

BILLY THE KID IN TIMBERLAKE?

Much has been said and written about William Bonney and Pat Garrett and whether the grave at Ft. Sumner actually contains the real Billy the Kid killed by Lincoln County Sheriff Pat Garrett in 1881. Recently it has come to forefront with the possible pardoning of Billy the Kid, by Bill Richardson, (current governor) and the DNA evidence that has been acquired by former Lincoln County Sheriff Tom Sullivan and former Deputy Steven Sederwall with privately donated money.

A story goes that when Billy the Kid was shot by Pat Garrett, his body was turned over to the Mexican women for burial. They found him still breathing and substituted for his body in the coffin that of a Mexican man who had died the night before. One woman, Isadora, carefully nursed him until he could be taken by night, hiding him in a straw mattress, for escape and recovery.

Billy was familiar with the Ramah area as he himself has spent many days in Outlaw Canyon. He took the name of John Miller. One story written by Atheling Bond of Ramah states that John Miller had a six-shooter about eight inches longer than an ordinary six-shooter, hanging up on this wall. When asked why all the notches on the gun, he replied "well, those represent the men I've killed." As they got to talking, John Miller pulled off his shirt and showed his back where he had been shot. He had been shot about 12 times. His wife's name was Isadora and she told Atheling Bond that his name is not John Miller, his name is Billy the Kid.

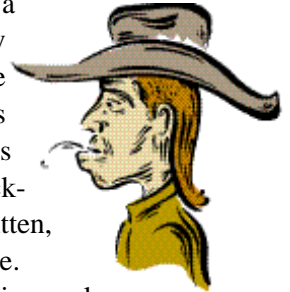
Herman Tacklanburg was a stowaway from Germany who worked his way to New Mexico where he knew Billy the Kid as a youngster. In his later years he came to Ramah and recognized Billy but kept his identity secret.

John Miller adopted a Navajo child named Max. The stories of John and Max Miller are well know to people living in Ramah, such as Gene Lambson and the Crocketts (who lived close by Miller). In 1938 the federal government interviewed a cattleman who said "he doubts very much if Pat Garrett really killed Billy the Kid."

Frank Coe, who knew the Kid well and had often ridden with him, told him (the cattleman) he could saddle his horse at sunrise at his ranch on the Ruidoso, and eat supper with the Kid at sundown." Also, a man by the name of John Collins had been a friend of Billy the Kid. When Sheriff Pat Garrett supposedly killed the Kid, Collins claimed the next day he helped bury the corpse of the man Garrett killed and it was not Billy the Kid.

Historians still puzzle over such basic

Billy the Kid facts as the day and place of his birth, and even his real name. Was he born Henry McCarty in New York City in November 1859, as some believe? Or was he Henry Antrim? Where did William H. Bonney come from, the alias he adopted in the wake of the killing of a Mr. Cahill. And what did he actually look like? The famous tintype – the only photographic image historians concur is really Billy the Kid – shows an impossibly homely boy, so buck-toothed that he could, as has been written, eat a pumpkin through a picket fence.



Sullivan and Sederwall's investigative work found 26 individuals who claimed to be Billy the Kid. However, they felt Helen Airy's book, "Whatever Happened to Billy the Kid?" about John Miller made a lot of sense.

Sullivan and Sederwall found the wooden workbench on which the Kid's body was supposedly laid after being shot and this bench was saturated in blood. The famous forensic expert

Dr. Henry Lee successfully pulled DNA from the bench.

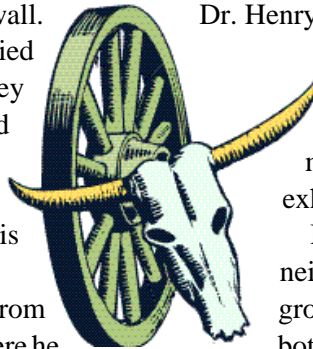
John Miller had been buried in Prescott. He entered the Arizona Pioneers' Home after injuring his hip in a fall from a roof and died 8 months later on March 14, 1937. The Miller exhumation was granted to obtain DNA evidence.

Miller's grave held no marker or headstone, and neither did the grave closest to his. Once in the ground the investigators found two sets of remains, both white males, resting side by side in graves separated by 3 to 4 feet. Which one was Miller? They pulled bones from both graves. According to Sederwall "We were shocked when we got him up. He had buck teeth just like the Kid and a bullet hole in the upper left chest that exited the shoulder blade."

Dr. Laura Fulginiti (forensic anthropologist) wasn't as enthusiastic as she couldn't tell whether it was from a gunshot wound or not. She examined the second body, finding no evidence of gunshot wound. But she did find a hip injury that was still in the process of repairing at the time of death. This fit the story from Airy's book that Miller had fallen off a roof just prior to coming to the Pioneers' Home.

The DNA expert present at the exhumation was unable to extract usable DNA from Hip Man, but he did get a usable sample from Scapula Man.

Did it match the blood on the workbench? We still don't know. Currently there is a legal battle under the Inspection of



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Public Records Act to produce the records from that investigation by Sullivan and Sederwall. Sullivan and Sederwall say anything they did was on personal time and using their own or privately donated money, so any records they might have are their personal material. Scot Stinnett and Gale Cooper want Lee's analysis of the DNA from the workbench, John Miller (Scapula Man) and William Hudspeth (Hip Man) and information regarding any payment to Lee.

Exhumation requests for Billy the Kid at Ft. Sumner and Catherine Antrim who is purported to be Billy's mother have been refused. A match of either man might force historians to rewrite one of the West's most iconic stories. These days, the Kid generates more dollars for New Mexico's Lincoln County than cattle. We will probably never know 'who' is actually buried 'where' as everybody is lawyered up to preserve their reputations and their incomes.

Many stories abound but, as with all stories, they need to be taken with a grain of salt. It still is exciting to think that Billy the Kid spent many days in the Timberlake area and his final resting place is in Prescott, Arizona. ✓

Special thanks to Kate Walling (Timberlake Landowner) for her contribution to this article.

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