



**Your On the
Street Reporter**



Uyless Black

Billy the Kid

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Billy the Kid¹

Report One: Exhibit at Albuquerque Museum of Art and History

May 25, 2007

Hello from Your on the Street Reporter. Today, I spent the afternoon at the Albuquerque Museum of Art and History. I toured a special exhibit, "Dreamscape Desperado: Billy the Kid, and the Outlaw in America." I hope my readers who live in Northern New Mexico take-in this exhibition. The exhibit is informative and entertaining, and says as much about America as it does about William Bonney (the Kid's real name). The show runs through July 22, 2007.

Since my youth, Billy the Kid has held my interest. He has also proven to be popular with the general public. More movies have been made about this man than any other historical figure (sixty, at the latest count).² The museum guide stated, "His legend seems to have a mythical power."

An Early Billy the Kid Groupie

As a boy, my playmates and I often played cowboys and Indians, or cowboys and cowboys. For our upcoming toy gun fight, each child would choose a hero whose character he would assume during our, "Bang, you're dead!" shoot-out. I usually chose to be Billy the Kid. First, he gained his fame in New Mexico's Lincoln Country, which was near Lea County, where I lived. Also, his grave was at Fort Sumner, not far from my hometown.

But of more importance, Billy the Kid is famous because he is alleged to have killed *twenty-one* men. What is more, he himself was killed when he was *twenty-one* years old. Some would say, what irony. It's not irony, just coincidence. But the books and movies about the Kid make a big deal about his twenty-one exterminations and his own extermination at twenty-one. Billy was a precocious lad. Some historians say he killed his first man when he was twelve years old.

As a youngster, I thought the idea of knocking-off twenty-one men was a heroic feat. He was my role model because he was adept at killing people. Go figure...but my fantasies were shared by many boys.

During my later times in the purgatory of youth---high school---I wrote a book report about Billy the Kid's participation in the Lincoln County War. After presenting an oral summary of my written report to the students in my English class, our teacher asked how much time I had spent researching my stellar presentation. I responded with a confused mumble. She responded it was likely my time in the library archives digging up stuff on Billy did not span over one study hall hour. I kept my silence as she had me pegged. As I've said in these reports, scholarship is not one of my long suits. Anyway, let's move on to some of the displays in this fine exhibit.

¹ Unless otherwise noted, the graphics in this report are sourced from *True West*, a magazine devoted to American Western folklore and fact. See the issue of May 2007, pp. 51-63. Unlike most of the debris that has accumulated about William Bonney, *True West's* write-up attempts to be accurate. The magazine's article on Billy the Kid is a fine piece of scholarship, as well as a fun read. You can reach *True West* via www.twmag.com.

² Display at the Albuquerque Museum of Art and History.

Billy the Ugly

Several quotes in the displays portray Billy the Kid as a handsome man. According to the write-ups, he had blue eyes, which were set into fine facial features, which were placed on top of a fine body. Only one picture of Billy is known to exist. It is shown in Figure 1.³ Beauty is in the eyes of the camera. In this case, if the camera is capturing anything, it is not beauty.



It's not my intent to attack the physical appearance of a person. After all, most of our looks are bequeathed to us from our parents. We may choose to modify these attributes with intakes of fat and cholesterol, or reverse our mistakes with liposuction. Whatever, the Kid does appear trim and plastic surgery was into the future.

Nonetheless, is this person attractive to you? The National Rifle Association (NRA) would like it. So would Lone Star boots and Stetson hats. I don't mean to be contrary, but Billy the Kid was one ugly dude. Flop ears. Slothful mouth. Small sloping shoulders. Even more: as I learned today, he wasn't even six feet tall! How can an American Cowboy legend *not* be at least six feet?

The possibility exists that Bill went about killing people because he was compensating for his unsightly countenance. Psychologists call the problem an *anxiety reaction*. Or, like the youthful assassins who are gunning down students in our schools today, perhaps he was not accepted by this peer group, so he decided to get even.

Figure 1. Billy's only known picture.

He gunned-down a variety of Lincoln County residents. He was a proponent of EEO: Equal Extermination Opportunity killing. Lawmen, as well as lawless men, were felled by his bullets.

He became a key player in the Lincoln County War, a feud between two combative capitalists. It wasn't an open range war between farmers building fences and cowboys driving cattle over those barriers. It wasn't a contest between sheep men and cattle men. It was a battle between two store keepers. Yep, retailers. One of these salesmen assumed he was entitled to all the business in Lincoln County---which reminiscent of Wal-Mart. Later, an interloper set up a consumer's alternative across the street. Target comes to mind.

³ Albuquerque Museum of Art and History book store.

Unlike today, in which merchandisers contest one another through community referendums and legal battles, the retailers in Lincoln County fought it out by killing the competition. Let's imagine the situations. First, the past:

A Lincoln County Store Owners Meeting.

- Owner # 1, "Fellow owners, I've just learned an Englishman is building a store across the street."
- Owner # 2, "That sumbitch! We got here first. Let's bring-in the gunmen. They'll kill-off that upstart."
- Which they did...literally.

Cut to the present:

A Wal-Mart Board of Directors Meeting.

- Wal-Mart Person # 1, "Fellow predators, I've just learned Target is building a store across the street."
- Wal-Mart Person # 2, "Those sumbitches! We got here first. Let's bring-in the lawyers. They'll kill-off that upstart."
- Which they try to do...if only legally.

The Movie Stars Play Billy the Kid

Let's look at a few samples of the sixty movies (and scores of books) about William Bonney. Because of his popularity, it comes as no surprise that many famous movie actors played the role of Billy. Figure 2 is a small sampling (counter-clockwise, from the top):

- Roy Rogers played a singing Billy the Kid in *Billy the Kid Returns*.
- Marlon Brando played a mumbling, surly Billy the Kid in *One Eyed Jacks*.
- In a Howard Hughes production, Audie Murphy played a heroic Billy the Kid. This film also highlighted Jane Russell. You may recall this movie. *The Outlaw* created a boom for the Maidenform Bra Company.
- John Wayne did not play Billy the Kid. In *Chisum*,⁴ he played the role of John Chisum, a famous cattleman from whom Billy rustled cattle.

⁴ The title *Chisum* is a correction to this original essay. For an explanation, see sidebar later in this report.

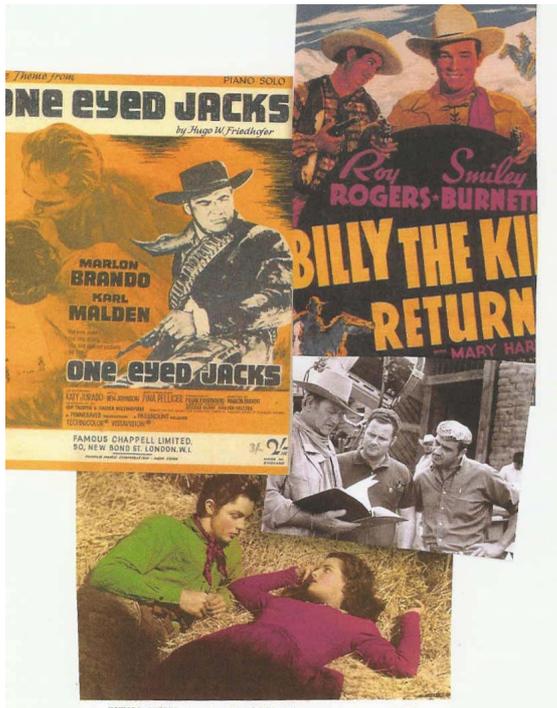


Figure 2. Billy and the stars.

Figure 3 shows more examples of Billy the Kid movies (starting at the left, going to the right):

- In *Billy the Kid*, Val Kilmer played a pouty Billy the Kid. The film was produced by Gore Vidal, the famous writer and wannabe cowboy.
- Emilio Estevez played a Latino Billy the Kid sidekick in *Young Guns*.
- Kiefer Sutherland played a terrorist-fighting Billy the Kid, also in *Young Guns*.
- Michael Pollard played a punk Billy the Kid in *Billy the Kid was a Punk* (a truer characterization of Billy's persona).
- Many other actors played the role; some are shown in the lower part of Figure 3.

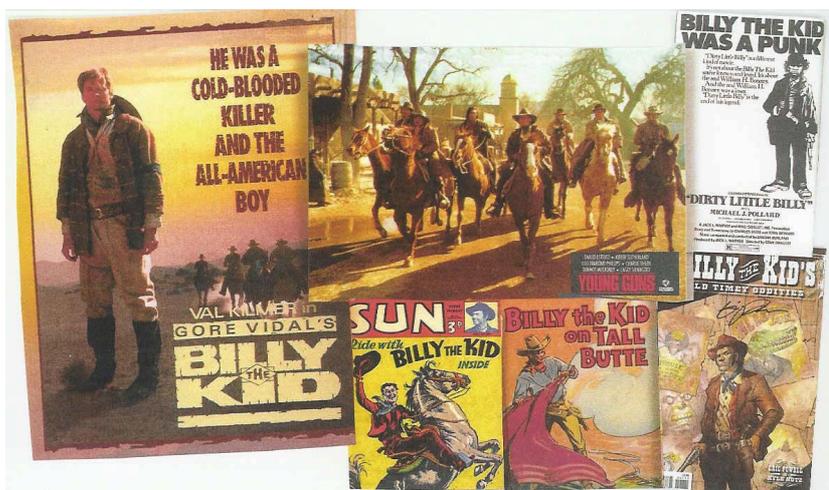


Figure 3. Billy and more stars.

Others cashed-in on this legend, such as:

- Johnny Mack Brown played a fullback Billy the Kid.
- Buster Crabbe played a crabby Billy the Kid.
- Lash LaRue played a whip-yielding Billy the Kid.
- Kris Kristofferson played another singing Billy the Kid (I'm kidding; unlike Roy Rogers, he didn't sing).
- James Coburn played a sneering Billy the Kid.
- Paul Newman played a left-handed Billy the Kid (See Figure 4). The title of the film, *The Left Handed Gun*, was concocted by non-gun-totting Hollywood wimps who did not realize a gun is ambidextrous. But it is easy to sympathize with their problem. They were running out of titles for Billy movies. And after all, how many tickets would likely be sold for a movie titled, *The Left Handed Person*?

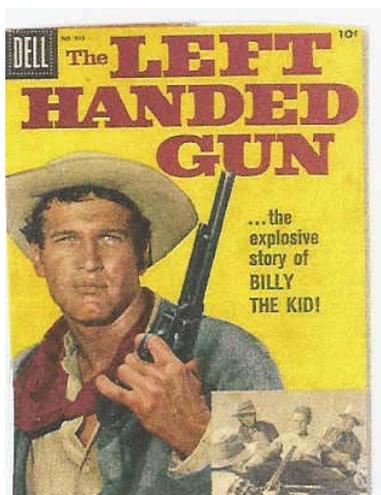


Figure 4. Billy and a big star.

Scores of books have been written about Billy the Kid. Even Larry McMurtry, who is a noted expert on Southwest history, was not above the temptation to cash-in on the Billy the Kid legend (see Figure 5, bottom-left).

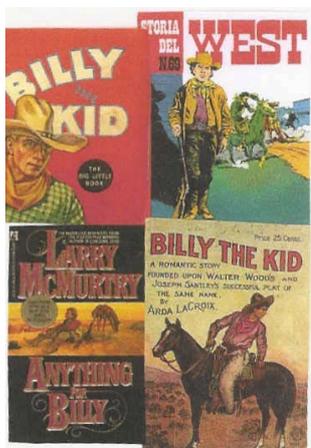


Figure 5. Billy and the books.

Songs, Ballets, and Operas about Billy the Kid

Billy the Kid's money machine never ends. An opera titled *Shooting Star* (ha) celebrated Billy's exploits. Bob Dylan, an icon of folk music, composed a score about Billy the Kid. I've not listened to this composition, but I'll wager it's full of angst about the under-handed triumph of a murderous sheriff against a noble non-conformist, and the unfairness of life in general.

The composer, Aaron Copland, created the musical score for the ballet, *Billy the Kid*. It opened at the Chicago Civic Opera House on October 16, 1938. According to the *True West* magazine article:

It became an instant classic. After Billy dies at the end, the brass band played chords of leaping fifths, likely indicating that the composer wanted his audience to feel sympathy for the Kid. Copland later revised his score into a 20-minute suite for orchestras that also enjoyed wide acclaim, remaining a popular recording to this day.

Later, in 1999, the ballet was performed at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York. The dancers who played Billy are shown in Figure 6 (Angel Corella, and Daniel Levins (insert)). These Ballet Billys did not don the attire of their role model, as a pistol, boots, and rifle would have interfered with their *arabesques*. But an artistic attempt at historical accuracy is evident. Notice the neckerchief on Corella and the chaps on Levins. *Buckle up boys! We're in for some rough riding!*



Figure 6. Ballet Billys.

What Would Billy think of Ballet Billy?

I wonder what William Bonney and his Lincoln County cohorts would have thought about this ballet? For myself, I just can't overcome my rural background and rearing, some of it on a cattle ranch. Try as I do, I can't help but laugh when I watch the dance scenes from *Oklahoma*. The cowboys performing *pirouettes* across the stage. Some of them mimicking galloping horses. How can a cowboy, wearing boots, perform *pointe* work (toe dancing)?

Let's listen-in on what Pat Garrett (who killed the Kid) might say to Billy. Pat is pointing his pistol at Billy the Kid's chest, "Kid, let's see your *sur les pointes* before I drill you. And while you're at it, I'd like to see a *entrechat*, so jump straight up and beat the calves of your legs together. ...Great!...Now try a *jeté*. I prefer a moving target."

I recognize my limited horizon places me at a handicap in my attempt to enjoy some of the arts. Still, certain aspects of human existence are not fittingly open to artistic interpretation. Say, a ballet celebrating a cold-blooded killer. Some of my readers tell me I'm wrong about this issue. They say anything should be subject to scrutiny, be it in the form of a ballet, or an op-ed piece.

I had the thrill of watching Baryshnikov dance several ballets. His style, strength, and grace astonished me. Perhaps if he had been playing Billy the Kid, I would not have cared. But I doubt it. I prefer ballet dancers who mimic swans, lions, and leopards. Leave murderers out of the picture. Otherwise, let's put ballet shoes on those two guys in Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood* and let them dance around in that basement in Kansas.

Billy Vs. Dracula

Another display in this exhibit is a depiction of the movie titled, *Billy the Kid vs. Dracula*. Dracula? Sure, Hollywood could not resist teaming-up two blood-thirsty men and have them go at each other. I've not seen the film, but I plan on logging-on to Netflix to order it. The museum exhibit shows Billy---pistol in hand---standing over a prostrate Dracula, who appears to be dead. One can only suppose the Kid's bullets were loaded with silver and not lead.

Help Wanted to Draw Wanted Posters

After several pursuits, Sheriff Pat Garrett managed to capture Billy. The outlaw was sentenced to hang for his malfeasances. But true to a movie script, the Kid killed two deputies then escaped from jail. He eluded the law once more.

During this time, the Territory of New Mexico offered a \$500 reward for the capture of Billy the Kid. A lot of money in those days. The problem of capture was compounded by the government hiring an incompetent artist to draw Billy's picture for the wanted poster. Look at Figure 7. The Kid's drawn mug shot bears little resemblance to his actual face, as seen in Figure 1. Small wonder Billy eluded capture for a while.

Pat Garrett wasted a lot of time asking the folks in Lincoln County if they had seen anyone who resembled the man in the wanted poster. A few replies:

- "You bet. That's my brother-in-law. He lives down the street."
- "Sure. That's my husband. He's taking a nap in the bedroom. He's mean as hell. Better shoot him while he's sleeping."
- "Yep. That's the man next door who owes me \$500."

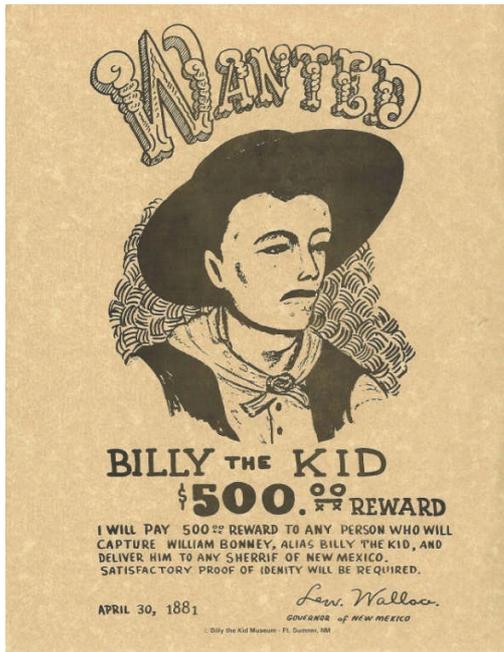


Figure 7. Go figure this figure.

You would think the law officers would have known the rendition of the man on the poster bore little resemblance to the real man. After all, they knew Billy well. So, why didn't they cut and paste Billy's real-life photo into the wanted poster, as seen in Figure 8? After all, the photograph was made in 1880, one year before this poster was created.

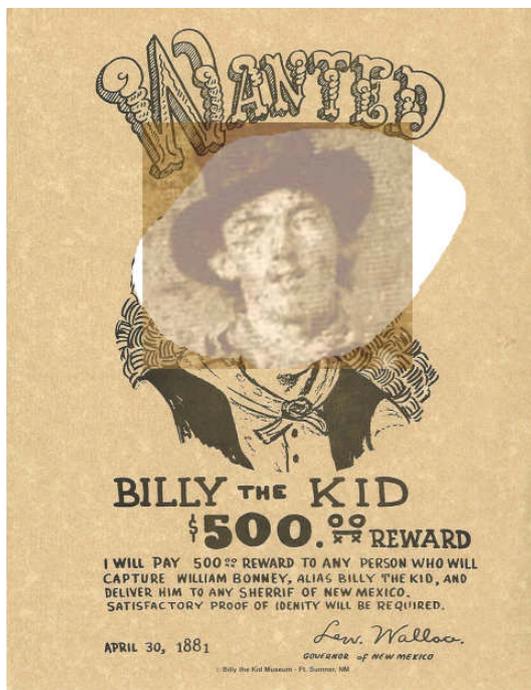


Figure 8. A sensible solution.

This strategy seems a good idea, but the authorities did not resort to this logical approach for two reasons. First, in the 1880s, cut and paste technology was in its Beta stages, not quite ready for wide-scale use. Second, folklore legend has it that the territorial Governor, Lew Wallace, had a cousin who lived in Lincoln County. His relative was an aspiring yet incompetent artist. Political largesse was the same in the 1880s as it is in the 2000s and the cousin drew the poster (true story).

Lefty or Righty?

Regarding *The Left Handed Gun* movie, played by Paul Newman. Billy's handedness is a subject of debate in some circles. For example, Microsoft's Encarta Encyclopedia shows Billy as a left-hander, as seen in Figure 9.⁵ But the photo from the Albuquerque Museum of Art and History in Figure 1 shows his pistol on his right hip. Based on my in-depth research (a 30 minute stay in a high school library), it appears the original tintype (actually a thin iron plate) photo shows the Kid as a left hander. So, breathe easy Mr. Newman. Your depiction appears to be the correct interpretation of Billy's (uneven) handedness. Eh...it appears I was incorrect on this matter. See sidebar below.



Figure 9. The Left Handed Gun?

Sidebar. An Update: Left-handed or Right-handed?

This sidebar reflects readers' comments I received recently on this essay. It is placed in this May 25, 2007, report with a date line of June 3, 2007. Thank you for your input and observations. One reader prompted me to delve into Billy's handedness in more detail.

The famous photo of Billy (Figure 1) was made from a four-tube camera, which produced one sheet of iron with four *reversed* exposures on the plate. So, he was actually right handed. Figure 1 is *re-reversed* image to make it correct.

Your comments also prompted me to re-examine the movie, *The Chisholm Trail*, which was mentioned in this report. The John Wayne (Billy the Kid related) movie is titled *Chisum*. I've made some additional inquiries into *The Chisholm Trail*, which began as a book. It was written

⁵ "Billy the Kid," *Microsoft Encarta Reference Library*, 2005.

by Borden Chase, and was used for the movie *Red River*. So, *Chisum* (released in 1970) and *Red River* (released in 1948) are two separate works, with two different screen writers for the films. So, *Chisum* is Billy-related. *The Chisholm Trail* is not.

What to Make of Billy the Kid?

Billy the Kid. A legend. An outlaw. A cattle rustler. A house thief. A killer of such renown, he has been elevated to the position of an American myth.

We humans---all people, not just Americans---have probably been manufacturing myths of mere mortals from the time we developed a frontal cortex. The human trait of admiration for achievers is instilled into our souls. We are inspired by those who go beyond what we can do. We try to follow them. We try to emulate their accomplishments. In so doing, we better ourselves and those around us.

But with a caveat. Emulating killers is not an effective way to interact with the general populace. We're doing satire here, but time-and-again, we witness mass shootings that have come about partially because the killer wanted to follow the murderous path of an earlier sociopath. The events are disturbing, and I wish we knew what was going on. But it does seem these killers were not all insane, in the clinical definition of the word. Some were simply alienated from life.

If they were not insane, then whose fault is it they were angry enough to take up a gun and kill people and themselves? DNA? Home? School? Church? Workplace? Booze? Drugs? An incompetent cook at McDonalds? Who knows? As a youth, I was shunned by a girl I thought was the only female in Lea County worth pursuing. She told me to get lost, that (in so many words) I was a not in her league---Lea County's Blue Book crowd was pretty fancy. OK, I was the object of rejection, but the family guns stayed in the gun cabinet. My revenge entailed tossing watermelons on her front yard lawn. After this assault, I felt a lot better.

Anyway, I turned out okay. My admiration for Billy's gunning down twenty-one humans had no effect on my mental and emotional development. Shooting someone with a real gun would have been as farfetched as, say, blowing up Lea County's Courthouse. My childhood body count put Billy's to shame. Yet after I had dispensed with thousands of make-believe bad-guys, it never entered my mind to borrow dad's .22 and shoot a bully classmate or a mean teacher. They were just part of my life. Pains in the ass to be sure. But that was that.

In hindsight, maybe I should have chosen someone to emulate besides a killer. Roy Rogers could have been my cowboy role model. I liked Trigger well enough. I thought Dale Evans was pretty. Roy's buddy, Smiley Burnette was funny---one reason people called him Smiley.

I did not pick up on Roy because, even as an eight year old, I thought singing cowboys was a stupid and phony idea. Not once did I witness a cowboy on our ranch sing "Get along little dogie" while he herded orphan calves around the pastures. As for Trigger, I didn't care for Palominos. They seemed effete, out of place on a working ranch. Something like a Ballet Billy executing *pirouettes* in a branding corral; performing elegant *pointes* as his toes touched down

into inelegant puddles and patches of blood, urine, defecation, burning skin, cast-off horns, and castrated testicles. The idea didn't make sense.

Nonetheless, during my childhood toy-gun battles, my model was Billy the Kid. Now-a-days, it's the president of AARP.

Your on the Street Reporter

Billy the Kid

Report Two: Billy the Kid Renditions

June 3, 2007

Hello from Your on the Street Reporter. Your Reporter received several responses to my report on the Billy the Kid exhibit at the Albuquerque Museum of Art and History. These comments prompted me to delve into more detail about Billy the Kid, and I've made a correction to the original report, which is reflected here.

The famous photo of Billy (Figure 1 in the *Billy the Kid* report, and shown as Figure 10 in this report) was reportedly made from a four-tube camera, which produced a thin sheet of iron (not tin) with four *reversed* exposures on the plate. If this supposition is true, he was right handed, and figure 1 is a *re-reversed* image to make it correct. At least, this view is what some historians believe.

In the end, who knows? Which is the subject of this report. To introduce the issue, let's offer a suggestion to that cool dude, Paul Newman.



Figure 10. The correct hand?

Mr. Newman: Sorry, but you need to re-make your movie, *The Left Handed Gun* and re-title it, *The Right Handed Gun*. According to the folks who devote a large portion of their time on earth researching this epic subject, your movie was based on a false fact. Yes, a false fact. A phrase used by sportscasters and other intellectuals to describe, "Something known to be false about something known to be true."

Let's assist you on this matter. First, as the old timey photographer did with Billy's shot, we'll take your image in the original movie promo, seen in Figure 11:

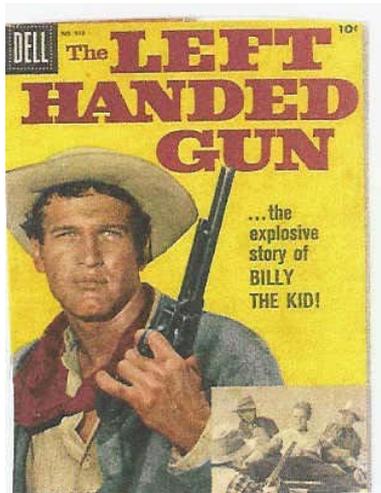


Figure 11. The original.

Then we'll do a bit of cutting, reversing, and pasting, as seen in Figure 12:



Figure 12. Reversing.

There you are. Right handed! Next, we paste the image onto the original marquee, make some edits to the prose, and we have now re-reverse-engineered the reverse engineering, as seen in Figure 13.

You're welcome. Just doing my job, By the way, the reason Hollywood chose to ignore the right handed possibility for the Kid is because Hollywood is left-leaning. Mel Gibson aside, we rarely see a right-leaning Hollywood movie. So, Figure 13 is a modest suggestion to please right-wingers, left-wingers, right-handers, and left-handers.

Also, I bulked-up Paul the Kid. Thicker neck. Broader shoulders. True to Hollywood beefsteak. And cheesecake. If the Hollywoodies can do it with women, they should be able to do it with

men. EOA: Equal Opportunity Alternations. Boobs and butts for the women. Pecks and necks for the men.

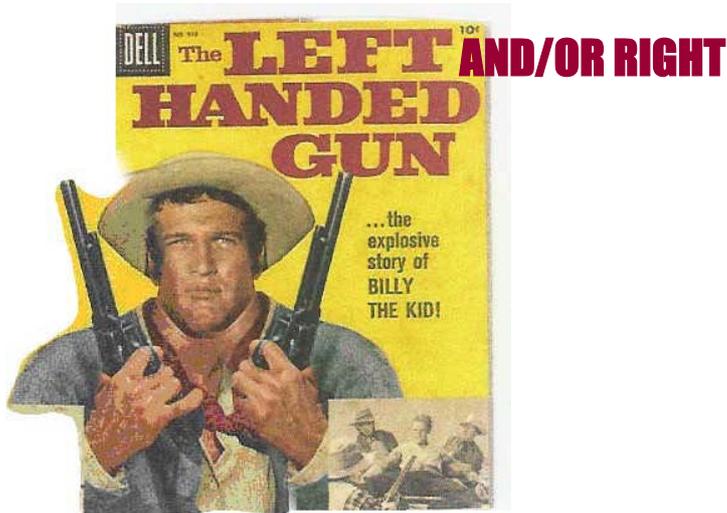


Figure 13. The finished product.

At last, this contentious issue has been put to rest, and this part of our report has a happy ending-- as in Hollywood movies and our Nation's annual budget. You're welcome. I'll take my bow later.

Your on the Street Reporter

Billy the Kid

Report Three: Billy the Kid Country in Fort Sumner

October 27, 2007

Hello from Your on the Street Reporter. Because of the responses your Reporter received from *Billy the Kid*, I promised another Billy the Kid report. Several readers offered comments about my report on the exhibit at the Albuquerque Museum of Art and History, "Dreamscape Desperado: Billy the Kid, and the Outlaw in America," which encouraged me to take a trip into the country where Billy the Kid became a legend...just before he became dead as a result of his becoming a legend.

Figure 14 shows an enlarged map of New Mexico and locales where the Kid did business: Fort Sumner, Lincoln, and Silver City. To gain a sense of distances, the dotted line--by way of the crow--represents the distance between Fort Sumner and Lincoln. It's slightly over 100 miles, and a visual demonstration of why the people who lived in those times seldom made casual trips to the next town.

The terrain between Fort Sumner and Lincoln is easy to traverse on horse. A few modest mountains, but mostly flat plains separate these two towns. Still, unless a cowboy decided to ride his horse to exhaustion, a trip in the 1800s from Fort Sumner to Lincoln would take two to three days. Same goes for the travel between Silver City and Lincoln, except the trip might extend to three or four days.



Figure 14. Billy the Kid's territory.

Fort Sumner

The main attraction in Fort Sumner, New Mexico, is the grave site of Billy the Kid. In the 1860s, a fort was established here to control the Navajos and Apaches who had been rounded-up and placed on the Bosque Redondo Reservation. After the Indians were sufficiently disciplined and "domesticated," the fort and surrounding land were sold to Lucien B. Maxwell, a wealthy businessman. Today, there is no longer a fort at Fort Sumner, which is now Billy the Kidville. Stopping at various stores in town, I found brochures on their counters about Billy, such as the one in Figure 15.

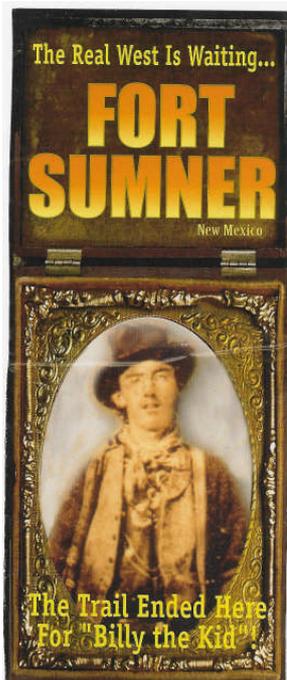


Figure 15. Billy the Kid slept here...and still does.

As I made my way to Fort Sumner, I wondered how many tourists visited this place. The closest Interstate (I-40) is 46 miles north. Perhaps Billy groupies drop-by as they make their way across this part of America.

Once in Fort Sumner, you will encounter flags, plaques, models, and museums celebrating this town's claim to fame, some shown in Figure 16. I toured two museums, one located in downtown Fort Sumner; the other at the Kid's grave site. Both were well appointed and featured many old West exhibits besides those about Billy the Kid and the Lincoln County War.



Figure 16. Signs and replicas.

As seen in these pictures (Figure 17)---and discussed in earlier reports---only one photo of Billy the Kid is known to exist. In our first reports, we also learned about the controversy surrounding his left or right handedness. For this report, I thought you might enjoy two interpretations of Billy's countenance. The photo on the left was taken in one of the museums. Hmm. Maybe the artist was a wannabe Warhol, out to caricature the Kid. But at least this photo was an attempt to present a likeness of Billy the Kid. The wooden carving in the right photo looks as much like the Kid as a kid goat does.



Figure 17. Billy was ugly enough on his own...don't make it worse.

After touring the museum exhibits, I drove to Billy the Kid's grave site---a few miles southeast of Fort Sumner. As shown in the left photo in Figure 18, the site is a forlorn, almost barren plot of land. The sidewalk leading to the tombstone (circled in red) is the only ornamental feature in the graveyard. The tombstone, the middle photo in Figure 18, identifies the graves of two other men who are buried alongside Billy (Figure 19 is a more detailed view.). A few other graves are located at this graveyard. Two are shown in the right photo in Figure 18. I don't mean to demean dead people or their resting places, but this place is deadly depressing. Some graveyards are attractive, some serene. Not this one.



Figure 18. Billy the Kid's final resting place.

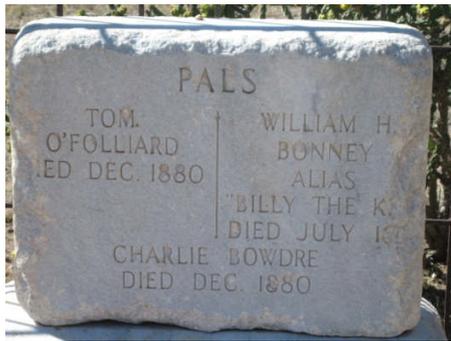


Figure 19. A more detailed view.

Contact the Local Missing Tombstones Bureau

During this tour, I snapped photos of old newspaper clippings on display in the museums. I learned Billy's tombstone had been stolen twice and recovered both times. One of the clippings about this subject is shown in Figure 20. Take a look at the print underneath the picture of the grave. It states the tombstone on the right is the original tombstone, which is now a footstone.



Figure 20. The footstone.

Who's (the) Who?

Earlier, I spoke of the inaccurate stories about William Bonney. A review of the entertainment world's "documentation" of his life, compared to a serious scholarly look at the historical records, reveals two characters as different as night and day. In preparing for this trip, I refreshed my knowledge of the man and the Lincoln County War. In so doing, I came across recent

research papers and books based on more plausible investigations into the Lincoln War, as well as William Bonney.⁶

Let's lay to rest a misconception about this man, his name. Researchers have examined court documents pertaining to a May 28, 1879, session in Fort Stanton, NM (near Lincoln). The hearing has held to determine if a Lt. Col. Nathan A. M. Dudley's intervention into a "civil disturbance" was in defiance of a June 18, 1878, Act from Congress barring the military from becoming involved in local vendettas, even if to prevent killing and assorted mayhem. The incident under investigation was the setting of a fire to the house/store of a Mr. McSween, which contributed to his death and five other people.

The court of inquiry was stacked in favor of Col. Dudley. The judge, court recorder, and attorneys on both sides of the aisle were friends of the Colonel and Governor Wallace. As well, the Governor was the first witness to appear on Dudley's behalf.

Enough about the background. We're dealing with Bonney's name, so here are excerpts from the inquiry, where Bill was called-in as a witness:⁷

- Court Recorder: "What is your name and place of residence?"
- Bonney, "My name is William Bonney. I reside in Lincoln."
- Court Recorder, "Are you known [as] or called Billy Kidd, also Antrim?"
- Bonney, "Yes sir."

Later in the inquiry:

- Col. Dudley: "In addition to the names you have given, are you also known as the 'Kid'?"
- Bonney, "I have already answered that question. Yes sir, I am, but not 'Billy Kid' that I know of."

Confusing? Yes, but it's straight from Bonney's mouth. He acknowledges being called Kid and Billy Kidd, but not Billy Kid. Perhaps he had a grammatical bias against double "ds" in a name. Who knows? Even more, this man never acknowledged part of this name was "the." What are we to make of this discovery? It's as surprising as discovering Smokey the Bear's name is Smokey Bear, but not Smokey the Bear.

Billy went by the name of "Antrim". Historians tell us during his early years as a horse thief he adapted the name "Kid Antrim.". By this time, he was no longer a kid. But then, I suppose "Horse Thief Antrim" does not have the whimsical ring of "Kid Antrim".

Billy the Kid began his outlaw ways as a horse thief. Time and again, he stole horses and traded them for money, or other horses and goods.

⁶ Frederick Nolan, *The Billy the Kid Reader* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2007). Unless noted otherwise, the facts in this essay are based on my speaking with the guides and curators at several sites in Fort Sumner and Lincoln, and the book.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 288-290.

A horse thief. The low life of the west. Rustling cattle in the 1870's Lincoln County was common, and some of the ranchers in that part of the country took turns stealing each others' bovines. But in those days, stealing a man's horse was stealing that man's *principal* means of mobility and livelihood. From what I can tell, Billy didn't care about the consequences his horse thievery had on his de-saddled victims. I am not a Billy the Kid fan.

Let's head south to a more attractive part of New Mexico. In the next segment of this report, we visit the town of Lincoln, which---with my apologies to Fort Sumner---is more interesting than Billy's grave.

Your on the Street Reporter

Billy the Kid Report Four: Billy the Kid Country in Lincoln County

October 27, 2007

Hello from Your on the Street Reporter. For the last report of Billy the Kid, we visit Lincoln, New Mexico, the site of several skirmishes in the Lincoln County War. We also take a side trip to Silver City. As seen in Figure 14 of report three (reproduced below as Figure 21), Lincoln is southwest of Fort Sumner, and Silver City is southwest of Lincoln.



Figure 21. Billy the Kid's territory.

Although not as grand in its restoration exhibits, Lincoln reminds me of Williamsburg, Virginia. Both sites show a period of the past with more than just an old cannon or a reconstructed building facade. Both show what an old town once looked like. Both have had the good fortune to keep fast food stores and discount chains outside their city limits.

Figure 22 shows a map of the preserved and reconstructed sites along the main street of the town of Lincoln. Those readers who have read about the Lincoln County War will recognize these landmarks, such as the Tunstall place, Dr. Wood's office, and Dolan's store and home.

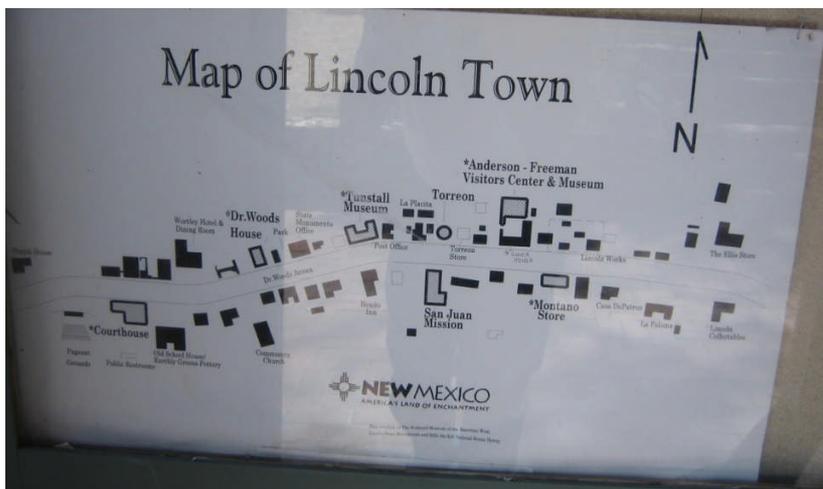


Figure 22. Layout of Lincoln.

To appreciate Lincoln, you need to stop-over for a few hours. You won't find the period cafes or the working shops, which make Williamsburg so fascinating. But with walks around the town, you can gain a sense of what it was like living in Lincoln in the 1870s. Many structures that William Bonney might have walked through are still standing.

One such building, a small shack inhabited by a person suffering from tuberculosis (TB), is shown in Figure 23. So-called consumptive folks came to this part of the country in search of relief from the humidity of the Eastern and Southern states. It was believed these "lungers" could be healed by breathing dry air. Historians think Billy's mom came to this part of the country (Silver City, New Mexico) because of her TB problems.

Some people find the landscapes of Southwest America unattractive because of their sparse, brown landscapes. I lived my first twenty-two years in this part of the country and never cared for the geography. I prefer foliage. On the other hand, prairie lands offer pristine air to inhale. On a summer day, you can walk for miles over these countrysides. The heat may be intense, but the humidity is so low you will not push one bead of sweat off your forehead. Green is cool, but brown is often cooler.



Figure 23. The TB shack.

Silver City and the 69'ers

Billy's mom, his step dad, and Billy moved to Silver City when Billy was a teenager----around the mid 1870s. As best the historians can tell, they came from Kansas. As mentioned, no one knows why they immigrated, but some think it was for the dry air. Whatever the reason, Billy's mom settled into this small town, a rough place in a rough part of America, populated with rough people. Billy also settled in, and accommodating himself to his surroundings, he became a rough hombre.

Why was there a Silver City in the first place? It's located in a desolate part of the world. Why go there? For that matter, why go to countless other places offering little more than dry, arid, waterless, desiccated, dehydrated, and parched terrain? Answer: Money. In 1869 the discovery of silver around this town pulled-in prospectors and assorted hangers-on from all over America.

Silver City earned its name as the silver lodes in the surrounding hills bootstrapped a town into existence.

Get Along Little Longhorn

A few years earlier, in 1855, the sheep ranchers in Lincoln County encountered competition for New Mexico's sparse grass spreads when the Texas Longhorn was introduced from West Texas. The area around Lincoln became a favored spot for the cattlemen because it was positioned in a valley with several creeks and small rivers. The land, while not as fertile as the Midwest, had enough grass to support fairly large herds of cattle.

With cattle, came horses to herd the cattle. With horses, came horse thieves to steal the horses. With horse thieves, came Billy the Kid. As mentioned earlier, the legendary Billy the Kid began his illustrious career as a low-life horse thief.

Indians Were Lincoln's Nemesis

Lincoln, New Mexico, is devoted to the history of America's West. While its buildings, museums, and other exhibits concentrate on the Lincoln County War and Billy the Kid, other aspects of Americana are on display, as seen in Figure 23 (the TB shack).



Figure 24. The Torreón.

Another interesting artifact is the Torreón, shown in Figure 24. Built in the 1850s, the Spanish-American citizens in Lincoln housed themselves inside this building and used the thick walls (their version of a castle) for protection from Apache attacks.

The locals were none too happy about the intrusions of white and semi-white people into their centuries-old homelands and attempted to make their lives miserable. Eventually, the Spanish-Americans grew weary of fending-off the local populace. Similar to most cultures that lived their lives in one place for centuries, the Indians viewed this land as their land. If not theirs, surely no one else's.

The intruders offered little in the way of an equitable land deal, in that they brought little with them to barter except cheap beads, phony coins, and shiny buttons. And what was more important than land to the natives? Apparently, cheap beads, phony coins, and shiny buttons. Especially if they had a lot of land but possessed no beads, coins, or buttons.

What you don't have you desire. What you have you don't desire. Go figure; but it's human nature. Anyway, the immigration gate was open. But unlike modern times, the wetbacks' backs weren't brown. They were white.

The white-skinned Anglos poured in. Only too late did the red-skinned-Indians realize they had entered into a devil's bargain: European wampum for Manhattan Island. A few gold coins for huge chunks of Oklahoma. Whiskey and guns for sizable parts of New Mexico, Arizona, and California.

The Indians were not the only dupes of these real-estate deals. The French (Louisiana Purchase) and the Russians (Alaska purchase) made the Indians look like pikers. All true. But with one big difference. The French citizens did not live in the lands of the Louisiana Purchase. The Russians did not live in Alaska. The Indians lived on their land. They had nowhere else to go. Small wonder they raided the whites.

Time and again, we read lamentations about the exploitation of the Native Americans by the Europeans. Some writers use the word *genocide* to describe the land clearing operations in North America during the 16th through 19th centuries. My take on this subject is that it was another example of we humans acting out our disposition to dispossess those who have something we want. We've been doing it for centuries. We continue to do it to this day. The Native Americans were doomed from the start. They had insufficient germs, guns, and steel to repel the invaders, and after a few years, the Europeans put the upstart Apaches in their place: the Bosque Redondo Reservation.⁸ But for a while, and during Billy's time, Indians were greatly feared around Lincoln County. The local museums reflect the influence of the Indians with a number of displays, one shown in Figure 25.



Figure 25. A museum display.

If you are in this part of the country, a trip to Lincoln will be worthwhile. It is a peaceful place, set in a small valley, surrounded by rolling hills covered with pinon and cedar. The town is easy to walk, and many of the buildings have markers in front of them explaining their history (the

⁸ Phase from *Germes, Guns, and Steel*, by Jared Diamond.

left and right photos in Figure 26). Most of the buildings are open (bottom, middle photo), with a wide variety of displays---some accurate, and true to Billy's legacy, some fanciful (top, middle photo).



Figure 26. Things to see in Lincoln.

The time has come to walk other streets and visit other places. Let's leave Billy the Kid with a few more thoughts about this man. Perhaps these thoughts pertain to our Old West as well. Perhaps they capture the secret rebel spirits of America's Walter Mittys:⁹

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 our dreams---
 forever free, forever young, forever riding.

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⁹ Nolan, 365.