Legends of the Wild West

Billy The Kid

Adam Woog

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Sitting Bull

Billy the Kid

Calamity Jane

Buffalo Bill Cody

Crazy Horse

Davy Crockett

Wyatt Earp

Geronimo

Wild Bill Hickok

Jesse James

Nat Love

Annie Oakley

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CHELSEA HOUSE
PUBLISHERS
An imprint of Infobase Publishing

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Chelsea House
An imprint of Infobase Publishing
132 West 31st Street
New York NY 10001

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Woog, Adam, 1953–
Billy the Kid / Adam Woog.
p. cm. — (Legends of the Wild West)
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-1-60413-596-1 (hardcover)
ISBN 978-1-4381-3448-2 (e-book)
1. Billy, the Kid—Juvenile literature. 2. Outlaws—Southwest, New—Biography—Juvenile literature. 3. Southwest, New—Biography—Juvenile literature. I. Title. II. Series.
F786.B54W66 2010
364.15'52092—dc22
[B] 2010006590

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You can find Chelsea House on the World Wide Web at
http://www.chelseahouse.com

Text design by Kerry Casey
Cover design by Keith Trego
Composition by EJB Publishing Services
Cover printed by Bang Printing, Brainerd, Minn.
Book printed and bound by Bang Printing, Brainerd, Minn.
Date printed: August 2010
Printed in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

This book is printed on acid-free paper.

All links and Web addresses were checked and verified to be correct at the time of publication. Because of the dynamic nature of the Web, some addresses and links may have changed since publication and may no longer be valid.

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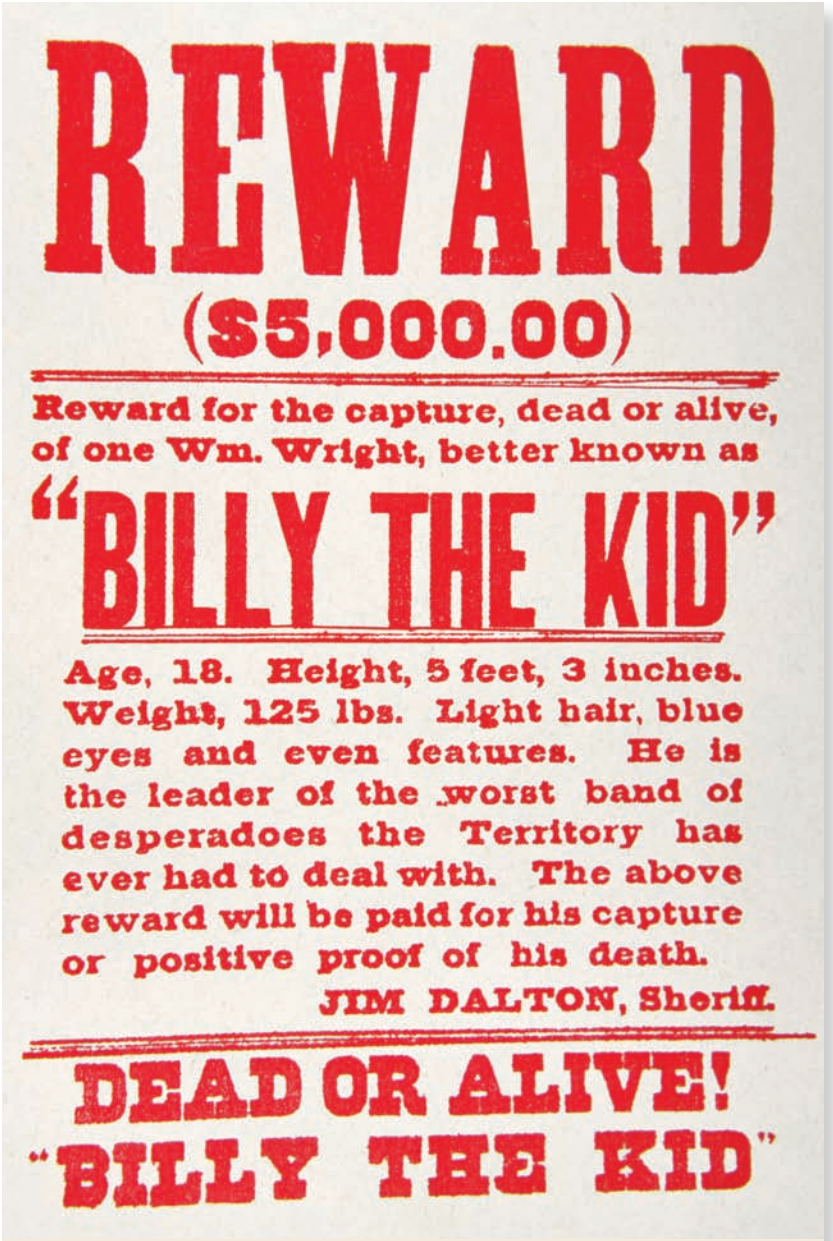
THE KID

The outlaw known as Billy the Kid is one of the most famous and dramatic characters to emerge from the wild days of the Old West. The Kid was only moderately famous during his brief life, mostly on the frontier in what was then New Mexico Territory. Today, more than a century after his death, he is far more famous than when he was alive.

Little is known about him. Yet, despite the many tantalizing questions about him, the Kid remains vivid in the public imagination. His reputation has spread from the American Southwest to the entire globe, and his legend remains strong. In his book *Billy the Kid: The Endless Ride*, historian Michael Wallis notes, "Billy continues to make news and [in] many ways the mysterious young man's story may be as relevant today as it ever has been."

Billy the Kid's life was typical of many men in the Old West. Born on the eve of the Civil War, he came of age in a place and time where lawlessness and desperation were a part of everyday life. Furthermore, like many others, he became well known for his criminal and violent ways: thievery, livestock rustling, and killing.

It is true that he played a key role in one of the bloodiest and best known of the Old West's range conflicts, the Lincoln County War. But there were plenty of other desperadoes in the Old West who were more bloodthirsty or cruel than the Kid. Nonetheless, toward the end of the Kid's two decades of life, many people considered him



Billy the Kid was considered one of the most dangerous outlaws of the West. Some stories say he killed 21 men, one just to see him kick or to prove his toughness. In actuality, the Kid single-handedly killed at least 4 men and participated in 5 shootings, all in self-defense or during acts of war. Still, by the end of his life he was a wanted man, dead or alive.

the most feared outlaw in the region. So what made him stand out? Why did the Kid become a legend while others did not? The answers to these tantalizing questions may never be known.

Perhaps one part of the answer lies in the contrast between the Kid's cheerful character and his violent acts. By all accounts, the Kid was generally good-natured, easy to get along with, and fond of dancing. He enjoyed the company of women, and they liked him.

On the other hand, the Kid's good humor could be instantly replaced with a dangerous hair-trigger temper. Billy was not someone to cross. When he was pushed, he pushed back. Biographer Robert M. Utley, in *Billy the Kid: A Short and Violent Life*, remarks, "Boldness verged on recklessness, and when provoked he could explode in deadly rage that carried no warning."

Another piece of the puzzle about Billy's enduring fame may lie in Billy's fearless, even brilliant knack for escaping the law—a gift that did much to cement his fame. Writer Fintan O'Toole, in an article in *The New Yorker* called "The Many Stories of Billy the Kid," comments,

> In all [his fights], the Kid proved to be a capable horseman and an efficient gunman. But what distinguished him was his recklessness, his flamboyance, and, above all, his elusiveness. He had a genius for escaping tight corners, for slipping away from what seemed inevitable.

As with many famous people from the days of the Old West, accounts of Billy's violence were inflated during his life, and even more so after his death. According to legend, the Kid killed 21 men—one for each year of his short, violent life. This is probably just a story. It is certain that he caused 4 deaths, and historians generally estimate that the true number was around 11.

This contradiction in numbers is significant. It symbolizes how the tale of Billy the Kid quickly grew and changed even before his death. His history was transformed. It shifted from being a believable life story into a genuine legend, a transformation that has today made it virtually impossible to separate fact from fiction.

A MAN OF MYSTERY

In part because of this blurring between fact and fiction, precious little is known for certain about Billy the Kid's early years. In fact, considering his enduring fame and the number of researchers who have sought clarification, it is surprising that his origins remain so uncertain and sketchy. Minimal record keeping about a person's life was commonplace in the Old West, but almost no information exists about the Kid's childhood.

Even the most basic facts about the Kid are uncertain. Historians continue to differ about such questions as his family tree, where and when he was born, and even who his parents were. Wallis, in *Billy the Kid: The Endless Ride*, notes, "What is astonishing for any potential biographer is to realize that there is no agreement about Billy's parentage and ancestry, his place of birth, and even the date and place of his death."

This haziness is also true especially when examining the Kid's adult years, after he had become the subject of countless newspaper and magazine pieces. The storm of stories and rumors that have sprung up around him obscure the few facts that are certain. In his book *The West of Billy the Kid*, writer Frederick Nolan notes, "Few American lives have more successfully resisted research than that of Billy the Kid. . . . [L]ittle more is known about him now than was current at the time of his death."

HOW THE KID LOOKED AND ACTED

One vivid example of the mysteries in the Kid's life concerns the difficulty historians have had in pinning down his physical appearance. Only one verifiable photo of him has survived. (Several other existing photos may be of him, but their accuracy has not been proven.) Taken sometime in late 1879 or early 1880 in Fort Sumner, New Mexico Territory, it shows the outlaw with his head slightly tilted, his rifle beside him, and his gun belt riding high on his hip. Billy stood still long enough for the unknown photographer to shoot this image, which would burn itself into the public consciousness.

This is the only known photograph of Billy the Kid. It is a tintype that shows him in mismatched cowboy clothes, posing with his Winchester rifle and a single-action Colt. The Winchester was one of the most coveted firearms in his day.

Despite the scarcity of photographic evidence, a general portrait emerges of the Kid's looks based on this single photo and on descriptions made by people who knew him. It is one of a young man who was, in many ways, perfectly ordinary. He was slightly built and a little shorter than average, with blue eyes and brown hair. He was not especially handsome, particularly because his two front teeth protruded slightly.

Descriptions by people who knew him indicate that he kept himself as tidy and clean as possible—no mean feat in a place like the Old West. Utley comments in *Billy the Kid: A Short and Violent Life*, "In attire [clothing], Henry [as he was once known] kept himself neat. He affected none of the garish costumes in which sensationalist writers later dressed him, but wore simple, serviceable clothing, often the ubiquitous black frock coat, dark pants and vest, and boots."

As to Billy's personality and characteristics, historians have had to rely on eyewitness accounts. These accounts often contradict each other, so their accuracy is questionable. Nonetheless, a general picture can be made of the Kid's personable nature, sudden temper, and reckless inventiveness when it came to stealing livestock or escaping capture.

One of the few things about the Kid's early life on which historians can agree is that nothing in it hints that he would someday become a famous outlaw. There is clear evidence that he was responsible for a series of petty crimes, but little to indicate his future celebrity. In the essay "Billy the Kid," included in the book *With Badges and Bullets*, edited by Richard W. Etulain and Glenda Riley, Etulain comments, "Nothing in Billy's mysterious beginnings suggests he would become a notorious national or even international character."

A HERO TO SOME

In drawing a portrait of Billy the Kid, it is crucial to note the widespread public image of him as a Robin Hood of the Old West. According to this view, the outlaw was a hero to the poor, unafraid

of corrupt lawmen or politicians, and dedicated to stealing from wealthy people to support those who had less.

New Mexico's Hispanic community especially revered Billy in this way. The Kid loved the Hispanic culture of the Southwest and felt more comfortable among this population than anywhere else. At the same time, his loyalty to his friends, fun-loving charisma, fluency in Spanish, and accomplished abilities as a dancer made him well loved in the territory's Hispanic community. Community members saw him as a champion of the oppressed, which included them. In *Billy the Kid: The Endless Ride*, Wallis comments,

> For a large number of Hispanic people in New Mexico Territory, especially the poor and disenfranchised [those without rights] but also some of those from prominent and well-connected families . . . the Kid was the ultimate underdog and a tragic hero. This young man spoke their native tongue, played alongside their children, treated them as equals, and savored their culture. Inevitably, he became both their favorite outlaw and venerated champion. . . .
>
> His many Hispanic friends did not view him as a ruthless killer but rather as a defender of the people who was forced to kill in self-defense. In the time that the Kid roamed the land he chided Hispanic villagers who were fearful of standing up to the big ranchers who stole their land, water, and way of life.
>
> In this sense, the Lincoln County War was a microcosm of the struggle of New Mexico's established Hispanic ranching communities to hold onto their lands in the face of the encroachments of northern Republican carpetbaggers such as Dolan, Fritz, Martin, Murphy and other corrupt members of the faction called "The House." This post-war struggle between Anglo-newcomers and ancestral Hispanic ranchers divides New Mexico to this day.

THE TWO SIDES OF BILLY THE KID

On the other hand, many others who knew or had heard of the Kid disagree with this glowing view. The same is true of many modern historians. To them, Billy the Kid was far from being a beloved folk hero.

Instead, he was little more than a violent criminal who was interested primarily in his own well-being and survival. Quoted in Wallis's *Billy the Kid: The Endless Ride*, writer Kent Steckmesser comments, "[T]here are two Billy the Kids in legend. The first is a tough little thug, a coward, a thief, and a cold-blooded murderer. The second is a romantic and sentimental hero, the brave and likeable leader of an outnumbered band fighting for justice."

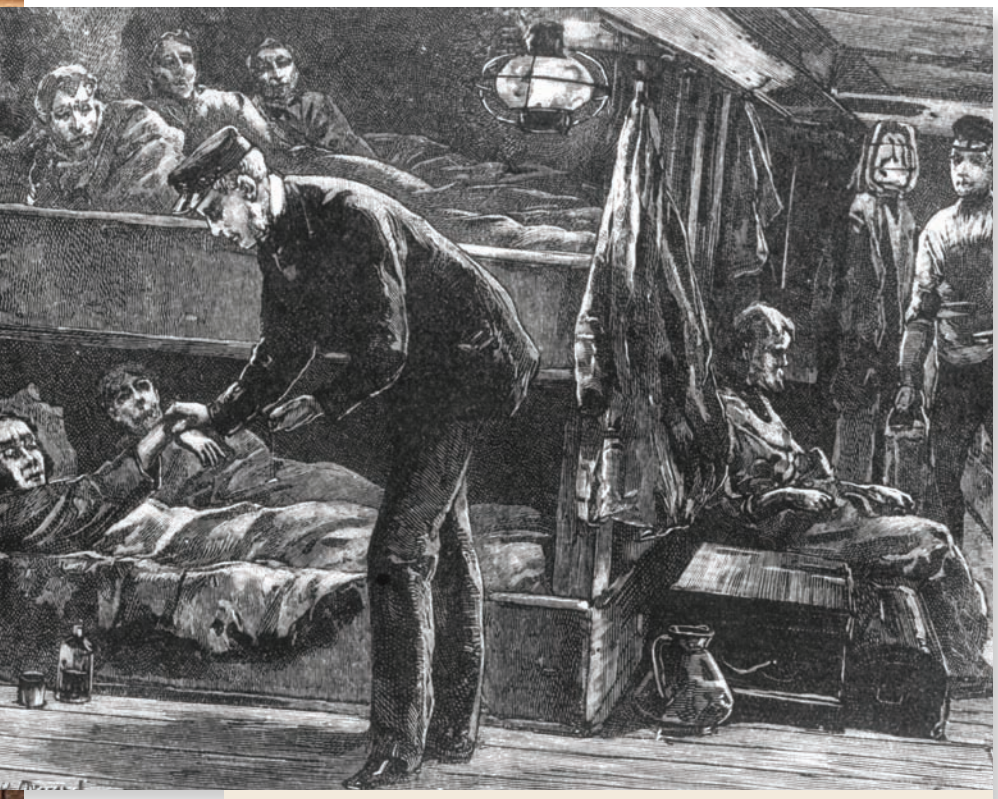
No matter how he is viewed, the Kid today remains a forceful and evocative figure. In *With Badges and Bullets*, historian Paul Andrew Hutton comments, "Billy the Kid just keeps riding across the dreamscape of our minds—silhouetted against a starlit Western sky, handsome, laughing, deadly. Shrewd as the coyote. Free as the hawk. The outlaw of dreams—forever free, forever young, forever riding." Exactly where and when this eternal ride began is unknown. It is likely, however, that it started in New York City, and it is certain that it happened in the years just before the Civil War.

THE KID'S EARLY LIFE

The origin of one of the Old West's most notorious outlaws probably will be a tantalizing mystery forever. No records have yet been found that could pin down details about the birth of the young outlaw known variously as William Henry McCarty, Henry Antrim, William Bonney, the Kid, Kid Antrim, and Billy the Kid.

Historians have put forward a variety of ideas about such questions. It has been suggested that the Kid was born in Indiana, Ohio, New York, and New Mexico. The Kid himself once told a census taker that he and both of his parents were born in Missouri—but then, the outlaw was well known for embroidering his own life story.

Pat Garrett, the sheriff who killed the Kid, flatly asserted that the outlaw was born in New York City, but Garrett's stories about the outlaw and his life and death were probably no more factual than the stories the Kid told about himself. Nonetheless, the most likely scenario is that Garrett was correct in saying that William Henry McCarty, as he was named at birth, was born in New York City. One piece of evidence to indicate that he was born there is that many people (in addition to Garrett) who knew Billy the Kid personally stated that the outlaw had told them so.



Although his origins are unknown, most historians believe that Billy the Kid's mother was a survivor of the Irish Potato Famine of the mid-nineteenth century. Catherine may have been one of many Irish immigrants who moved to New York, settling in the port city where their ship docked. Above, a view of an immigrant ship during the famine.

Furthermore, historians have determined that young Billy's mother, Catherine (also spelled Katherine and Kathrine) McCarty, had recently arrived in America from Ireland when he was born. She was among the victims of the Irish Potato Famine, a devastating period of starvation and disease in the 1840s and 1850s that sent an estimated one million Irish citizens overseas and caused the deaths of another million who stayed. For the waves of Irish men and women immigrating to America, New York City was one of the major entry ports. Many of these desperately poor refugees settled in the rough and densely packed neighborhoods that formed the

heart of New York's Irish community. It is plausible that the Kid was born in one of these neighborhoods.

Catherine's background is as much of a mystery as Billy's. Her birth date, the exact place of her birth in Ireland, and her maiden name are unknown. It is also unknown whether Catherine was accompanied by anyone when she came to America or if she was a "fallen girl," expecting the Kid without a husband. In Catherine's obituary, it states that she died at the age of 45 from tuberculosis on September 16, 1874, so the year of her birth would have been 1828 or 1829.

The same uncertainty about the Kid' also extends to the date of his birth. According to Garrett, the outlaw was born on November 23, 1859, making him 21 when he died. However, other evidence suggests that he might have been born sometime in 1858, 1860, or 1861.

BILLY'S FAMILY

The identity of the outlaw's biological father is an equally obscure puzzle. Some historians have theorized that he was a man named Patrick McCarty or Michael McCarty, or perhaps William McCarty or Edward McCarty. In any case, he was apparently never a part of young Billy's life. Catherine's second husband, William Antrim, did recall later that Catherine's first husband had died in New York, but it wasn't clear if he was Billy's father.

The argument has been made that Billy had a different set of parents altogether: William Harrison Bonney and Katherine Boujean Bonney. It is true that the Kid sometimes used the surname Bonney, but there is no proof of this assertion. In fact, it has never been clearly shown why the outlaw used this name at all.

Billy apparently had a brother named Joseph, but he also remains a mysterious presence. It has not even been proven which of the brothers was older, nor has it been proven whether they were half brothers or full brothers. However, evidence suggests that Josie, as he was nicknamed, was probably the older of the two.

In fact, one of the few definitely known pieces of information about the family concerns their departure from the place of the boys'

birth. In about 1867 or 1868, Catherine McCarty and her two young boys left New York and resettled at North East Street in Indianapolis, Indiana. It is not known why she chose Indiana; however, it is known that at some point before or after her arrival there Catherine met William Antrim, a laborer and teamster 12 years younger than Catherine. Antrim was also known as Billy, so to avoid confusion between him and her son, Catherine started calling the boy by his middle name, Henry. For many years after, he was known as Henry. The small family did not stay long in Indianapolis. They moved around the country for a couple of years as Antrim looked for work. In about 1870, they settled in Wichita, Kansas.

LIVING IN WICHITA

Kansas had become a state in 1861 only a few years before their arrival, and Wichita was growing rapidly from its origins as a small collection of dusty buildings. The reason for this growth centered on the beef industry.

Huge herds of cattle were being raised on ranches in Texas. Cowboys (or drovers, as they were often called then) brought the herds north to towns such as Wichita. These towns were part of the railroad system that was rapidly expanding to crisscross America. Once the livestock arrived in a cattle town, they were shipped east by train for consumption in larger cities.

When Henry's family settled in Wichita, some 15,000 cattle passed through the town each week on their way eastward. This activity was quickly changing the once-remote outpost into a bustling boomtown. Wichita at the time boasted three churches, two hardware stores, two drugstores, a jewelry store, two blacksmiths, two restaurants, three hotels, and many more businesses and institutions. Its streets were crowded day and night—at least in the late summer and early fall, when the herds arrived—with drovers and buyers connected to the cattle trade. Buffalo hunters, soldiers, ranchers, gunmen for hire, professional gamblers, and other colorful characters were also common sights around town.

Because of its location on the Chisholm Trail, Wichita, Kansas, became a popular destination for cattle drives headed north. By 1890, Wichita had built itself into a rowdy cowtown with a population of 24,000.

This rich stew of humanity was a constant source of variety and adventure for a young boy like Henry. A historical vignette published later in the *Wichita Eagle* (and reprinted in Utley's *Billy the Kid: A Short and Violent Life*) evokes the lively atmosphere in one particular part of town:

> Day and night this sweltering corner was lined on either side by unbroken rows of cow ponies tethered to the hitching rails. Horse corrals were filled to overflowing. Flimsy hotels were sleeping six and eight cattlemen to the room. Along the old board walks from saloon to gambling house, to dance hall, to stores and back to

> saloons again, roamed hundreds of Texas men [in town from the cattle drives], in sombreros, chaps and high-heeled boots, looking for recreation and excitement.

Life in Wichita sometimes could be a little too exciting. It presented a constant threat of considerable danger, especially for young people like the McCarty boys. One such danger was the constant presence of unruly herds of Texas longhorn cattle stampeding through people's property and inciting bands of wolves. Quoted in Frederick Nolan's book *The West of Billy the Kid*, Mary Weeks, whose family lived near town, recalled,

> The cowboys were bringing their herds of cattle through from Texas and we were constantly fearful lest they stampede. Mother often cautioned us children 'Be careful that you look out for the cattle.' The sunflowers and the blue grass [in the fields outside of town] were so high that we couldn't tell when the cattle were near. The wolves howled at our doors. We were not so very much afraid of them in the daytime, but we kept rather close inside after night.

Other dangers included rattlesnakes, coyotes, and natural disasters such as tornadoes, floods, and, worst of all, brushfires.

A TYPICAL BOYHOOD

Catherine McCarty soon joined the ranks of Wichita's commercial enterprise. She opened a laundry. Reprinted in Utley's *Billy the Kid: A Short and Violent Life*, the first issue of the Wichita *Tribune*, a newspaper that had recently begun operations, noted, "The City Laundry is kept by Mrs. McCarty, to whom we recommend those who wish to have their linen made clean."

Catherine also dabbled in real estate and got involved in town politics. She attended board of trustees meetings and was the only woman to sign a petition to support incorporating the town. There

were living quarters above the laundry, and it is likely that Catherine, Joseph, and Henry lived there. William Antrim did not. Instead, he looked for work in and around Wichita. He also bought a plot of land outside of town, planted crops, and built a house and stable. Presumably, William lived there full-time and Catherine and the boys spent some of their time there. Catherine seemed to be financially stable, for she purchased a quarter-section lot next to Antrim's for $200 that she paid in full. Later, she and her sons moved in with Antrim.

Henry was growing up to be a lively young man, strong but slightly built. He and Joseph probably led lives very similar to other boys in their time and place. They helped out with chores, did odd jobs for neighbors, and, when they could, explored the flat plains around town.

Fishing, hunting, and swimming in nearby creeks were popular activities for their free hours. In addition, the boys spent as much time as possible in the dusty streets of Wichita, mingling with the town's motley collection of residents and soaking up its atmosphere. It is not believed that the boys attended school because the only one that had been available in town had collapsed within the last year, but Catherine may have home-schooled them when she could.

ON TO SANTA FE

The family's time in Wichita did not last long. Catherine was diagnosed with tuberculosis, a serious respiratory illness that was then often called consumption, and her health was beginning to deteriorate. A variety of diseases were easily picked up in the unsanitary conditions of towns in the Old West, and a serious illness could easily result in death in those days before antibiotics and other advanced medical treatments. Her condition was surely aggravated by the damp and humid atmosphere of her laundry.

The only remedy for those suffering from consumption during that time was to move to a dry and warm climate. Catherine and her family hoped that the Southwest desert would help. Catherine and William sold their businesses and real estate properties, and by early

1873 they were in the high desert town of Santa Fe in New Mexico Territory. (New Mexico did not become a state until 1912.)

The family's new home, like much of the Old West, was a wild and wooly place. It had few laws, widespread poverty, vast and sparsely populated expanses, and a colorful, sometimes volatile mixture of Hispanic, Anglo, and Native American cultures. In *Billy the Kid: The Endless Ride*, Wallis writes, "Now Henry McCarty, on the brink of adolescence, and his family really did live on the authentic frontier."

They also became a family in the eyes of the law. Catherine McCarty and William Antrim were married in First Presbyterian Church in Santa Fe on March 1, 1873. The wedding was a modest affair. Only five people, including Henry and Joseph, witnessed it. The wedding announcement in the local newspaper is the first known document in print that mentions the boy who would later be known as Billy the Kid. Young Henry officially took on his stepfather's name.

SILVER CITY

Not long after the wedding, the family was on the move yet again. This time, they settled in the southwest part of New Mexico Territory, in the appropriately named mining boomtown of Silver City.

They had needed to move due to Catherine's ill health. She also thought Silver City would be a place for her boys to go to school. In addition, they were among the many people drawn there by the prospect of striking it rich in the region's vast silver and copper mines. Newspapers all over the country were publicizing the discovery of these valuable deposits. In his book *Antrim Is My Stepfather's Name*, writer Jerry Weddle comments, "The spectacular mineral discoveries in this section of the Continental Divide had become national news."

As a result, Silver City was growing so fast that the local sawmills operated 24 hours a day to provide enough lumber for new buildings. The town's saloons also stayed open all the time, with three shifts of workers to handle the needs of a thirsty public. The

local barber turned his fenced yard into a campsite because there were not enough hotel rooms for newcomers.

Silver City's dozen or so square blocks soon boasted many of the trappings of civilization. The town had handsome brick buildings, modest adobe homes, log cabins, hardware and general stores, butcher shops, hotels, saloons, gambling halls, and other amenities.

In addition, the dusty streets of the town were filled with a collection of horses, wagons, stagecoaches, freight wagons, and other means of transport. A newspaper article in the New Mexico community of Las Cruces, reprinted in Utley's *Billy the Kid: A Short and Violent Life*, noted, "Strangers who recently made their first trip to Silver City tell us they are astonished to find a real American town with fine two-story buildings and a live energetic people so far on the southwestern frontier."

Despite the lack of housing, the Antrims were able to rent a modest log cabin. William Antrim found work as a bartender and carpenter, but he was often gone for long periods. His great passions were prospecting and gambling, and he spent much of his time pursuing them out of town. He often came home empty-handed.

Meanwhile, Henry's mother washed clothes, baked pies, and took in boarders to make ends meet. Her boarders and neighbors later remembered Catherine as a perennially cheerful person. One of their boarders, Ash Upson, provided one of the few descriptions of Catherine in Pat Garrett's *The Authentic Life of Billy the Kid* (Upson is also the cowriter of this book):

> To those who knew Billy the Kid's mother, his courteous, kindly, and benevolent spirit was no mystery. She was evidently of Irish descent. Her husband called her Kathleen. She was 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. She kept boarders in Silver City, and her charity and goodness of heart was proverbial [well known]. Many a hungry tenderfoot [rookie or newcomer] has had cause to bless the fortune

> which led him to her door. In all her deportment [demeanor] she exhibited the unmistakable characteristics of a lady—a lady by instinct and education.

The Authentic Life of Billy the Kid identifies other neighbors who thought highly of Catherine. They recalled her outgoing personality and her love of dancing, which she passed on to her eldest son, whom she took with her to the dance halls.

Henry's childhood friend Louis Abraham, in Weddle's *Antrim is My Stepfather's Name*, remembered the Antrim household as "an ordinary good American home. Good parents, and a good environment in the home." These friends and neighbors also recalled Henry with affection. In Nolan's book *The West of Billy the Kid*, another boyhood friend, Chauncey Truesdell, remembered, "Henry was only a small boy, small for his age and kind of skinny." And Louis Abraham recalled, "Henry was a good boy, maybe a little [more] mischievous than the rest of us with a little more nerve."

Everything seemed to be going well for the family. Henry and Joseph went to school in Silver City, probably their first exposure to education beyond informal home schooling. They learned to read and write, although it is not known if they had learned this from their mother or in school. Literacy set them apart from many in the Old West. "Being lettered" was not always a common skill.

Being lettered enabled young Henry to indulge in one of his favorite pastimes: reading. Quoted in Weddle's *Antrim is My Stepfather's Name*, another of Henry's friends from this time, Anthony Connor, recalled, "Billy got to be quite a reader. He would scarcely have the dishes washed, until he would be sprawled out somewhere reading a book . . . finally, he took to reading the *Police Gazette* and dime novels."

Henry and Joseph also made friends, with the Antrim house being the meeting place for after-school games of foot racing and playing pirates until suppertime. Henry apparently developed a crush on the teacher in his one-room schoolhouse, and he became convinced that they were distant relatives. It has been reported

that both Henry and his teacher were ambidextrous (able to write with the right and left hands), and if this is true it might have been enough to convince the boy that they were somehow connected as family.

The town's school included about 30 students. Henry's teacher, quoted in Utley's *Billy the Kid: A Short and Violent Life*, remembered him as "a scrawny little fellow with delicate hands and an artistic nature, always willing to help with the chores around the school house. Billy (they called him Henry then) was no more of a problem in school than any other boy growing up in a mining camp."

THE KID'S FIRST KILL, ACCORDING TO LEGEND

According to a legend that began circulating several years after the Kid became a well-known outlaw, he killed a man when he was only 12 years old. There is no evidence that it is true—the anecdote is merely a story, but it is a good one.

The incident supposedly took place in Silver City in 1871. (If it was indeed 1871, Henry was still living in Wichita.) Henry and his mother were walking down a street when they passed a group of men standing in front of a saloon. One of the men, a blacksmith with a reputation for being a bully, said something insulting to Henry's mother.

Catherine ignored the man, but Henry did not. He picked up a rock and angrily threw it, missing his target but knocking the man's hat off his head. The blacksmith ran after Henry but was stopped by a man named Moulton. Moulton restrained the man until the boy could run to safety.

A few weeks later, young Henry was in the same saloon, learning card tricks. (It was not unusual or illegal for children of the Old West to spend time in saloons.) While drinking there, the blacksmith whose hat Henry had knocked off got into an argument with Moulton, the boy's protector.

The blacksmith tried to smash a chair over Moulton's head. At this point, Henry got involved in the scuffle. He ran up to the blacksmith and stabbed him three times in the heart with a small knife.

A statement by Louis Abraham, the Kid's childhood friend, supports the falsehood of this anecdote. Quoted in an essay called "Billy the Kid—Eulogy" on the Web site aboutbillythekid.com, he commented,

> The story of Billy the Kid killing a blacksmith in Silver City is false. . . . When the boy was placed in jail and escaped, he was not bad, just scared. If he had only waited until they let him out he would have been all right, but he was scared and ran away. He got in with a band of rustlers in Apache Tejo in a part of the county where he was made a hardened character.

By all accounts, Henry quickly became accustomed to life in New Mexico Territory. He liked the region's strong Hispanic culture, and he liked the way it mixed (not always peacefully) with Anglo and Native American cultures. He liked Mexican food, and he learned to speak fluent Spanish. This was the beginning of a close bond between Billy the Kid and the Hispanic population of the Southwest. The region's Hispanic communities generally loved the Kid and remained loyal to him even after he became a feared outlaw.

THE DEATH OF CATHERINE

Not everything about the Kid's new life was good. Catherine's health was deteriorating quickly. Because William was not bringing home enough income due to prospecting and gambling, Catherine had to work extra in order to support the family. The stress of physical labor and worry caused her health to worsen. Those who suffer from tuberculosis are often in physical pain with hacking coughs, chest aches, and severe fatigue, and they are required to rest and live

Already in the late stages of tuberculosis when the family moved to New Mexico Territory, Catherine Antrim finally succumbed to her illness on September 16, 1874. Once his mother was gone, the devastated and orphaned Billy the Kid began a life of lawlessness.

a stress-free lifestyle. Catherine was not able to do that; she had to push herself to feed her family.

A neighbor suggested that Catherine visit Hudson's Hot Springs. The hot springs were thought to cure ailments, but unfortunately they did not help Catherine. Another neighbor, Clara Truesdell, who had trained as a nurse, helped care for Catherine as best she could and tended to Henry and Joseph. Catherine and Henry were close, and this was a devastating period for him. He spent his days sitting by his mother's bedside, trying to comfort her during her attacks of coughing. During this time, William was not around and was not much support to the family. Catherine asked Clara to care

for her boys after she was gone, and Clara promised to look after them. On September 16, 1874, after being bedridden for nearly four months, Catherine died at the age of 45. Clara prepared Catherine's body for burial while neighbor David Abraham and his son made the coffin and dug the grave. A number of neighbors attended the funeral service, and Catherine was buried in the town's Memory Lane Cemetery. Her husband was still away and did not get back to Silver City in time for his wife's death or the funeral.

When William Antrim finally returned home, he paid only minimal attention to his stepsons. Uninterested in caring for them himself, Antrim sent Henry and Joseph to live with various foster families. They lived with the Hudson family and the Knight family. The boys continued to attend school while Antrim came periodically to Silver City and disappeared again. Eventually Antrim separated the boys, with Henry going to live with the Truesdells, who owned a hotel-restaurant. Henry worked to earn his keep. Quoted in writer Jon Tuska's book *Billy the Kid: His Life and Legend*, the head of the Truesdell family later stated, "Henry was the only kid who ever worked there who never stole anything. Other fellows used to steal the silverware—that kind of stuff was scarce in the camp." Joseph lived with John Dyer, owner of the Orleans Club, where he worked as an errand boy, served liquor, and cleaned the saloon. Unfortunately, without proper supervision, Joseph gambled and drank.

Now a teenager, Henry stayed in town for almost a year after his mother's death. In addition to his schooling (it is not known how long he attended), he found a variety of odd jobs.

SLIDING INTO CRIME

During this rough period in his life, Henry began to slip into petty crime. One of the first crimes that the teen contemplated was a double theft. One target was a small peanut and candy stand, and the other was a window display of costume jewelry. Both were owned by a man who ran a furniture store.

Henry and another boy planned to steal money from the stand, then take the jewelry to Mexico to sell it. The scheme was wrecked

when the other boy had second thoughts and told his father what they planned to do.

Sheriff Harvey Whitehill was an early foe of Henry's. Whitehill briefly jailed the budding criminal at least twice during Henry's time in Silver City. Quoted in Nolan's *The West of Billy the Kid*, Whitehill later asserted that he saw positive signs that the boy was headed toward a life of lawlessness. The sheriff recalled, "There was one peculiar facial characteristic that to an experienced man hunter would have marked him immediately as a bad man, and that was his eyes. They were never at rest, but continually shifted and roved, much like his own rebellious nature."

Many people have speculated about why a boy like Henry, no better or worse than any other typical boy of his time and place, grew up to become one of the Old West's most famous outlaws. Some early biographers have sought to explain his descent into lawlessness by noting his habit of reading lurid dime novels and magazines. Perhaps, they suggest, he was influenced by the daring adventures he absorbed from them.

Another explanation that some historians have proposed concerns the boy's slender physique. It is possible, they argue, that bigger and stronger boys bullied him, which in turn would have forced him to be aggressive. Perhaps Henry also began to break the law to impress these boys. Or perhaps it was a combination of these reasons. His friend Louis Abraham felt that the boy was not inherently bad, but that he simply drifted into crime after meeting a string of disreputable characters. Abraham, quoted in Utley's *Billy the Kid: A Short and Violent Life*, stated that Henry "was a good kid, but he got in the wrong company."

Catherine's death may have also been a factor. Henry had been particularly close to his mother, and the loss, not surprisingly, affected him deeply. Writer James D. Horan, in his book *The Gunfighters*, comments, "Watching his mother die apparently did something to Billy."

MEETING SOMBRERO JACK

One reason for Henry's early career of crime was the simple fact that he was poor. Although he worked at a variety of jobs, money was

scarce. Furthermore, by all accounts he was a headstrong boy who was not afraid to take what he wanted.

Whatever the reasons might have been, Henry fell in with a crowd of unsavory characters. As quoted in Nolan's *The West of Billy the Kid*, Frank Coe, later a member of Billy the Kid's gang, commented, "I found Billy different from most boys of his age. He had been thrown on his own resources from early boyhood. From his own statement to me, he hadn't known what it meant to be a boy; at the age of twelve he was associated with men of twenty five and older."

In particular, during this time he befriended George Schaefer, who was known as "Sombrero Jack" because of the style of hat he wore. (Somberos, the favorite headgear of Mexican cowboys, were hats with wide brims to keep off the sun.) Jack was, by general agreement, not a very nice man. He was a thief, a drunk, a gambler, and an all-around bad influence on the teen who had no one to look after him.

Sombero Jack involved Henry in a number of increasingly serious crimes. Now 13 or 14 and living at Mrs. Brown's boarding house, Henry was very poor and dressed in worn-out clothes. Sombrero Jack had stolen a bag of laundry from a Chinese launderer and gave it to Henry. Mrs. Brown discovered the bundle in Henry's room and reported him to Sheriff Whitehill.

On September 24, 1875, Henry was arrested for possessing the clothing and firearms that Jack had stolen. The local newspaper, the *Silver City Herald*, quoted in Weddle's book *Antrim Is My Stepfather's Name,* commented, "It's believed that Henry was simply the tool of 'Sombrero Jack,' who done the actual stealing whilst Henry done the hiding. Jack has since skinned out [disappeared]."

The sheriff put young Henry in jail. The lawman wanted to keep him there for only a short time, hoping to teach the boy a lesson and scare him. But Henry apparently did not understand that the sheriff planned to keep him there only briefly. Two days after being taken into custody, he escaped by climbing up through the jailhouse chimney.

After fleeing, Henry sought shelter with the Truesdells. They gave the teenager some money and put him on a stagecoach bound

The Teenager Escapes from Jail

Sheriff Whitehill later wrote a memoir about his experiences with the young Billy the Kid. One of his anecdotes, reprinted in Wallis's *Billy the Kid: The Endless Ride*, was about the time the Kid escaped from the town jail, where he had been confined for a brief time:

> One day the Kid complained to me that the jailer was treating him roughly and kept him in solitary confinement in his cell without any exercise. So I ordered that he be allowed to remain in the corridor for a limited time each morning.
>
> He was only a boy, you must remember, scarcely over 15 years of age. Yet we made the mistake of leaving him alone in the corridor for a short half hour. When we returned and unlocked the heavy oaken doors of the jail, the Kid was nowhere to be seen.
>
> I ran outside around the jail and a Mexican standing on a ridge at the rear asked whom I was hunting. I replied in Spanish, "a prisoner." "He came out of the chimney," answered the Mexican.
>
> I ran back into the jail, looked up the big old-fashioned chimney, and sure enough could see where in an effort to obtain a hold his hands had clawed into the thick layer of soot which lined the side of the flue.
>
> The chimney hole itself did not appear as large as my arm and yet the lad squeezed his frail slender body through it and gained his liberty. Then commenced his career of lawlessness in earnest.

for southeastern Arizona Territory, just across the border. William Antrim had been staying in Clifton, Arizona, another boomtown settlement, and Henry hoped to stay with him. Unfortunately, when Henry told Antrim what had happened, Antrim kicked him out. From that point on, Henry was more or less a fugitive. He would remain one for the rest of his short life.

THE LINCOLN COUNTY WAR

Retaliating against William's mistreatment, Henry stole a six-shooter and some clothes from his stepfather and left the area. Henry's exact route in Arizona Territory is not known. Pinning down his whereabouts during this period is just speculation. As Wallis comments in *Billy the Kid: The Endless Ride*, "Details of his movements at this time are understandably sparse." It is known that life in the hostile area of the Arizona desert was dangerous for an adult man. Life must have been much worse for a teen with a youthful, slender build like Henry's.

MEETING MACKIE

The young man ended up in the vicinity of a U.S. Army cavalry base called Fort Grant in Arizona. There he picked up various odd jobs, including work as a ranch hand. He already rode and shot well, both necessary skills for the job, and the ranch work he did at this point gave him experience in handling cattle—a skill that would come in handy later when he began stealing livestock.

Henry also frequently played cards for money. Gambling and drinking went together naturally, but Henry never cared for

Here at Fort Grant, also known as Old Camp Grant, in Arizona Territory, Billy the Kid worked as a ranch hand, tending sheep and doing other chores. After killing Frank Cahill, the Kid spent time in the camp's stockade before he escaped and returned to New Mexico Territory.

alcohol. Quoted in Utley's *Billy the Kid: A Short and Violent Life*, a doctor he befriended, Henry Hoyt, once remarked, "Billy was an expert at most Western sports, with the exception of drinking."

Nonetheless, Henry spent a lot of time in saloons—after all, that was where he found the bulk of the gambling action. The teenager could use his boyish looks to his advantage there, because older men generally thought he would be an easy opponent to beat. In fact, he was a very good card player, and he beat many a surprised challenger.

During this time, Henry met another partner in crime to take the place of Sombrero Jack. John R. Mackie, a Scottish-born ex-cavalryman who had drifted into petty crime after the war,

encouraged his protégé's own forays into lawlessness. Wallis comments in *Billy the Kid*: *The Endless Ride*, "Mackie instructed him in the finer points of larceny and how to stay one step ahead of the law. Mackie taught him well, and Kid Antrim proved to be an able student."

It was during this time that Henry developed the famous nickname by which he would forever be known: Kid Antrim, later shortened to just the Kid. According to Utley's *Billy the Kid: A Short and Violent Life*, he was called Kid Antrim because of his youth and his slight physical appearance. Kid Antrim and Mackie paired up on a regular basis to steal horses and saddles. Since horses were the main means of transportation in the West, they were essential possessions—and stealing them was a crime often punished by immediate hanging.

Despite the dangers, the life of a livestock thief suited the Kid. Weddle comments in *Antrim Is My Stepfather's Name*, "Through a combination of circumstance and habit, Billy finally settled into an occupation that suited his physical abilities and appealed to his sense of adventure: horse stealing."

There were many opportunities for the Kid to practice his new livelihood. This was especially true when soldiers stationed at Fort Grant rode into Globe City and other nearby settlements. These unfortunate soldiers often found that their horses disappeared while they were visiting the local saloons, brothels, and dance halls.

One often-repeated story involves some soldiers who tried to outwit potential thieves by tying long ropes to their horses and holding on to the other ends of these ropes while in a saloon. Mackie followed them inside and struck up a conversation to distract them. When the soldiers came out, they found that they were holding only ropes—the Kid had cut the animals loose and made off with them.

The Kid was caught several times, but he managed to get away every time. On one occasion, according to legend, he escaped from jail while being escorted to the outhouse. The outlaw somehow was able to hide a handful of salt, throw it in the eyes of his guard, and make his getaway. On another occasion—again according to legend—he scaled a guardhouse wall and squeezed his slender body through a ventilation shaft before dropping to the ground.

One odd aspect of the Kid's many escapes is that he almost always returned to the same area. He seemed not to have been bothered by the prospect of being caught. This reckless habit would become a recurring theme in his life.

HIS FIRST KILLING

In August 1877, the Kid committed his first documented killing. The victim was a civilian blacksmith at Fort Grant, a burly Irish immigrant named Frank "Windy" Cahill. (Cahill apparently got his nickname because he was considered a boastful blowhard.)

For some time, the blacksmith had taken pleasure in bullying the much smaller Kid Antrim. In Nolan's *The West of Billy the Kid*, Gus Gildea, a local ranch hand, recalled, "[A]fter the Kid came to Fort Grant, Windy started abusing him. He would throw Billy to the floor, ruffle his hair, slap his face and humiliate him before the men in the saloon."

Finally Cahill insulted the Kid and threw him to the ground once too often. The younger man decided enough was enough, and he fought back. Gildea said, "Windy threw the youth on the floor. He sat on him, pinned his arms down with his knees and started slapping his face. Billy worked his right arm free and managed to grasp his .45. Then there was a deafening roar. Windy slumped to the side as the Kid squirmed free." The blacksmith died the next day from a gunshot wound to the belly.

Some witnesses to the fight testified that the Kid had simply acted in self-defense. However, Cahill was unarmed at the time, so self-defense would have been hard to prove. Indeed, the coroner's inquest ruled against the Kid. Quoted in Etulain's essay "Billy the Kid," it concluded that the shooting was "criminal and unjustifiable, and Henry Antrim alias Kid, is guilty thereof."

FLEEING ARIZONA

The Kid, still a teenager, had now killed his first man—his first documented killing, at any rate. It looked like things were serious enough that the teen would have to leave town or face a trial.

Pictured is Lincoln County, New Mexico, around 1886. It is the site of one of the most violent conflicts in the state's history—the Lincoln County War.

The prospect of successfully pleading self-defense was not a sure thing. Furthermore, killing a man was a much more serious crime than anything he had previously done, even horse theft. In *Antrim Is My Stepfather's Name,* Weddle comments, "Unlike his occasional theft of a horse or a saddle, [the Kid] could not undo Cahill's death, and he must have been aware of the gravity of the verdict."

So the Kid took off, stealing a horse and riding back east into New Mexico Territory. It was a huge area with very few people, and therefore a place in which a man running from the law could easily disappear and invent a new identity for himself. Quoted in the book *Untold New Mexico* by Jason Silverman, writer W. Eugene Hollon comments, "New Mexico was sparsely populated in the 1870s, but it is doubtful whether there has ever been another place in the United States where so many men were indicted for murder and so few convicted."

The Kid ended up in Lincoln County, a sprawling but sparsely populated region in the south-central part of the territory. Its capital, a settlement of about 300 people high in the county's mountainous region, was called Lincoln or Lincoln City.

It was a typically rough Old West environment, with constant danger from hostile American Indians and plagues of destructive insects, drought, and deadly diseases such as smallpox and cholera. It was also as lawless as any other part of the Old West. Wallis comments in *Billy the Kid: The Endless Ride*,

> Against a backdrop of ethnic hostility, greed, and corruption dating back years before the Kid's arrival, Lincoln County epitomized the desires of the lawless. Crooked politicians, ruthless cattle lords, and hired gunmen cohabited there in a milieu of unspeakable cruelty and vindictiveness. . . . The place was made to order for anyone choosing mayhem as a way of life.

THE BOYS

In Lincoln County, the Kid fell in with a loosely organized band of desperadoes known as "the Boys." A local newspaper editor rather grandly dubbed them "the Banditti"—Italian for "the bandits." By any name, the gang was a motley collection of rogues—anywhere from 10 to 30 ex-soldiers, gunmen, rustlers, and former cowboys and ranch hands.

The gang's base of operations was La Mesilla, a settlement in the flatlands of the county. They specialized in stealing cattle, valuable animals that were always in high demand. The Boys typically sold their pilfered livestock to hotelkeepers, army cooks, and anyone else who was not fussy about legal bills of sale.

The gang often focused its attentions on one particular target: the vast herds of cattle owned by a wealthy rancher named John Chisum. (John Chisum should not be confused with Jesse Chisholm, who started a famous cattle-drive route called the Chisholm Trail.)

As the Boys terrorized Lincoln County, a growing number of local residents became increasingly alarmed about them. Justice was swift in the Old West, and criminals were often executed before a proper trial could be held. Colonel Albert Fountain, a former soldier and the founder of a local newspaper, the *Mesilla Valley Independent*, at one point published a warning to the gang. He predicted that the desperadoes would be hanged if they could not be jailed. The article, reprinted in Nolan's *The West of Billy the Kid*, read, in part,

> There are twelve of you and if room cannot be found for you in the county jail twelve ropes and twelve cottonwood limbs can be found. You have adroitly succeeded thus far in frustrating the earnest efforts of the district attorney and other officers of the law to bring you to justice, you cannot escape swift retribution of an outraged community. *We warn you to beware*.

At some point during this period, the Kid picked up yet another name: William Bonney. It has never been clear where the surname came from. From this time until the year of his death (when he finally became known as Billy the Kid), the young outlaw alternated between calling himself Billy Antrim, Kid Antrim, William Bonney, and simply the Kid.

Thieving was not a full-time occupation for the Kid. He also regularly worked for brief periods on ranches and farms in the area, picking up a few dollars here and there. Most of these jobs were short-term affairs of no consequence, but two led to significant events.

In the fall of 1877, a couple of local men, Doc Scurlock and Charlie Bowdre, hired the Kid to work in their cheese factory. He also worked for a spell on the Coe-Saunders ranch, where he met cousins Frank Coe, George Coe, and Ab Saunders. All of these men would soon become important figures in the outlaw's life.

Late in 1877, the Kid's fortunes took a significant turn. John Tunstall, a British-born banker, merchant, and owner of vast cattle holdings in Lincoln County, hired him and several of his new friends.

WORKING FOR TUNSTALL

In part, the young man got the job because he got along well with the other hands. Another reason was his proficiency with guns. He handled a '73 Winchester rifle well and did the same with the several handguns he usually carried.

His favorite handgun was a .41-caliber Colt double-action revolver called the Thunderer. Frank Coe, quoted in Wallis's *Billy the Kid: The Endless Ride*, recalled, "I saw that the Kid, as we had named him, was a fine shot with a rifle. . . . He spent all of his spare time cleaning his six-shooter and practicing shooting. Billy explained to me how he became proficient in the use of firearms."

The Kid had told Coe that he needed to learn about using guns as a means of protecting himself. He felt that his young age and slender physique were handicaps in fights, so he wanted to become an expert shot.

The Kid admired his boss and did what he could to win the older man's favor. It seems a reasonable assumption that the young man saw Tunstall as the strong, supportive father figure he never had. Besides, the Kid knew he had a good deal; he had a place to stay, good companions, and a little spending money. In *Billy the Kid: The Endless Ride*, Wallis writes,

> For the first time in a long while he had three square meals each day, a job of sorts, a warm bunk inside a crowded but cozy adobe, and a decent horse to ride. The wages he drew allowed him to procure a dime novel or two, a tin of pomade for slicking back his hair before a dance, and maybe even a slim grubstake for a game of three-card monte.

The cattle baron, in turn, took a liking to the brash young man. Quoted in Wallis's *Billy the Kid: The Endless Ride*, Frank Coe later stated,

> Tunstall saw the boy was quick to learn and not afraid of anything. . . . He made Billy a present of a good horse,

> saddle and a new gun. . . . My, but the boy was proud [and he] said it was the first time in his life he had ever had anything given to him. . . . I found Billy different from most boys of his age. He had been thrown on his own resources from early boyhood. From his own statement to me, he hadn't known what it meant to be a boy; at the age of twelve he was associated with men of twenty-five and older.
>
> Billy was eager to learn everything and had a most active and fertile mind. He was small and of frail physique; his hands and feet were more like a woman's than a man's. He was not the type who could perform heavy labor. . . . Billy explained to me how he became proficient in the use of firearms. He said that his age and his physique were handicaps in his personal encounters, so he decided to become a good shot with both rifle and six-shooter as a means of protection against bodily harm.

THE LINCOLN COUNTY WAR

Among Tunstall's business partners were John Chisum and another important man in Lincoln County's political and economic worlds: Alexander McSween, a native of Canada and a prominent lawyer.

These businessmen hired the Kid and the others for a very specific reason. The cattle owners needed well-armed help to guard their huge herds. The fact that the Kid and the others were now guarding herds that they used to raid was a common occurrence in the Old West, where loyalties could quickly shift.

The reason for the extra security was an atmosphere of increasingly dangerous tension between the Tunstall-McSween faction and a rival group of cattlemen. In time, this conflict erupted into deadly violence and became known as the Lincoln County War. In *The Gunfighters*, Horan calls this clash "the most savage political and economic range war in the history of the American West."

Tunstall and McSween, along with several ranchers, were on one side of the battle. Their opposition was a group led by two other

powers in the county's economic, law enforcement, and political life: Lawrence Murphy and James Dolan.

This conflict, at least according to a missionary who lived in the region, was much more disruptive than any trouble that local Native Americans and Mexicans caused. Quoted in O'Toole's article "The Many Stories of Billy the Kid," the missionary wrote in a letter to relatives, "Indians & Mexicans are not troublesome—it is the whites. One party trying to elbow the other out of the country."

Both natives of Ireland, Murphy and Dolan owned a bank and the largest store in Lincoln, in addition to their large cattle holdings. They also controlled the town's sheriff, William Brady. Murphy and Dolan's headquarters were in Lincoln City's biggest building. This imposing structure was known as "the big house" or simply "the House," and the Murphy-Dolan faction was also called the House.

The two sides were battling for a monopoly on the region's trade. Specifically, both wanted a lucrative contract with the U.S. Army to supply beef, flour, and other staples to the nearby fort. The lines of loyalty in this conflict, as with the hiring of the Kid, were sometimes blurry. Individual "soldiers" from either side often moved from one faction to the other, depending on (among other things) which side paid the best. Utley's *Billy the Kid: A Short and Violent Life* quotes Tunstall, in a letter to relatives, noting that this demand for money meant that the conflict was increasingly expensive: "It has cost a lot of money, for men expect to be well-paid for going on the war path."

TUNSTALL'S DEATH

In February 1878, the longstanding friction between the Tunstall-McSween group and the Murphy-Dolan group erupted into open violence. Four men in the employ of the House—William Morton, Jesse Evans, Tom Hill, and Frank Baker—confronted Tunstall one day as he was out on horseback, working on his property. The men cold-heartedly killed Tunstall and, as a further insult, shot his beloved bay horse as well. The Kid and several other Tunstall men witnessed this crime from a distance.

At the subsequent trial, the House tried to paint Tunstall's death as justifiable homicide. Evidence and eyewitness testimony suggested, however, that Tunstall was not armed, and that he had tried to avoid a violent confrontation. Nevertheless, the men were acquitted.

For Tunstall's supporters, it was the breaking point. Wallis, in *Billy the Kid: The Endless Ride*, notes, "Most historians maintain that the cold-blooded execution of Tunstall in a patch of scrub oak marked the official start of the Lincoln County War." Among Tunstall's employees, the Kid was particularly devastated by the death of the man whom he had admired. Quoted in Utley's *Billy the Kid: A Short and Violent Life*, Frank Coe later recalled the scene when the young man saw Tunstall's body laid out for embalming: "Kid walked up, looked at him, and said, 'I'll get some of them before I die,' and turned away."

THE REGULATORS

Tunstall's murder naturally enraged many others besides the Kid—men who had been sympathetic to his side. A number of them, including the Kid, banded together into a group they called the Regulators. (The term can be considered synonymous with *vigilantes*.)

This gang varied widely in size, ranging in number from 10 to 60 at any given time. It included both Anglos and Hispanics. Some had worked for Tunstall; others were local residents who were sympathetic to his side of the conflict. As he had been when Tunstall was alive, the Kid was widely considered one of the most loyal supporters of the Tunstall faction.

The group swore revenge, even though the possibility of payment for its efforts was uncertain. Tunstall had paid his men four dollars a day—a very good salary—and McSween hoped to give them some of the money that he expected would come in time from Tunstall's father. In the meantime, the men worked solely to avenge their murdered boss.

"I Never Enjoyed Better Company"

George Coe, a core member of the band known as the Regulators, commented many years later, "Billy was a brave, resourceful and honest boy. He would have been a successful man under other circumstances." This comment is reprinted in the article "About Billy the Kid—Eulogy" on aboutbillythekid.com. Quoted in Nolan's *The West of Billy the Kid*, Frank Coe, George's cousin and also a Regulator, added,

> We became staunch friends. I never enjoyed better company. He was humorous and told me many amusing stories. He always found a touch of humor in everything, being naturally full of fun and jollity. Though he was serious in emergencies, his humor was often apparent even in such situations. Billy stood with us to the end, brave and reliable, one of the best soldiers we had. He never pushed in his advice or opinions, but he had a wonderful presence of mind. The tighter the place the more he showed his cool nerve and quick brain. He never seemed to care for money, except to buy cartridges with. Cartridges were scarce, and he always used about ten times as many as everyone else. He would practice shooting at anything he saw, from every conceivable angle, on and off his horse.

THE REAL PURPOSE OF THEIR CRUSADE

The local justice of the peace, John Wilson, appointed one of the Regulators, Dick Brewer, as a special constable, and Brewer deputized the other vigilantes. McSween, in his capacity as a lawyer, obtained warrants from Wilson for the alleged killers' arrests.

Meanwhile, Sheriff Brady, who was firmly in the House's pocket, chose not to do anything about apprehending Tunstall's killers.

Furthermore, he briefly arrested the Kid and another Regulator, Fred Waite, when they tried to serve him with a warrant.

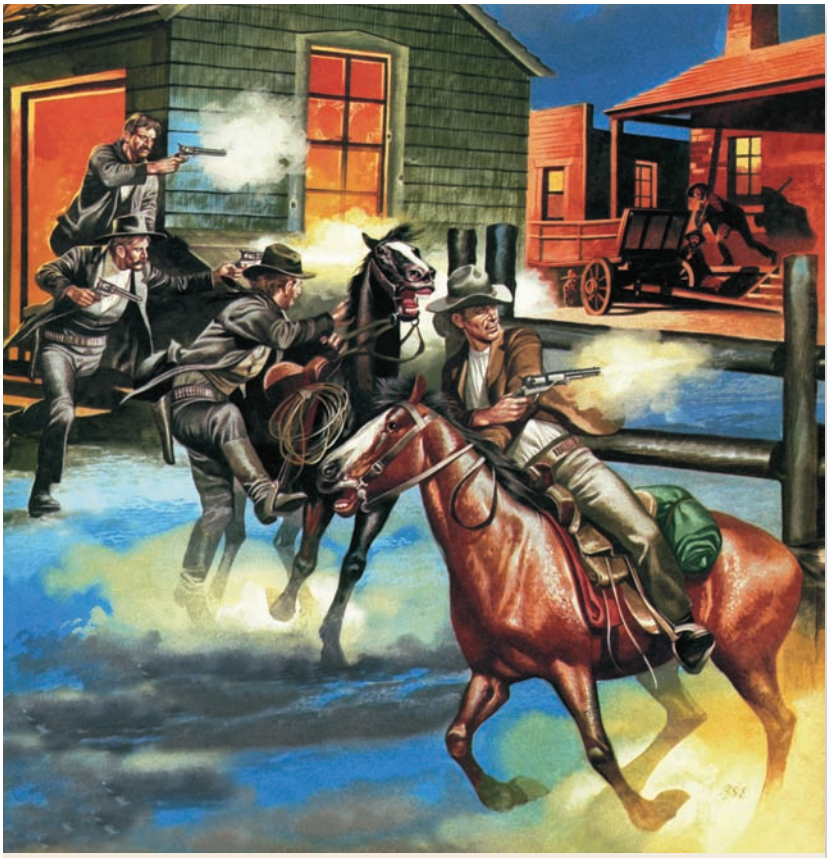
Although they were legal deputies, it is clear that the Regulators were not too concerned with precisely following the letter of the law. Legally, they were only allowed to arrest those suspected of the crime, but it was no secret that their true purpose was to exact bloody revenge. Nolan comments in *The West of Billy the Kid*,

> Although they called themselves by an honorable name inferring honorable intent, it is hard to believe any of them was under any illusions about the real purpose of their crusade. They knew the warrants they held gave them only the power of arrest, nothing more.
>
> They knew any prisoner they took, once handed over to Sheriff Brady for trial, would almost certainly walk free. It follows that they knew from the beginning anyone they captured would of necessity have to be executed.

For five months, armed with their warrants, the group searched for Tunstall's killers. The band focused on the most wanted of these men, William Morton and Frank Baker. Despite the pair's efforts to flee, the Regulators captured them in the early spring. The other two wanted men, Jesse Evans and Tom Hill, were arrested elsewhere on different charges.

The Regulators returned to Lincoln, but when they arrived in town they brought back the bullet-riddled bodies of Morton and Baker. The vigilantes alleged that the two had been shot and killed while trying to escape. However, each of the bodies had nearly a dozen bullet wounds—strong evidence that the wanted men had been deliberately murdered.

The Regulators also had with them the body of one of their own members. This was Morton's friend William McCloskey, who had apparently resisted the Regulators' insistence on killing the men instead of bringing them to trial. It is not clear if the Kid was one of



Pictured is a depiction of the shootout during the Lincoln County War. The Lincoln County War pit local ranchers against the House—a posse that controlled the whole town. With the murder of John Tunstall, the ranchers, including the Kid, formed a group called the Regulators and vowed to avenge Tunstall's death.

those who pulled the trigger on any of the three dead men, but he was certainly aware of, and a party to, their deaths.

AN AMBUSH ON SHERIFF BRADY

Not long after this incident, the governor of New Mexico Territory, Samuel Beach Axtell, arrived in Lincoln to investigate the violence.

Axtell, a notoriously corrupt politician, openly supported the House and did everything he could to help Murphy and Dolan.

The Regulators were unfazed by the presence of the politically powerful governor. The group went ahead with its plan to settle the long-simmering score with Sheriff Brady, who still was refusing to do anything about finding Tunstall's killers.

On April 1, 1878, six Regulators, including the Kid, ambushed and killed Brady in Lincoln's main street. (Since it has never been proven that the Kid fired a fatal shot, this death is not included in the four documented deaths attributed to him.)

The group members hid with their rifles behind an adobe wall, and as Brady walked down the street the Regulators opened fire. One eyewitness, quoted in Nolan's *The West of Billy the Kid*, reported that he "looked up to see William Brady fall to a sitting position. He said, 'Oh, Lord' and tried to get up, but there was another round of shots and he fell back."

Brady was shot at least a dozen times. Some of the men he was walking with were also killed, and the others in his group were wounded. The Regulators, meanwhile, suffered only minimal wounds. The Kid was among them—shot in the leg, but not critically.

NOT THE END OF THE VIOLENCE

The ambush and murder of Brady disillusioned some of Lincoln County's citizens who had been, until then, sympathetic to the Regulators' cause. In the wake of this death, many came to feel that the Regulators were just as bloodthirsty as their rivals. Utley, in *Billy the Kid: A Short and Violent Life*, comments, "To gun down a generally respected lawman from ambush disgusted [even] people inclined to tolerate almost any level of violence or homicide that could be rationalized."

As it turned out, these deaths were by no means the last of the violence in Lincoln County. Much more would follow.

THE OUTLAW RUNS

The next significant outburst of violence after Brady's murder came three days later, on April 4, 1878. This incident has become known as the Gunfight at Blazer's Mills. Blazer's Mills was southwest of Lincoln City. It was a small settlement with a sawmill and a trading post that supplied the Mescalero Indians in the region. There the Regulators found Andrew "Buckshot" Roberts, a rancher and former buffalo hunter who was suspected of involvement in Tunstall's murder.

Apparently, however, Roberts wanted no part in the ongoing war. Frank Coe tried to talk him into surrendering, but Roberts refused. He believed that the vengeful Regulators would kill him rather than take him into custody.

A furious gunfight broke out and Charlie Bowdre killed Roberts, but not before Roberts was able to kill the Regulators' leader, Dick Brewer, and seriously wound two others. A bullet grazed the Kid, but he was not seriously hurt.

Buckshot Roberts was clearly a tough man. He got his nickname because he carried a load of buckshot in one shoulder, a souvenir of an earlier fight. Furthermore, despite his serious wounds, Roberts survived into the next day. The following day, he and Dick Brewer were buried side by side near the main building in Blazer's Mills.

THE REGULATORS VS. THE U.S. ARMY

The shootout at Blazer's Mills was, overall, a disaster for the Regulators. For one thing, it turned public sympathy further against the vigilantes, since many felt that Roberts had valiantly fought against great odds. Furthermore, Brewer's death left the band in shambles. In *The West of Billy the Kid*, Nolan comments, "Their leader dead and two of their complement in dire need of medical attention, the Regulators were in complete disarray."

In the absence of Brewer, Frank McNab was appointed captain. Meanwhile, the Murphy-Dolan faction forced John Copeland, the sheriff who had taken Brady's place, to resign because they felt he had been too sympathetic to the Regulators' cause.

Copeland was replaced by the House faction's choice, George W. Peppin, who had been a deputy under Brady. Late in April, Peppin and a large posse of men confronted Frank McNab, Ab Saunders, and Frank Coe in a shootout at a ranch owned by Emil Fritz, who was part of the House group. McNab was killed, Saunders was severely wounded, and Coe was captured (though he later escaped).

The next morning the factions fought again, this time in the town of Lincoln. The Regulators, including the Kid, traded shots with Peppin's men, as well as a group of U.S. cavalrymen. The soldiers were supposedly neutral but in fact were working for the House side.

The only injury in this battle was when George Coe wounded a Dolan man named "Dutch Charley" Kruling. Nonetheless, the battle constituted a turning point in the war. It marked the first time the Regulators had shot at government troops. Firing on federal soldiers was a serious offense, and it earned the vigilantes a new and formidable group of enemies—the U.S. Army—in addition to those who already opposed them.

The Kid and his fellow vigilantes were increasingly vulnerable and in danger. They were forced to flee Lincoln City and wander in the rugged countryside surrounding it. Large posses of pro-House men tracked the Regulators relentlessly. Nolan comments in *The*

George Coe fought alongside Billy the Kid during the Lincoln County War. Coe later wrote about his experiences as a Regulator in his autobiography, *Frontier Fighter*. Here Coe is pictured in 1941, at the age of 85.

Left-Handed or Right-Handed?

For many years, it was widely assumed that Billy the Kid was left-handed. This was because the only verified photograph of him shows the Kid wearing a gun belt with a holster apparently on his left side. The idea that the outlaw was a left-handed shooter became so prevalent that a 1958 movie about him, starring Paul Newman, was entitled *The Left Handed Gun*. More recently, it was discovered that this idea is incorrect. The photo is actually a reverse image. This can be demonstrated by the way the rifle he is carrying, a Model 1873 Winchester, was manufactured. All Model 1873s had their loading ports on the right side, but the rifle Billy is holding shows the weapon with its loading port (where a bullet is inserted) on the left side. The Kid, therefore, had the holster for his six-shooter on his right hip.

However, there is a widespread belief that the desperado could use both hands equally well. If this is true, the question of him being right- or left-handed is thrown into doubt. Historians disagree, however, on the Kid's proficiency at shooting with either hand.

West of Billy the Kid, "The character of the skirmishing changed, and heavily armed parties began scouring the hills and canyons trying to find them, ready to shoot on sight."

THE FIVE-DAY WAR BEGINS

Undeterred by their exile from Lincoln, the Regulators continued their self-appointed task of tracking down their enemies. They succeeded on several counts. In mid-May, for instance, they killed Manuel Segovia, who was suspected of firing the bullet that had killed Frank McNab.

The Kid and the Regulators spent a few more months in hiding before another major shootout took place. This incident, known as

the Five-Day War, occurred in July 1878 when some of the group's members, including the Kid, returned briefly to Lincoln. They took up temporary residence at the home of lawyer Alexander McSween, who until this point had not been involved in the ongoing bloodshed.

A posse of the House's men discovered the Regulators and surrounded the McSween home, which was attached to a general goods store and a second home. The Regulators, plus McSween and about a dozen Lincoln residents who were on their side, were trapped inside this compound. Outside were about 40 men from the House faction. A column of cavalry officers, armed with a 12-pound mountain howitzer and a Gatling gun (an early form of machine gun), joined them. This large group maintained a siege of the McSween house despite the brutal summer heat and high winds that blew dust everywhere. As the standoff continued, the Kid and his comrades barricaded themselves from gunfire with sacks of flour and adobe bricks. They carved gun ports in the walls of the buildings and stocked up from the general store on food, ammunition, and water.

For the first four days of the siege, there was only sporadic shooting. No resolution to the situation appeared to be in sight. Gradually, some of the Regulators and their supporters fled, leaving only about 13 people inside the makeshift fort.

On the fifth day, the remaining Regulators were still refusing to surrender. McSween's wife, Sue, came out of the fort to try and make a deal with Peppin, but the two sides could not come to an agreement. After Sue McSween returned inside, Peppin's men set the house on fire. The blaze quickly grew intense. One of the soldiers outside, a captain, quoted in Utley's *Billy the Kid: A Short and Violent Life*, commented, "If the poor devils in that house could live through such a fire and get away they were certainly entitled to freedom."

As the flames spread, the trapped men and women took refuge in increasingly smaller spaces. At this point, historians believe, the Kid ascended, for the first time, to leadership of the group. No one

will ever know what happened during that last hour, except that the Kid undeniably took command of the situation.

The Kid's rise to the role of leader had begun some time earlier, in the wake of the battle at Blazer's Mills. He was proving beyond all doubt to be a skilled, loyal, and resourceful combatant. Nolan, in *The West of Billy the Kid*, comments, "Just another homeless drifter two months earlier, the Kid was now something of a local favorite. He had on several occasions convincingly demonstrated that for all his youth he was as good a fighting man as any of those around him."

THE KID GAINS THE RESPECT OF HIS PEERS

The Kid quickly formulated an escape plan. The group would flee out the back door and make for the Ruidoso River as quickly as possible. The Kid's strategy was a dangerous one, but, as Wallis's *Billy the Kid: The Endless Ride* notes, "there seemed no other viable option." The escape was only partially successful. A number of the trapped people, including Kid Antrim, were able to break away. They reached the safety of the Ruidoso River, which covered their tracks, and eventually rendezvoused at Frank Coe's ranch. However, not everyone survived the conflict.

One House member, Bob Beckwith, was killed in the course of the siege, as were several members of the trapped Regulator party. The most prominent of these victims was Alexander McSween, who was cut down by at least five bullets as he tried to escape out the back door. In some ways, McSween's death essentially marked the end of the long feud between the Tunstall and House factions. There was little significant violence afterward. There was also no clear resolution to the war; neither side could claim victory. The end of open conflict was by no means the end of the bitter feelings on both sides, however. Quoted in Nolan's *The West of Billy the Kid*, an observer at the time commented, "One thing is sure. A deep revenge will be sought by the sheriff's

posse for the loss of . . . Beckwith, and a still stronger spirit exists on the part of the McSween men to retaliate for the death of their headsman, McSween."

To some of the residents of New Mexico Territory, the Kid was just another member of the gang, one of the escapees from the besieged house. To his comrades, however, he had become something more: a leader. The young man had led the surviving members of the group through a dangerous situation to freedom. By doing this, he had proven himself capable of staying cool under pressure. The experience earned him the respect of older and more experienced Regulators, and the Kid was now the band's acknowledged leader.

In the following weeks, he and the other remaining Regulators wandered the rugged hills of the county, avoiding the search posses. They were forced to travel on foot until they were able to steal some horses. Being mounted on horses allowed the group to make its way safely to San Patricio, a small village south of Lincoln. At this point, some members of the party, including the Coes, left the group to strike out on their own. The few who remained gathered around the Kid to determine what to do next. In the meantime, the gang continued to survive by stealing horses and gambling in the small villages that dotted the area. Posses continued to hunt for the wanted men, but the gang always managed to elude its pursuers.

As the gang's new leader, the Kid began to experience a growing reputation, not only among his peers, but also among the general public and local law enforcement officers. In just a short time, this reputation became so strong that the Kid was generally considered the most wanted criminal in the Southwest.

Many other outlaws and rustlers were in the area, and they caused just as much trouble as the Kid. Nonetheless, the press now singled him out and made him seem much more dangerous than he really was. Some historians speculate that the Kid's enemies helped foster this notoriety, inciting the press to paint him in a bad light.

THE GOVERNOR OFFERS AMNESTY

That fall, there was another major turning point in the Kid's fortunes. Lew Wallace, a former general in the Union Army, was appointed governor of New Mexico Territory. (Although Wallace's career as a statesman was undistinguished, he soon found fame in another way. He was the author of *Ben-Hur*, a wildly popular religious novel that was later filmed three times.)

In an effort to restore peace in Lincoln County, Wallace announced that he would offer amnesty for anyone who had been involved in the Lincoln County War. There was a catch, however. The amnesty did not apply to anyone who was already indicted for a crime related to the war. This included the Kid, who was already under indictment for two crimes: the murders of William Brady and Buckshot Roberts. Nolan comments in *The West of Billy the Kid* that Wallace's announcement "was good news for the men who had stolen or killed or both as members of a sheriff's posse, but where the Kid was concerned—not to mention the men who had fought beside him during the war—the amnesty had a hook in it."

In February, the House faction and the Kid's side agreed to meet for a "parley"—a peaceful discussion of the situation, meant to defuse the simmering violence. At night, representatives of the two sides gathered on opposite sides of an adobe wall. They argued about what was going on, but they agreed that no one would kill any more men or testify against anyone in court. They also agreed that anyone who violated this could be executed. Then the two sides met in person, shook hands all around, and went off to the saloon together.

Unfortunately, more violence did take place. The Regulators, intoxicated from alcohol, encountered H.L. Chapman, a lawyer who was loyal to McSween's side of the conflict. In what may have been an accidental death, Chapman was killed—shot at such close range that his clothing was scorched. According to some sources, his body was then doused with whiskey and set on fire.

Lew Wallace served as governor of New Mexico Territory and met with Billy the Kid after the Lincoln County War. The Kid agreed to testify against members of the House in return for amnesty for two former murders, but the deal fell through. Today Wallace is best known for his novel, *Ben-Hur,* which has never been out of print and has been filmed three times.

The Kid did not kill the lawyer, but he was a witness to the crime. Also, the Kid may have agreed to leave one of his guns in the victim's hand to make it appear as if Chapman had threatened the others and had been justifiably shot in self-defense. He, therefore, continued to stay hidden from the law.

In March 1879, as the negotiations for the amnesty were in progress, the Kid sent a letter from his hideout to Wallace, New Mexico's territorial governor. The Kid had witnessed the murder of Chapman, the lawyer, which had led to the arrest of Evans, Campbell, and Dolan. His letter offered his services as a witness against the three in exchange for immunity from prosecution himself. The letter, reprinted in Nolan's *The West of Billy the Kid*, was written in a neat hand, although it had numerous misspellings and grammatical mistakes. It read:

> Dear Sir I have heard that You will give one thousand $dollars for my body which as I Can understand it means alive as a Witness. I know it is as a witness against those that murdered Mr. Chapman, if it was so as that I could appear at Court I could give the desired information, but I have indictments against me for things that happened in the late Lincoln County War and am afraid to give up because my Enemies would kill me.
>
> The day Mr. Chapman was murderded [sic] I was in Lincoln, at the request of good Citizens to meet Mr. J. J. Dolan to meet as Friends, so as to be able to lay aside our arms and go to Work. I was present When Mr. Chapman was murderded and know who did it and if it were not for those indictments I would have made it clear before now. If it is in your power to Annully those indictments I hope you will do so so a[s] to give me a chance to explain.
>
> Please send me an annser [sic] telling me what you can do You can send annser by bearer I have no wish to fight any more indeed I have not raised an arm since Your proclamation. As to my Character I refer [you] to any

of the Citizens, for the majority of them are my Friends and have been helping me all they could. I am called Kid Antrim but Antrim is my stepfathers name.

Waiting for an annser I remain Your Obedeint Servant,

W. H. Bonney

MEETING THE GOVERNOR

Despite the obstacle his indictment posed, the Kid held out hope for making a deal with the governor. The outlaw guessed, correctly, that Wallace was not terribly interested in rounding up the Regulators, since he considered them nothing more than common criminals. The governor was more concerned with bringing to justice the House faction, particularly James Dolan and the bloodthirsty Jesse Evans. To Wallace, they symbolized the more serious threat of widespread corruption.

Therefore, the Kid used letters, sent via messengers, to explore the possibility of surrendering. In return for amnesty, the outlaw offered to testify in court against the worst of the House group. The Kid felt that this would be mutually beneficial. Nolan writes in *The West of Billy the Kid*, "Wallace was . . . only interested in one thing: getting credible testimony with which he could indict Dolan and Evans. The Kid was interested in only one thing: getting off the hook."

Nevertheless, nothing happened. In part, this was because Wallace was distracted with the writing of his book. Another reason was because he thought little of the Kid and assumed his testimony would not be worth much. The governor, therefore, did not answer the outlaw's proposal.

Things finally moved forward in the spring of 1879. In March, the Kid wrote to the governor, once again offering his testimony in exchange for having his indictment dropped. This time, the governor agreed to meet. A few days later, the outlaw and the governor met at a house in Lincoln City belonging to a friend of Wallace. The governor later recalled to a newspaper reporter, in a passage

reprinted in Wallis's *Billy the Kid: The Endless Ride*, that the Kid made a dramatic entrance:

> At the time designated, I heard a knock at the door, and I called out, "Come in." The door opened somewhat slowly and carefully, and there stood the young fellow generally known as the Kid, his Winchester in his right hand, his revolver in his left.

A DEAL IS REACHED

The outlaw laid down his weapons, and the two men spoke at some length. They were able to work out a deal. The Kid agreed to testify against Dolan and Evans. In return, the murder charges against him would be dropped.

The Kid was unwilling to be seen surrendering, however, since he felt it would make him look weak and defeated. He and Wallace therefore agreed to a face-saving plan: The outlaw would pretend to be captured "fair and square" against his will, and then he would be briefly jailed. This ensured that the Kid would not lose his reputation for bravery.

The ruse was quickly accomplished. The Kid endured a short stay in the Lincoln jail until his testimony could be heard in court. While there, the outlaw continued to have the sympathy and support of much of the public, especially among the Hispanic community. To the Kid, Lincoln County was as close to a home as he had ever had; he had great affection for his many friends in the area, and they returned it.

Wallace noted this mutual regard with a mixture of contempt and amusement. He found it strange that the public would have such a high opinion of a wanted criminal. As noted in Utley's *Billy the Kid: A Short and Violent Life*, the governor wrote in a letter to a colleague, "A precious specimen named 'The Kid' whom the Sheriff is holding here in the Plaza, is an object of tender regard. I heard singing and music the other night; going to the door I found the minstrels of the village actually serenading the fellow in his prison."

The Kid kept his part of the bargain. His testimony helped to indict his old enemy Dolan for the murder of Huston Chapman. Unfortunately, the Kid's testimony did not prove to be effective enough to convict the ringleader of the House faction. The judge dismissed the charge against Dolan.

The Kid also testified unsuccessfully in a separate trial, this one against Colonel Nathan Dudley. Dudley had been the officer in charge of the army detachment that took part in the siege of McSween's house. He was charged with refusing to stop the deliberate burning of the lawyer's home.

In return for his cooperation in these trials, the Kid expected the government to treat his own cases as mere formalities, but things turned out differently. His first trial concerned the charge of killing Sheriff Brady. The district attorney on this case was an ally of the House, and he consistently blocked efforts to conduct a fair trial.

The Kid's attorney, Ira Leonard, wrote to the governor in Santa Fe to complain about the situation. He hoped Wallace would make sure that his promise to the Kid would be fulfilled. The letter, reprinted in Utley's *Billy the Kid: A Short and Violent Life*, stated, "[T]he District Attorney here is no friend of law enforcement. He is bent on going after the Kid. . . . He is a Dolan man and is defending him in every manner possible."

THE KID GOES ON THE RUN AGAIN

Wallace declined to get involved, however. The Kid came to the conclusion that he would never get a fair trial and that the government was not willing to live up to its part of the bargain. The Kid felt he had no choice but to resume his life as an outlaw. It was time to escape again.

The Lincoln jail was loosely guarded, and it was not difficult for Kid Antrim to escape. He stole a horse and rode away in the company of his good friend, a tall, redheaded former Regulator from Texas named Tom "Big Foot" O'Folliard. According to some

accounts, Doc Scurlock rode with them. The men kept low profiles, and little is known about the Kid's whereabouts during this period. It is known that he spent some time in Las Vegas, New Mexico, which by now was a substantial town with a population of about 2,000.

There are reports that he may have run an illegal gambling operation there, but some historians speculate that this was probably a different man who went by the nickname Kid (as did many others in the Old West). According to legend, while in Las Vegas Kid Antrim met Jesse James, the famous train and bank robber from Missouri. This is likely just one of the many stories that have been told about both outlaws over the years.

The outlaw moved on to the Fort Sumner area, a military fort in southeastern New Mexico. He survived for the next year and a half in part by rustling cattle. The cattle herds of John Chisum, the former partner of Tunstall and McSween, were among his primary targets for thievery. The Kid justified stealing from Chisum by saying that the wealthy cattleman owed him wages from his time fighting for Chisum's side in the Lincoln County War.

In addition to these pursuits, the Kid occupied himself with a variety of pastimes. He continued to gamble, and he indulged his love for dancing at the many community dances that were a part of life in the Southwest. These affairs, called *bailes* (from the Spanish word for "dance"), were lively affairs that attracted people from all over, providing a respite from backbreaking daily chores.

The Kid was also friendly with many of the pretty young Hispanic women in the region. Paulita Maxwell, one of his girlfriends, is quoted in Nolan's *The West of Billy the Kid*: "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."

KILLING TEXAS RED

The Kid stayed in the Fort Sumner area for the rest of 1879. During this period, a loosely knit gang of outlaws formed itself around him. The core of this band was composed of the Kid and three other

In the Wild West, frontiersmen tried to make a name for themselves by boasting of their shooting skills and intimidating others. Joe Grant had threatened to kill Billy the Kid should he ever encounter him but instead became Billy the Kid's second casualty.

former Regulators: Tom O'Folliard, Charlie Bowdre, and Doc Scurlock. A number of others enlarged this inner circle, including a bloodthirsty former marshal and train robber named "Dirty Dave" Rudabaugh—so named, according to some sources, because he rarely bathed or washed his clothes.

In January 1880, the Kid killed a man—the second of the deaths that can reliably be attributed to him. The victim was Joe "Texas Red" Grant and the place was a Fort Sumner saloon. According to legend, a drunken Grant repeatedly boasted that he would kill someone that day—and specifically mentioned the Kid. He did not realize that he was at the card table with that very man.

Grant became more and more belligerent, getting up and smashing bottles behind the bar. At one point during this drunken tirade, Grant "borrowed" a fancy pistol from a man named Jack Finan, taking it from Finan's holster and replacing it with his own. Prudently, Finan did not object. When Grant sat back down to play cards, the Kid tricked him. In those days, revolvers typically had only five rounds. The Kid knew something that Grant didn't—that Finan had recently fired the gun three times but had not reloaded.

So the Kid asked Grant if he could see the fine revolver. While looking at the weapon, he rotated the cylinder so that the hammer would fall on an empty chamber. In other words, the gun would not fire when the trigger was pulled. The Kid then revealed his identity to Grant and deliberately turned his back. Grant fired, but nothing happened. The Kid then turned and fired three times, instantly killing Grant. It was a measure of the Kid's shooting skills that one witness swore that the bullet pattern—the area covered by the bullet wounds—was no larger than a silver dollar.

The Kid was not worried about anyone seeking revenge, since the shooting clearly appeared to have been in self-defense. Quoted in Horan's *The Gunfighters*, he later jauntily remarked, "It was a game of two and I got there first." In fact, the Kid professed to fear no one. This, however, was about to change. The outlaw was about to meet his match: Sheriff Pat Garrett.

PAT GARRETT AND BILLY THE KID

Born Patrick Floyd Garrett on June 5, 1850, in Cusseta, Alabama, Pat Garrett was raised on a plantation in northern Claiborne Parish, Louisiana, just below the Arkansas state line. When he was 19, Garrett left home and traveled to Dallas County, Texas. Like many others in the Old West, Garrett had done a number of things in his life to earn a living. He found work as a cowboy, but he left after a few years to hunt buffalo. At other times, he worked as a trail driver and a bartender, and he also raised hogs.

Rumors surrounded Garrett. As the story goes, in 1878, following a disagreement over buffalo hides, a fellow hunter charged at Garrett with a hatchet. In self-defense, Garrett shot and killed the hunter. As the hunter lay dying, he asked Garrett for forgiveness, bringing Garrett to tears. Following the incident, Garrett soon left for New Mexico and opened his own saloon.

Garrett was a handsome man and unusually tall. He stood six feet six inches in an era when men were typically almost a foot shorter. Locals referred to Garrett as Juan Largo (Long John). In 1879, he married Juanita Gutierrez, but she died within the year. In 1880, he married Gutierrez's sister Apolinaria, and they had nine children. Rumors continued to swirl around Garrett—that he was

Sheriff Pat Garrett was eager to fulfill his promise to rid Lincoln County of outlaws and rustlers. His first target was Billy the Kid, who was carrying a $500 bounty on his head.

running from the law and that he had abandoned a wife and children elsewhere. Nonetheless, when a vacancy came up for the job of Lincoln County sheriff, Garrett was considered a good candidate. Utley's *Billy the Kid: A Short and Violent Life* quotes one contemporary observation: "Coolness, courage, and determination were written on his face."

CHASING THE KID

Garrett was elected sheriff of Lincoln County, New Mexico, in November 1880. Soon after, the first mention was made in print of the most famous man with whom he would forever be linked. In an article reprinted in Nolan's *The West of Billy the Kid*, the *Las Vegas Gazette* of December 3, 1880, editorialized,

> There's a powerful gang of outlaws harassing the stockmen of the Pecos and Panhandle country, and terrorizing the people of Fort Sumner and vicinity. The gang includes forty or fifty men, all hard characters, the offscourings [dregs] of society, fugitives from justice, and desperadoes by profession.... The gang is under the leadership of "Billy the Kid," a desperate cuss, who is eligible for the post of captain of any crowd, no matter how mean or lawless.... Are the people of San Miguel County to stand this any longer?

In part because of this outraged article, Governor Wallace was moved to post a $500 reward for Billy the Kid's capture. As reprinted in Tuska's *Billy the Kid: His Life and Legend*, it read:

> $500 REWARD
> I will pay $500 reward to any person or persons who will capture William Bonny [sic], alias the Kid, and deliver him to any sheriff of New Mexico. Satisfactory proofs of identity will be required.
> LEW WALLACE
> Governor of New Mexico

Garrett had run as a Democrat (although a member of the Republican Party) on a pledge to rid the area of rustlers, and now he hoped to collect the reward money for capturing an old friend from his saloon-keeping days, Henry McCarty. Also known as the Kid, he was still considered a fugitive and an outlaw due to his involvement in the Lincoln County War in 1878 and three murders. Later that month, the new sheriff assembled a posse and set out to find the outlaw.

NEGOTIATING WITH THE KID

The Kid's most recent crime had been to lead five men in stealing some horses in the nearby settlement of Puerta de Luna. The gang sold them to rancher and friend Jim Greathouse. When Garrett and his deputy, William Hudgens, formed their posse, they headed to Greathouse's place near Anton Chico.

Garrett's posse found the Kid's gang there on November 27, 1880, a bitterly cold day with snow on the ground. Joe Steck, a member of the posse, went into the Greathouse home with a note demanding surrender. Steck, quoted in Utley's *Billy the Kid: A Short and Violent Life*, later testified that the Kid read this message out loud but the gang scorned it: "I took the note in and delivered it to the one I knew to be Billy the Kid. He read the paper to his *compadres* [comrades], who all laughed at the idea of surrender."

At some point, another member of Garrett's posse, James Carlyle, agreed to meet with the gang to negotiate its surrender. He went into the house carrying a white flag, indicating he was not armed. At the same time, Greathouse went outside to act as a hostage who would ensure that the gang would be safe.

The opposing groups could not come to an agreement, and negotiations stalled. Everyone inside, including Garrett's man Carlyle but excluding the Kid, started drinking heavily to pass the time. At some point in the evening, Carlyle decided the outlaws would continue stalling indefinitely, so he began pressuring them to make a move. Stories differ about what happened next. According to one version, Carlyle heard an accidental shot outside. Thinking that the

posse had shot Greathouse, Carlyle panicked and crashed through a window into the snow. Someone in the posse failed to recognize Carlyle and fatally shot him.

In another version, it was one of the outlaws who shot and killed Carlyle, and the gang then threw him through a window. Like so much else about the Kid's life, the truth will never be known—but it seems unlikely that the gang would have murdered him while their hostage was outside. In her article "Pat Floyd Garrett," in Etulain and Riley's *With Badges and Bullets*, writer Kathleen P. Chamberlain comments, "The posse and press later blamed Billy for Carlyle's death, but it is likely that he was cut down by his own men."

However it happened, a round of general gunfire broke out. The situation was so chaotic that the Kid and his gang were able to slip away. By the time the shooting stopped, Carlyle's body had frozen in the snow. Steck recalled, in a quote from Nolan's *The West of Billy the Kid*, that they had to improvise caring for the dead man: "We found poor Carlyle frozen stiff where he fell. We tied a blanket around him and buried him as best we could. He was afterwards taken up and put in a box by the Sheriff's posse."

GARRETT SETS A TRAP

Once out of immediate danger, the Kid and his crew hid out in a variety of places, moving around constantly in the driving snow. The sheriff chased them with a huge posse, estimated at 200 men. Etulain, in his essay "Billy the Kid," comments, "Garrett tailed the Kid like a determined, persistent bulldog."

Garrett then laid a trap for them. He paid a man $100 to go the Kid's hideout. This man carried the message that the posse had turned back. It was now safe to come to Fort Sumner. The Kid believed him. He and the others—Dave Rudabaugh, Charlie Bowdre, Tom O'Folliard, Billy Wilson, and Tom Pickett—returned to Fort Sumner, taking refuge in an unheated, abandoned military hospital. Bowdre's wife and mother-in-law were already living there. On December 19, the night Garrett's posse approached the hospital,

there was a full moon, heavy fog, and deep snow. When the sheriff called out, one of the gang fired. Another fierce gunfight broke out.

Despite the shooting and the surrounding posse, nearly all of the bandits were once again able to escape. The exception was O'Folliard, who had been shot in the chest. The gang was forced to leave him behind.

It was too dark and snowy to pursue the escapees, so Garrett's men holed up inside the hospital. They brought the badly wounded O'Folliard inside, and he died during the night. The four surviving gang members rode to the ranch of a friend, Manuel Brazil, and camped out in the hills above his spread. It seemed likely that Garrett would pursue them to the Brazil ranch, so they carefully watched for him.

THE KID IS BETRAYED

When the sheriff failed to show up, the gang returned to Brazil's ranch. The Kid convinced Brazil to ride into Fort Sumner to find out what the sheriff was planning. However, when Brazil found Garrett he was too frightened to go through with the ruse.

He informed Garrett that the gang was hiding at his ranch. Garrett told Brazil to return home and tell the outlaws that Garrett was in Fort Sumner with only a skeleton posse, "only Mason and three Mexicans," and that he "was considerably scared up and wanted to go back to Roswell, but feared to leave the plaza," according to Utley's *Billy the Kid: A Short and Violent Life*. On December 22, Brazil did as he said and returned to his ranch to pass on this message. The Kid's gang immediately rode out and away from Fort Sumner.

Brazil doubled back in secret and told Garrett that the gang was on the run. With a dozen men, the sheriff took off into the frigid night. They were able to follow the gang's trail in the snow to an abandoned house about three miles east of Brazil's ranch to a place called Stinking Springs—so named for the rotting vegetation around it. The gang had taken refuge there in a one-room shepherd's shelter. The tiny house was made of stone, with no windows or doors, just

an opening big enough to pass through. The outlaws brought two of their horses inside and left three outside.

THE SIEGE AT STINKING SPRINGS

Before sunrise on the morning of December 23, the posse surrounded the stone house and waited. Just as the sun was coming up, Charlie Bowdre stepped outside, perhaps to feed the horses.

Bowdre was wearing a large sombrero similar to the one Billy the Kid typically wore. The posse, mistaking him for Billy, shot him down. Bowdre staggered inside, then out again. According to legend, the Kid pushed him out, telling the wounded man that he might die—but at least he could take some of Garrett's posse with him. However, Bowdre died too quickly to fire at their pursuers.

The element of surprise was now gone—the gang knew the posse was outside. One of the outlaws tried to pull in one of the horses tethered outside, but Garrett shot and killed the animal. He then cut the ropes holding the two other animals to prevent the outlaws from making a break. The animals trotted off. The body of the dead horse blocked the building's only exit.

The gang was now thoroughly trapped. Ironically, the Kid's sense of humor wasn't dampened. He and Garrett bantered back and forth, with the Kid inviting Garrett inside the house for coffee and Garrett inviting the Kid out to surrender. Although the two sides talked to each other from a distance, they remained in a standoff. Brazil, the traitor, arrived with a wagonload of food, firewood, and other supplies for Garrett's posse. Garrett was now prepared for a long siege.

Later that morning, the lawmen cooked a breakfast of bacon and beans over a fire. They knew that the Kid's gang had little food. Garrett called out and invited the outlaws to eat. At first, they refused. They had some food and could have lasted a little longer. They also knew, however, that the posse could starve them out. Toward sundown, the besieged outlaws finally surrendered. As they came outside, one posse member leveled his rifle, intending to shoot the Kid on the spot. Two others, who wanted to keep the Kid

alive for trial, drew their weapons and ordered the posse member to hold his fire. Utley's *Billy the Kid: A Short and Violent Life* relates how the outlaw blamed his capture on the dead horse. In an interview with a Las Vegas, New Mexico, reporter several days later, the Kid commented:

> If it hadn't been for the dead horse in the doorway I wouldn't be here [in captivity] today. I would have ridden out on my bay mare and taken my chances of escaping. But I couldn't ride out over that, for she would have jumped back, and I would have got it in the head. We could have stayed in the house but there wouldn't have been anything gained by that for they would have starved us out. I thought it was better to come out and get a good square meal.

PEOPLE REACT TO THE KID'S CAPTURE

The posse fed the outlaws before taking them into custody. The group, transporting Bowdre's body, then spent the night at Brazil's ranch. The shackled prisoners were transported by wagon to Fort Sumner the next day.

In Fort Sumner, Bowdre's wife, Manuela, was given his body. The widow, distraught with grief, kicked and struck Garrett and hit a posse member on the head with a branding iron. Nonetheless, Garrett was respectful toward the dead man. The sheriff had always considered Bowdre a brave man, and he honored the outlaw by paying for his funeral and burial suit.

On Christmas Eve, a shackled Kid was allowed to say good-bye to his main sweetheart, Paulita Maxwell, at her house. Then, after a holiday meal of roast turkey, the prisoners were given new clothes and transported to Las Vegas. This may have been the first time the Kid had ever been on a train.

Many people in Lincoln applauded the Kid's capture, but many did not. Quoted in Miguel Antonio Otero's book *The Real Billy the*

"A Bold Yet Pleasant Cast of Countenance"

Following the Kid's capture at Stinking Springs by Sheriff Pat Garrett, he and his gang members were taken to town and jailed. The Kid was said by onlookers to be in good spirits. He joked with the crowds of curious onlookers who came to catch a glimpse of him. He also chatted with reporters, one of whom (in an excerpt from the essay "Billy the Kid—Capture" on aboutbillythekid.com) wrote that the Kid

> has a bold yet pleasant cast of countenance [face]. When interviewed between the bars at jail this morning, he was in a talkative mood, but said that anything he might say would not be believed by the people. He laughed heartily when informed that the papers of the Territory had built him up a reputation second only to that of Victorio [an Apache warrior].
>
> Kid claims never to have had a large number of men with him, and that the few who were with him when captured were employed on a ranch. This is his statement and is given for what it is worth.

Kid: With New Light on the Lincoln County War, Susan McSween, the widow of Alexander McSween, stated,

> Billy was not a bad man, that is he was not a murderer who killed wantonly. Most of those he killed deserved what they got. Of course I cannot very well defend his stealing horses and cattle, but when you consider that the [House] people forced him into such a lawless life through efforts to secure his arrest and conviction, it is hard to blame the poor boy for what he did.

Still, many residents of Las Vegas were happy to see the outlaw in chains. A number of men offered to buy Garrett celebratory

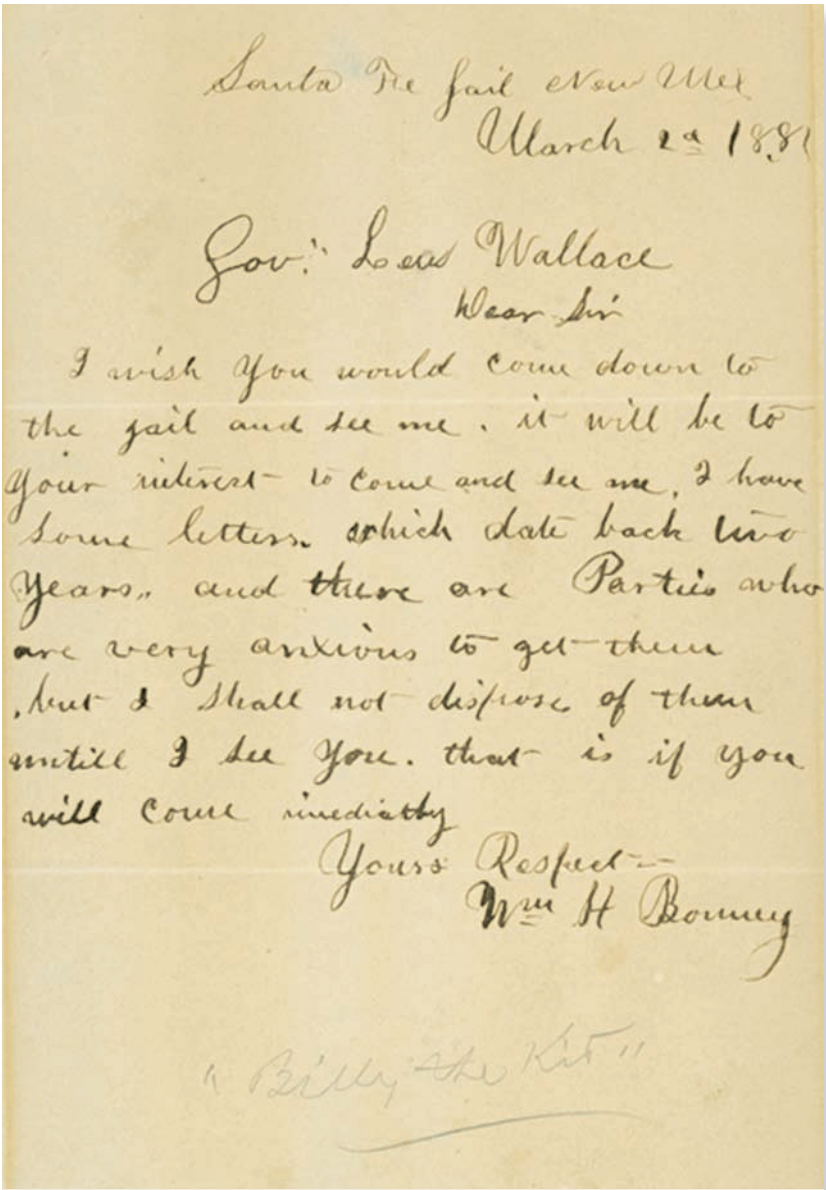
drinks. Meanwhile, a curious group of people gathered around the jailhouse. Quoted in Nolan's *The West of Billy the Kid*, the *Gazette* reported, "A large crowd strained their necks to get a glimpse of the prisoners, who stood in the passageway like children waiting for a Christmas tree distribution."

The Kid liked the attention he received. Even though he was a captive, by all accounts he was in a buoyant and friendly mood, greeting people he knew and giving interviews to reporters. When one of these reporters remarked that the outlaw seemed unworried about his situation, the outlaw (quoted in Utley's *Billy the Kid: A Short and Violent Life*) replied, "What's the sense of looking on the gloomy side of everything? The laugh's on me this time."

While awaiting his trial in Santa Fe, Billy began sending letters to Lew Wallace, now governor of New Mexico. (These were probably dictated.) The outlaw wanted Wallace to fulfill his part of their bargain and grant him immunity from prosecution. The letters, many of which are still in existence, are remarkably polite and articulate; a typical comment, reprinted in Tuska's *Billy the Kid: His Life and Legend*, is, "I would like to see you for a few moments if you can spare time."

Despite the Kid's requests, Wallace refused to intervene in the case. The governor used the excuse that he was back east on official business. However, it became increasingly clear that Wallace had never had any intention of helping the prisoner. In fact, it became clear that the governor was determined to put the Kid behind bars. Utley wrote in *Billy the Kid: A Short and Violent Life*, "Whether or not Billy truly believed that he still deserved the governor's aid, he perceived his prospects with clarity: he had become New Mexico's No. 1 outlaw, and [the authorities] did indeed intend to send him up."

During this period, the government retracted another promise. The acting governor denied the $500 reward to Garrett on a technicality. Outraged citizens of Santa Fe, grateful to the sheriff, took up a collection and raised the $500 themselves.



Santa Fe Jail New Mex
March 21 1881

Gov: Lew Wallace
Dear Sir

I wish You would come down to the jail and see me. it will be to your interest to come and see me, I have some letters which date back two Years, and there are Parties who are very anxious to get them, but I Shall not dispose of them until I See You. that is if you will come imediatly

Yours Respect—
Wm H Bonney

"Billy the Kid"

In an attempt to have Governor Wallace make good on his earlier offers of amnesty, Billy the Kid repeatedly petitioned Wallace through letters. At the time, newspapers built up his reputation and singled him out as one of the most violent outlaws in the West, causing a public uproar and cries for justice. The Kid's appeals were unsuccessful, and he was sentenced to hang on May 13, 1881.

THE TRIAL BEGINS

The Kid's retrials for the murders of Sheriff Brady and Buckshot Roberts were held in the spring of 1881 in the small town of Mesilla, New Mexico. En route, during a stop in the town of Las Cruces, an angry crowd confronted the outlaw, his guards, and his lawyer, Ira Leonard.

The Kid was able to defuse the tense situation. When someone asked which one was Kid Antrim, the outlaw put his hand on Leonard's shoulder and smilingly insisted that the much older attorney was the notorious Kid.

The little adobe courtroom in Mesilla was small and stiflingly hot. It was furnished only with backless benches, three small tables, and a few chairs. Billy's cell was just as bleak, and he was always heavily guarded. The contrast between him and his guards was striking. A court clerk (as noted in Nolan's *The West of Billy the Kid*) later remarked: "It looked almost ridiculous, all those armed men standing around a harmless looking youth with the down [light fuzz] still on his chin."

The Kid pleaded not guilty on both murder counts. Leonard was able to get the Roberts case dismissed. He argued successfully that the murder took place on Indian land, the Mescalero reservation, where the government had no jurisdiction. On April 9, however, Billy was found guilty of murdering Sheriff Brady. The Kid was one of six men involved in the shooting, but he was the only one to be placed on trial. In fact, this conviction made him the only person convicted of any crime connected to the Lincoln County War, New Mexico's most notorious conflict.

SENTENCED TO HANG

Four days later, Judge Warren Bristol sentenced the Kid to hang. Execution was scheduled for May 13, 1881. In *Billy the Kid: The Endless Ride*, Wallis comments, "For the very first time in his brief but violent life, the Kid had been tried and found guilty." Billy was sent to Lincoln for execution. He was shackled and housed in a former

bedroom on the top floor of the town courthouse. Ironically, this building once had been the Murphy-Dolan store—the infamous House itself.

The Kid had no intention of staying there. Nolan writes in *The West of Billy the Kid*, "From the moment he stepped out of the stone shack at Stinking Springs with his hands up, the Kid's agile mind had focused on one thing and one thing only: escape."

On April 28, 1881, while Garrett was out of town and after only a week of confinement, the Kid broke out. One of his guards, deputy James Bell, watched over him as he ate his evening meal. Billy probably had his handcuffs removed from one hand so that he could eat. Another guard, Robert Ollinger, was across the street with five other prisoners in a café as they ate.

THE KID BREAKS OUT

There are different versions of what happened next. Some researchers believe that Bell escorted the Kid to an outhouse, where a friend of the outlaw had hidden a pistol. The Kid then shot Bell after returning to the courthouse. Another story has The Kid slipping off his chains while in the courthouse, striking Bell on the head with them, and shooting the deputy with his own gun.

In any case, Bell staggered into the street and collapsed before dying. Quoted in Horan's *The Gunfighters*, a longtime member of the House group, Gottfried Gauss, recalled in an account for the *Lincoln County Leader*:

> I came out of my room whence I had gone to light my pipe, and was crossing the yard behind the courthouse when I heard a shot fired, then a tussle upstairs in the courthouse, someone hurrying downstairs, and Deputy Sheriff Bell emerging from the door, running towards me.
>
> When I arrived at the garden gate . . . I saw the other deputy, Ollinger, coming out of the hotel opposite. . . .

> When he had come up close to me I told him I had left Bell laying dead behind me in the yard.

After killing Bell, the Kid found Ollinger's double-barreled shotgun and waited for him at an upstairs window. When Ollinger heard the shot that killed Bell, he came running. When he came close, the Kid called out "Hello Bob!" and shot him dead.

According to some stories, the Kid stood on the courthouse's balcony and told the assembled crowd that he had not meant to kill the deputies—but that he would kill anyone else who got in his way. Billy then came downstairs, removed his irons with an axe or pick, and then borrowed or stole a horse and several weapons before riding leisurely out of town.

Some historians argue that this bold act was what sealed the outlaw's fame. His escape from the Lincoln County jail, they feel, was the defining moment of his life, catapulting him into American folklore.

The notoriety that followed the Kid generated hundreds of newspaper stories. Quoted in Utley's *Billy the Kid: A Short and Violent Life* is a comment from the *Las Vegas Daily Optic*. The newspaper called him "the daredevil desperado" and a "young demon" whose name "has long been the synonym of all that is malignant and cruel."

Readers across the country thrilled to accounts of his bloody adventures. Though it is definite that the Kid killed only four men, the press quickly inflated that number into the dozens.

Apparently, after his daring escape the outlaw remained near Fort Sumner for several months, even though there was a substantial reward for his capture. Instead of fleeing, he drifted between various ranches and sheep camps belonging to Hispanic friends.

In July 1881, Garrett learned that the Kid was hiding at the ranch of a friend, Paulita Maxwell's brother Pedro (known as Pete). With two deputies, John Poe and Kip McKinney, Garrett headed that way on July 14. That night, around midnight, Garrett came into Maxwell's darkened bedroom, ordered Maxwell to stay quiet, and lay in wait.

Pictured is the courthouse where Billy the Kid was held after being captured and tried for the murder of Sheriff Brady. Although the Kid was in irons and under heavy armed guard, he was able to make a daring escape. Today the courthouse is a museum.

At some point, the Kid came along. There are several versions of what happened next. It is likely that the outlaw was headed to the kitchen from another building. He wanted to get some meat from a recently slaughtered animal. The Kid was only partly dressed, bareheaded, and barefooted.

¿QUIÉN ES? ¿QUIÉN ES?

Spotting Garrett's deputies waiting in darkness on the porch, the Kid headed to Maxwell's bedroom. Garrett was sitting on the bed so that his height would not give him away. (Some sources say that

The death of Billy the Kid earned Pat Garrett fame and higher appointments in law enforcement. Later, Garrett became unpopular when questions arose concerning the manner in which Billy the Kid was killed, especially the issue of the Kid being unarmed and shot without warning. One version of the incident is depicted above.

the confrontation between Garrett and the Kid took place in the kitchen, where Garrett was hiding in the shadows.) The Kid saw that someone besides Maxwell was there and called out, *"¿Quién es? ¿Quién es?"*—"Who is it? Who is it?"

They were the Kid's last words. As Maxwell fled, Garrett drew his weapon and fired twice. As quoted in O'Toole's article "The Many Stories of Billy the Kid," the sheriff wrote, "He must have recognized me, for he went backwards in a cat-like movement, and I jerked my gun and fired." At least one of the bullets struck the Kid in the chest, just above his heart.

Deluvina Maxwell was a friend of the Kid and a relative of the family who owned the house (she was Pete and Paulita's stepmother, by some accounts). Deluvina stated that she was on the scene and the first to discover that the outlaw was dead.

THE KID'S SUPPORTERS REACT TO HIS DEATH

Word of the shooting spread quickly. An angry group of the Kid's Hispanic friends and supporters gathered around the house and kept the authorities from leaving. Deputy Poe recalled, in a statement quoted in Utley's *Billy the Kid: A Short and Violent Life*, "We spent the remainder of the night on the Maxwell premises, keeping constantly on our guard, as we were expecting to be attacked by the friends of the dead man."

The next morning, July 15 1881, Justice of the Peace Milnor Rudulph viewed the body and signed a death certificate. An inquest later ruled that the death was justifiable homicide. Some historians have disputed the official finding that the murder was fair. They point out that Garrett fired without warning. Furthermore, the sheriff stated that the outlaw had a pistol in his hand—but no such weapon was ever found.

The Kid's body was prepared for burial in a carpenter's shop. A group of women from the Hispanic community carefully washed the outlaw's corpse, combed his hair, and filled the exit wound in his back with a rag. They used one of Pete Maxwell's shirts for a shroud and placed candles around the body.

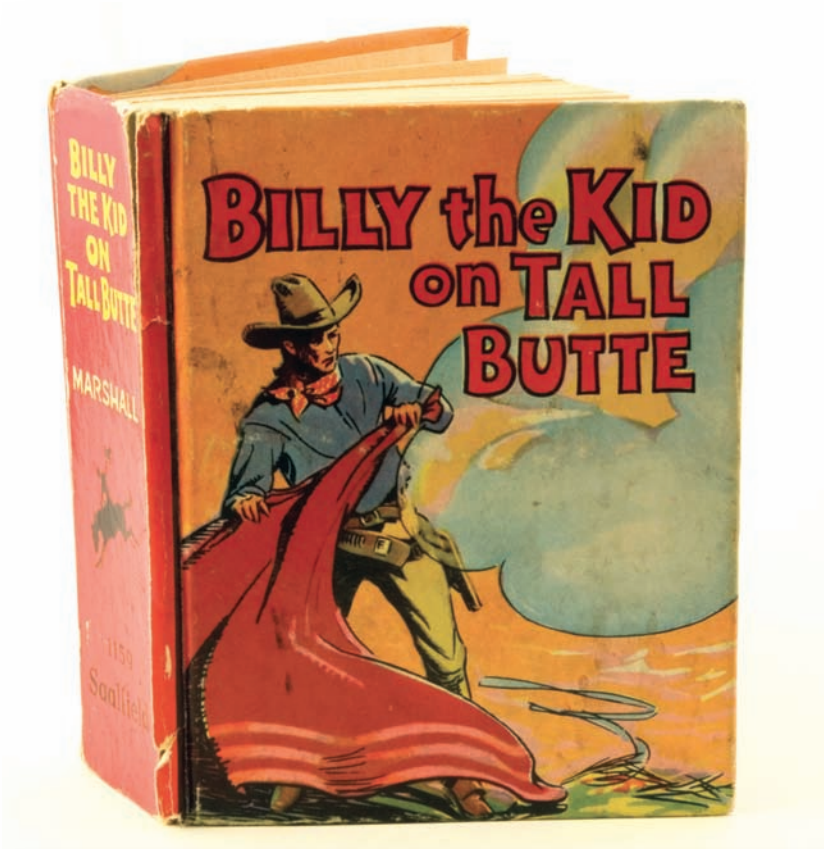
Nearly every citizen in town followed the wagon carrying Billy's coffin to Fort Sumner's old military cemetery. He was buried in a grave with a crude wooden cross at its head. The grave lay between those of the outlaw's friends Tom O'Folliard and Charlie Bowdre. A single tombstone was later placed over the three burial spots. Their names and the word *Pals* were carved on it.

THE KID BECOMES A LEGEND

New Mexico's most famous outlaw was dead, but his legend was just beginning. Before his death, the Kid had been a relatively unknown desperado, famous only in the Southwest territories where he had spent most of his life. The outlaw thus had the beginnings of a reputation even before Pat Garrett fired the fatal shot.

But the Kid's fame skyrocketed in the years following his death. He immediately started to be celebrated—or condemned—and his exploits made for thrilling reading all around the world. Nolan comments in *The West of Billy the Kid*, "Already, within weeks of his death, he [became] Billy the Kid the avenger, the outlaw, the cold-blooded killer."

Historians have debated for decades about how much truth there might be in these tales, and why they were created. One possibility, of course, is that they were invented to make stories about the Kid more exciting, but there may be another reason. O'Toole comments in "The Many Stories of Billy the Kid," "The easy answer is that [they] made them up to glorify Garrett's achievement in killing not just a cheeky little punk but a legendary outlaw. But there is another possibility: that Henry McCarty, in the course of creating himself as Billy the Kid, told them himself."



Billy the Kid has been an inspiration for books, films, music, plays, and other types of popular culture. Today, he is one of the most famous outlaws of the frontier.

PROFITING FROM THE KID'S DEATH

In any case, as the news of his death spread, the outlaw's exploits inspired thousands of articles in newspapers around the world, as well as in dime novels and magazines, such as the "police gazettes" that were popular at the time. These articles were typically far from being factual. They usually inflated, with great ingenuity, the Kid's daring deeds and adventures.

Typical of the headlines that ran with these pieces was one (quoted in Nolan's *The West of Billy the Kid*) from the *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*: "True History of the Boy-Devil's Exploits." Wallis, meanwhile, quotes in *Billy the Kid: The Endless Ride* that the New York *Daily Graphic* had reported that the Kid "had built up a criminal organization worthy of the underworld in any of the European capitals." The Santa Fe *Weekly Democrat* (again quoted in Wallis's *Billy the Kid: The Endless Ride*) went even further, imagining that a devil appeared at the moment of the Kid's death:

> No sooner had the floor caught the descending form, which had a pistol in one hand and a knife in the other, than there was a strong odor of brimstone in the air, and a dark figure with the wings of a dragon, claws like a tiger, eyes like balls of fire, and horns like a bison, hovered over the corpse for a moment, and with a fiendish laugh said, "Ha! Ha! This is my meat!" and then sailed off through the window. He did not leave his card, but he is a gentleman well known by reputation, and there by hangs a "tail."

Soon after the outlaw's death, Pat Garrett applied to the government for the $500 reward that had been posted for the capture of the Kid. Surprisingly, the government stalled this process and did not present the reward to the sheriff until 1882. Some accounts state that he never received the money at all.

In the meantime, according to some sources, several grateful citizens of Lincoln County banded together and raised about $1,000 for Garrett and his men. Furthermore, the citizens of nearby Grant County presented the sheriff with a beautiful cane with an inscribed gold head. It was made of wood taken from the home in Silver City where Billy the Kid had lived as a boy.

Garrett hoped to benefit from his achievement in other ways. Early in 1882, he published a biography of his most famous adversary. It was just one of five books that came out within a year after the Kid's death, all purporting to tell the truth about his life story.

Garrett wrote a book, he said, because he wanted to counteract the many untrue tales that were circulating about the outlaw. He did not completely succeed. The parts that were based on Garrett's first-hand recollections were generally factual.

Unfortunately, the sheriff's coauthor, a journalist named Ash Upson, weakened their project by sensationalizing the sections about the Kid's early years. The title that Upson chose gives a flavor of the book's melodramatic tone: *The Authentic Life of Billy the Kid, the Noted Desperado of the Southwest, Whose Deeds of Daring and Blood Made His Name a Terror in New Mexico, Arizona and Northern Mexico*.

GARRETT'S FINAL YEARS

The book did not have immediate success. Its sales were hampered by poor distribution and publicity. Also, because of its uneven tone, *The Authentic Life of Billy the Kid* displeased both reviewers and readers. Garrett did not have much success in other projects, despite the degree of fame he enjoyed in the Southwest.

Part of this had to do with his personality. He became increasingly difficult to deal with as his gambling and tax debts grew higher. Adding to his troubles were nagging questions about the manner of the Kid's death. The rumors that the outlaw had been unarmed when Garrett killed him persisted. These rumors further tarnished the lawman's reputation and made him unpopular in many circles.

The sheriff drifted unsuccessfully from one job to another. He held several positions in law enforcement, but he did not distinguish himself and eventually retired from policing. The former lawman then tried ranching, but the sedentary life bored him. He ran without success for the New Mexico legislature. In December 1901, his friend Theodore Roosevelt appointed him customs inspector in El Paso, Texas, but that job did not suit him either. He served for five years but was not reappointed. Some historians say Garrett had embarrassed Roosevelt by bringing a notorious gambler friend to a San Antonio Rough Riders reunion, resulting in

bad publicity for the president. Disappointed in Roosevelt's decision, Garrett retired to his ranch in New Mexico.

Garrett, like so many in the Old West, suffered a violent death. In 1908, a rancher named Jesse Wayne Brazel killed Garrett in a dispute over Brazel's use of Garrett's property as grazing land for goats. Brazel did not deny that he shot Garrett. He was indicted for murder, but he was acquitted on the grounds that Garrett had threatened Brazel and that the shooting was justifiable homicide.

NEW INTEREST IN THE KID

Over time, after several decades of ongoing interest in Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid, the general public began to forget about them. By the early decades of the twentieth century, the Kid was becoming an obscure figure. Beginning in the 1920s, however, that changed.

The reason was a newspaperman from Chicago named Walter Noble Burns. While working for the *Chicago Tribune*, Burns traveled to New Mexico in search of interesting stories. He became fascinated by Billy the Kid's life, and he interviewed a number of people who had known the outlaw.

In 1926, Burns published *The Saga of Billy the Kid*, based on his research. Critics praised the book, and it sold well. The appearance of Burns's biography was probably the single event that was most responsible for the rekindling of interest in the Kid. Ironically, it was during this period, some two decades after Pat Garrett's death, that the lawman's own book about the Kid finally became a bestseller.

MOVIES AND MORE

Since then, the legend of Billy the Kid has steadily grown. His life has been explored, dissected, embellished, and celebrated in hundreds of ways. Countless nonfiction books, plays, novels, television shows, documentaries, songs, poems, toys, video games, and more have been devoted to him. The Kid was even the inspiration for a famous ballet suite written by the American composer Aaron Copland.

Inventing a New Life

Outlaws have always been powerful figures in the American imagination. In part, this is because they represent something that has always been a crucial foundation of the American way of life: the ability to reinvent oneself in a new way. In this passage from "The Many Stories of Billy the Kid," O'Toole reflects on the place of Billy the Kid, who was probably the son of immigrants:

> He may have started out as an Irish cowboy, but he became an American cowboy. For he embodied the greatest of American paradigms [patterns of society], that of an immigrant making a new life. He discovered that out here, where no one knows you, you are free to invent a new life and call it authentic, to spin a story and find that others will tell it for you, to escape from history and enter the vast playground of myth.

Perhaps no other medium has made use of the Kid's legend more than the movies. Among the many film actors who have portrayed the outlaw over the years in feature films or TV movies are such familiar names as Roy Rogers, Paul Newman, Donnie Wahlberg, Kris Kristofferson, Emilio Estevez, and Val Kilmer. The Kid has even appeared in a Disney cartoon with another American cultural icon: Mickey Mouse.

The first instance of a film character based on Billy the Kid was probably a silent movie made in 1911. Dozens more have followed. In fact, according to one estimate, more films are based on the Kid than on any other individual in the history of cinema. These movies range from serious and generally accurate treatments (such as *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid* and *Young Guns*) to the ludicrous (one example being the low-budget horror movie *Billy the Kid vs. Dracula*, which was originally double-billed with *Jesse James Meets Frankenstein's Daughter*).

DID THE KID CHEAT DEATH?

In addition to the dozens of rumors about the Kid that surfaced during his short life, many more have appeared in the years since. One of the most persistent is the allegation that Garrett never killed the Kid, that another man was buried in place of the outlaw, and that the Kid went into hiding and survived for many years.

At least 20 men have claimed that they were "the real" Billy the Kid. At least two were successful in swaying public opinion. One was John Miller, whose family asserted in 1938 (after his death) that he was Billy the Kid. Tom Sullivan, a former sheriff of Lincoln County, had Miller's bones unearthed from his burial site at Pioneers' Home Cemetery in Prescott, Arizona, in May 2005. DNA samples were taken and compared to blood traces taken from a bench believed to be the one on which the Kid's body was placed after he was shot to death. The results have never been made public.

The other was a colorful character from West Texas named Ollie Roberts, who was nicknamed "Brushy Bill." In 1949, paralegal William Morrison met Brushy Bill, and they asserted that he was the outlaw. If true, this would have made the desperado about 90 years old.

In 2004, a group of researchers tried to answer the question definitively by exhuming the remains of the Kid and those of his mother. The plan was to sample the DNA of the bodies and compare the two. This project ran into problems from the start. For one thing, there was uncertainty about the exact location of the outlaw's grave. Soon after the Kid's death, a flood had washed away the wooden tombstone that marked his grave. So it is unclear whether or not Billy is really the body in the burial site that is now considered his.

Furthermore, there was fierce public opposition to this plan. Many people were outraged at the thought of the remains of the famous outlaw and his mother being dug up. A lawsuit was filed to prevent it, and New Mexico's governor, Bill Richardson, appointed a lawyer to represent the Kid's interests in the ensuing legal battle.

Despite eyewitness accounts of Billy the Kid's slaying, his legend lives on. Many men even claimed to be the Kid, one of the most famous being Ollie Roberts, also known as Brushy Bill. Although Roberts' claim has been rejected by historians, his hometown, Hico, Texas, has capitalized on his claims by opening the Billy the Kid Museum. There visitors can compare pictures of Billy the Kid with Brushy Bill.

Although the case was dismissed, Richardson recognized the value Billy had as a symbol for the state. In the article "Billy the Kid's DNA sparks legal showdown," by MSNBC reporter Alan Boyle, the governor stated,

> We want to get to the bottom of it. And if it means New Mexico gets a little attention, so be it. I'm the governor, I want to see promotion, I want to see tourism go up. I want to see people fascinated by Billy the Kid. And that means a fascination with New Mexico.

HIS NAME LIVES ON

Currently, a number of organizations are dedicated to keeping the story of Billy the Kid alive. One of these is the Billy the Kid Outlaw Gang, a group based in Fort Sumner that boasts hundreds of members from many countries. It raises money to fund projects that preserve the desperado's legend, such as putting up historical markers.

A variety of museums and other public institutions also help keep the Kid's name alive. For example, Fort Sumner, New Mexico, maintains two rival Billy the Kid museums, which feature such artifacts as the outlaw's rifle, chaps, and spurs; an original Wanted poster; and locks of his hair.

Reflecting the fact that the Kid's gravestone has been stolen several times, Fort Sumner also holds annual Tombstone Races, during which contestants drag 80-pound (36.2-kilogram) tombstones across a field and over barriers. Not to be outdone, Hico, Texas, the hometown of Brushy Bill Roberts, capitalized on Roberts's notoriety by opening its own museum about the Kid.

Another project, still in the planning stages, is one envisioned by an artist in Las Cruces, New Mexico. He hopes to create a three-story Billy the Kid museum, complete with a 60-foot (18.2-meter) sculpture of the outlaw on its outside wall.

A further sign that the Kid's legend lives on is that memorabilia associated with the outlaw is highly prized. For example, in 1999 a collector paid $46,000 for a revolver the outlaw once used. It has been estimated that millions of dollars are spent yearly on Billy the Kid-related artifacts and other items.

RIDING BOLDLY INTO HISTORY

Despite the museums, organizations, and other signs of continued interest in the outlaw, much about Billy the Kid's life will undoubtedly always remain a mystery. There are many tantalizing questions that remain unresolved. Where and when, precisely, was he born? What happened during the unknown gaps in his history? How many people did he kill? Did Pat Garrett really kill him, or did he

escape? Was he a romantic outlaw, as some of his friends and fans claim, or was he little more than a vicious thug?

After more than 100 years, these questions still intrigue people all around the globe. Summarizing the issue in *Billy the Kid: A Short and Violent Life*, Utley comments, "More than a century after his death, Billy the Kid still rides boldly across America's mental landscape, symbolizing an enduring national ambivalence toward corruption and violence." Especially considering that the Kid died when he was only about 21, his legacy is an impressively powerful reminder of what life was like in the Old West of yesteryear.

CHRONOLOGY

Circa 1859 William Henry McCarty is born.

Circa 1867 Catherine McCarty and her sons William and Joseph move to Indianapolis, Indiana. She meets William Antrim.

Circa 1869 Antrim and the McCarty family move to Wichita, Kansas.

TIMELINE

Circa 1859: William Henry McCarty is born

Circa 1873: Catherine and William Antrim marry; Henry begins using the surname Antrim

1874: Catherine Antrim dies of tuberculosis; Henry moves in with a series of foster families and commits his first crimes, then flees to Arizona

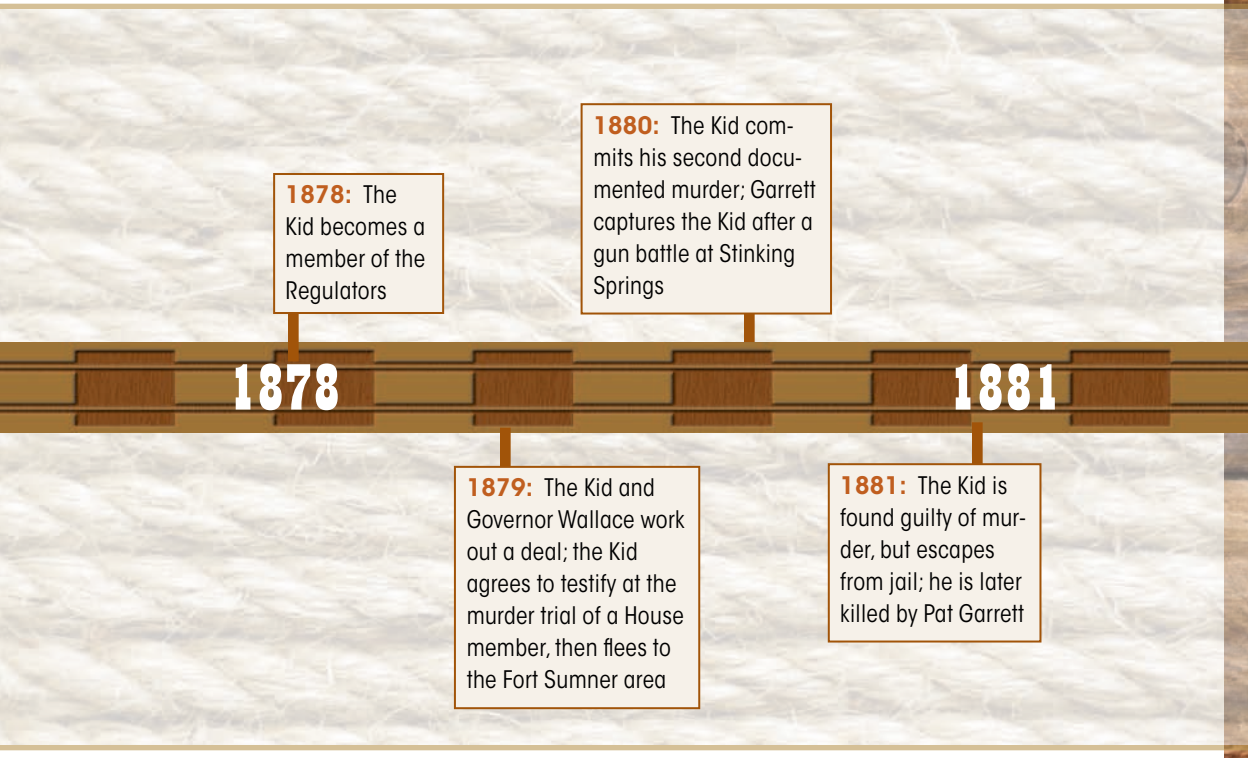
1874–1877: The Kid, as he is now known, drifts around Arizona, stealing, rustling, gambling, and picking up occasional ranch work

1877: In August, the Kid commits his first documented murder; he joins a group of rustlers in Lincoln County called "the Boys."

1870 Catherine McCarty opens a hand laundry. Henry (as he was called) and his brother, Joseph, attend school.

Circa 1873 The group moves to Santa Fe, New Mexico Territory. Catherine and William Antrim marry on March 1. Soon after, they move to Silver City, NMT. Catherine's son Henry begins using the surname Antrim on occasion.

1874 Catherine Antrim dies of tuberculosis on September 16. Henry and Joseph move in with a series of foster families. Later that year Henry commits his first crimes, is briefly jailed, and flees to Arizona.



1874–1877 The Kid, as he is now known, drifts around Arizona, stealing, rustling, gambling, and picking up occasional ranch work.

1877 In August, the Kid commits his first documented murder, of a blacksmith named Frank "Windy" Cahill. After breaking out of jail, he flees back to New Mexico Territory and joins a group of rustlers in Lincoln County called "the Boys." Later that year he joins John Tunstall's ranch staff, primarily to guard Tunstall's cattle herds in preparation for a conflict between the cattleman and rival forces known as "the House."

1878 In February, Tunstall is murdered by members of the House faction. Later that year a warrant for the arrest of Tunstall's murderers is issued, and a group called the Regulators is formed to track down the wanted men. The Kid becomes a deputy and a member of this group. Members of the Regulators, including the Kid, kill Sheriff Brady and continue their search for Tunstall's killers. As part of this search, a fierce gun battle takes place at Blazer's Mills.

In July, the Kid is part of a group held in a siege in Lincoln. It ends with a house burned down, several deaths, and a small group (led by the Kid) escaping. The Kid then becomes the leader of the gang formed from the remaining Regulators. He writes the first of many letters to Governor Lew Wallace, seeking protection from prosecution.

1879 The Kid and Governor Wallace meet in March to work out a deal. The outlaw agrees to testify at the murder trial of a House member. Feeling

that he will not get a fair trial himself, the Kid flees to the Fort Sumner area.

1880 In January, The Kid commits his second documented murder, of a threatening drunk named Joe "Texas Red" Grant. Later that year, Pat Garrett is elected sheriff of Fort Sumner. In December, Garrett captures the Kid after a gun battle at Stinking Springs. The outlaw is transported to Santa Fe for trial.

1881 The Kid goes on trial in Mesilla, New Mexico Territory, for two murders, of Buckshot Roberts and Sheriff Brady. He is found guilty and sentenced to hang. He is transported back to Lincoln but daringly escapes from jail.

On July 14, Pat Garrett and two deputies track Billy to the ranch of Pete Maxwell. Garrett surprises the Kid in Maxwell's bedroom and shoots him dead. The news travels around the world, and the legend of Billy the Kid begins to spread far beyond New Mexico.

GLOSSARY

adobe Sun-dried brick; a common building material in the American Southwest and Mexico.

ambidextrous Able to use both hands equally well.

amnesty Granting a pardon to a large number of people for a crime.

bailes Dances held in the Old West, from the Spanish word for "dance."

boomtown A town undergoing a time of growing population and a good economy.

coroner's inquest An official examination to determine the cause of a death.

exhuming The act of digging up the remains of a body.

memorabilia Collectible objects connected to a person or event.

teetotaling Not drinking alcohol.

tuberculosis A serious respiratory illness, sometimes called consumption.

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About Billy the Kid

http://www.aboutbillythekid.com/

Contains a lot of information, though some of it is of dubious accuracy.

Bad Hombres: Outlaws, Gunmen, Lawmen

http://www.badhombres.com/outlaws/billy-the-kid.htm

Has biographical information on some of the most famous figures of the Wild West.

"Billy the Kid," Eyewitness to History

http://www.eyewitnesstohistory.com/billythekid.htm

Contains, among other things, a lengthy excerpt from Pat Garrett's book about the outlaw.

Billy the Kid Outlaw Gang

http://billythekidoutlawgang.com/

Maintained by a group dedicated to preserving the life and legend of the famous outlaw.

New Mexico: Billy the Kid Territory

http://www.newmexico.org/billythekid/

Travel information and resources related to Billy the Kid's time in New Mexico.

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