

Billy the Kid Becomes a New Drawing Card

WALTER C. BUNCH



BILLY THE KID . . . New Mexico's most famous outlaw . . . remains today as during his lifetime the source of controversy.

Some believe that Henry McCarty, alias Billy Antrim, alias William H. Bonney, alias Billy the Kid, was a mad-dog killer.

Others insist he was a kind of Robin Hood of the old Southwest, fiercely loyal to friends, implacable foe of enemies.

But all agree Billy the Kid wrote large on the pages of New Mexico history. And all agree that in death Billy is a bigger drawing card than he was in real life.

The folks at Fort Sumner, N. Mex., are about to cash in on Billy's notoriety in a big way. He is expected to become their No. 1 tourist attraction.

Under the Greenspan provision of the Cropland Adjustment Program of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the village of Fort Sumner received a grant to help purchase cropland containing the original Bosque Redondo Indian Reservation and Fort Sumner. This land, and the cemetery adjoining it, will become—Fort Sumner residents hope—a mecca for historians of the Southwest and a top tourist attraction for visitors traveling U.S. 60 or U.S. 84 in eastern New Mexico.

Fort Sumner was established in 1862 by Brig. Gen. James H. Carleton to protect area settlers from Indian attackers. It was a six-company army post in the "Bosque Redondo"—Spanish for "grove of trees."

General Carleton, determined to corral marauding Indians at the fort, assigned

the task of bringing them in to Col. Kit Carson. By the end of 1864, several thousand Indians had been brought to the fort and an effort to teach them to farm the white man's way was commenced. Due to drought and insects, the venture failed. However, in the meantime the town had become established and served as a trading center for early-day settlers. It was an important supply post on the Goodnight-Loving cattle trail, which ran from west Texas to Colorado and Wyoming.

The Fort Sumner Military Post was abandoned in 1868. Shortly afterwards it was sold to the Fort Sumner Land and Cattle Co., whose chief stockholder was Lucien B. Maxwell, pioneer stockman and former owner of the vast Maxwell Land Grant in northeastern New Mexico. After Lucien's death, the property passed to his son, Pete.

It was in Pete Maxwell's home on the east bank of the Pecos that Billy the Kid was shot to death by Sheriff Pat Garrett on July 18, 1881.

Billy was born in New York City November 3, 1859, as Henry McCarty. The McCartys moved to a rural area near Coffeyville, Kans., in 1861. Billy's father died and his mother married William H. Antrim. They moved to Silver City, N. Mex. Here Billy attended school under the name of Billy Antrim.



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Billy the Kid.

FINAL IRONY

Billy and two outlaw friends are buried in the Fort Sumner military cemetery. Their graves are far better marked than the nearby grave of Lucien B. Maxwell, famous pioneer of the Southwest.

Legend has it that Billy killed his first man when he was between 12 and 15 years of age. The incident has several versions: One has Billy stabbing a man to death for allegedly insulting his mother. Another version has Billy shooting the man to death with a stolen gun.

Billy fled to Arizona where he worked briefly as a cowboy. With a Mexican partner, Billy spent the next few years ambushing and robbing Indian trappers.

More killing and scrapes with the law caused him to flee once more—this time across the border into Mexico. Here his career broadened into operation of a gambling hall. He had to leave once again because of a quarrel which ended with Billy's gun blazing faster than that of his opponent.

Next he moved to Chihuahua, where reportedly he courted the local senioritas. But in 1877 Billy grew homesick for his homeland and friends in New Mexico.

This next period is generally known as the cattle and horse rustling period of Billy's life.

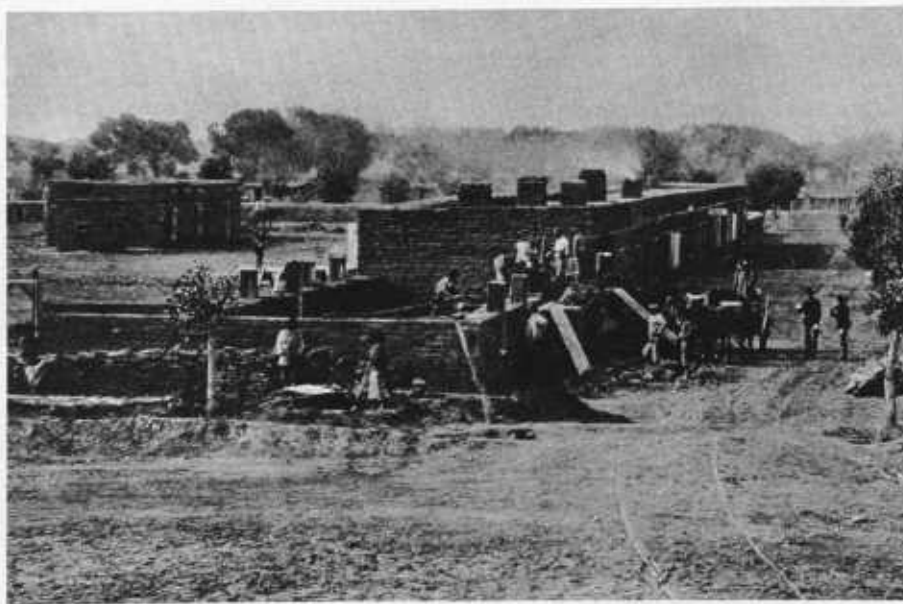
Many times he and his friends crossed and recrossed the Rio Grande with cattle and horses stolen on one side of the river and sold on the other.

However, by mid-1877 the famous Lincoln County feud was ready to erupt, and Billy was in the middle of it. John H. Chisum, the noted New Mexico cattle king, accused small ranchers of rustling his cattle. The small ranchers, in turn, made similar charges against Chisum and his associates, a lawyer named McSween, and an Englishman by the name of John H. Tunstall.

Billy had decided to settle down and was working as a cowboy on the Tunstall Ranch. Oldtimers recalled that his good nature made him a great favorite with all the other hands. Billy was also a good friend of John Chisum.

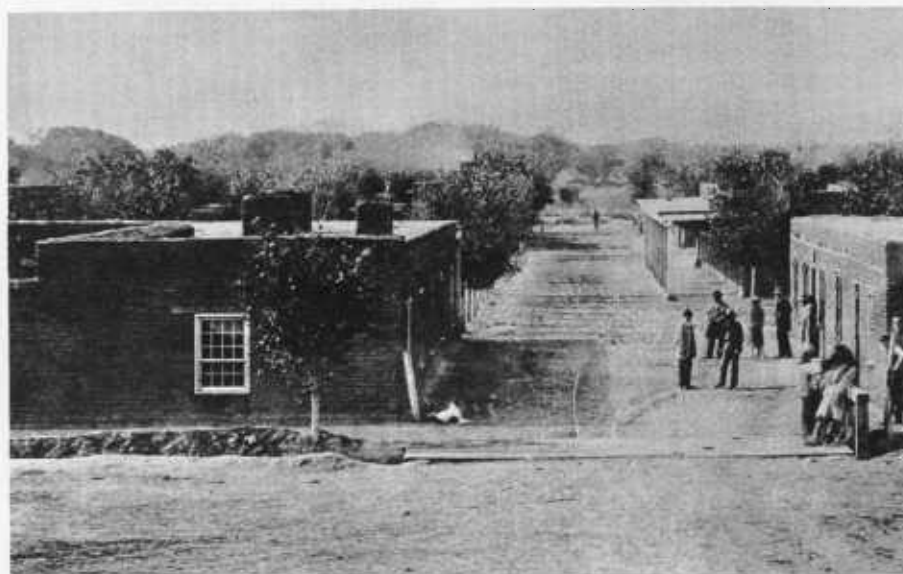
The smaller ranchers were led by the firm of Murphy and Dolan, a supply store in Lincoln County.

Most historians agree that about this time the feud took on political overtones. Murphy managed to get a cowboy named Brady elected sheriff of Lincoln County. Brady's posse downed several rounds of whisky in Murphy's saloon and headed



In the Bosque Redondo (grove of trees) area of the Pecos River country in New Mexico, soldiers and Indians built the original Fort Sumner and Indian Reservation. Here, new company quarters are being erected by Indians. The cottonwood limbs set out along the irrigation ditches later became large trees. Construction materials are adobe bricks. The Pecos River is in the background.

This photograph of company quarters was made after construction was completed. The view is from the sutler's store, straight down the street and into the wooded area west of the compound. Note the open ditch and plank crossing. Pioneer citizens and Indians mingled freely within the historic fort, named for General Edwin Vose Sumner, who died March 21, 1863, as the new fort was being built.



for the Tunstall Ranch. They met Tunstall on the road and killed him. The story also relates that Billy swore a solemn oath he would track down and kill every man who had helped to murder his friend and benefactor.

Sheriff Brady posted a reward for Billy the Kid "Dead or Alive." Shortly afterward Sheriff Brady was killed, and Billy was charged with his murder.

This was the crime for which Billy was later sentenced to hang.

President Rutherford B. Hayes had removed Territorial Governor Samuel B. Axtell in 1878 and replaced him with Gen. Lew Wallace. Wallace issued a pardon to all participants in the Lincoln County war except Billy the Kid. He sent word he would like a meeting with Billy to discuss his surrender and trial for the killing of Sheriff Brady.

New Mexico historians agree Governor Wallace told the Kid that if he would surrender and stand trial for the killing of Sheriff Brady he would be pardoned if he was convicted.

He also was to be pardoned for all of his other crimes.

In April of 1881 Billy was captured and put on trial. He was convicted of Brady's murder, and the court ordered him to be hanged on May 13, 1881.

On April 28, Billy escaped, killing two deputies.

He was trailed to the Maxwell House in De Baca County. Here he was shot and killed by Sheriff Pat Garrett.

Billy the Kid was buried in the old military cemetery.

Rogue, desperado, western badman? As the Spanish Americans would say, "¿Quien sabe?" which translates "Who knows?"

Certain it is that some will curse the day that such a fiend was spawned, while others will recount with reverent awe the 21 notches he carved on his pistol butt.

Meanwhile, let the controversy rage. It should bring more and more people to the site to look and talk and conjecture.

That's what will make the folks happy in Fort Sumner.

Looking back the other way from company quarters toward the sutler's store you can see soldiers standing at ease and dogs sleeping in the street. Captain John C. Cremony in his book, "Life Among the Apaches," described in detail the careful selection of the site on which Fort Sumner and the Indian Reservation were erected. He called it "the most beautiful Indian fort in the United States."

