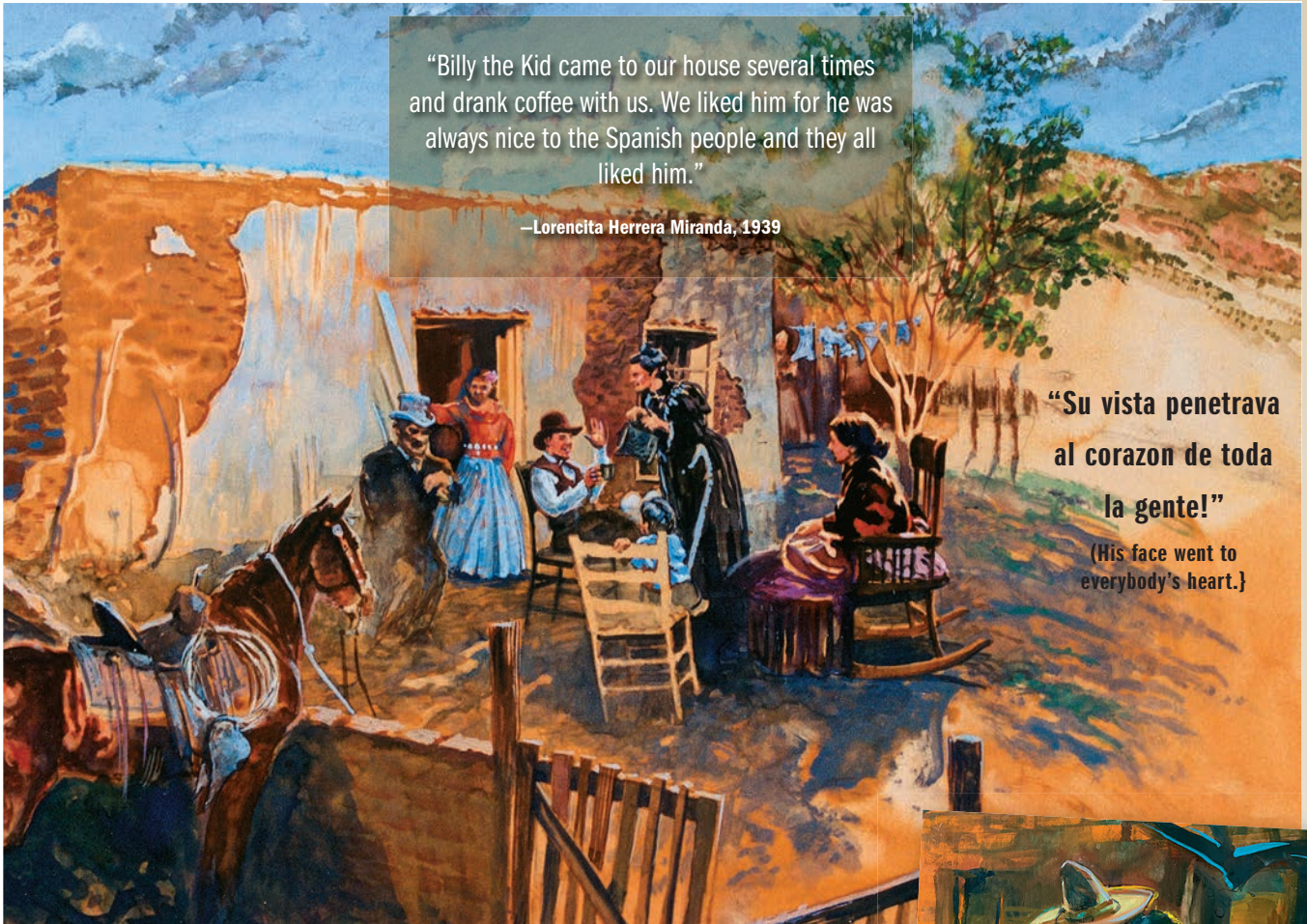
# CHARMING BILLY

“Billy the Kid came to our house several times and drank coffee with us. We liked him for he was always nice to the Spanish people and they all liked him.”

—Lorencita Herrera Miranda, 1939

“Su vista penetrava al corazon de toda la gente!”

(His face went to everybody's heart.)



In 1924, Paulita Maxwell told writer Walter Noble Burns, “Billy the Kid, I may tell you, fascinated many women. In every *placeta* [little plaza] in the Pecos some little *senorita* was proud to be known as his *querida* [Spanish for beloved]. Three girls at least in Fort Sumner were mad about him. One is now a respected matron of Las Vegas. Another, who died long ago, had a daughter who lived to be eight years old and whose striking resemblance to the famous outlaw filled her mother’s heart with pride. The third was his *inamorata* when he was killed.” [She implies this unnamed lover was Celsa Gutierrez, but some historians believe Billy’s last love was, in fact, Paulita herself.] She goes on, “The weekly dance was an event, and pretty girls from

Santa Rosa, Puerto de Luna, Anton Chico, and from towns and ranches 50 miles away, drove in to attend it. Billy the Kid cut quite a gallant figure at these affairs. He was not handsome but he had a certain sort of boyish good looks. He was always smiling and good-natured and very polite and danced remarkably well, and the little Mexican beauties made eyes at him from behind their fans and used all their coquetries to capture him and were very vain of his attentions... They knew how to use their black eyes to good advantage... [and made] their fans talk when their tongues were silent.”



Billy was always smiling and good-natured and very polite and danced remarkably well.



# A Querida In Every Plaza



EMILY SCHLANDER



CELSA FLOREZ



MINNIE SHIELD



FREDRICKE DEOLAVERA



DELUVINA MAXELL



LILY HUNTRESS



MYSTERIOUS MAMACITA



NASARIA YERBY



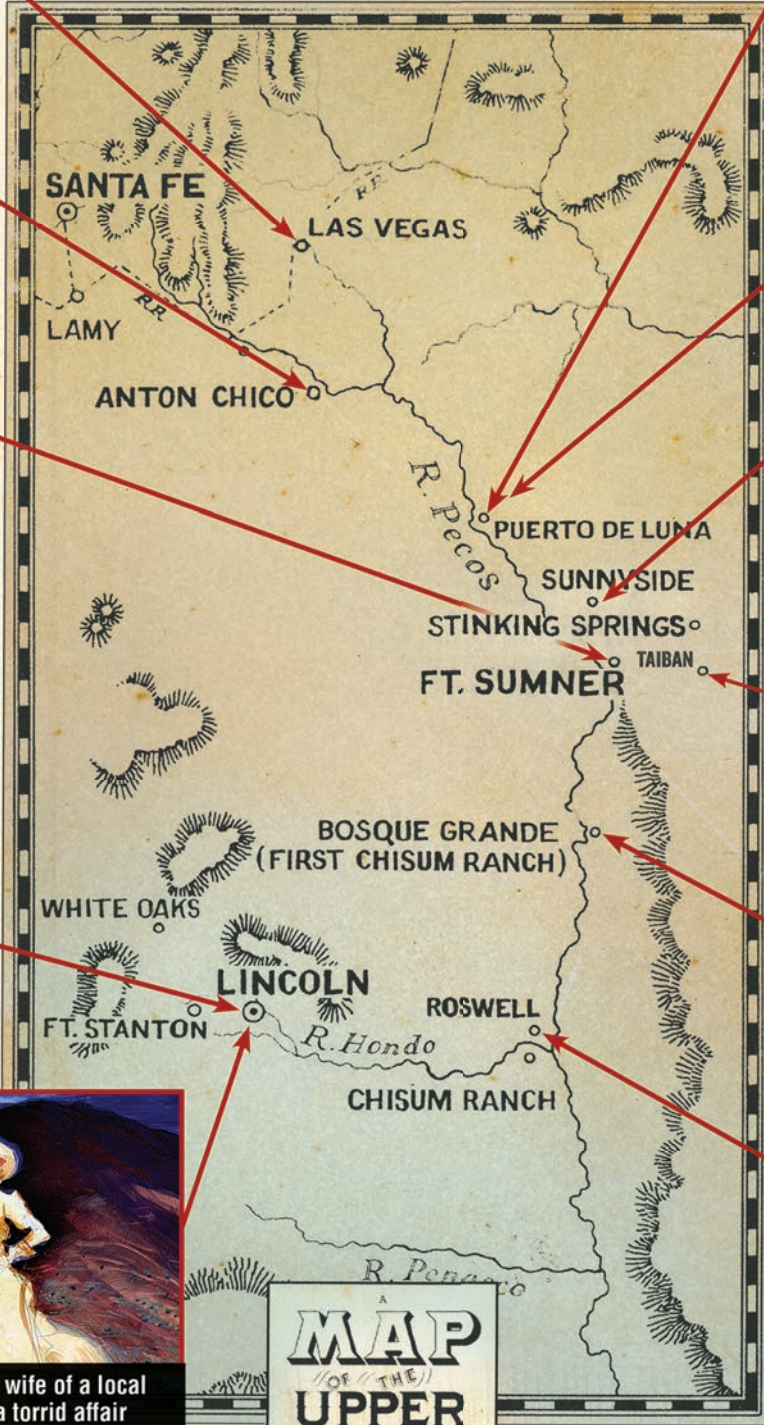
CARLOTTA BACA



SALLIE CHISUM



EMILY BRUJA



A  
**MAP**  
OF THE  
**UPPER  
PECOS**

(DRAWN BY BOB STEINHILBER)



**LINCOLN HONEY:** The wife of a local merchant, she had a torrid affair with the Kid and told no one.

(Image Montage by Rebecca Edwards)

Billy loved them all, but he took a bullet in the heart for one of them. The question is, which one?

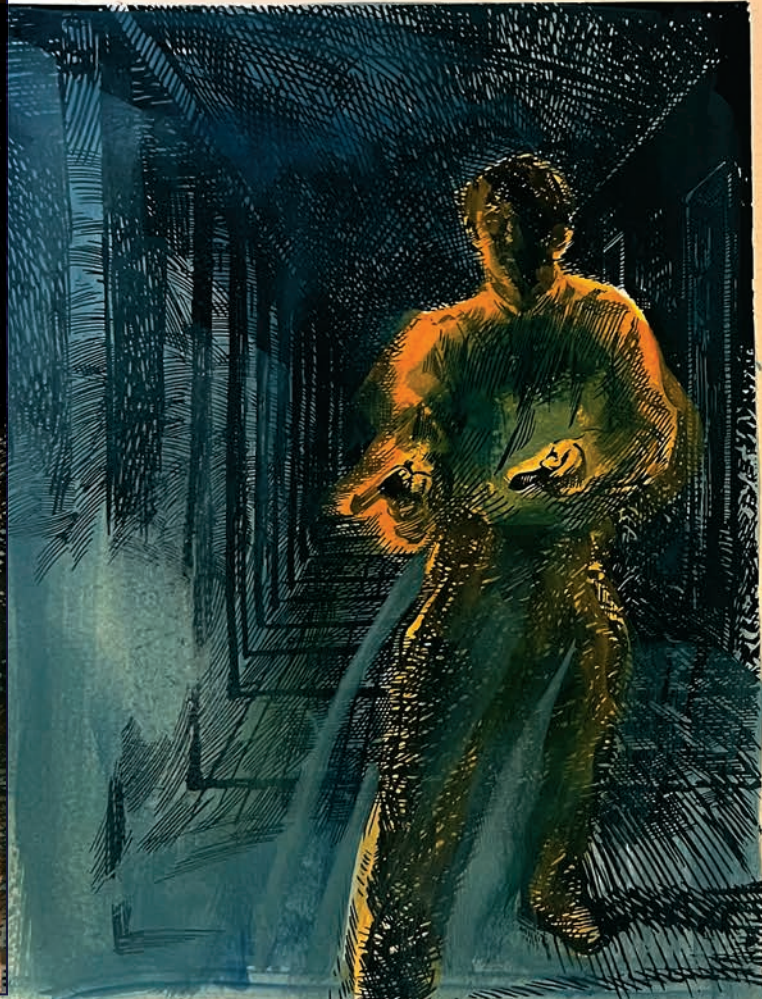
# SPOTTING BILLY



## The Midnight Men

Sheriff Pat Garrett and two deputies leave Roswell, New Mexico, after dark on July 10, 1881. They take the back trails and ride all night. Scouting around the Old Fort Sumner area and finding nothing, they finally slip silently onto Pete Maxwell's south porch on the old parade ground. The sheriff leaves his two deputies outside by the gate and goes inside to query Pete about the whereabouts of Billy the Kid. A full moon lights up the cottonwoods as a dark figure slips into the side yard and walks towards Maxwell's buttoning his trousers.







“Quien es, Pete?”

# KILLING BILLY

## Dead End Again

The Kid backs into Pete Maxwell's bedroom. Garrett, engulfed in the darkness, freezes. "He came directly towards me," Garrett recounted. "Came close to me."

Garrett said he dared not speak because his own gun was in its holster, and he was sitting on it!

"He came close to me, leaned both hands on the bed, his right hand almost touching my knee."

"The Kid must have seen, or felt, the presence of a third person at the head of the bed. He raised

his pistol, a self-cocker, within a foot of my breast."

The Kid jumped back, but instead of firing, he demanded in Spanish one more time, "Quien es?"

Big mistake. Garrett drew his revolver and fired twice.

"The Kid fell dead. He never spoke. A struggle or two, a little strangling sound as he gasped for breath, and the Kid was with his many victims."

Thus ends the sheriff of Lincoln County's version of the events in Pete Maxwell's bedroom in the early hours of July 15, 1881.

So, what, pray tell, is the reason for revisiting all of this for the eighteen-hundredth time when I recently claimed I had written my final word on the subject?



# MOURNING BILLY

We all know the Kid was put in the ground with modest fanfare. “Practically every man, woman, and child in town followed the body to the little cemetery,” remembered Paulita Maxwell. Okay, but that is still roughly only about 170 souls, certainly not the crowd Billy deserved then, or now. It has been Buckeye Blake’s dream to fix that, to make it right for the Kid with a show of proper respect and honor.

Several local Hispano women begged Garrett to allow them to remove the body, which he did. Jesus Silva and a couple others carried the Kid’s slender body to the old carpenter shop across the parade ground, near the quartermaster’s corral and placed Billy on a sturdy workbench. The fatal exit wound was plugged with a rag. (It did not bleed out until two hours after the shooting perhaps from the jostling.) A clean shirt was produced from Pete Maxwell that was too large. The women prepared the body for a wake, placing lighted candles all around his lifeless body while several Fort Sumner residents, both men and women, kept a quiet vigil over their friend’s body.

A hastily held coroner’s jury led by Alcalde Alejandro Seguro and ordered by Pat Garrett viewed the body of Billy Bonney in the carpenter’s shop to confirm the cause and manner of death.

Jesus Silva constructed the coffin and then he and Vicente Otero dug a grave in the old post cemetery.

After Billy’s body was placed in his coffin, it was moved to Beaver Smith’s saloon, where it remained until time for burial. The funeral took place in the afternoon. Garrett gave Pedro Maxwell \$25 to get some proper clothing for the dead boy.

Otero used his wagon to transport



the body from the saloon to the graveyard and almost everyone in the small community followed the procession.

The next day, a marker made of a stave from the picket fence he walked

by the night before, was placed at the head of the grave. The marker had no last name or date, just the words, “Billy the Kid.”

And, that was the end of that.  
***Or, was it?***

# Finally, A Fitting Funeral for Billy the Kid!

Some 20 years ago, Buckeye Blake wanted to give the Kid a proper graveside crypt, so he went to the powers that be in Fort Sumner and they flat turned him down. As he put it in an interview with Ken Amorosano back in 2014: “It didn’t go over well. They didn’t know what a crypt lid was. Thought I was part of the forensic crowd who wanted to dig up Billy. And then you’ve got the religious side—sanctity of the dead. Plus, the locals—Mexican families, especially—held the Kid in high esteem. He was their hero. They weren’t gonna let just anybody mess with him. ‘We don’t want dead people in our cemetery,’ they said. I told them, ‘Well, most of them live there already.’”

And so, Buckeye went home to Texas and destroyed his clay sculpture.

But, believe it, or not, that was then, and Buckeye’s old idea has

been dusted off and approved by a new set of crypt keepers in Fort Sumner! What was dead has been resurrected. Both the outlaw and Buckeye’s project.

## How The Buckeye Wake Project Finally Happened

Buckeye pitched his idea to Mary Ann Cortese and the Fort Sumner chamber. She took on the concept and championed it relentlessly. She brought in Mayor Louis Gallegos and the entire city council, who then approached Tim Roberts at the State of New Mexico about collaborating on something that would honor the Kid without opening old controversies. This led to an interpretive exhibit concept floated by Roberts who brought on Billy Roberts, Scott Smith and the late Drew Gomber. The city then pursued and won grant money to fund the project.



## The Traveling Wake of Billy the Kid

Buckeye Blake’s wake sculpture, below, will be unveiled at the **Old Fort Sumner Graveside Museum** in the spring of 2026.

In the meantime you will be able to see all of this artwork, including the sculpture, on **The Traveling Wake of Billy the Kid** in the following locations (this is a tentative list and more locations may be added):

**The Lamy Church**, in Lamy, New Mexico, on July 4, 2025. At the **Raton Museum** on August 23 and at the **Scottsdale Museum of the West** on October 3rd.



The Kid Returns

## “The Wake of Billy the Kid”

A lifesize sculpture by Buckeye Blake



# BILLY BEFORE BURNS

BEFORE THE MYTH WAS  
PENNEDED, THE KID HAD  
ALREADY BECOME A  
LEGEND IN THEATERS,  
TABLOIDS AND THE  
AMERICAN  
IMAGINATION.

There is no question that Walter Noble Burns's *The Saga of Billy the Kid* broadened William Bonney's prominence and deepened interest in the outlaw's exploits when it was published in 1926. The talented writer's book became a hit from coast to coast, setting off a wave of "Billy fever" that resulted in a motion picture—King Vidor's *Billy the Kid*—hitting cinemas in 1930. The author's enthralling narrative would also inspire a generation of future historians, including Bob Boze Bell and the late Frederick Nolan, to spend decades of their lives pursuing the history that inspired his literary masterpiece.

For many decades now, the general consensus has been that Billy the Kid had fallen off the proverbial radar by 1926. Some of that conviction has come as a result of novelist Harvey Fergusson's opinion piece that asked the question, "Who remembers Billy the Kid?" when it was published in *The American Mercury* in 1925. As far as the cynical Fergusson was concerned, the bandido had pretty much been forgotten and would only fade further into obscurity.

The story goes that Walter Noble Burns rescued Billy the Kid from cultural oblivion and transformed him into a household name with the publication of his enchanting book in 1926. It has always made for a nice story. The only problem is; it is not entirely true. While Burns may not have heard about him when visiting Tom Powers's Coney Island Saloon in

El Paso in 1917, Billy the Kid was already a proven box-office attraction and a household name before the author even started typing his manuscript.

## BILLY ON STAGE

Since Ancient Greece, long before motion pictures became the world's primary source of visual entertainment, theatrical productions had set the standard for show business. While Billy the Kid had yet to reach the same level of iconic outlaw status as Jesse James in terms of dime novel numbers and book sales in the early 20th century, fictionalized tales of New Mexico's most famous bandido were a dependable attraction in theatres for almost two decades.

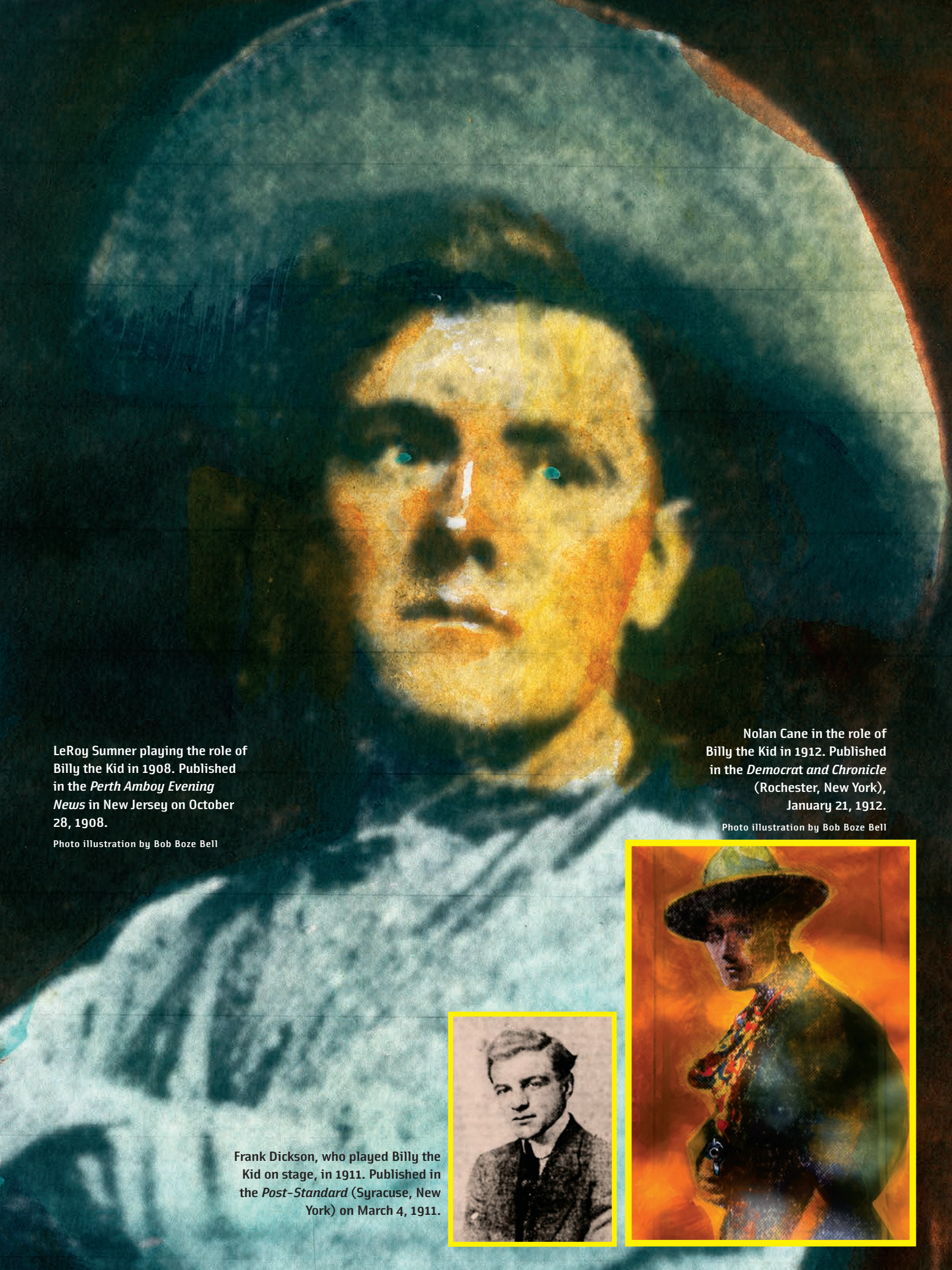
In 1906, a play titled *Billy the Kid* began drawing large crowds throughout America. The comedy-melodrama written by Joseph Santley and Walter Woods—with the 16-year-old Santley also playing the lead role—caused quite a sensation that year. "Hooray, I have this week seen *Billy the Kid*," declared a correspondent in the *Chicago Tribune* on August 26, 1906. "The theater where this new play is presented holds more people than any other in town and has a larger ratio of boys to men in its audiences. Not less than 10,000 lads will have seen the glorification of juvenile depravity when the week is over." The production was

described as "The Bloodiest Play on the New York Stage" before the show hit the road in New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Connecticut, Delaware, Illinois, Ohio, Indiana, Wisconsin and Missouri. "Billy the Kid, as played by a reformed Wall Street messenger boy, is the hottest stuff ever and anywhere," declared the *Saginaw News* in Michigan on September 21, 1906.

The appeal of Joseph Santley and Walter Woods's play showed no sign of dissipating as the production enjoyed further success in 1907. The four-act play was performed in packed houses in New York, New Jersey, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Connecticut, Illinois, Ohio, Indiana, Wisconsin, Missouri, Minnesota, and even in Ontario, British Columbia, and Quebec, Canada. "For a rip-roaring, something-doing-every-minute melodrama, *Billy the Kid* is all that could be desired," the *Fort Wayne*



Joseph Santley in the role of "Billy the Kid" in 1906. Audiences were mesmerized by the teenage actor's enthusiasm on stage. Published in the *Cincinnati Post*, September 5, 1906.



LeRoy Sumner playing the role of Billy the Kid in 1908. Published in the *Perth Amboy Evening News* in New Jersey on October 28, 1908.

Photo illustration by Bob Boze Bell

Nolan Cane in the role of Billy the Kid in 1912. Published in the *Democrat and Chronicle* (Rochester, New York), January 21, 1912.

Photo illustration by Bob Boze Bell

Frank Dickson, who played Billy the Kid on stage, in 1911. Published in the *Post-Standard* (Syracuse, New York) on March 4, 1911.



*News and Sentinel* declared on January 18, 1907. The hit production made Joseph Santley a star, and photographs of the young actor were published in many newspapers across North America. "Joseph Santley, perhaps the greatest boy actor on stage today, is drawing large audiences," the *Buffalo Courier* announced in New York on September 10, 1907.

The demand for *Billy the Kid* was so strong that another young actor named LeRoy Sumner began playing the lead role in certain cities in place of leading man Santley. "The popular young actor, LeRoy Sumner, has a part which is just suited to his requirements," the *Morris County Chronicle* declared in New Jersey on August 13, 1907. Various newspapers provided a summation of the melodrama's plot for the public, including the *Hartford Courant* in Connecticut on October 15, 1907:

The story of the play comes from Texas and New Mexico, where Stephen Wright's son, Billy the Kid, swears an oath of vengeance upon the death of his parents, they having been shot to death by Boyd Denver, an Eastern "gentleman" who had a heart that probably resembled a den of rattlesnakes. Billy goes West and turns desperado. At the "Broken Heart," Billy meets Denver and his gang of crooks and is surrounded but by clever use of his revolver he escapes after a battle with the men in the dark, taking with him his sweetheart, Nellie Bradley, who with her colored servant, Mose Moore, was held prisoner there. Following this affair Colonel Bradley, the uncle of Nellie, gives a dinner to Billy the Kid and it is attended by Denver and his pals, who hope to kill the kid, who is Denver's son, the father wishing to gain possession of all the Wright property. Billy gets wise to their antics and takes the role of servant girl, gets the whole bunch drunk and then beats it while his shoes are still good. Followed by the colonel and his niece Billy makes his way to his old home where he finds Denver, who plans to take possession. Accidentally shot by a friend, who took him for



A shootout scene in Joseph Santley and Walter Woods's melodrama *Billy the Kid* in 1907. Published in the *Fort Wayne News and Sentinel*, January 19, 1907.

Billy, the life of the villain comes to a close, Billy marries Nellie and a happy family once again hold forth in the Wright homestead.

The plot was pure fiction, but audiences didn't care. They just wanted Billy the Kid. One can easily imagine young boys pouring out of the theaters eager to start imitating the vengeful desperado while playing with their friends in the streets.

*Billy the Kid* was picked up by various production companies and continued to enthrall audiences in theaters across the United States and Canada for more than a decade after its 1906 premiere. While Joseph Santley became the star of the



Billy the Kid (Joseph Santley) and his sweetheart Nellie Bradley (Charlotte Huntington) on stage in 1907. Published in the *Courier-News* (Bridgegewater, New Jersey), October 28, 1907.

musical *When Dreams Come True*, the role of the good-bad boy Billy was played by various young actors including LeRoy Sumner, Frank Dickson, Nolan Cane, Frederick Huxtable and the popular Berkley Haswell. "Every boy who sees Billy just raves over the bravery displayed against the cowboys, and every girl loves him for the gallantry displayed by Billy as a sweetheart," the *Courier-News* proclaimed in New Jersey on October 31, 1912. "Jack London has turned the tide of public sentiment toward western life with his powerful tales of those regions, but nothing from his pen surpasses in pathos and realistic life pictures the situations, portrayed in the play," declared a press release published by the *Hinton Times* in West Virginia on November 16, 1912. "*Billy the Kid* is a good play, better than any western play I ever saw," declared stage actress Edyth Totten in New York in 1913.

*Billy the Kid* had recently enjoyed seven seasons of production in New York when playwright James Hoadley wrote a sequel titled *Billy the Kid in Mexico* in 1920. Berkley Haswell returned to the role, and the production received warm reviews following its premieres in New York and Ontario, Canada, but like many sequels, the play ultimately failed to replicate the sweeping success of its star-making predecessor.

## BILLY AND THE PRINTED WORD

While a theatrical production was bringing a largely fictionalized version of Billy the Kid to the masses, the historical William Bonney who had fought in the Lincoln County War was no stranger to the reading public prior to 1926. Almost every year, another feature about the Kid's often-embellished exploits and his death at the end of Pat Garrett's revolver was being written and republished in countless newspapers across America, Canada and as far as Australia throughout the early 20th century.

In 1905, Arthur Chapman's vitriolic and exaggerated article, "Billy the

## WHEN BILLY THE KID WAS A GIRL



Photo illustration by Bob Boze Bell

Edith Storey, the first thespian to play “Billy the Kid” on a silver screen, was born in New York City on March 18, 1892. Her film career began in 1908. She played the lead role in *Billy the Kid* three years later in 1911. “A very fine picture,” the *Arkansas City Daily Traveller* announced. “It was the story of a girl who from birth had passed as a boy. This picture was enjoyed by the audience.” The Western Comedy film was well-received by other critics and moviegoers across the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia. “The girl leads the life of a cowboy until she is 16 years of age, and her sex is discovered through an encounter with a band of outlaws,” the *Idaho Statesman* declared on September 3, 1911. “This production has many laughable situations. It is both convincing and enjoyable and worth going miles to see.” Edith Storey starred in numerous other silent Western films, including *The Immortal Alamo* (1911) and *As The Sun Went Down* (1919), before she retired from acting at the age of 29 in 1921. Having starred in over 140 silent films throughout her career, Storey eventually received a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame. Edith worked as a village clerk in Long Island for decades prior to her death in Northport, New York, on October 9, 1967.

Kid: A Man All Bad,” was republished in newspapers throughout Pennsylvania, Louisiana, Alabama, Kansas, Oklahoma, Florida, Nebraska, North Carolina and South Carolina. Snippets of Chapman’s piece were also published in New York, Massachusetts, Iowa and Canada. Another lengthy feature written by journalist Webster Ballinger that focused on the Kid’s famous jailbreak and death ran in the *Evening Star* (Washington D.C.) on March 4, 1905. That piece was faithfully reproduced in newspapers in Minnesota, Tennessee, North Dakota and Ohio that spring.

The following year, *American West* writer Allen Kelly published a sympathetic article about William Bonney titled “A Swashbuckler Out of Time” for the *San Francisco Chronicle* on June 10, 1906. “Born 300 years too late, William Bonney, instead of becoming the hero of an historical novel, was hunted to a death in the dark as the toughest bad man of the west,” Kelly professed. “It was the bad luck of Billy the Kid, cow puncher, to be engaged on the wrong side in the big cattlemen’s feud known as the Lincoln County War.” *The Province* in Vancouver, Canada, republished Kelly’s piece for its readers later that month.

1907 saw the publication of Emerson Hough’s preachy book *Story of the Outlaw*, in which Billy was a prominent figure. The name Billy the Kid and his outlaw exploits were again all over the newspapers when Pat Garrett’s death was reported across America in 1908. Later that year and in the early months of 1909, an embellished feature from *Harper’s Weekly* about William Bonney, titled “A Notorious Outlaw,” was reprinted in newspapers throughout New Jersey, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Nebraska, Tennessee, North Dakota, West Virginia, Montana, Ohio, Oklahoma, Texas, Kentucky, Virginia, Florida, Minnesota, California and other states across the country. “Fearless Billy the Kid, who reveled in carnage,” the

article declared. “Only a boy, yet a terror.”

In 1911, two different articles titled “Killing of Billy the Kid” were published in newspapers in Canada and Australia. Two years later, an article about William Bonney titled “Billy the Kid: The Most Famous of the Bad-Men of the West,” written by author Frank J. Arkins was published in New York, Pennsylvania and more than a dozen other states across America. “The Kid killed more men, wantonly and for sheer love of murder, than any other man of whom there is a record in the west,” Arkins sensationally declared. A dose of “Billy fever” struck Australia in 1914, as dozens of newspapers across the land down under published various articles about the American desperado.

By 1915, “Billy the Kid” was the name of a racehorse bolting toward finishing lines in various states in America, and was also the name of a popular young monkey at a zoo in Kansas. Numerous articles about William Bonney’s exploits continued to be published in newspapers across the country before Charles A. Siringo’s *A History of Billy the Kid* was released in 1920. Siringo’s independently published book received a recommendation in the *Boston Globe* but failed to make a dent outside New Mexico, although a summation of William H. Bonney’s

life under the headline “Made Name As Desperado” was published in various states.

In 1921, the story of Billy Bonney’s capture at Stinking Spring based

An artist’s depiction of Billy the Kid,

published with Frank J. Arkins’s article “Billy the Kid: The Most Famous of the Bad-Men of the West” in various newspapers in 1913.



An artist’s depiction of Billy the Kid’s death at the end of Pat Garrett’s revolver published with Allen Kelly’s article “A Swashbuckler Out of Time” in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, June 10, 1906.

on the recollections of Garrett posse member Jim East was published

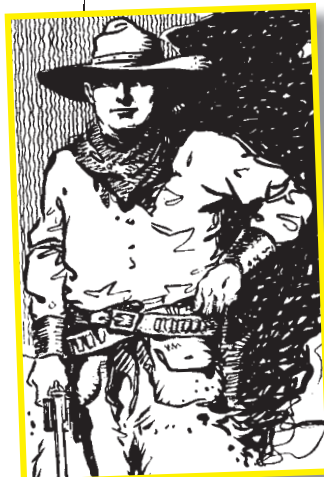
by the *Boston Globe* and other newspapers across the country.

While William Bonney was mentioned sparingly in a variety of articles in 1922, the Kid was back with a bang the following year in a feature titled “Back-trailing on the Old Frontiers: Billy the Kid, Chief Figure in Border Warfare in New Mexico, a Bad Man of Pioneer Days.” The article about Bonney’s life and Charles M. Russell’s drawing titled *Billy the Kid Avenges the Death of John Henry Tunstall*, was published by newspapers in New York, California and numerous states between them. Later that year, “The True Story of the Killing of Billy the Kid,” as told by John W. Poe, was published across the pond in *World Wide* magazine in London, England, and reproduced in almost every newspaper in Montana.

People in California were able to read another article about William Bonney published across the pond by *World Wide* magazine when the *Los Angeles Evening Post-Record* reproduced E.A. Brininstool’s lengthy piece, “Billy the Kid,” which provided recollections from John W. Poe, in February 1924. The name “Billy the Kid” was also advertised in newspapers across America later that year when inviting the population to visit their local movie theater.

## BILLY ON THE BIG SCREEN

The art of filmmaking was still in its infancy when a silent film titled *Billy the Kid* was released in 1911. Written by Edward J. Montagne and directed by Laurence Trimble for Vitagraph Studios, the film starred Edith Storey—who had recently played the lead in a film adaptation of *Oliver Twist*—in the role of Billy the Kid. The plot revolved around an orphaned young girl raised to become a cowboy



by her grandfather, “Uncle Billy,” who is kept unaware of the child’s gender. The 16-year-old “Billy the Kid” is kidnapped by a gang of outlaws on her way to school and held for ransom. Her grandfather, the sheriff, rushes off to rescue her with his foreman, Lee Curtis, but Billy the Kid manages to escape. The Kid informs her grandfather that she wants to be “Billy the Kid,” and live her life as his foreman Lee Curtis’s companion. “Uncle Billy” remains silent, and the teenage girl soon changes her name to Mrs. Lee Curtis.

To say the silent film *Billy the Kid* was even loosely based on the life of William Bonney would be an overstatement, but the comedy-drama Western was received warmly by the paying public. The picture played in movie theaters throughout the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia. “One film worth going a long way to see is *Billy the Kid*,” the *Geelong Advertiser* declared in Victoria, Australia, on January 6, 1912. The one-reel film described as a

“Yankee Comedy” when advertised in Newcastle, England, has since been lost to history.

While Joseph Santley and Walter Woods’s play kept live audiences entertained, it took more than a decade for any kind of Billy the Kid to once again ride across the silver screen.

Contrary to popular belief, King Vidor’s movie based on Walter Noble Burns’s book starring Johnny Mack Brown was not the next Kid film enjoyed by the public. In late 1924, film producer Jesse J. Goldberg’s motion picture *Billy the Kid*, starring Franklyn Farmer in the lead role, was released in cinemas. The film continued playing in movie theaters in California, New York, New Jersey, Indiana, Texas, Kentucky, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Louisiana, Maryland, Iowa, Alabama, and other states throughout



Franklyn Farnum and Ethel Shannon in Jesse J. Goldberg’s “Billy the Kid.” Published in the *Fresno Morning Republican* (Fresno, California), December 2, 1925.

1925—the same year Harvey Fergusson publicly suggested the Kid had been forgotten.

Jesse J. Goldberg’s film, written and directed by J.P. McGowan, received praise in various newspapers following its release. “*Billy the Kid* is a wow,” proclaimed the *Appeal-Democrat* in Marysville, California, on January 18, 1925. “It has fast action, good comedy and a fine love story.” The *Lebanon Daily News* in Pennsylvania happily provided a summary of the film’s plot for readers:

[Franklyn] Farnum plays the parts of Billy the Kid, the supposed bad man and Tom Price, young ranch owner who is being hounded by the village scoundrel. Point is that these two so closely resemble each other



An advertisement for the theatrical production “Billy the Kid” playing at the Well’s Bijou Theater in Evansville, Indiana, in December 1912. Published in the *Evansville Press*, December 21, 1912.



ranchman, who was shot down in the dark at the age of twenty-one,” says historian and author Mark Lee Gardner. “It was this Billy, the real-life Kid, that became a cultural icon.”

Walter Noble Burns may not have saved Billy the Kid from cultural irrelevance in 1926, but what the author did do was steer the masses in the direction of the real history rather than entirely fictionalized depictions of the famous outlaw. That alone was a significant contribution to American West history and pop-culture for which we should all be thankful and serves as the talented writer and researcher’s true legacy.

James B. Mills is an author and historian. His award-winning *Billy the Kid: El Bandido Simpático* was published in 2022. His latest book, *In the Days of Billy the Kid: The Lives and Times of José Chávez y Chávez, Juan Patrón, Martín Chávez, and Yginio Salazar*, was published by University of North Texas Press in May 2025. He dedicates this article to his disapproving friend, Mark Lee Gardner.

scarcely anyone can tell them apart, and when Tom is led off to prison, Billy steps in and pretends he is Tom in order to get from the invalided widow Price the information as to where the stolen booty is hidden. The problems that develop from this situation add delight and pleasure to every foot of the film.

Leading man Franklyn Farnum was supported on screen by the beautiful Ethel Shannon. “As Tom Price’s sister, she is demure and charming and immediately wins the sympathy of

BY JAMES B. MILLS

# MARTÍN CHÁVEZ

• FORGOTTEN HOMBRE OF THE LINCOLN COUNTY WAR •

No participant of the Lincoln County War accomplished as much in his lifetime as Martín Chávez. It is therefore perplexing as to how the leader of the McSween partisans during the five-day siege in Lincoln, also known as “The Big Killing,” became the most forgotten participant of the famous conflict. One can only scratch their head further when considering Martín was not only one of the closest friends of the legendary William “Billy the Kid” Bonney, but his own name was once known to everyone throughout the entire state of New Mexico. That former governor James Hinkle served as a pallbearer during Martín’s funeral was an accomplishment for an orphan who rose from the humblest of origins to become one of Lincoln County’s greatest Hispano success stories.

José Martín Chávez was born in the small settlement of Manzano in the eastern foothills of the formidable Manzano Mountains in Valencia County, New Mexico Territory, on December 11, 1852. He was baptized in the Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception Roman Catholic Church in Tome 18 days later. Martín had barely learned to walk and talk before becoming a *huérfano* (orphan) when his parents Juan and María

Lauriana Chávez suddenly died from unknown causes. He would spend the remainder of his childhood living with relatives, including his uncle José Chávez and his grandmother Magdalena in Manzano.

In contrast with many *Nuevomexicanos* of his time, Martín Chávez received a strong education when a Catholic priest named José Sambrano Tafoya began tutoring the boy in the 1850s. Martín embraced Padre Tafoya as a mentor and father-figure while learning how to read and write, and presumably accompanying the priest on his excursions to a small chapel in a *placita* (village) eventually known as Lincoln on the Río Bonito in southeastern New Mexico. The growing boy would remain devoted to his Roman Catholic faith for the rest of his days, also possessing an innate sense of conservatism and a strong work ethic.

Like many residents of Manzano, 18-year-old Martín Chávez had migrated into southeastern New Mexico Territory by 1870. He established a modest farm for himself and his elderly grandmother

Magdalena on the outskirts of a village called Picacho on the Río Hondo in Lincoln County. The *huérfano* was determined to succeed and quickly became one of the more accomplished sheep farmers in the region. Martín’s education set him apart from many of his fellow Hispanos on the Río Hondo, and he soon became the *majordomo* (leading citizen) of Picacho. If there was a problem or concern in the community, the local farmers and shepherders all looked to him for leadership or advice. It was a status Martín retained for the next five decades.

The citizens of Picacho were looking to Martín Chávez for reassurance and guidance during the Horrell War in January 1874. The violent race war between the Horrell brothers and the Hispanos of Lincoln County encroached on Martín’s home turf when Horrell associates Ben Turner and Edward Hart rode into Picacho that month. The dangerous duo were leaving the village after failing to acquire some corn when Turner was fatally shot by a bullet fired through a porthole of an adobe wall. Many people believed Martín Chávez was the *hombre* who left a puff of smoke rising above the adobe wall that day.

“It was always said that it was Martín Chávez who did this killing,” Lincoln County resident Lily Casey recalled. “But it was never known positively that this was the case.” If Martín was responsible for killing Ben Turner, his willingness to shoot down one of the Horrell brothers’ associates would have only further endeared him to the local Hispano populace.

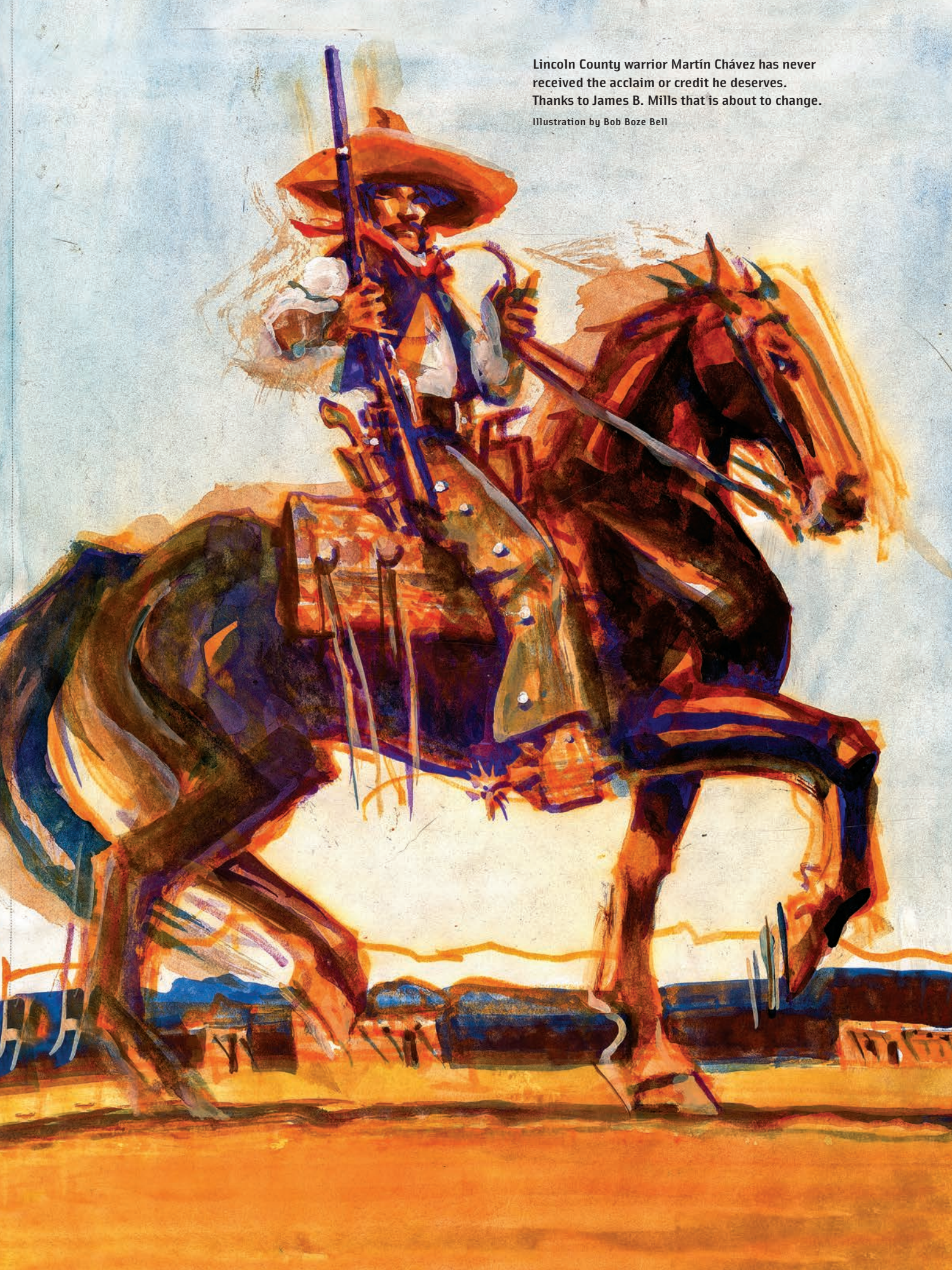


Martín's son Benjamin Chávez with his wife Emma Peppin-Chávez, the daughter George W. Peppin

All Photos Courtesy Ed Romero unless otherwise noted

Lincoln County warrior Martín Chávez has never received the acclaim or credit he deserves. Thanks to James B. Mills that is about to change.

Illustration by Bob Boze Bell



Martín Chávez (left), with his friend  
August Kline, ca. 1888

Herman B. Wiesner papers, Rio Grande Historical  
Collections, New Mexico State University

As the *majordomo* of Picacho, Martín Chávez was familiar with all the local citizens, including Civil War veteran Vicente Romero and his family, who had also migrated from Manzano years earlier. Vicente and his wife, María, served as witnesses when the 24-year-old Martín married their 16-year-old niece Juanita “Juana” Romero in the Our Lady of Sorrows Church in Manzano on August 16, 1875. The wedding was fittingly performed by Martín’s mentor Padre José Sambrano Tafoya, who eventually relocated to Lincoln County himself.

In addition to farming and raising sheep on the Río Hondo, Martín became a lawman when his fellow Democrat and Lincoln County Sheriff Saturnino Baca deputized him in 1876. There was little Deputy Sheriff Martín Chávez or anyone else could do to temper the growing animosity between Irish businessmen Lawrence Murphy, James J. Dolan and John H. Riley—known collectively as “The House”—and a Scottish attorney named Alexander McSween and English merchant John Tunstall in Lincoln County.

Martín Chávez’s term as a deputy sheriff had concluded by the time John Tunstall’s murder ignited what became known as the Lincoln County War on February 18, 1878. Martín remained focused on his farming duties the next few months while a conglomerate of Tunstall associates known as the Regulators carried out a series of revenge killings against the Dolan faction members responsible for the Englishman’s murder. Although Martín initially refrained from participating in the guerrilla warfare, the sheep farmer established a strong friendship with a young member of the Regulators named



Henry McCarty, alias William H. Bonney, whom many referred to as “The Kid.”

As the war between Jimmy Dolan and Alexander McSween’s factions continued raging throughout Lincoln County, Martín’s sympathies for the McSween side only strengthened after Dolan and his supporters ransacked the Hispano village of San Patricio on July 3, 1878. “The [Dolan] crowd was becoming overbearing, intolerable and very dangerous,” Martín later said. “They helped themselves to whatever they wanted—anywhere. If any one of them found a woman or a girl unprotected or alone, she was treated with insult and horrible usage. Their conduct caused them to be intensely hated.”

Alexander McSween and the Regulators were aware of Martín’s disdain for the Dolan faction when they arrived in Picacho on the evening of July 14, 1878. They wanted the widely respected 25-year-old farmer to lead them into battle upstream in Lincoln. “We knew him to be one of our sympathizers,” recalled Regulator George Coe. “We requested him to take on the leadership of our band, and promised to abide by his decisions and follow his plans.” Martín readily accepted the McSween faction’s offer, and recruited roughly 20 local Hispanos to join their ranks, including his uncle-in-law Vicente Romero.

Martín hugged his concerned wife, Juanita, and led a force of approximately



60 armed partisans up the Río Bonito into Lincoln under cover of darkness. His plan was to “gain a toehold before any resistance could be offered,” as George Coe later described it. Martín and his men managed to remain undetected by any of the locals. “Chávez placed us in various sections of town,” recalled Coe. Martín and roughly 20 of his Hispano fighters took position inside the Montaño store. Alexander McSween, Billy Bonney and others took position in the McSween home, while other members of their faction took cover in the Patrón store and the Ellis house. Jimmy Dolan and his faithful crony Sheriff George Peppin were at the western end of Lincoln in the Wortley Hotel and unaware of the McSween faction’s arrival until the following morning. Martín’s strategy had proven a masterstroke.

Martín Chávez and his armed partisans held the advantage in Lincoln throughout the next four days while frequently exchanging shots with members of the Dolan faction. They were better positioned and intending

to fight it out to the last bullet. Martín was very nearly shot when briefly exiting the Montaño store to confront House partisan Lucio Montoya on the morning of July 17. “[Montoya] miraculously missed me,” he remembered. Martín and two of his *hombres* chased Montoya into the Romero home up the street, but were unable to find him. The Dolan loyalist had hidden inside a box in the living room and was able to sneak back to the western end of town while disguised in women’s clothing. “Years later when we were at peace, I had many hearty laughs with Lucio,” Martín later recalled.

The advantage held by Martín’s forces evaporated when Colonel Nathan Dudley and some buffalo soldiers arrived in Lincoln with a howitzer on the morning of July 19. When Dudley assisted the Dolan faction by positioning the cannon directly in front of the Montaño store, Martín stepped outside to confront the white-haired officer.

“Colonel, you want to kill me and my men in the house?” Martín asked.

Martín Chávez (left) and his son-in-law Francisco Santana (second from the left) inside their store

“If a single shot is fired by your men, I will blow your house to pieces,” Dudley responded.

Martín ordered his men to shoot the soldier operating the howitzer if it looked like the fuse was about to be lit, but he knew the game was over. Martín sent a note to Alexander McSween suggesting they vacate the Scotsman’s home, as it appeared the army might blow them all to pieces. He then swallowed his pride and led his Hispano fighters out the back of the Montaño store and down the street to the Ellis house. When Dudley repositioned the howitzer in front of the Ellis building, Martín and his men mounted their horses and exchanged fire with the Dolan partisans while withdrawing into the northern hills across the Río Bonito.



Martín and his *hombres* continued firing shots at the Dolan partisans from the hills while their enemies set fire to the McSween home. After nightfall, Martín and a handful of his men tried to assist Billy “The Kid” Bonney and their comrades in the McSween house by stealthily crossing the river and aiming their rifles at the Dolan store. It was little use, as the Irishman and his supporters had surrounded the McSween home down the street. Martín approached the rear of the burning building and shouted for his comrades to come out before returning to the northern hills. “It was impossible for us to be of any assistance,” Martín lamented years later. “But we remained in the vicinity to be on hand in case they did escape.”

While Billy Bonney and some of his companions managed to escape the burning house in a hail of gunfire later that night, Alexander McSween and

Vicente Romero were among those killed by the Dolan faction. “I shall never forget the night they took forcible possession of Lincoln and set fire to the McSween home,” Martín said decades later.

Feeling that any further fighting was pointless in the wake of Alexander McSween’s death, Martín informed Billy Bonney of his intention to return to his wife in Picacho at the Agua Sol ranch in the foothills of the Capitan Mountains. “As spokesman for our group, I told the Kid our decision,” he recalled. “And we parted as good friends.” While Bonney and some of their partisans were determined to continue to fight, Martín returned home and watched his uncle-in-law Vicente Romero’s funeral with a heavy heart in Picacho. “Thus ended my participation in the Lincoln County War,” he later remarked.

Martín Chávez and members of his family posed for a photograph with a Padre (on the far left). Juanita Romero-Chávez and Martín are both seated, with their granddaughter Anita Santana standing between them. Standing in a row behind them are—from left to right—their son Benjamin Chávez, their daughter-in-law Trinidad Montoya-Chávez holding a baby, their son José “Modesto” Chávez, their daughter Josefita Chávez-Santana, and their son-in-law Francisco Santana.

### The Loss of a Friend

Martín resumed his farming duties in Picacho and continued transporting shipments of quality wool to Las Vegas after the five-day siege in Lincoln. The locals all turned to him and his friend August Kline for leadership while John

Selman and his “Rustlers” murdered, pillaged and raped throughout Lincoln County during the fall of 1878. When Governor Lew Wallace finally arrived in Lincoln the following spring, Martín signed up as a member of Juan Patron’s “Mounted Rifles.” He later collected \$6 for his service with the county militia. Martín also testified for the prosecution during a court of inquiry held in Fort Stanton for Col. Nathan Dudley regarding his conduct during the five-day-siege that summer, although Dudley was ruled innocent of charges subject to a court marshal.

On the Río Hondo, Martín and Juanita often received visits from their helpful friend Billy “The Kid” Bonney, who had failed to receive his promised pardon from Governor Wallace. Like most of the Hispanos throughout the county, Martín had embraced Bonney as the social bandit of New Mexico. “Billy was one of the kindest and best boys I ever knew, and far superior in many respects to his pursuers,” Martín recalled. “All the wrongs have been charged to Billy, yet we who really knew him know that he was good and had fine qualities.” On one occasion, the Kid helped Martín collect an unpaid wager by fearlessly shooting three cows belonging to a group of Texans and instructing his friend to collect his beef. “Kid stayed with me many nights,” Chávez remembered.

Martín tried to visit Billy Bonney in the Lincoln County Courthouse prior to the outlaw’s spectacular jailbreak in April 1881, but the malicious Deputy Bob Olinger refused. “He declared that I had been too friendly with [Bonney],” Chávez recalled. Billy paid Martín and Juanita Chávez one last visit in Picacho following his famous escape before returning to Fort Sumner. Martín advised his *amigo* to ride for Old Mexico or “any place a long way from here.” Billy



Martín Chávez posed for a photograph with George Curry, ca. 1910s.

refused to leave the territory without his intended bride, Paulita Maxwell.

“No,” Bonney insisted. “I go with my wife. If I die, I am satisfied, for I die for her.”

Martín was saddened when he learned of Billy the Kid’s death at the end of Pat Garrett’s revolver in Fort Sumner during the night of July 14, 1881. He would publicly defend his slain friend’s character and legacy for the rest of his days.

### **Business and Politics**

1884 proved an eventful year for Martín and Juanita Chávez. Having already adopted a boy named David Billescas, the couple realized in the spring that Juanita was pregnant with their first biological child. Two months later, in late June, Martín was devastated when his mentor Padre José Sambrano died of a fractured skull after falling from his buggy on a hillside above Lincoln. Already one of the most successful sheep farmers in the region, Martín was appointed as a road supervisor shortly before his son, José

“Modesto” Chávez, was born in Picacho on November 29.

With a growing family, Martín began his steady ascension in politics. He represented his precinct as a member of the Democratic County Central Committee at the Democratic Convention held in Lincoln shortly after the birth of his daughter Josefa “Josefita” Chávez in Picacho on March 20, 1887. Martín also attended the Democratic Convention held in Lincoln on August 14, 1890. He was among the dele-

gates elected to represent their county at the upcoming Democratic Convention over in Roswell, Chaves County. Three years later, in June 1893, Martín and Juanita welcomed the birth of another son named Benjamin Chávez. In one of history’s wonderful ironies, Benjamin eventually married Emma Peppin, the daughter of his father’s one-time adversary George W. Peppin.

Having rapidly become one of the leading Democrats in Lincoln County, Martín was elected to represent his party at the territorial convention during the summer of 1894. Although he was unsuccessful in his bid for probate judge, the increasingly wealthy sheep farmer represented the local Democrats at the territorial convention in Las Vegas in June 1896. The *majordomo* of Picacho achieved his first significant political success five months later when elected to the Board of Lincoln County Commissioners that November.

Martín’s duties as a public servant continued in a variety of ways throughout the early 20th century. He was appointed the local postmaster in May 1900, and

Martín's daughter Josefita,  
with her husband  
Francisco Santana



succeeded his brother-in-law and close friend George Kimbrell as the local justice of the peace. That job almost cost Martín his life when he was severely beaten by a gun-waving troublemaker in Picacho in January 1901. “Chávez is in critical condition and will probably die,” a Las Vegas newspaper declared. Martín recovered from his injuries and welcomed the birth of a second daughter, Marietta “María” Chávez, on November 3, 1902. The following year, he was appointed as the deputy sheriff of Picacho by the recently elected Sheriff John W. Owen.

Martín continued prospering on his “Sunset Ranch” in Picacho throughout the next decade. He cultivated profitable fruit orchards on the Río Hondo, and shipped thousands of pounds of wool to the Aurora Scouring Mills in Illinois. He also opened a successful grocery store in Picacho called Martín Chavez & Sons. The Lincoln County War veteran was making enough money to hire two live-in servants for his family, and his reputation grew to the point that even his farming activities and mere presence in a town were reported by various newspapers. He was also handpicked as a delegate by Governor George Curry to represent Lincoln County at the National Farmers’ Congress in Oklahoma City on October 17, 1907.

Age did not slow Martín as he continued selling shipments of wool in Roswell and was appointed to the Democratic State Central Committee at a convention in Santa Fe on October 3, 1911. The following autumn, Martín was nominated as a representative for

Lincoln County on the executive committee for the New Mexico Wool Growers’ Association. The successful businessman was also chosen as a member of the board of control for the Eastern New Mexico Good Roads Association the following year. A man of multiple talents, Martín was appointed to the Lincoln County Board of Education in 1917, and joined the Lincoln County Council of Defense the following year while still serving on the Democratic State Central Committee.

Lincoln County became too small for Martín’s prospects, so the widely respected entrepreneur and his family relocated to Santa Fe by the spring of 1919. He established a profitable mercantile store called Martín Chavez & Sons—later renamed The New York Store—on San Francisco Street in the state capital. The 66-year-old merchant decided his days in the wool trade were over that autumn and sold all of his sheep to Jaffa, Prager & Co. in Roswell for approximately \$50,000. The hard-working orphan from Manzano was now one of the most esteemed businessmen in all of New Mexico.

### **So Valuable a Citizen**

Martín Chávez quickly established himself as a pillar of his community in Santa Fe. The businessman invested in local real estate, became a member of the

St. Francis Cathedral and church societies of Saint Joseph and Saint Francis, and achieved the pinnacle of his success when

Governor James Hinkle nominated him for the New Mexico State Tax Commission on March 9, 1923. Martín’s appointment was confirmed by the senate, and he was among the 34 delegates chosen by Governor Hinkle to represent their state at the four-day National Taxation Conference commencing in White Sulphur Springs, West Virginia, on September 24. The following year, Martín travelled east again as one of the 80 delegates chosen by Governor Hinkle to attend the seven-day National Taxation Conference that commenced in St. Louis, Missouri, on September 13, 1924.

Martín had barely returned from St. Louis when tragedy struck his family on October 15, 1924. That was the day Martín’s son-in-law Francisco Santana committed suicide by shooting himself through the heart inside the restroom of their New York Store on San Francisco Street. The patriarch of the family oversaw the funeral procession held in Santa Fe two days later and tried to comfort his suddenly widowed daughter Josefita and his grandchildren. Martín subsequently sold his mercantile store to fellow Santa Fe merchant John Rousseau Martin in January 1925.

What was supposed to be a six-year term for Martín on the State Tax Commission began unravelling when Governor Arthur T. Hannett suddenly requested his and George Ulrick’s resignations in February 1925. Governor Hannett accused the 72-year-old Martín of negligence due to his advanced years, and removed him from the tax

Martín Chávez and Juanita Romero-Chávez's marker in the Rosario Cemetery, Santa Fe. The birth date for Martín Chávez is incorrect, as his baptismal records reveal that he was actually born on December 11, 1852.

James B. Mills Collection



commission that spring. Martín's and George Ulrick's attorneys tried to fight against their dismissals in what became known as the "State Tax War," but Governor Hannett eventually emerged victorious. Martín subsequently retired after decades of public service and enjoyed the fruits of his many labors with his family.

Martín never forgot his *amigo* William Bonney and was given the chance to reminisce about the old days when interviewed by Walter Noble Burns while the author worked on a book about the famous desperado titled *The Saga of Billy the Kid*. Martín was unimpressed with Burns and various other authors' depictions of his late friend, as he informed former governor Miguel Antonio Otero Jr. in Santa Fe during the summer of 1926. Otero was planning to write his own book about the Hispano population's favorite *bandido* and devoted an entire chapter to *Don Martín's* recollections. "We have not put our impressions of [Billy] into print and our silence has been the cause of great injustice to the Kid," Martín insisted.

Martín and Juanita moved into a new home at 518 College Street in Santa Fe in 1927. The elderly couple were enjoying their autumn years when tragedy struck their family again during the spring of 1930. Their daughter Josefita's

21-year-old son Henry Santana was killed in an automobile accident outside of Watrous, Mora County, on April 10. Martín served as a pallbearer during his grandson's funeral service held inside the St. Francis Cathedral two days later.

José Martín Chávez's own funeral service would be held in the same cathedral after the 78-year-old journeyman died of pneumonia in his home at 2:30 in the afternoon of December 8, 1931. His passing was reported in several newspapers—in as far as Wyoming—including the *Santa Fe New Mexican*, which published both an obituary and a partly accurate account of his remarkable life:

*Don Martin belonged to the McSween section, the crowd of which Billy the Kid was the hero. Interviewed in recent years by authors of Billy the Kid books, Don Martin stoutly resented word pictures that made the Kid appear in the role of a "crook." He was loyal to his friends, he said, not a killer for the sake of killing... Martin was born at Manzano, but "drifting down" to Picacho he became a rancher in Lincoln County in the days when history was being made with six-shooters...*

Martín's funeral service was held in the St. Francis Cathedral on December 11, 1931. "There were many beautiful floral designs, each bearing a message of deep sympathy in the loss to the community of so valuable a citizen as Mr. Chaves [sic]

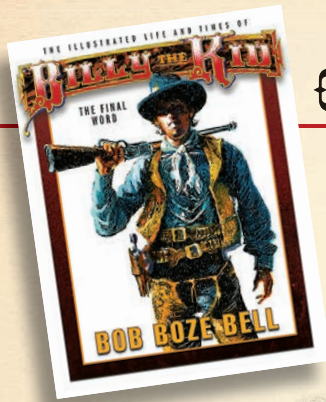
was," the *New Mexican* announced. Former governor James F. Hinkle, George Ulrick and "Colonel" George Prichard acted as pallbearers, and Martín was buried in the family plot in the Rosario Cemetery on North Guadalupe Street. His devoted wife Juanita Romero-Chávez was buried with him following her passing on April 21, 1947.

For all of Martín Chávez's achievements and decades of success—and his recollections of New Mexico's most famous conflict being published in Miguel Antonio Otero's *The Real Billy the Kid: With New Light on the Lincoln County War* in 1936—the *majordomo* of Picacho was largely forgotten in the decades following his death. His name has only been mentioned sparingly by most historians, and he has never been portrayed on screen in any of the dozens of films about his famous *amigo* Billy Bonney.

An *hombre* who survived the Lincoln County War and exceeded the more famous Juan Patrón as a businessman deserved better.



James B. Mills is an author and historian. His award-winning *Billy the Kid: El Bandido Simpático* was published in 2022. His latest book, *In the Days of Billy the Kid: The Lives and Times of José Chávez y Chávez, Juan Patrón, Martín Chávez, and Yginio Salazar*, was published in May 2025.



## CLASSIC TRUE WEST

FROM THE TRUE WEST ARCHIVES

**Editor's Note:** If you'd like to read more of Bob Boze Bell's articles, like "Brushy Bill" from his Illustrated Life & Times series, please go to [TrueWestMagazine.com](http://TrueWestMagazine.com) and subscribe to more than 70 years' worth of exciting issues.

# Brushy Billy

BY BOB BOZE BELL

"What people choose to believe is a fact in itself."

—Leon Metz

## 1948

William V. Morrison is working as an investigator for a law firm in Florida (although he has a law degree he is not a bar member). Morrison is currently working on an estate case involving an old man named Joe Hines, who claims he fought against Billy the Kid and doesn't believe the official history of the outlaw's demise: "Garrett did not kill the Kid on July 14, 1881, or any other time."

Morrison then contacts a fellow Missourian named J. Frank Dalton who has recently been written up in the papers because of his startling declaration that he is Jesse James. Through this dubious character (few believe Dalton's claim), Morrison learns the address of the man in Texas who claims to be Billy the Kid.

## August 1949

After some correspondence and an initial meeting, Morrison picks up Brushy Bill Roberts in Hico, Texas, and they set off on a road trip to New Mexico. Brushy Bill reminisces along the way, making numerous mistakes and contradicting himself, but Morrison rationalizes that the Kid is "still running," and is dodging questions that might compromise him with the authorities.

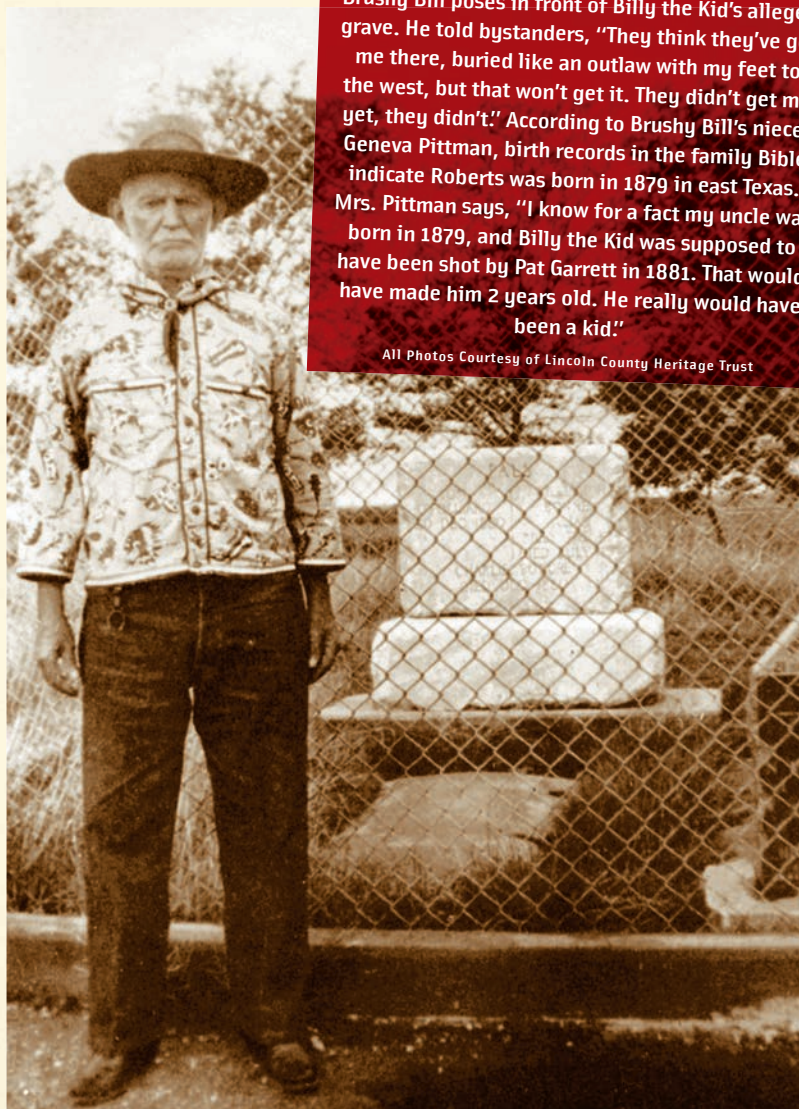
## July 1950

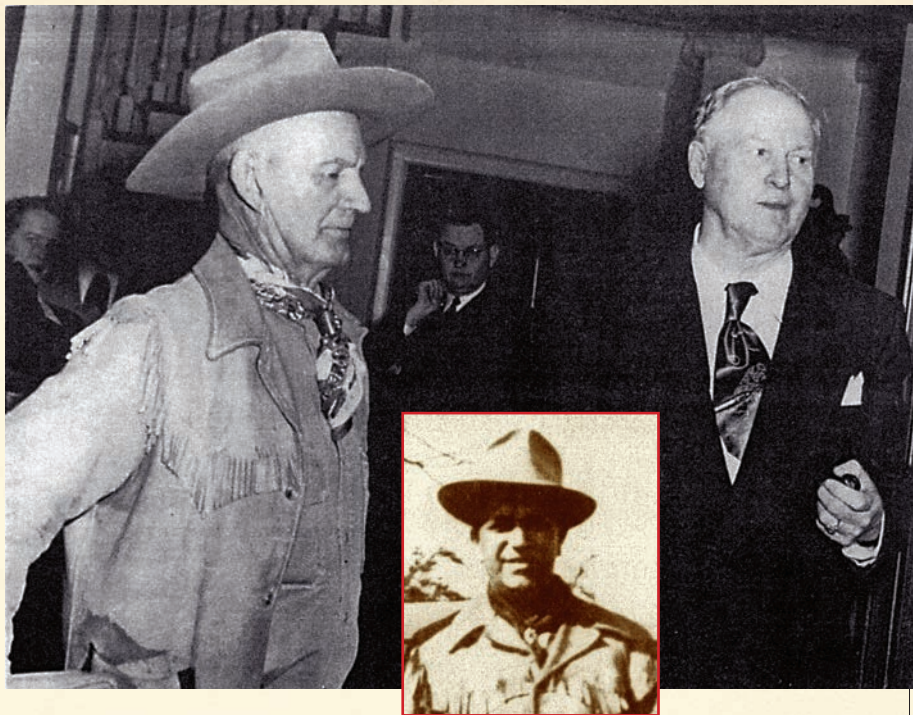
Morrison moves to El Paso, Texas, "to be near the records" he needs to work up a Brushy Bill brief (a request for a full pardon) to present to the governor of New Mexico.

### A GRAVE MISTAKE?

Brushy Bill poses in front of Billy the Kid's alleged grave. He told bystanders, "They think they've got me there, buried like an outlaw with my feet to the west, but that won't get it. They didn't get me yet, they didn't." According to Brushy Bill's niece, Geneva Pittman, birth records in the family Bible indicate Roberts was born in 1879 in east Texas. Mrs. Pittman says, "I know for a fact my uncle was born in 1879, and Billy the Kid was supposed to have been shot by Pat Garrett in 1881. That would have made him 2 years old. He really would have been a kid."

All Photos Courtesy of Lincoln County Heritage Trust





## GRAVE CONSEQUENCES

Brushy Bill Roberts with Gov. Mabry. In 1955, William Morrison (inset), with the participation of noted Southwest author C.L. Sonnichsen, was able to convince the University of New Mexico to publish *Alias Billy the Kid*, a book that lays out in some detail the claims of Brushy Bill. Adherents claim Roberts knows too much about the details of the Lincoln County War to be a faker, while critics believe Morrison simply padded Brushy Bill's shaky narrative with the semi-correct answers. Although widely dismissed, the book has managed to keep Roberts' dubious claim alive. It didn't hurt that in 1991, the *Young Guns II* movie resurrected Brushy Bill and his claim and gave them a fresh coat of glossy paint.

## November 29, 1950

In Santa Fe, Governor Mabry meets with William Morrison and Ollie L. Roberts, in the study of the governor's mansion. On behalf of Roberts, Morrison wants the governor to "pardon this man and restore him to good standing in the state." Morrison claims that Roberts is really Billy the Kid.

After meeting with the governor, the trio enters the dining room where the press, various historians and interested parties, 20 in all, are gathered. They include Pat Garrett's sons Oscar and Jarvis who are indignant about the whole proceeding. Also in attendance are Cliff McKinney, son of Kip McKinney, and Arcadio Brady, son of William Brady.

The meeting goes badly for Brushy Bill. He is nervous and flustered. At one point he can't even remember Pat Garrett's name. When asked if he killed Olinger and Bell when he escaped from the Lincoln County jail, Roberts claims he didn't do any shooting that day—he just got on his horse and rode off.

Oscar Garrett is asked if he wants to query Roberts and he says, "I do not wish to dignify this claim with any questions."

Brushy Bill looks like he is going to faint and asks to lie down, saying, "I don't feel good."

After Roberts' respite, the governor issues his verdict: "I am taking no action,

now or ever, on this application for a pardon for Billy the Kid because I do not believe this man is Billy the Kid."

Soundly defeated and bitterly disappointed, Morrison and Roberts drive back to El Paso. Brushy Bill returns to his home and is bedbound for several days because of the stress of the meeting and his trip.

## December 27, 1950

It is a mere four weeks since the fiasco in Santa Fe. Brushy Bill Roberts leaves his house around 1 p.m. to go to the post office and mail a package for his wife. As he is passing the *Hico News-Review*, he has a heart attack and collapses. Bill is found lying in the gutter with one arm across the bumper of a car parked at

the curb. O.L. Roberts is pronounced dead on the scene. His claim, however, will live on.



## Who's Calling Who Bogus Billy?

In 1991, this author did a cover story for *Arizona Highways* on Billy the Kid in Arizona. One of the sidebars in the article was titled *Bogus Billy* and stated, "There are at least three details about Brushy Bill that do not match up with Billy the Kid:

- "1. Brushy Bill was left-handed, and Billy the Kid was right-handed.**
- 2. Brushy Bill was illiterate, and Billy the Kid wrote letters to the governor of New Mexico that are on public display.**
- 3. Brushy Bill doesn't look one whit like Billy the Kid."**

*Arizona Highways* received the following reply from one of Brushy Bill's most ardent supporters, Judge Bob Hefner of Hico, Texas: "Mr. Bell can fast draw with the best, but he missed the target completely with *Bogus Billy*:"

- "1. Brushy Bill Roberts was ambidextrous (Paul Newman was "The Left Handed Gun").**
- 2. Many letters written by and for Brushy exist today.**
- 3. Brushy did not look like the tintype, so what, the tintype IS NOT BILLY. Quien es? Only the Lord would know."**



## TRUE WEST ARCHIVES

For the first time ever, every issue of *True West* magazine is now online, including this original, unabridged article as it appeared in a past issue.

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**Our past awaits you!**

BY JOHNNY D. BOGGS

# On the New Mexico Trail of Billy the Kid

*A Kid Road Trip is the best thing for your soul.*

**I**'m not driving to Utica, New York, to start this Renegade Roads trip—or anywhere else Billy the Kid was supposedly born that isn't within the New Mexico boundaries.

Utica is the latest potential birthplace—following New York City (the most commonly cited) and, in no particular order, Indiana, Kansas, Ireland, Ohio, Missouri—and there's a lot of evidence to back up that Utica claim. But it's still just circumstantial.

I'm starting in New Mexico, because that's where his legend was born. And, yeah, you can even find some theorists who say the Kid was born here, too.

The first stop is First Presbyterian Church in Santa Fe, and not because it's just a 23-minute drive from where I live and write or because my son was baptized there 23 years ago.

The church was organized on January 6, 1867; the ruins of a failed Baptist church and two acres were bought two months later; and on March 1, 1873, the widow Catherine McCarty married William Antrim in the church. Her two sons, Billy and Joseph, were witnesses. The family briefly moved into the Exchange Hotel.

## The City Different

While the current First Presbyterian Church is located on the same property as the original, the Exchange Hotel was torn down in 1919 and replaced with La Fonda on the Plaza in 1922. Three years later, the hotel became one of Fred Harvey's Harvey Houses, and today, just off the Santa Fe Plaza, remains a popular hangout for tourists and locals—and walking distance to the New Mexico



**Catherine and the Kid**

She was known in Kansas as "The Widow McCarty" and a resident in Silver City, New Mexico, described her as "a jolly Irish lady, full of life, fun and mischief, [who] could dance the Highland Fling as well as the best of dancers." Journalist Ash Upson described Catherine as "about medium height, straight and graceful in form, with regular features, light blue eyes, and luxuriant golden hair. She was not a beauty, but what the world calls a fine-looking woman." And then he adds, "Her charity and goodness of heart were proverbial!"

It's safe to say, young Henry, and his younger brother, Josie, lost a much-needed influence, at a much-needed point of their lives.

All illustrations by Bob Boze Bell

Died in Silver City, on Wednesday the 16th inst, Catherine, wife of William Antrim, aged 45 years.  
Mrs. Antrim with her husband and family came to Silver City about one year and a half ago, since that time her health has not been good, having suffered from an affection of the lungs, for the last four months she had been confined to her bed. The funeral occurred from the family residence, on Main street, at 2 o'clock on, Thursday.—Silver City N. M. *Mining Life.*

Courtesy newspapers.com



La Fonda Hotel

Courtesy New Mexico Department of Tourism



A part of the New Mexico History Museum's award-winning exhibit "Cowboys, Real and Imagined"

Courtesy New Mexico History Museum

History Museum, Palace of the Governors, Loretto Chapel, The Cathedral Basilica of St. Francis of Assisi and O'Farrell Hat Company, where hatmaker Scott O'Farrell is always asking me to bring Bob Boze Bell for a visit to talk history and hats.

The Antrims didn't stay long in Santa Fe, but Billy would return years later, writing unanswered letters to Governor Lew Wallace while waiting in jail before being sent south to Mesilla (Gadsden Museum), near Las Cruces (New Mexico Farm and Ranch Heritage Museum), to be tried for the murder of Sheriff William Brady. The Santa Fe jail is now site of Collected Works Bookstore & Coffeehouse.

The Antrims went south, first stopping in Georgetown, which at its peak had a population of 1,200, but now has a historic cemetery, some vacation cabins and a lot of gorgeous mountains. In 1873, Georgetown suited William Antrim but not Catherine, so they moved to Silver City (Silver City Museum, historic Fort Bayard).

### Silver City Days

Young Billy thrived at his new home, becoming a good student at the public school and performing in amateur theater. His mother took in boarders and sold homemade pies and sweetcakes to help make ends meet, while his stepfather

prospected in the area, worked as a butcher and carpenter and gambled.

And young Henry (called that to avoid confusion with stepdad William) might have grown up to be a forgotten productive member of society if Catherine hadn't died of consumption on September 16, 1874. With his stepdad having no interest in parenting, Billy fell in with bad company.

That led to the straying youth's arrest for stealing clothes from a Chinese laundry. The sheriff locked him up in Silver City's new jail, hoping to scare the kid away from a life of crime, but Billy escaped through the chimney and fled to Arizona.

And there begins the Kid's missing years until he shot and killed a bully named Frank P. Cahill, who had pinned the Kid down and was slapping him, at Arizona Territory's Camp Grant on August 18, 1877. Once again, Billy disappeared, only to show up a few months later in New Mexico's Lincoln County.

Frank B. Coe said "the Kid," as he was called, worked on Coe's ranch and "was very handy in camp, a good cook and good-natured and jolly." He was also an excellent shot.

By November, the Kid was working for transplanted Englishman John Henry Tunstall, who had started a ranch in Lincoln County, started a store in

Lincoln, the county seat, and, while he might not have realized it, started a deadly war against a powerful faction known as the House.

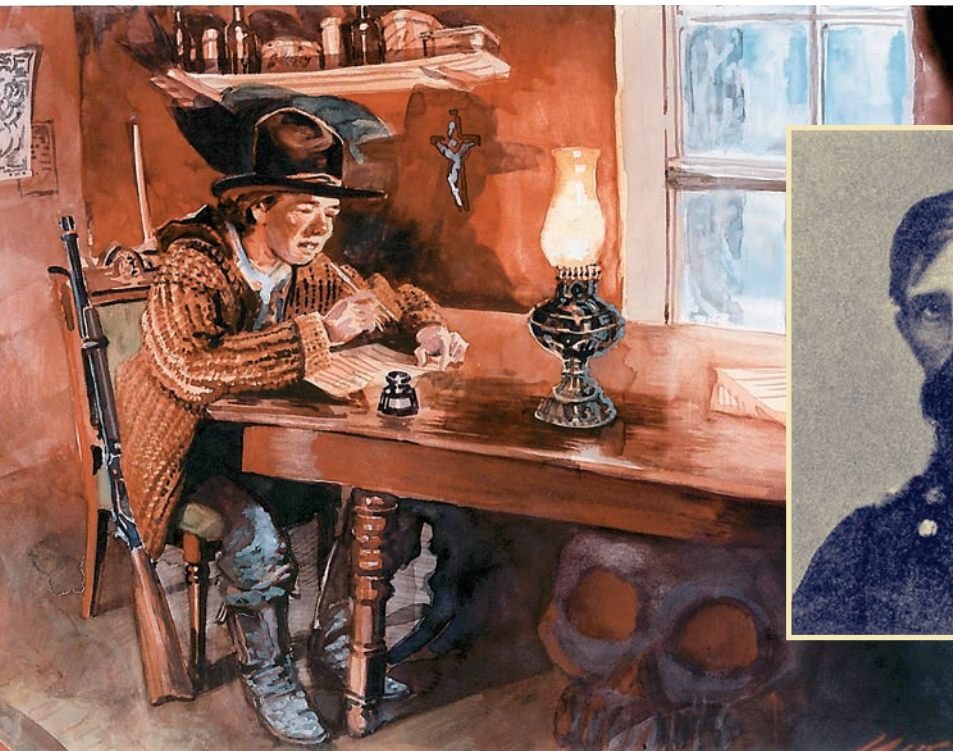
### A Country for Bold Men

The Lincoln County War is far too complicated to detail in a travel article (read Frederick Nolan's myriad nonfiction books), but Lincoln today does a fine job of explaining things since the whole village is a historic site—and little has changed in its appearance more than a century later.

Tunstall was murdered on February 18, 1878—a crime witnessed by the Kid—in what is now part of Lincoln National Forest, where a "sweet, gentle mare" named Honey tried to murder me while riding to the site years ago. In 1878, a series of retaliatory shootings followed, including the ambush murder of Lincoln County Sheriff William Brady, before the Lincoln County War arguably ended with a fiery, deadly gunfight in the town that left several dead.

### But Not the Kid

In short order, Wallace took over as territorial governor with a promise to end Lincoln County's troubles, but he was preoccupied with getting a better job—an ambassadorship to the Middle East. Wallace made a deal with the Kid:



Major General Lew Wallace, 1860s

National Archives



Testify in a military court of inquiry at Fort Stanton (Fort Stanton Historic Site) and “go scot free with a pardon in your pocket for all your misdeeds.”

Billy lived up to his end of the bargain. Wallace didn't. So the betrayed Billy rode off for a new chapter in his life.

**Dear Lew**

In red ink on ruled paper, Billy the Kid writes a letter to Governor Lew Wallace on December 12, 1880, pleading his case. He insists he isn't the leader of any gang and he claims he is making his “living gambling,” which is about half true.

**Viva Billy**

Which was mostly gambling in Las Vegas (City of Las Vegas Museum), Anton Chico, Puerto de Luna (Our Lady of Refuge Church) and Fort Sumner.

By 1881, the Kid, rustling with some pals, became an annoyance to Wallace and newly elected Lincoln County

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# A WIDE SPOT IN THE ROAD

Sheriff Pat Garrett, who ambushed the Kid and his pals at Fort Sumner and captured Billy at Stinking Springs (on private property). Billy was taken to Las Vegas and then by train to Santa Fe before heading to Mesilla (Gadsden Museum), where he was tried for Brady's murder, found guilty and sentenced to be hanged in Fort Sumner.

But the Kid escaped in Fort Sumner, killing two deputies, and riding out of town unmolested—till Garrett shot the Kid dead in Pete Maxwell's bedroom back in Fort Sumner on July 14, 1881.



Johnny D. Boggs also recommends Michael Wallis's *Billy the Kid: The Endless Ride*, Mark Lee Gardner's *To Hell on a Fast Horse: The Untold Story of Billy the Kid and Pat Garrett* and Bob Boze Bell's *The Illustrated Life and Times of Billy the Kid*.

## BOSQUE REDONDO MEMORIAL AT FORT SUMNER HISTORIC SITE

Fort Sumner is home to two Billy the Kid museums and the graves of Billy and his "pals" Charlie Bowdre and Tom Folliard aka O'Folliard. We're not going to pick a favorite, but the museum not to be missed is the Bosque Redondo Memorial at Fort Sumner Historic Site. Created in 2005, this state-of-the-art



Bosque Redondo Memorial

Photo by Mike Lawson

and incredibly moving museum, designed by Navajo architect David Sloan, powerfully documents the 1863-68 internment of Diné (Navajo) and Ndé (Mescalero Apache) people on the Bosque Redondo Indian Reservation that left an estimated 1,500 Natives dead from starvation, disease and exposure. The subject is heartbreaking, but the memorial also celebrates the perseverance and triumphs of the two tribes today.

[NMHistoricSites.org/bosque-redondo](http://NMHistoricSites.org/bosque-redondo)

## GOOD EATS & SLEEPS

**GOOD GRUB:** **Santa Fe Bite**, Santa Fe, New Mexico; **Little Toad Brewery & Distillery**, Fort Sumner, New Mexico; **Charlie's Spic & Span**, Las Vegas, New Mexico

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## Will Rogers, the Chili Lover

*He called it the cowboys' caviar and a bowl of blessedness.*



L to R: Sallie McSpadden (Will's sister), Will Rogers, Tom McSpadden and Will's wife, Betty, at Will's California ranch.

Courtesy of the Will Rogers Memorial Museum

**M**any people know that Will Rogers was a Wild West show performer, vaudevillian, newspaperman, radio pundit, philosopher and actor. But, did you know Will loved food? Not just to eat to fill his belly, but he loved food. About food, he said, "We only have one or two wars in a lifetime. But we have three meals a day. When you have helped raise the standard of cooking then you would have raised the only thing in the world that matters."

What were some of Will Rogers' favorite foods? His son James Rogers recalled, "Since Dad came from Oklahoma and grew up on country cooking, his favorite dishes were plain and simple. He sure liked a mess of hot biscuits with cream gravy. Chili was high on his list of favorite foods. But I think that a big bowl of whiter, navy beans cooked with ham hocks and served real soupy would be his first choice." He also recalled their cook, Lilly, bringing a large crock that held over a half gallon, of these beans to

the table with a platter piled high with corn bread. He wrote, "We would smother the corn bread with beans and sit there and eat and talk until that old crock was empty."

Will loved chili and believed it was the best thing to eat for many reasons. He once wrote, "You can have fried chicken anywhere but there's only one place to have Ike's chili," and "Ike's chili is a bowl of blessedness," and "Chili is cowboys' caviar." According to Oklahoma's *Claremore Weekly Express*, Ivan "Ike" O. Johnson worked for J.C. Morris, who introduced chili to the 60 residents in 1893. Morris wrote, "People certainly did like to eat chili. Guess they still do. I had a bright young fellow working for me then. His name was Ike and I taught him all I knew about the chili business." Ike opened his first location in 1925 and became known as the Tulsa Chili King by 1930, after opening chili parlors across the state. They knew Will so well that they once opened the restaurant after hours so

he could get a bowl of their chili. Will had his choice of chili four ways—chili and beans, chili and spaghetti, plain chili, and spaghetti with chili and beans. I'm bettin' Will was a plain chili kind of guy.

Will also loved his sister's chili recipe. When he was suffering from gallstones, he proclaimed that he had, "nuthin' a bowl of chili wouldn't cure." He also shared, "Always liked chili. I've always said nobody could make a decent banquet speech unless he has a good dish of chili, the real Mexican kind." He had a knack for finding hole-in-the-wall spots in the towns and cities he visited, including places like New York City. He also enjoyed the corned beef and cabbage at Dinty Moore's restaurant when he was in the city.

In 1927 Will found a canned chili product he liked when he was in Corsicana, Texas. There he was presented with Lyman's Famous Chili, which he liked so much, that he ordered two cases to have shipped to his home in Beverly Hills. Lyman Davis originally started selling his chili for five cents a bowl from the back of a wagon parked on the streets in downtown Corsicana in 1895. He then canned his chili and adopted the brand name Wolf Brand Chili, in honor of his pet wolf.

This chili recipe appeared in the *Will Rogers Birthday Centennial Cookbook* and shared by his granddaughter Jennifer Etcheverry. The recipe itself was contributed by the Beverly Hills Woman's club cookbook from 1931. Will endorsed the recipe in this book and wrote, "Course we got some might fine recipes in here...."

### CHILI AND BEANS

1 lb. ground round

1 medium onion, diced • 1 can tomatoes  
2 roasted red peppers • 2 cans of red kidney  
beans • Salt and pepper, to taste

Over medium heat, sauté the ground beef and onion and add salt and pepper until cooked. Add the tomatoes and pepper and simmer for 1 hour. Next add the kidney beans and taste for seasoning. Allow the beans to warm and serve.

Recipe adapted from the *Will Rogers  
Birthday Centennial Cookbook*.

Sherry Monahan kicked off her journey into Old West cuisine, spirits and places by authoring *Taste of Tombstone*. Visit [SherryMonahan.com](http://SherryMonahan.com) to learn more about her books, awards and TV appearances.



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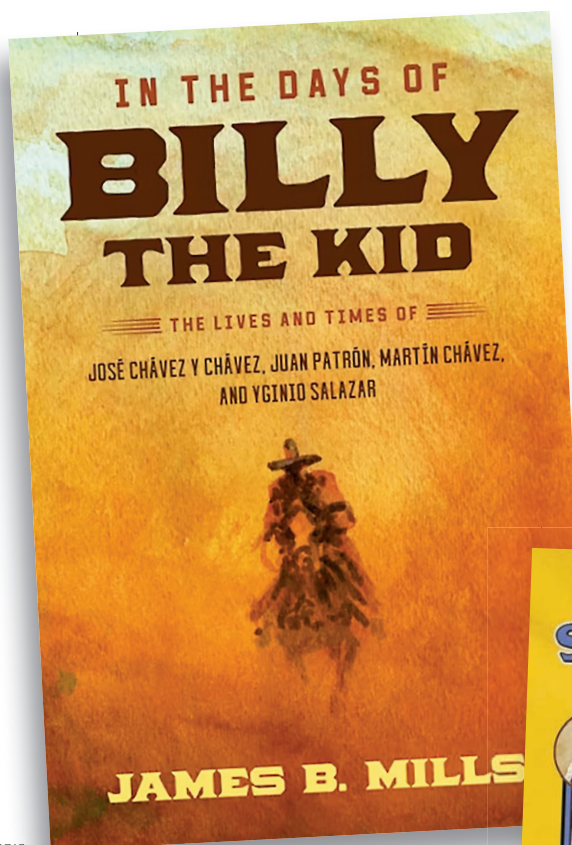
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## Heroes and Heroines of the West

*New biographies by James B. Mills and Chris Enss, plus a rollicking volume of Western short stories, a history of Fort Worth, and insightful bios of Pancho Villa and Billy the Kid.*

**F**ew authors of Western history live farther from the location of their subjects or are as passionate for their topic as Australian author James B. Mills. Along with his fellow countryman Peter Brand, Mills is producing some of the most original research in the Old West genre. Like his long-distance predecessor Englishman Frederick Nolan, Mills works from many miles away. But, unlike Nolan, Mills has the advantage of being able to ply his craft in the digital age and do his research from his home in the Southern Hemisphere. And ply it Mills does with determined pursuit of the truth and undiscovered and unmined information on his subject matter.

Mills' second major work on William Bonney, the Lincoln County Cattle War and the Hispano culture of Territorial New Mexico particularly in Lincoln County, is a grand new addition to the historiography. *In the Days of Billy the Kid: The Lives and Times of José Chávez y Chávez, Juan Patrón, Martín Chávez, and Yginio Salazar* (University of North Texas Press, \$40) is ambitious and literary, entertaining and groundbreaking. Continuing from where he started in *Billy the Kid: El Bandido Simpático* (2022), the Australian historian has



effectively proven through his scholarship the importance of the Hispanic culture in the life of William Bonney and the Lincoln County War. I particularly like what Mills has to say in his "Introducción": "This is a study that extends well beyond the Lincoln County War and into the early twentieth century as we follow the lives and times of a lawman turned outlaw, an

intellectual prodigy, a conservative journeyman, and a resilient vaquero. It is also a history of racial conflict, ambition, political rivalry, bravery, greed, vengeance, theft, friendship, romance, good fortune, tragedy, and rebellion in the days of Billy the Kid, the Santa Fe Ring, the White Caps, and the Society of Bandits of New Mexico." After reading *In the Days of Billy the Kid*, you will be counting the days for the next James B. Mills history of the American West.





## 2025 WWA SPUR AWARDS

Western Writers of America will convene in Amarillo, Texas, June 18–22. On Saturday, June 21, the annual WWA Spurs will be awarded to this year's winners. I recommend these authors and their prize-winning works:

**Best Biography:** *The Sugar King of California: The Life of Claus Spreckels* by Sandra E. Bonura (University of Nebraska Press)

**Best Contemporary Nonfiction Book:** *No Friday Night Lights: Reservation Football on the Edge of America* by John M. Glionna (Bison Books/University of Nebraska Press)

**Best Contemporary Novel:** *Blue Wild Indigo* by James Jennings (Plum Bay Publishing)

**Best Documentary Script:** *Power of the Mounds* by Candy Moulton (Boston Productions/Angel Mounds State Historic Site)

**Best Drama Script:** *The Dead Don't Hurt* by Viggo Mortensen (Talipot Studio/Recorded Picture Company/Perceval Pictures/Shout! Studios)

**Best First Nonfiction Book:** *A Cowgirl's Conservation Journey: Stories from the Dugout Ranch* by Heidi Redd with Larisa Bowen (The Nature Conservancy in Utah)

**Best First Novel:** *Dust Covered Lies* by Catherine M. O'Connor (TCU Press)

**Best Historical Nonfiction Book:** *Compliments of Hamilton & Sargent: A Story of Mystery and Tragedy on the Gilded Age Frontier* by Maura Jane Farrelly (Bison Books/University of Nebraska Press)

**Best Historical Novel:** *Bloody Newton* by Johnny D. Boggs (Kensington Books)

**Best Original Mass-Market Paperback Novel:** *The First Day of Eternity* by Charles G. West (Pinnacle/Kensington)

**Best Short Fiction:** *The Devil's Left Hand* by Michael John Petty (Bright Morning Star Press)

**Best Short Nonfiction:** "The Mysterious Death of Johnny Ringo" by Doug Hocking (Wild West)

**Best Traditional Novel:** *Winner: Dust Covered Lies* by Catherine M. O'Connor (TCU Press)

For a complete list of all 2025 Spur category winners and finalists visit [westernwriters.org](http://westernwriters.org).

—Stuart Rosebrook

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**JAMES B. MILLS**

"A masterpiece. *In the Days of Billy the Kid* is a tremendous contribution to New Mexico and American West history." —Chuck Parsons, author of *The Sutton-Taylor Feud* and *Clay Allison: Portrait of a Shootist*

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### Hero and Heroine of the Wild West

For more than two decades, Chris Enss has outpaced her peers in publishing about the women of the American West. Her follow-up to her dual-biography *Tilghman: The Legendary Lawman and the Woman Who Inspired Him* (Far Country Press, \$18.95) published last fall returns to the late 19th century, an era in the West marked by great cultural change. Her latest dual-biography of a famed Western American woman and her husband is *The Sharpshooter and the Showman: May Lillie, Pawnee Bill, and Their Wild West Show* (Far Country Press, \$18.95).

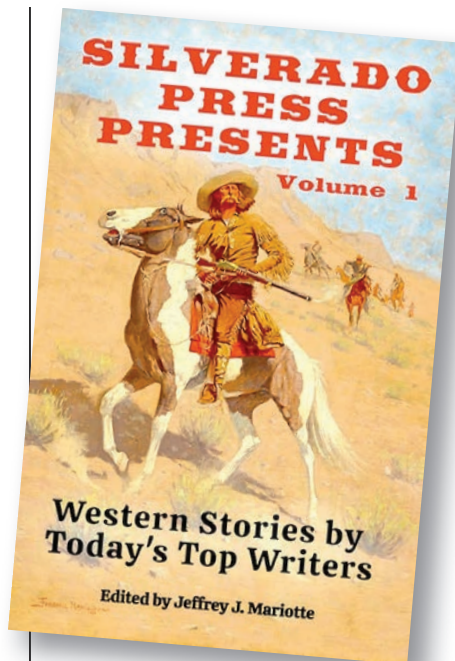
Enss, who could also be considered one of America's foremost experts on the history of Old West popular culture, brings to life the exciting era of Wild West circuses and Buffalo Bill Cody and Annie Oakley's top competitors, Pawnee Bill and May Lillie. Unlike Cody and Oakley, Gordon and May Lillie were married, and their marriage endured the trials and tribulations of a traveling Wild West show and the tragic loss of their young son. Enss' entertaining style takes readers into the arena and we only wish we could have experienced the thrill of The Pawnee Bill Wild West Show in person. Researchers will appreciate Enss's chapter endnotes and inclusive bibliography.

Next up for fans of Enss is her dual-biography of a couple whose notoriety was opposite of the Lillies': *Meet the Kellys: The True Story of Machine Gun Kelly and His Moll Kathryn Thorne* (Citadel). The story, like all of Enss's, will break new ground while entertaining the reader from cover to cover

—Stuart Rosebrook

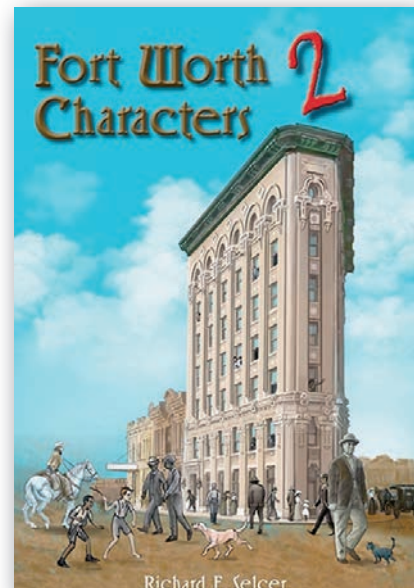
### The Sun Never Sets on the Wild West

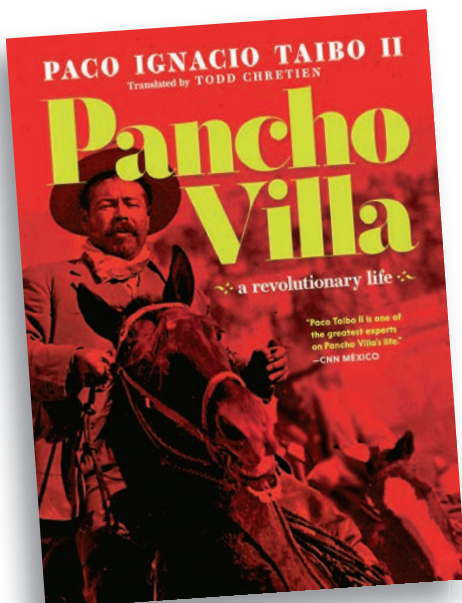
A Western writer who has consistently entertained readers for many years with his skill with the written word is Jeffrey J. Mariotte. Most recently, the Arizona author has turned his hand to editing as well and has produced a wonderful collection: *Silverado Press Presents:*



*Western Stories by Today's Top Writers, Volume 1* (Silverado Press, \$15.99). Fans of Mariotte's prose will be happy to know he has included one of his original stories, "Roy Earll's Debt," in the collection of 16 short stories. In Mariotte's "Introduction," he shoots straight on the goals of bringing this fine remuda of writers together: "You will find traditional Western stories written by a diverse and enthusiastic group of talented scribes." So what are you waiting for? Saddle up and ride with Mariotte's brand and follow the trail to Old West glory, grit and gunfights.

—Stuart Rosebrook, executive director of Sharlot Hall Museum





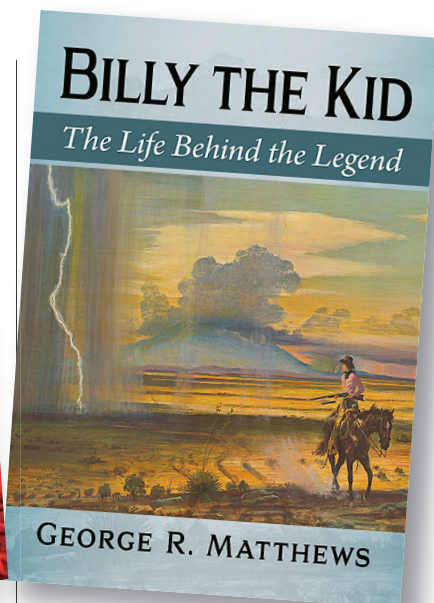
### Cowtown Denizens

North Texas historian Richard F. Selcer follows his popular *Fort Worth Characters* (2009) with *Fort Worth Characters 2* (University of North Texas Press, \$34.95) with interesting character sketches from the famous cowtown. Written with equal parts energy and authority, Selcer takes readers on a deep dive into Fort Worth's underbelly and includes individuals who made their respectable mark on history. Known best for his seminal work *Hell's Half Acre: The Life and Legend of a Red-Light District* (Texas Christian University Press, 1991), Selcer also explores familiar characters, including lawyer Will McLaury, brother of those McLaury boys killed at the OK Corral street fight in 1881. *Fort Worth Characters 2* is a fascinating book about a forgotten time and a city hardly reminiscent of its former rowdy self.

—Erik J. Wright,  
assistant editor of  
The Tombstone Epitaph

### Villa the Hero

Paco Ignacio Taibo II's stunning biography of Pancho Villa, a mysterious and lauded figure in Mexican history, is the best book on the man since Katz's monumental work a quarter of a century ago. *Pancho Villa: A Revolutionary Life*, translated by Todd Chretien (Seven Stories Press, \$49.95) is a deeply researched and skillfully written account that repositions Villa as a central, morally driven force in the Mexican Revolution. In



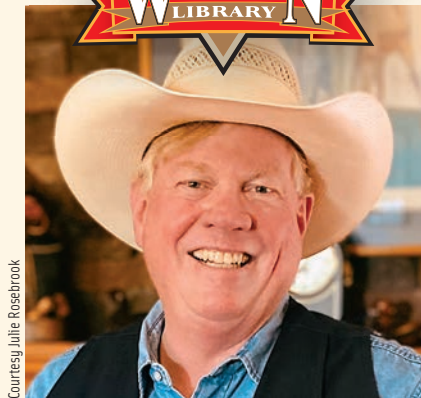
this reimagining, Villa emerges not just as a battlefield tactician, but as the unwavering conscience of the movement—fiercely committed to revolutionary ideals and social justice. Enhanced by striking period photographs, the book captures the turbulent energy of a nation in transition—making it a must-read for anyone interested in revolution, resistance and the real man behind the myth.

—Erik J. Wright,  
assistant editor of  
The Tombstone Epitaph

### The Kid

George R. Matthews' *Billy the Kid: The Life Behind the Legend* (McFarland, \$49.250) is a compelling new biography of Henry McCarty. Matthews offers a richly detailed and thoroughly researched account that sheds new light on the legendary outlaw's life. Moving beyond the well-worn tales of the Lincoln County War and his early days in Silver City, New Mexico, the book explores previously overlooked facets of his story, including his Irish mother's immigration journey to Indiana, his education in Indianapolis and the McCarty family's relocations to Wichita and Santa Fe. What sets this work apart is its depth and originality. Drawing on a wealth of newly accessible archival material, the author presents the most complete and humanizing portrait of Billy the Kid to date.

—Erik J. Wright, assistant editor of  
The Tombstone Epitaph



Courtesy Julie Rosebrook

### ARIZONA AUTHOR AND MUSEUM DIRECTOR'S FIVE FAVORITE BIOGRAPHIES OF ARIZONA WOMEN

**Stuart Rosebrook**, executive director of Sharlot Hall Museum in Prescott, Arizona, and *True West's* editor-at-large, has edited *TW's* Western Books department since 2013. He also currently serves as vice president of Western Writers of America. Earlier this year, Sharlot Hall Museum republished Margaret Maxwell's long out-of-print biography of Sharlot M. Hall, *Passion for Freedom*. Here are five must-read biographies/autobiographies, including Maxwell's, of Arizona women whose lives left a lasting legacy.

- 1 ***Passion for Freedom: The Life of Sharlot Hall*** by Margaret Maxwell (Sharlot Hall Museum): The only major biography to be written about the groundbreaking Arizona woman, profiles the first American woman to hold paid public office in the United States.
- 2 ***Vanished Arizona, Recollections of My Army Life by a New England Woman*** by Martha Summerhayes (Bison Books): Originally published in 1908, the honest and frank book about life as an Army wife has never been out of print.
- 3 ***Lazy B: Growing up on a Cattle Ranch in the American Southwest*** by Sandra Day O'Connor and H. Alan Day (Random House): Like Sharlot Hall, Sandra Day O'Connor was a ranch woman at heart—and a groundbreaker, too, as America's first woman to serve on the U.S. Supreme Court.
- 4 ***According to Kate: The Legendary Life of Big Nose Kate, Love of Doc Holliday*** by Chris Enss (TwoDot): Enss' biography of the fiercely independent Hungarian immigrant turned prostitute is the definitive chronicle of the life of Mary Katherine Horony Cummings.
- 5 ***Josephine "Sadie" Earp: The Sordid Truth 1870-1883*** by Peter Brand (Independently Published): Australian author Brand's original research reveals the reality of Josephine Marcus's troubled life before she was Wyatt Earp's wife and champion.

# The Way West

Western historians and novelists are the trailblazers who inspire our curiosity and passion for America's legendary lands and people.

**W**hy do you love the West? What brought you here? When was the first time you saw the Pacific Ocean? How old were you when you first crossed the Mississippi? Or walked in the Rocky Mountains? Or stood in awe at the sight of a Western sunset? Where were you when you knew you had to motor West? What was your first road trip across the Great Plains? Who inspired your desire to know more about this wondrous land we call the American West?

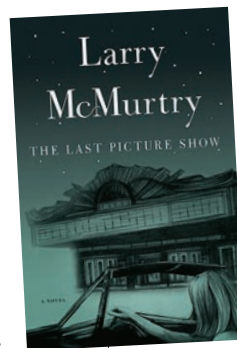
For me and many others with a lifelong curiosity for all matters and interests in our Western American culture, my answers to the above questions begin with my upbringing in the West—in Southern California and Arizona. Readers who reflect on these queries will quickly realize, as I do, that inspiration for their love of the West—especially its history, people and land—began with books. Sure, I grew up going to the Pacific Ocean—and my parents driving us back and forth from Los Angeles, across the Mohave Desert to Phoenix and points north and south in Arizona—but it was on that first trip East—by railroad in 1975—that my 12-year-old's imagination finally began to meet the places I'd been reading and learning about for so many years. I still remember the thrill of pressing my face to the train's window to see with my own eyes the Mississippi River for the first time. Or my disappointment that I was asleep when the Amtrak Super Chief passed through Dodge City in the

middle of the night. (I finally saw Dodge City for the first time in 2020 when we were moving back to Arizona, but that is another story.)

Today, 42 years since I traveled across the country for the first time, Winston-Salem, North Carolina, to North Hollywood, California, via Interstates 40, 17 and 10, I still find my inspiration for travel—and my never-ending curiosity about the American West—in books—fiction, nonfiction, biography, photography, art, archaeological, natural history, geography, food, film, television. Name the topic on the West and I doubt there is a genre about the region that does not pique my interest somehow or in some way.

And, I would believe that as readers of *True West* magazine the same is true for you. For a dozen years, I have been following the publishing trends of the Western—both fiction and nonfiction—and like the great Colorado River, from its source in the Rocky Mountains to its delta in the Sea of Cortez, the genre has been declared dead or on life-support by many a prognosticator. But, like the grand Colorado, the genre keeps flowing, keeps surprising, and keeps millions “alive” with its power, its magical life-giving ways.

In 2025, publishers of the Western novel, history and biography must work hard to reach their audiences. Bookstores and newsstands are fewer and smaller, while readers' habits twist and turn between hardcovers, paperbacks, e-books



and audibles. The mass market paperback has just been retired as a popular publishing form for publishers of Western fiction in favor of the larger trade paperback. Between the merchandiser, retailer and consumer, changes happen, but the Western rolls on, just like the mighty Colorado.

I believe the Western will always survive—as will my beloved Colorado—but like the river the genre must be supported, cared for and loved through both real and existential threats.

As readers and writers of Western literature we must support the genre from its source to its delta and make sure that we prevent it from drying up literally and figuratively before it is too late.

The Western publishers of 2025 are as varied and diverse as the Western landscape, and I encourage you to support your publishers from independents to universities, from individuals to Madison Avenue. We are the West, and we must remain united in our efforts to keep the Western alive.



**Stuart Rosebrook**, the executive director of Sharlot Hall Museum in Prescott, Arizona, has been *True West's* Western Books editor since 2013. His first favorite Western heroes were Jim Bridger, Kit Carson, Davy Crockett and the Lone Ranger—and they still are today.

## Ten Western Classics for 2025

Our shelves are full of our favorites, including Western novels, biographies and histories. Mine are never too far from me, and I like to go back and reread them regularly. I also re-discover classics I have wanted to read or finish but have found reasons—or excuses—not to and must move them to the top of the list. Here are 10 classic and personal favorite Westerns I am ready to reread, and you should too!

### *The Last Picture Show*

by Larry McMurtry: Most would choose McMurtry's *Lonesome Dove* as the Texan author's classic to reread, but I suggest you start with *The Last Picture Show*.

### *The Big Sky*

by A.B. Guthrie: My favorite of Guthrie's epic Western trilogy, it inspired my interest in the history of the fur trade and mountain men.

### *Give Your Heart to the Hawks*

by Win Blevins: I can read Blevins' classic again and again and never tire of his literary history of the fur trappers.



### *Nevada*

by Zane Grey: Maybe not at the top of everyone's list of Zane Grey novels, I read it when I was 15, and it is still one of my favorite classic Westerns.

### *The Blessing Way*

by Tony Hillerman: Isn't it time we all go back and reread Hillerman's first novel in the Leaphorn and Chee series, the series that inspired an entire modern genre of Western mysteries?

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Abigail Gutting, *Born for This*, Oil on linen, 40 x 30 in.

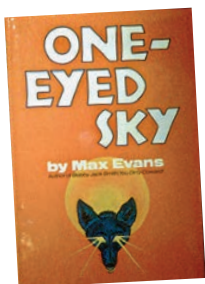
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**One-Eyed Sky**

by Max Evans: Ole Max was a mentor of mine, and this novella captures the spirit of the enigmatic Westerner.

**Hombre**

by Elmore Leonard: Leonard was one of the most influential, popular Western fiction authors and screenwriters; I often go back to *Hombre*.

**Deadwood**

by Pete Dexter: His prose is so vivid you feel like your own shoes are covered in the blood and the mud of the streets of Deadwood in 1876.

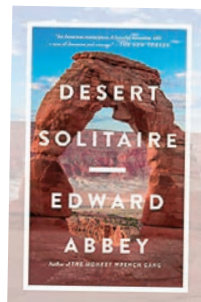
**The Great Plains**

by Ian Frazier: This book influenced how I looked at America and the West as a travel writer.

**Desert Solitaire**

by Edward Abbey: This is Abbey at

his very finest, and one I have read many times and will continue to share as one of the best books ever written about the American West—and one man's personal relationship with the land and people.



**Top Summer Reads in Nonfiction**

If you love a good biography or history to enjoy on a long summer day, publishers of American Western history have provided a grand selection to choose from this year. I recommend these to start with, but don't hesitate to go to the catalogs of these publishers and mine for more good reads for your summer reading.

Who doesn't love some good old regional competition? Well, when it

came to the West and horses, Westerners loved to race Easterners and their steeds, and Catharine Melin-Moser's

**When Montana Outraced the East: The Reign of Western Thoroughbreds, 1886-1900**

(The University of Oklahoma Press, \$34.95) looks at when Western horses ruled the paddock.

Entertaining from cover to cover,

**Texas Red**

by Red Steagall with Jim Jennings, foreword by Reba McEntire (Texas Tech University, \$26.95) will remind you why he is one of our most beloved Westerners.

**Theodore Roosevelt's Wilderness Writings, New Edition**

by Theodore Roosevelt, edited by Paul Schullery (Bison Books, \$21.95) is a must-read for anyone who loves the natural wonders of the American West.

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We are on Facebook at "Billy The Kid Pageant"

Artwork courtesy of Bob Boze Bell

Do you love Texas and Texas history? If so,

***Bridles and Biscuits: Contraband Culture in Spanish East Texas***

by Gary L. Pinkerton in collaboration with Tom H. Gann (Texas A&M University Press, \$33.35) will satisfy your interest in knowing more than your friends have ever known about a lesser-known but fascinating era in the history of the magnanimous land known as Texas.

***The Essential Book of Pickup Trucks***

by Fred Haefele (Bison Books, \$21.95) leaves the 19th for the 20th century West and reminds us that what defines the history of the Western steed is more than Appaloosas and Mustangs.



***Fort Whipple (Images of America)***

by Worcester Bong and Mick Woodcock (Arcadia Publishing \$24.95) tells the story

in words and photographs of one of the Army's oldest and most significant outposts in Arizona.

David A. Wolff's

***The Gateway to the Hills: Rapid City and the Central Black Hills, "Black Hills History Tours Series"***

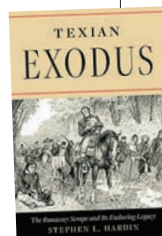
(South Dakota Historical Society Press, \$19.95) is essential reading for travelers to this amazing, culturally rich corner of the American West.

***John Gregory Country: Place Names and History of Ralston Buttes Quadrangle, Jefferson County, Colorado***

by Charles and Mary Ramstetter, editors (Galaxy Press, \$34) is a true collectible for Coloradans and those who love the Rocky Mountain State.

***Texian Exodus: The Runaway Scrape and Its Enduring Legacy***

by Stephen L. Hardin (University of Texas Press, \$32.47) is one of Hardin's finest volumes in his Texas history series.



***Dorothea Lange: Seeing People***

by Philip Brookman, Sarah Greenough, Andrea Nelson and Laura Wexler with Nana Adwoa Nyamekye Ferdnance, Elizabeth Fortune and Kyra March (Yale University Press, \$55) is a classic and insightful look back into the soul of Lange's artistry with the camera.

**Bonus Books:**

***Going North: Memorabilia of Tourism in Alaska, Yukon and Northern British Columbia: Early 1900s to the Present***

by Stan Cohen (Mountain Press Publishing, \$24); If you love travel and books, this colorful book is perfect for your library

***The Sheep Industry of Territorial New Mexico: Livestock, Land, and Dollars***

by John M Wallace (University of New Colorado Press, \$53) is an award-winning look at an overlooked industry that helped define New Mexico during territorial years, 1846 to 1912.

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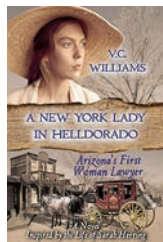
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## Top Summer Reads in Fiction

Arizona author V.C. Williams'

***A New York Lady in Helldorado: Arizona's First Woman Lawyer, A Novel Inspired by the Life of Sarah Herring***

(Outlaws Publishing, \$19.15) is a rollicking read inspired by the real history of territorial Tombstone.



Set in the Sandhills of Nebraska,

### **Return**

by Kittredge McKee (Newman Springs Publishing, \$45.95) is her third epic volume in the Prairie novel series, the sequel to *Prairie* and *Homestead*.

Western romance has been an essential element for Old West authors from the beginning of the genre, so why not add a little to your reading list this summer with Tracie Peterson's second installment in "The Hope of Cheyenne" series,

### **Designed with Love**

(BethanyHouse, \$18.99)?

Scott F. Smith, following in the footsteps of his father, Cotton Smith, has hitched up with Wolfpack Publishing and written three new books in Cotton's "Corrigan Brothers" series:



***Vengeance Wears a Star, Cast Asunder and Blue Sky Reckoning.***

Read them all for \$11.99 each!

### **Coal**

by J. Jason Grant (Kensington, \$17.95) is a barn-burning Western with a fictional hero, El Diablo Negrito, who hasn't been seen or read about since Jamie Foxx rode the silver screen in *Django Unchained*.

### **Dangerous Latitudes: A Novel**

by Jack Woodville London (Stoney Creek Publishing Group, \$22.95) is a historical adventure Western set in the Republic of Texas, a great

follow-up to London's prize-winning French Letters trilogy.

Michael Knost's

***Trail of Madness: Jack McCall and the Killing of a Legend***

(Lawless Trails Press, \$14.99) with a foreword by Johnny D. Boggs, will leave you searching for the truth in the mythic life of Wild Bill.

***A Cowboy's Quest: The Incredible Journey of Boyd Lee Parker***

by Ray Graf (Independently Published, \$17.99) is classic Western adventure that will remind you why our heroes have always been cowboys.

## Eight Western Gems for 2025

Whether you stack books on your nightstand, on your e-reader or in your backpack, the Western publishers of 2025 have made sure you will have plenty of new material to read this summer.

Here are eight new Westerns that are must-reads this year:

***In the Days of Billy the Kid: The Lives and Times of José Chávez y Chávez, Juan Patrón, Martín Chávez, and Yginio Salazar***

by James B. Mills (University of North Texas Press, \$40): The Australian historian's major follow-up to his groundbreaking Billy the Kid biography is one of the most important Western history books of the year.

***Shadow of the Solstice: A Leaphorn, Chee & Manuelito Novel***

by Anne Hillerman (Harper, \$30) takes you back to Navajo country for a mystery that will keep you on the edge of your seat and waiting for Anne's next entry in her award-winning series.

***The Sharpshooter and the Showman: May Lillie, Pawnee Bill, and their Wild West Show***

by Chris Enss (Farcountry Press, \$18.95): The only piece missing from

Enss's latest Western history is a pair of tickets to the revival of Pawnee Bill's Wild West this summer. After reading *The Sharpshooter and the Showman* you'll be wondering why we don't have such great entertainers anymore.

### **Return to Sender: A Longmire Mystery**

by Craig Johnson (Viking, \$27): The Wyoming author's latest in the Walt Longmire series will instill a desire to see the series return to television or even the big screen.

### **The Jemez Mountains: A Cultural and Natural History**

by Thomas W. Swetman (University of New Mexico Press, \$24.95): Following in the footsteps of lauded geography professor Donald W. Meinig and literary historian John McPhee, Swetman provides a fascinating geographic and cultural history of this ancient region of New Mexico.

Coming August 5, 2025:

### **The Undiscovered Country: Triumph, Tragedy and the Shaping of the American West**

by Paul Andrew Hutton (Dutton, \$35): Hutton's is the most anticipated history of the West of the year—and maybe the decade.

Coming August 19, 2025:

### **Deadwood: Gold, Guns, and Greed in the American West**

by Peter Cozzens (Knopf, \$35): The prize-winning author returns to the West, and *Deadwood* promises to be one of the best of the year.

Waiting in the Wings:

November 11, 2025: Mark Lee Gardner's latest Western biography,

### **Brothers of the Gun: Wyatt Earp, Doc Holliday, and a Reckoning in Tombstone**

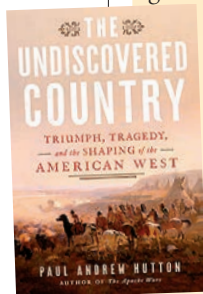
(Dutton, \$35) will be the hottest ticket in the West this holiday book-buying season.

## **The Western Book of the Summer**

On August 5, 2025, Distinguished Professor of History at the University of New Mexico and Interim Curator of the Buffalo Bill Museum at the Buffalo Bill Center of the West in Cody, Wyoming, Paul Andrew Hutton, PhD, will have his long-awaited magnum opus of the American West published. *The Undiscovered Country: Triumph, Tragedy and the Shaping of the American West* is Hutton's first major work since his award-winning *The Apache Wars* (Crown) was released in 2016. Like the lauded Western historian's previous works, *The Undiscovered Country* is epic in proportion, literary in its style and magnificently layered in details, facts and little-known gems of history woven into the fabric of a wide-ranging narrative.

Like Hutton's career, influenced by the giants of Western historiography, the distinguished academic has turned to seven major figures in American history—Daniel Boone, Red Eagle, Davy Crockett, Mangas Coloradas, Kit Carson, Sitting Bull and William "Buffalo Bill" Cody—to carry the weight of this panoramic tapestry of the American West. Spanning the growth of the United States of America from an 18th-century revolutionary congress of 13 colonies to a 20th-century imperial power, *The Undiscovered Country* tells our nation's history in a style that can only be compared to Bernard De Voto's *Across the Wide Missouri*, Stephen Ambrose's *Undaunted Courage* and William Manchester's *Glory and the Dream*.

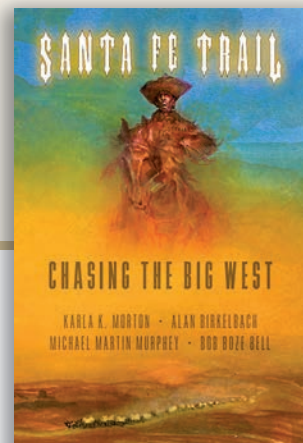
Hutton's generational story of the West will take the reader back to the fragile beginnings of the United States, and through the lives of seven unique and magnanimous men in American history, inspire us through the tragedy and triumph of their lives—and the nation's real and imagined history. As Hutton says so eloquently in his Introduction: "They had built something grand, but at a terrible price that quickly morphed into a story that was both wildly romantic and oddly tragic."



## **Take Me Home, Western Roads**

In 2025, one of the most interesting and creative books on the American West to be published is the highly collectible and creative *Santa Fe Trail: Chasing the Big West*: poems and songs by Karla K. Morton and Alan Birkelbach, music by Michael Martin Murphy and art by Bob Boze Bell. (Madville Publishers \$29.95). If you believe in magic, well, that is what *Santa Fe Trail: Chasing the Big West* is: inspiring, surprising, illuminating and mystical. The prose and poetry, the songs and artwork, the music and the muse—the American West—are all found inside this organic volume of words and creativity. It even has a bonus CD of music by Michael Murtin Murphy set to the lyrics of Morton and Birkelbach's poems.

After reading *Santa Fe Trail*, you will be demanding volume two and wondering why it took you so long to remember why poetry, art and music are such a natural trio to tell the story of our beloved West.



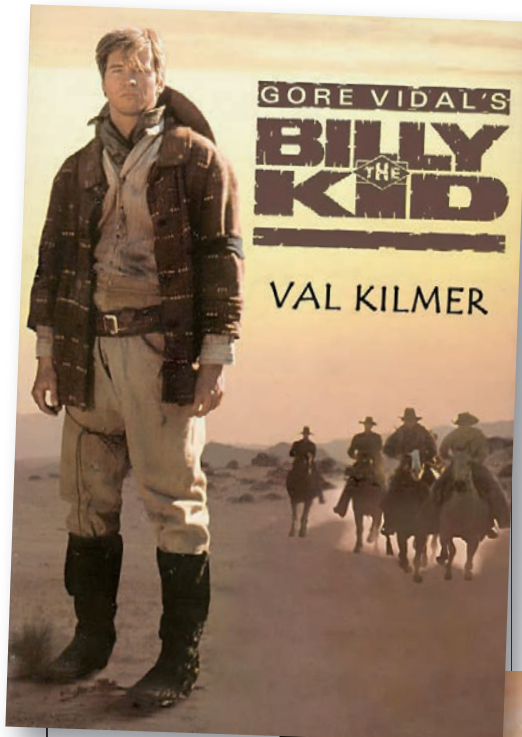
## Val Kilmer's 'Billy'

*Billy himself would have approved.*

**T**he late Val Kilmer's acting career delved into films of so many genres—from *Top Secret* to *Top Gun*, from *The Doors* to *The Island of Dr. Moreau*—that it's hard to pick favorites. Unless you love Westerns, in which case your favorite is undoubtedly his portrayal of Doc Holliday in *Tombstone*. He'd go on to several more in the genre, including *Thunderheart*, *The Missing*, *Comanche Moon*, but his first Western, and his first dramatic film as a leading man, is often overlooked.

In 1989 Val Kilmer was the title character in the TNT film *Gore Vidal's Billy the Kid*. It was Vidal's third go at the story. His 1955 teleplay for Philco Television Playhouse, *The Death of Billy the Kid*, featured Paul Newman, on the verge of stardom, as Billy. Newman saw the value of the property, and promoted it as a feature. It became one in 1958, as *The Left-Handed Gun*, adapted by Leslie Stevens, directed by Arthur Penn, starring Newman, with radio's Paladin, John Dehner, as Pat Garrett.

In 1989, now with Kilmer on the verge of stardom, Vidal took his third pass. Duncan Regehr, who has always divided his time between acting and graphic art, had made a splash as Errol Flynn in *My Wicked, Wicked Ways*, and would soon become TV's *Zorro*. He remembers going in to read for Pat Garrett. "They called up and said, 'We'd like to match you up with a young actor named Val Kilmer.' So Val and I sat down and read a bunch of scenes together. There was a good thing going between the two



Val Kilmer as Billy in *Gore Vidal's Billy the Kid*

Courtesy TNT

Val as Doc in *Tombstone* 1993  
True West Archives



of us, we saw that right off, and they said, 'This works.'" This was the first film where Billy was played by someone who seemed like

the teenager Billy was. Although Kilmer was 28, he had a wide-eyed, peach-fuzz quality, so when someone offers Billy a drink, and a friend scoffs that Billy doesn't even shave yet, you believe it. You believe Billy's idealism, so different from Paul Newman's cynicism. Friendship is sacred; a man's word is sacred, and he is, perhaps childishly, unwilling to tell authorities the lies they need to hear to justify setting him free. And you believe the friendship between Billy and Pat. "The whole Big Casino, Little Casino deal," says Regehr, recalling their nicknames. "There was a camaraderie there, a big brother kind of thing. Pat was older, and Billy was

very much a wild boy, but then Pat was no angel either."

Holding the reins was William Graham, who'd directed Powers



Paul Newman in  
*The Left Handed Gun*

Courtesy Warner Bros.

Boothe to his Emmy as Jim Jones, and several solid Westerns like *Harry Tracy: Last of the Wild Bunch*. “[Graham] was very patient,” Regehr remembers. “Very supportive. Val was pretty young; pretty insecure. He didn’t want to share, to work through a scene rather than just come up with stuff and hope that it works. You don’t have that luxury on a six-week shoot. So he was not easy to work with at all. But he was a young actor, he later became a really fine actor. He was brilliant in *Tombstone*. His Doc Holliday was just the best ever, I thought.”

The streets Kilmer would later tread as Holliday are here. “The wonderful thing is being on location in Old Tucson,” says Regehr. “You could really get into the role and not have to leave it. You could live and breathe the character in that atmosphere. It’s very helpful. Whereas filming in Hollywood, at the end of the day, you go back into the mainstream; you don’t remain a cowboy.”

Wilford Brimley plays a well-meaning but ineffectual Governor Lew Wallace. “I got to be good friends with Wilford. He was never without an anecdote. I remember watching him sit this girl down and he hypnotized her, and cured her of smoking. The other guy that I really

enjoyed, and worked with later in *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*, was Rene Auberjonois, who played the drunk. He was a great raconteur, and I always enjoyed listening to him, to his politics and his point of view on things.”

And there was the name above the title, Gore Vidal, who even played

a small role as a preacher. “I always admired him very much as a raconteur and writer, so it was great to have him on the show; in his show, really. He gave me his book that he’d just finished writing at the time, and I gave him my [art] book that I’d just finished, called *The Man with the Smoking Gun*. It was pure coincidence that I would be doing a Western at the same time that I was creating these motifs.”

*Gore Vidal’s Billy the Kid* is available on YouTube, probably not legally, but that’s the way Billy would have wanted it, and maybe Pat as well.

### YOUNG GUNS 3, PANCHO VILLA 1, LAWMEN

After a gap of 35 years, the waiting is nearly over: *Young Guns 3–Dead or Alive* will roll camera in New Mexico later this year! Emilio Estevez, Billy in the first two, and John Fusco, who wrote and executive produced the first two, have collaborated on Number 3’s script, which Estevez will direct. And not only will Estevez return as Billy, but since they were not killed on-camera, Lou Diamond Phillips will be back as Chavez, as will Christian Slater as Arkansas Dave Rudabaugh.

In the 1940s, a geezer named Brushy Bill Roberts materialized, claiming that



Old Tucson Studios in Arizona is the backdrop for some of Hollywood’s greatest Westerns, such as *Gunfight at the O.K. Corral*, *Rio Bravo* and even 1993’s *Tombstone*. Above is a movie still of a stagecoach scene filmed at Old Tucson Studios.

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### DYNAMIC DUO FORMS AN UNHOLY TRINITY: PIERCE BROSNAN AND SAMUEL L. JACKSON RETURN TO THE WEST

"Pierce Brosnan and Samuel L. Jackson were just amazing, and available because of the Guild strikes. We were fortunate enough to be an independent production so that we could shoot," says *Unholy Trinity* director Richard Gray. "I don't think we would've got them outside of the strike." Of course, he did have the advantage that they both like Westerns: Jackson starred for Quentin Tarantino in both *Django Unchained* and *The Hateful 8*. Brosnan starred in *Seraphim Falls*, *Gray Owl* and the miniseries *The Son*.

*Unholy Trinity* concerns young Henry Broadway (Brandon Lessard), whose father (Tim Daly) calls out from the gallows that he was framed for murder by the sheriff of Trinity. Broadway goes there to kill the sheriff, finds his quarry already dead, replaced by Sheriff Gabriel Dove (Pierce Brosnan). And he learns that his father was no saint: during the Civil War, he and former slave St. Christopher (Samuel L. Jackson) stole a trove of Confederate gold, and Henry's dad hid it somewhere in the town. Many are seeking the treasure, and the likable-but-lethal St. Christopher is particularly determined to have his share.

"Pierce had never been to Montana, and he just adored it, brought his whole family, and both his sons are in the movie. Sam brought his whole team. It's a beautiful, beautiful place." And there's a good reason why the Western town won't look overly familiar. "The town was built for this movie," the Australia-born graduate of Melbourne's Victorian College of The Arts explains. "We were going to go to New Mexico or Calgary, as you do to make a Western; it's really just the two options these days. And my partner, Carter Boehm said, 'Why don't we build it in Montana?' That sounded great to me." If you have seen it before, then you've seen Gray's 2022 Western, *Murder at Yellowstone City*, which features Gabriel Byrne, Thomas Jane and Richard Dreyfuss.

"There're no new buildings, no mobile phones, no WiFi; there's no nothing. Nothing but this 1880s town: 28 buildings plus a church on 500 acres with nothing around us. So it's really easy to escape. I think it helps the actors, particularly in a period film. We do the rehearsals and the blocking on location. It helps me to just be super-present."

Screenwriter Lee Zacharia is also from down under. "I worked at the local art house cinema, and he was a local film critic as well as being a writer. We shared a love for *Deadwood*, *Unforgiven*, for *Once Upon a Time in the West*: my favorite Western. When I told him I wanted to make a Western, he just went all in. It's tough to create something original, entertaining, but with enough depth that we could attract actors like these. It's a story of revenge; it's a coming-of-age film as well. And in a pretty tight package, Lee was able to pull it together."

It's an unusually international Western, both in characters and in fact. "[Ireland-born] Pierce honed into an



Irish heritage so we rewrote a great backstory for him, that he fled from the potato famine." Q'Orianka Kilcher, well-remembered as Pocahontas in *The New World*, and whose character has a claim to the gold, is of indigenous Peruvian and German-Swiss parentage. Veronica Ferris, who plays the sheriff's wife, is German, "and

Gianni Capaldi, who plays Gideon, is Scottish-Italian." Gray's film celebrates the American melting pot. "That's what I really wanted to embrace, straight after the Civil War. It was exciting to get actors from around the world, 'cause it's a little bit tired when Westerns don't have accents, when you consider how new everybody was to the country."

*Unholy Trinity*, from Saban Films & Roadside Attractions, will open in theaters nationwide on June 13, 2025.

he was Billy and that Pat Garrett only pretended to kill him. The decision for *Young Guns 2* to endorse—at least for entertainment purposes—that narrative, makes it possible to tell stories about Billy until 1950. Estevez already has a plot in mind for *Young Guns 4*!

And in case you're wondering if there will be any actually young young guns this time, just as Tunstall was a mentor to the Regulators in the first film, in *Number 3*, Billy takes an errant youth under his wing, Doroteo Arrango, better known as Pancho Villa, and is soon south of the border with a new crop of mostly Latino and indigenous Regulators, as Billy becomes enmeshed with the Mexican Revolution.

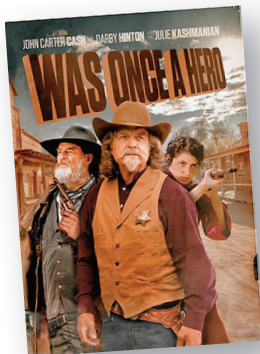
## DVD REVIEW

### WAS ONCE A HERO, 2025

DVD—\$19.99 Twin Engines Global Distribution, Streaming AMAZON - \$4.99 Rent, \$9.99 Buy

In the 1890s, a traumatized sister (Julie Kashmanian) and brother (Noah Deavers) are traveling through the forest, trying to evade the men who killed their father, and who intend to finish the job. They meet a wandering old man, former Major Malcolm Hunter (Darby Hinton), who suffers the combined effects of age, injuries and the horrors of The Civil War—today we'd say PTSD. His doctor (Robert Carradine) finds Hunter's memory rapidly deteriorating. The trio forms an odd alliance, as Hunter attempts to lead them to a vaguely remembered town where they'll be safe. Hinton's and Kashmanian's performances propel this quirky, moving

character study, shot in the lush green wilds of Maryland and Pennsylvania, written by Dan Searles and Paige Smith, and directed by Michael Tuthill.



**Henry C. Parke**, Western Film and TV Editor for *True West*, is a screenwriter, and blogs for the INSP Channel, and at [HenrysWesternRoundup.blogspot.com](http://HenrysWesternRoundup.blogspot.com). A book based on his *True West* columns, *The Greatest Westerns Ever Made*, was recently published by TwoDot.

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BY PETER CORBETT

# The Gateway to Mount Rushmore

Visit Rapid City, the "city of presidents," on the way to the iconic monument.

**R**apid City in western South Dakota is the gateway to the iconic Mount Rushmore National Memorial, one of America's most revered monuments.

Since the memorial opened in 1941, nearly 130 million people have visited the 60-foot busts of Presidents Washington, Jefferson, Lincoln and Teddy Roosevelt etched in granite.

Sculptor Gutzon Borglum chose those four influential presidents for the memorial.

"As far as I know, no one argued with him," said Laurie Sutterer, Rapid City tourism spokesperson. "It was his vision that ultimately got carved on Rushmore."

Borglum started carving his monumental work August 10, 1927. And President Calvin Coolidge attended a dedication ceremony that day wearing a wide-brimmed 10-gallon hat and riding a horse named Mistletoe to the remote carving site.

"The people of the future will see history and art combined to portray the spirit of patriotism," said Coolidge, as reported by the *Weekly Pioneer Times*.

Borglum died in March 1941. The monument was unfinished but his son Lincoln completed the work seven months later.

Since then, Rapid City has flourished as a base camp for travelers visiting Mount Rushmore, the Black Hills, Crazy Horse Memorial, the bison herd at Custer State Park and other nearby attractions.

Founded as Hay Camp in 1876, Rapid City took its name from the rushing water of Rapid Creek, a Cheyenne River tributary.

Rapid City is South Dakota's second-largest city with about 75,000 residents.



Just outside the historic mining town of Keystone, South Dakota, Mount Rushmore National Memorial rises majestically from the Black Hills.

Chad Coppess, South Dakota Department of Tourism



Gutzon Borglum's model of Mount Rushmore memorial

Library of Congress

Rapid City is the type of place you didn't know you've been looking for until you're here, fully embraced by America's hometown. For millennia, the Black Hills and Badlands have had a magnetic pull for those seeking more. Whether it's the serenity of nature or the thrill of adventure, these lands have nurtured the spirit of countless generations.

There's something about this place that almost feels too iconic, too legendary, too remarkable. Simply too good to be true. But we're here to tell you: It's real. It's Rapid City.



*It's Real.*

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# THE JOURNEY MUSEUM

Explore 3 billion years of history, uncovering the people, cultures, and science of the ancient Black Hills and Western South Dakota prairies. It's a journey rich with stories and traditions—from prehistoric encounters, the Indigenous heritage to pioneer tales. Each member of the family will delight in discovering a vast array of cultural artifacts and interactive experiences and leave with a connection to this unique and diverse place Lakotas fittingly called the "Island in the Plains."



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Crazy Horse continues to take shape out of the mountain at the Crazy Horse Memorial in the Black Hills of South Dakota, a reminder of the Lakota spirit in South Dakota.

Candy Moulton

It's in the American Heartland, an hour from the nation's geographic center.

Capitalizing on its location near Mount Rushmore, Rapid City touts itself as the City of Presidents. It features 43 life-size statues of American presidents on its downtown streets. Diminutive James Madison at 5 feet 2 inches tall is there along with portly William Howard Taft, who the artist slimmed down for his statue. President Trump's bronze will be unveiled this summer at the Rapid City Visitor Center and then moved to a street corner in late September. A sculpture of former President Biden is in the works, Sutterer said.

The visitor center is a good place to start for navigating to the area's attractions and scenic routes into the Black Hills to discover hiking trails, waterfalls and another monumental mountain carving.

Crazy Horse Memorial is a work in progress. Started in 1948, the carving features an 87-foot sculpture of the Lakota Sioux's face with his shoulder, forearm and hand. Twice a year in June and October visitors can hike a six-mile route to get close to the figure's outstretched arm.

In late September, Custer State Park features a roundup of the its 1,300 bison for health checks and vaccinations. Huge crowds turn out to witness

cowboys and cowgirls herding the bison into corrals.

"You get to see this huge buffalo herd come galloping over the horizon into a valley," said Sutterer, adding that visitors closer to the action can actually feel the ground pounding from the rumbling herd.

The roundup on September 26 coincides with a three-day arts festival at the State Game Lodge. Custer State Park also features a Bison Center that explains the historical importance of bison on the plains.

Northwest of Rapid City, visitors can follow the 19-mile Spearfish Canyon Scenic Byway with stops at Bridal Veil, Spearfish and Roughlock falls for short hikes.

Back in Rapid City, the Journey Museum and Learning Center has exhibits on the region's geology, paleontology, archaeology and Native American and pioneer history.

Rapid City's Memorial Park honors 238 people who died in a 1972 flood that destroyed homes and trailers along Rapid Creek.

Looking ahead, Mount Rushmore will feature a fireworks display on July 4, 2026, America's 250th birthday.



**Peter Corbett** has been exploring the West and writing about it for a half century. He experienced a bison traffic jam in Custer State Park 40 years ago.

# WHERE HISTORY MEETS THE HIGHWAY



Stop and have a beer at Firehouse Brewing Co.

Courtesy firehousebrewing.com

## FIRST STOP

Visit the Rapid City tourism office to learn about Black Hills attractions and scenic drives. 613 Main St.

[VisitRapidCity.com](http://VisitRapidCity.com)

## GREAT WALL OF PRESIDENTS

Mount Rushmore National Memorial, a half hour from Rapid City, is one of America's most iconic landscapes. Be sure to visit sculptor Gutzon Borglum's studio.

[NPS.gov/moru](http://NPS.gov/moru)

## CRAZY HORSE

See the work in progress on the Crazy Horse sculpture started in 1948 by Korczak Ziolkowski, who died in 1982. His grandson Caleb has taken over carving the monument.

[CrazyHorseMemorial.org](http://CrazyHorseMemorial.org)

## TALLY HO!

Tally's Silver Spoon, serving breakfast, lunch and dinner, has been a Rapid City landmark since the 1930s.

[tallysilverspoon.com](http://tallysilverspoon.com)

## HOTEL WITH A VIEW

Hotel Alex Johnson, completed in 1927, features tasty cuisine and cocktails at the Juniper at Vertex Sky Bar atop the 11-story building

[alexjohnson.com](http://alexjohnson.com)

## BLACK HILLS BROWN

Try the Black Hills Brown Ale or the Big Horse IPA at Firehouse Brewing Co., in the city's former 1915 fire station. Established in 1991, it's one of South Dakota's oldest craft breweries and offers a lunch and dinner menu that includes four-alarm chili.

[firehousebrewing.com](http://firehousebrewing.com)

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# RELIVE THE GOLDEN AGE OF WESTERN RAILROADS

A True Westerner's guide to America's most historic train rides—where frontier lore, breathtaking landscapes and iron-horse grit meet on the tracks

**There was a time** on the frontier when the shriek of a steam whistle meant salvation—or trouble. Trains didn't just conquer the West; they built it. They stitched cattle towns to mining camps, carried settlers across vast plains, and delivered telegrams, guns and gossip to the farthest reaches of civilization. Today, though the iron horse no longer rules the land, its spirit is alive and well on America's most historic railways.

**From the red rock** canyons of Arizona to the alpine passes of Colorado, a number of vintage train excursions invite modern-day passengers to step back in time. These aren't amusement park rides or glossy imitations—they are living museums, many operating century-old steam locomotives and rolling stock that once hauled ore, livestock and homesteaders. The scenery is stunning, yes—but the real draw is the sense of time travel, the click of the rails, the soot in the air and the stories echoing through every trestle and tunnel.

**Whether you're chasing** ghosts through mining country, retracing the path of the transcontinental, or rolling past the very depot where Billy the Kid once disembarked, these excursions are more than scenic—they're a portal into the past. So, buy the ticket, grab a seat by the window and get ready to ride the rails of Western history.



A vintage 1880s steam engine cuts through the granite peaks of South Dakota, just minutes from Mount Rushmore.

## 1880 Train—Black Hills Central Railroad

Ride the same rails once traversed by gold miners, lawmen and outlaws aboard the *1880 Train*, a fully operational steam locomotive running between Hill City and Keystone, South Dakota. This stretch of the Black Hills was once the domain of the Deadwood Stage and the booming mining camps of the 1870s. Today, the train winds past forests, granite outcroppings and wildlife-rich hills that once echoed with six-shooters and prospecting dreams. Onboard narration tells the story of the region's colorful frontier past.

The two-hour roundtrip journey offers standard and first-class seating with open-air views. The railroad also hosts themed events such as the Wine Express and Old West Shootout Trains, blending entertainment with historical immersion. Tickets range from \$38 to \$70, and kids under 3 ride free. [1880train.com](http://1880train.com)



**Top Pick:** In summer, the Old West Shootout Train—complete with costumed bandits and lawmen for an immersive frontier experience

## Abilene & Smoky Valley Railroad

Departing from the famed Chisholm Trail town of Abilene, Kansas, the Abilene & Smoky Valley Railroad captures the spirit of cattle drives and steam-powered promise. This heritage railroad operates on tracks first laid in 1886, offering a 10.5-mile excursion to the old prairie village of Enterprise. Riders enjoy the prairie vistas once dotted with longhorn herds and frontier settlements.

Depending on the season, passengers may be treated to a rare ride aboard the only operational steam locomotive in Kansas—*Santa Fe 3415*—or travel in vintage diesel cars. Special dinner trains, complete with



Santa Fe 3415, Kansas' only operating steam engine, roars to life in the historic Cowtown of Abilene Abilene and Smoky Hills Railroad

Courtesy Kansas Office of Tourism

Kansas-grown fare, and rides to the historic Hoffman Grist Mill make for an authentic taste of Plains history. Fares are modest, typically ranging from \$15 to \$30, with discounts for families and seniors. [asvrr.org](http://asvrr.org)

**Top Pick:** The Dinner Train to Enterprise—a prairie sunset, homemade

Kansas fare and a dose of small-town charm

### Arkansas & Missouri Railroad

Embark on a journey through the heart of the Ozarks aboard the Arkansas & Missouri Railroad, where the echoes of 19th-century frontier life still resonate. Originally constructed in the late 1800s to serve the timber and mining industries, this line now offers passengers the chance to witness the rugged beauty of the Boston Mountains from vintage railcars. Traversing high trestles and passing through historic tunnels, the route showcases the engineering marvels that opened up the Old West.

The day-long, 134-mile round trip from Springdale to Van Buren includes a three-hour layover in downtown Van

Buren—perfect for lunch in a local café or browsing antique shops along Main Street. Riders can choose from standard coach, premium table seating, or the elevated Silver Feather dome car, with tickets ranging from \$65 to \$126. Themed rides like the Mardi Gras Express add lively flair, while seniors, veterans and AAA members enjoy special pricing throughout the season. [amtrainrides.com](http://amtrainrides.com)

**Top Pick:** Silver Feather Dome Car—panoramic mountain views and plush luxury high above the treetops

### Cumbres & Toltec Scenic Railroad

Voted one of the most scenic train rides in America, the Cumbres & Toltec Scenic Railroad takes riders across the Colorado-New Mexico border on a 64-mile journey carved straight from the Wild West. Built in



A narrow-gauge steam locomotive crosses the soaring Cascade Trestle on its way to the Colorado high country.

### Durango & Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad

1880 as part of the Denver & Rio Grande's San Juan Extension, this narrow-gauge line served mining towns and mountain outposts with grit and guts.

Today's steam-powered locomotives haul passengers through alpine meadows, high trestles, deep gorges and the 10,015-foot-high Cumbres Pass. The full-day excursion includes a lunch stop in the old rail town of Osier and a choice of departures from Chama or Antonito. Open-air gondolas, coach seating and parlor cars are available, with ticket prices ranging from \$65 to \$200. Don't miss their popular photo trains and fall foliage rides for unforgettable views. [cumbrestoltec.com](http://cumbrestoltec.com)

**Top Pick:** Unmatched fall foliage rides in September—historic steam, golden aspens and jaw-dropping mountain views

Since 1882, the Durango & Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad has been transporting passengers through the majestic San Juan Mountains of Colorado. Built to move gold and silver ore, this steam-powered marvel now offers one of the most iconic train journeys in the West—hugging the sheer cliffs of the Animas River and passing ghost towns and mining remnants left behind by fortune-seekers.

The 45-mile ride from Durango to Silverton includes a two-hour layover in the historic mining town, allowing time to stroll among saloons, souvenir shops and scenic views. Tickets start at \$90, with seating options ranging from standard coach to Presidential Class—each offering unique perks like oversized seats or panoramic windows. Special events including the Polar Express and Cowboy Poetry Train bring an extra dose of nostalgia and

A coal-fired steam engine hugs cliffside curves, just as it did for miners over a century ago.

Courtesy D&SNGRR



seasonal magic to an already unforgettable experience. [durangotrain.com](http://durangotrain.com)

**Top Pick:** Presidential Class to ride like a railroad baron with large leather seats, open vestibules and stunning views

### Georgetown Loop Railroad

Step back into the silver rush days aboard the Georgetown Loop Railroad, a marvel of 1880s rail engineering that still winds its way through Colorado's rugged Clear Creek Canyon. Built to connect the mining towns of Georgetown and Silver

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## Grand Canyon Railway

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Passengers can choose from six classes of service—from Pullman cars to luxury observation domes—while enjoying onboard musicians and Old West entertainment, including a mock train robbery. Round-trip journeys include a layover at Grand Canyon Village, allowing time to explore the rim. Prices range from \$67 to \$226, with packages including hotel stays and meals available for full-immersion experiences. [thetrain.com](http://thetrain.com)



The Grand Canyon Railway chugs into the South Rim Depot—just as it has for over a century.

**Top Pick:** Travel in Luxury Parlor Class—panoramic dome views and a champagne toast as you arrive at the Canyon's edge

## Grapevine Vintage Railroad

Travel back to the age of cowboys and cattle drives on the Grapevine Vintage Railroad, where restored 1920s-era coaches roll along the historic Cotton Belt Route. Departing from the Fort Worth Stockyards and journeying to the town of Grapevine, this line blends Texas tradition with turn-of-the-century travel charm.

The four-hour round trip includes a two-hour layover at the Stockyards, where passengers can catch a cattle drive or visit the Texas Cowboy Hall of Fame. Choose

Plume, the line scales steep grades and crosses the towering Devil's Gate High Bridge—making it a must-see for railfans and history lovers alike.

Today's 90-minute round-trip excursions offer several service tiers including coach, parlor and Presidential Class, each with distinct comforts and views. Passengers can add a tour of the Lebanon Silver Mine or try their luck panning for gold—turning a scenic ride into a hands-on historical adventure. Seasonal favorites like Oktoberfest Trains and Victorian holiday specials create even more reasons to ride. [georgetownlooprr.com](http://georgetownlooprr.com)

**Top Pick:** Lebanon Mine Tour Add-On—pairs your ride with a walk through an actual silver-mine shaft



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grapevinetexasusa.com/gvrr

**Top Pick:** North Pole Express (Holiday Season)—a Texas-style winter tradition aboard 1920s coaches

**Great Smoky Mountains Railroad**

Echoing through misty hollows and across rushing mountain streams, the Great Smoky Mountains Railroad revives the golden era of Appalachian rail travel. Built atop 19th-century track once used to haul timber and ore, the train now carries passengers past the scenic beauty



A vintage train snakes along the Nantahala River, framed by tunnels, trestles and towering forest.

of Western North Carolina's backcountry—including stretches of the Nantahala Gorge and Tuckasegee River.

The 4.5-hour Nantahala Gorge excursion covers 44 miles and includes a stop at the outdoor adventure hub of Nantahala Outdoor Center. Ticket options range from standard coach to private caboose rentals, with prices starting at just \$29. Riders also enjoy free

admission to the Smoky Mountains Museum and can upgrade their trip with themed rides like the Moonshine Experience or the beloved Polar Express. [gsmr.com](http://gsmr.com)

**Top Pick:** Moonshine Experience — riding the rails with a taste of Appalachia's famous outlaw spirit

**Leadville, Colorado & Southern Railroad**

High in the Colorado Rockies, the Leadville, Colorado & Southern Railroad climbs to over 10,000 feet—making it the highest-elevation train in the state. Built during the silver boom, the line once linked



Above 10,000 feet, this line offers unmatched views of Colorado's tallest peaks and mining lore.

Denver to the hard-rock mining town of Leadville and served as a vital supply route through the harsh alpine terrain.

The modern-day 2.5-hour excursion rises into the San Isabel National Forest, with sweeping views of Mt. Elbert, Mt. Massive and the Arkansas River Valley. Unique experiences like the Wildflower Special and weekend BBQ Trains add flavor to the ride, and yes—well-behaved dogs are welcome aboard. It's a journey that blends altitude, attitude and unmatched alpine beauty.  
[leadville-train.com](http://leadville-train.com)

**Top Pick:** Wildflower Special—alpine blooms and interpretive guides on this seasonal favorite

**Nevada Northern Railway**

Step directly into a living museum at the Nevada Northern Railway in Ely, Nevada—one of the most complete and authentic historic rail facilities in the country. Built in 1905 to haul copper ore from the mines of the Robinson District, this line has barely changed since its heyday. It features original steam locomotives, shop buildings and trackwork—making it a film-worthy frontier setting.

Visitors can board seasonal excursions like the Haunted Ghost Train or Rockin' & Rollin' Geology Ride, or take the 90-minute



Sparks fly and steam rises as volunteers restore century-old locomotives at one of America's most intact rail yards.

journey through Robinson Canyon in vintage passenger coaches. Adventurous guests can even operate a steam locomotive themselves with a Be the Engineer package. General admission fares start at \$38, with special events priced separately. [nrry.com](http://nrry.com)

**Top Pick:** The Be the Engineer program—allowing you to throttle a steam engine down the original mining-grade line

### Skunk Train—Mendocino Railway


Named for the pungent exhaust of its early gasoline-powered motors, the Skunk Train is a California legend dating back to 1885. Originating in Fort Bragg and Willits, this railroad once carried redwood logs and rugged pioneers through the dense forests and steep canyons of the Noyo River.




Passengers gaze upward as the Skunk Train weaves through a living cathedral of redwoods along the Noyo River.

Today, it offers breathtaking rides through towering redwoods, across trestles and into the untouched heart of Mendocino County. Travelers can enjoy shorter scenic runs like the Pudding Creek Express or opt for the two-hour Wolf Tree Turn. Railbike adventures and electric-powered excursions

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offer a unique twist for modern explorers. Tickets range from \$29 to \$69, with railbike rides priced higher due to limited availability. [skunktrain.com](http://skunktrain.com)

**Top Pick:** The Railbike Adventure—pedal-powered exploration with the sounds of the forest and old rails beneath you

## Texas State Railroad

Dubbed the “Official Railroad of Texas,” the Texas State Railroad runs between Palestine and Rusk through the piney woods of East Texas, tracing its roots to an 1881 prison labor project. Once used to transport iron ore and timber, the line now serves up nostalgia and heritage with every mile of its 25-mile journey.



The “Official Railroad of Texas” serves up Southern charm with a side of iron-horse nostalgia.

Passengers enjoy a four-hour round trip with a 90-minute layover at the historic Rusk Depot, where they can dine at the Railcar Café and explore interpretive exhibits. Seating options range from classic open-air coaches to private cabooses and luxury dome cars—each offering a different flavor of Texas rail travel. With wine trains, dinner excursions and holiday specials throughout the year, it’s both a rolling museum and a living tribute to Lone Star grit. [texasstaterailroad.net](http://texasstaterailroad.net)

**Top Pick:** Observation Dome Class—wide Texas skies and frontier forests from glass-topped cars

## Verde Canyon Railway

Winding through Arizona’s rugged red rock country, the Verde Canyon Railway follows a historic 1912 route first used to haul copper ore from the mines of Jerome. Departing from Clarkdale, this 20-mile journey into the backcountry reveals cliff dwellings, Native ruins and bald eagle habitats—all inaccessible by car.

FP7 diesel engines lead a gleaming line of vintage cars past ancient cliff dwellings and towering canyon walls.

Courtesy Verde Canyon Railroad



The train features vintage FP7 diesel locomotives and fully refurbished coaches with panoramic windows, plush seating and open-air viewing cars. First-class service includes complimentary champagne and hors d’oeuvres, while standard-class passengers enjoy comfortable seats and café access. Roundtrip excursions last four hours, with tickets starting at \$69 and topping out near \$130. Moonlight and Ales on Rails rides make this

a favorite for history lovers and wine connoisseurs alike. [verdecanyonrr.com](http://verdecanyonrr.com)

**Top Pick:** Ales on Rails—a scenic ride with craft beer, live music and a dose of desert lore



## TRACKSIDE TREASURES: RAILROAD MUSEUMS WORTH THE STOP

### Arizona Railway Museum

Explore a hands-on collection of restored passenger cars, cabooses and locomotives in the heart of Chandler. [azrymuseum.org](http://azrymuseum.org)

### California State Railroad Museum

Located in Old Sacramento, this world-class museum brings the golden era of railroading to life with immersive exhibits and beautifully restored trains. [californiarailroad.museum](http://californiarailroad.museum)

### Colorado Railroad Museum

This sprawling 15-acre rail yard in Golden features vintage locomotives, rolling stock and hands-on exhibits. [coloradorailroadmuseum.org](http://coloradorailroadmuseum.org)

### Durango & Silverton Railroad Museum

Located inside the original roundhouse, this museum showcases Old West rail history, mining relics and working engines. [durangotrain.com/museum](http://durangotrain.com/museum)

### Galveston Railroad Museum

Housed in a historic depot, this Gulf Coast gem displays locomotives, model trains and a life-sized art deco railcar collection. [galvestonrrmuseum.org](http://galvestonrrmuseum.org)

### Golden Spike National Historical Park

Stand where the East met West at Promontory Summit, Utah—the very site of the 1869 transcontinental railroad completion. [nps.gov/gosp](http://nps.gov/gosp)

### Golden Spike Tower & Visitors Center

Climb seven stories for panoramic views of North Platte’s Bailey Yard—the world’s largest rail yard. [goldenspiketower.com](http://goldenspiketower.com)

### Nevada State Railroad Museum

Located in Carson City, this museum preserves the Silver State’s railroading past with working trains and an impressive historic collection. [carsonrailroadmuseum.org](http://carsonrailroadmuseum.org)

### Ridgway Railroad Museum

A tribute to Colorado’s Rio Grande Southern, this open-air museum features restored rolling stock and the famous Galloping Goose. [ridgwayrailroadmuseum.org](http://ridgwayrailroadmuseum.org)

### Southern California Railway Museum

The West’s largest railway museum offers trolley and train rides, massive collections and special events in Perris, California. [socalrailway.org](http://socalrailway.org)

### Tennessee Valley Railroad Museum

This “moving museum” near Chattanooga offers heritage train rides alongside indoor exhibits and restored railcars. [tvrail.com](http://tvrail.com)

### Western Pacific Railroad Museum

In Portola, California, visitors can tour and even operate historic locomotives at this living tribute to Western rail history. [wplives.org](http://wplives.org)

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Marshall Trimble, Arizona's official historian and the beloved, now-retired writer of *Ask The Marshall*, has shared countless stories over the years. We asked him to select a handful of his favorites to feature in 2025. This collection showcases some of his top picks.

**Ask The Marshall**

BY MARSHALL TRIMBLE

# Cavalcade of *Ask The Marshall*

*Lessons I have learned during more than a quarter century of "Ask the Marshall."*

## What did the expression "I'm your huckleberry" mean?

Clinton Smith  
Ruidoso, NM

There's been a lot of discussion on the meaning ever since Val Kilmer uttered it in the 1992 film *Tombstone*. It was a commonly used statement in the West, and since the film came out, there have been a number of bad or bogus definitions. Basically it means, "Name the place, and I'll go with you" or "Name the job, and I can do it."

## When the pioneer women were crossing the Great Plains—where there were no trees—how did they find a private place to pee?

Betty Larson  
Newton, KS

Come potty time on the lone prairie, the women went out in a group and formed a large circle and spread their skirts. One or two would enter the circle, squat and do their business (unencumbered by panties). After each had their turns, they would return triumphantly to the wagon train.

## The cowboy song "Little Joe the Wrangler" says he died in a cattle stampede. One version says they camped by the Pecos River; another claims it happened by the Red River. Can you tell me where the stampede happened?

Charlie Thorne  
Newton, KS

A cowboy named Jack Thorp wrote "Little Joe the Wrangler" in 1898 while helping trail a herd from Chimney



Val Kilmer as Doc Holliday in *Tombstone*.

Stuart Rosebrook Collection

Lake, New Mexico, to Higgins, Texas. Sitting around the campfire one night, he scribbled the words on an old paper bag. It was about a wrangler he knew, and it was sung to the tune of "Little Old Log Cabin in the Lane." It began to circulate around the cattle camps after he sang it at a saloon in Weed, New Mexico. It was first published in 1908 in Thorp's book, *Songs of the Cowboys*.

In the original lyrics Thorp writes, "We'd driven to Red River, the weather had been fine. We were camped down on the south side in a bend..." That's

when the norther started blowing and the cattle stampeded.

Songs like "Little Joe" and Curley Fletcher's "Strawberry Roan" drifted around the West; the lyrics were often localized and adapted to another horse and location, hence the version that mentions the Pecos River.

## Did they really shoot horses in the early days in Western movies?

Jane Satterfield  
Boston, MA

Not just Westerns, but in all action films. It frequently happened after an animal was injured while performing a stunt, such as a fall.

Yakima Canutt, the great cowboy stuntman, developed the "running W" stunt, bringing down a horse at a gallop by attaching a wire to its fetlocks and then anchoring the wire to the ground. The result: the rider was launched through the air in spectacular fashion. But this either killed or severely injured the horse, requiring the animal to be put down. It's unclear just how many mounts died during the filming of Westerns. The running W is now banned.

## In movie and television portrayals of Old West killings, if witnesses said the killing was in self-defense, the sheriff took the witnesses' word and dropped the matter. Is this an accurate picture of frontier justice?

Billy Ray Murphy  
Gulfport, MS

Yes, that's pretty much the way it was, although some of these cases

went before a jury or judge to get the self-defense verdict. And some situations were extreme; one man threatened the life of another, and the second man then shot and killed the other—who was unarmed. But merely making the threat was enough to release the killer in many jurisdictions.

### Who invented the first reliable self-contained cartridges?

Rufus Anderson  
San Francisco, CA

The first reliable centerfire cartridge was invented in 1845 by Frenchman Louis-Nicolas Flobert. He also developed the first rimfire metallic using a bullet fit into a percussion cap. But they didn't gain acceptance until the 1860s. An employee of Colt, Rollin White, came up with the idea of boring through the cylinder to accept metallic cartridges. But Sam Colt vetoed the innovation, so White went to work for Smith and Wesson, who licensed a patent.



Louis-Nicolas Auguste Flobert

True West Archives

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# What HISTORY HAS TAUGHT ME

## My favorite place in the West is

Yosemite National Park in California. It holds a special place in my life, with a wealth of memories accumulated during summer vacations spent with my parents and family. It keeps on giving, memory-wise.

**For my money, the best history is** taking the time to fully stop and read a roadside historical marker. The ultimate roadside attraction.

**Most people don't know I** grew up riding horses on the San Francisco beaches. Heck, yeah, I would rent horses at the stables just south of San Francisco on the Coast Highway 1.

**When I was growing up my favorite TV show was,** of course, the Saturday morning cartoon *Johnny Quest*.

**Closest I ever got to** a near-death experience was when I was in a shootout as a young 20-year-old rookie police officer in Northern California.

**I was born to** hardworking Southern parents who raised me their way. My Southern roots run deep. My 90-year-old mother is a Waco, Texas, native and my 93-year-old father is a South Mansfield, Louisiana, native; they're the epitome of Southern charm.

**I wish I had a dollar for every time** I was told there aren't any Black cowboys.

**History has taught me** that every incident in the United States is all American history!

**The way to be authentic is to** embrace my Marsh Family Celtic motto "Nil Desperandum". Never Give Up, Never Despair.

**I got my best gig when** I performed my one-man play *Bass Reeves* at The Crossroads at the National Cowboy Western Heritage Museum in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma in 2022.

**The biggest break I ever got was** the privilege of being part of Taylor Sheridan's universe in 1883.

**The best cowboy(s) I ever knew were** Mel Haynes, Ray Hunt, Billy Blackwell, Roger Allgeier, Charlie Sampson, Fred Whitfield, Lynn Hart and Ora Brown.

**Of all the things I've done I am most proud of** teaching someone how to get over their fear and ride a horse and go on to show, compete and win. Teaching therapeutic riding with disabled veterans with PTSD was especially gratifying.

**My parents taught me** how to embrace and cultivate gumption. And do things twice as good just so that it could be considered equal.

**Where I was raised,** we walked to school. We rode our bicycles to the beach or played outside in the street until the streetlights turned on.



Photo Courtesy: Claudia Carmago

## ERNEST MARSH

Ernest Marsh, a San Francisco native, was the star quarterback of Balboa High School's 1975 championship team before serving in the U.S. Army and California National Guard as a military policeman and Special Tactical Sniper for Governor Jerry Brown. With a degree in Law Enforcement from Los Medanos College, he built a distinguished career in law enforcement and private security, holding key roles with the State of California and Texas. A lifelong cowboy, Ernest transitioned to horse and cattle ranching, later gaining acclaim for his Buffalo Soldier reenactments and portrayal of legendary lawman Bass Reeves on stage and screen. A SAG-AFTRA actor, he has worked with industry giants like Taylor Sheridan and Kevin Costner. In 2023, he was inducted into the National Multicultural Western Heritage Museum Hall of Fame and appointed as an Honorary Deputy U.S. Marshal in 2024. Ernest continues his work in Western film, living history and ranching.

**The one thing I don't understand is** why I didn't have the opportunity to take agriculture elective classes in San Francisco as part of my K-12 school curriculums. I could have benefited very much and had a much better understanding of 4-H youth programs and/or Future Farmers of America participation.

**If I could go back in time, I would** ride for Hanging Judge Issac Parker in the Indian Territory.

**My next big challenge is** accurately portraying Deputy United States Marshal Bass Reeves in the upcoming film titled *Indian Territory*.

**What this country needs is** American patriotism and the Pledge of Allegiance to the United States flag and republic. Start finish.



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