

BACK-TRAILING ON THE OLD FRONTIERS

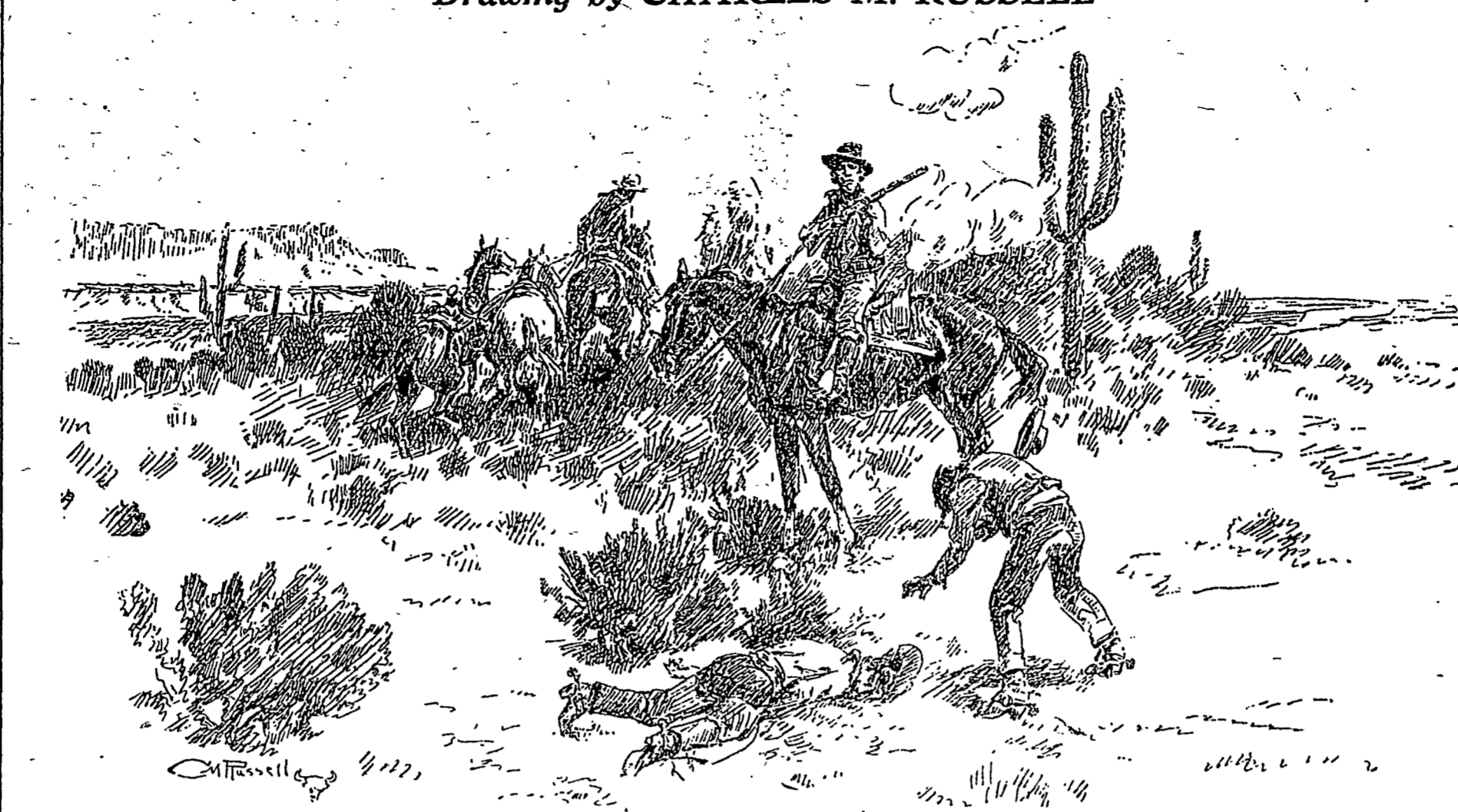
Drawing by CHARLES M. RUSSELL

Both the northwest and the southwest, in frontier days, had their full quota of bad men, many of picturesque type, whose names will live as long as that of Robin Hood. The lives of some, such as Slade and Plummer, were so interwoven with events of great historical interest during periods of romance in the west that they will always remain outstanding figures in that great drama of the last century to which Roosevelt gave the title, *The Winning of the West*.

The southwest has developed many more bad men than the northwest, due to a larger population of mixed bloods, and there have been no more desperate outlaws than those of Texas, New Mexico and Arizona. Of these one figure stands forth as the most prominent in a period of outlawry along the southwestern border which found its climax in the Lincoln county war, known, first locally, and then nationally, as *Billy the Kid*. Killed by a sheriff at the age of 21, he had more than a score of killings marked up against him, some to his credit. During the few years of his career on the border he lived in an atmosphere of intense factional feeling and bitter hatred, where an enemy was to be shot down in fair fight or cold blood, and where a man was expected always to risk his own life to save a friend. Billy the Kid lived by this creed. He was a perfect example of the real bad man and his memory is respected accordingly by the few surviving friends and foes of his time, who knew the counterfeit bad man from the genuine.

The true name of this outlaw was William H. Bonney. He was born in the slum district of East side New York in November, 1859. In 1862 his father removed to Coffeyville, Kansas, on the border of the Indian Nations, in 1862, where soon after he died. The mother then moved to Colorado, where she took a second husband, and then, following the shifting frontier, the family moved to New Mexico.

First Killing at Twelve Years
The Kid was precocious far beyond his years, and being reared amid surroundings where lawlessness was the rule, he picked as his heroes men who led as gunfighters, gamblers or both. When still a little boy, having just passed his 12th birthday, he became involved in a saloon quarrel in which a friend was being badly beaten, and killed with a pocket-knife a man who had previously insulted him. With a companion only a year or two older than himself, he rode to the Fort Bowie reservation in Arizona. There the youngsters killed three Apache Indians, stole a band of horses and drove them to Tucson, where they sold them. The Kid, despite his tender years, was able to make a comfortable living as a monte dealer until, in a gamblers' quarrel, he killed another man. He fled across the line into old Mexico, where he had his first real gun duel. He accused a Mexican, Jose Martinez, of cheating. The latter was notoriously quick with a gun. As they sprang to their feet, both the Kid and the Mexican



The Kid Shoots Down Two Prisoners in Cold Blood

Billy the Kid, Chief Figure in Bloody Lincoln County Border War in New Mexico, Was Outstanding Type of Bad Man of Old Frontier Days

draw. The Kid was a second the quicker and the Mexican fell with a bullet through his heart. The Kid was now a confirmed killer. He had served an apprenticeship that fitted him for the life of fighting and bloodshed in which he was to play a leading role in the brief time before he, too, was to pay with his life.

The Lincoln County War

The Lincoln county war was in reality a feud inspired by self-interest ranged against self-interest. Bad feeling, which had smoldered for four years and had resulted in several series of killings, turned to actual border warfare in 1874. At that time Lincoln county, New Mexico, was as large as Pennsylvania, extending eastward from the Rio Grande river and embracing a tract of plateau and rugged mountain land 200 miles square. The two dominant cattle owners of the district were John Chisum, described as fearless, shrewd, and unscrupulous, but genial and magnetic; and Major L. G. Murphy, a union officer during the Civil war who had located as a post trader at Fort Stanton, who was also a type of intelligent, generous and shrewd frontiersman. Chisum ran 80,000 head of cattle, and was a true type of cattle baron. Murphy "staked" every little cow man in Lincoln county, including scores who hung on the flanks of Chisum's herd and stole his cattle. These little cattle owners supported Murphy and built up his prestige. He became interested in government beef contracts and soon developed into a dangerous enemy of Chisum.

The two factions, each with considerable followings, were on the verge of open warfare when Billy the Kid arrived in Lincoln county. He was nearly at his physical growth at the time, standing about five feet seven and a half inches and weighing 135 pounds. Always slight and slender, a hard rider and active as a cat, he did not live long enough to take on weight. His hair was light brown; his eyes blue-gray, with curious hazel spots in them. His face was rather long, his chin narrow and long and his front teeth were a trifle prominent. He was a pleasant-mannered youth, cheerful and laughing, but not talkative. His face was beardless, and his skin was as soft and tender as a girl's.

Works for Chisum

The Kid went to work for John Chisum as a cowpuncher, and it is known that when he left his service he cherished a grudge against the cattle man. He then got employment with a young Englishman, J. H. Tunstall, to whom he took a great liking.

At this time Chisum's right hand man was Alexander A. McSween, a lawyer. Tunstall formed a partnership with McSween in the banking and mercantile business, and he also started a cattle ranch of his own. Being thus associated with the Chisum faction, he won the enmity of Major Murphy, who had by now gained much power. Murphy, as the result of some legal encounter with McSween, secured a writ of attachment on the latter's property, and sent out a posse, which claimed legal authority, to levy on McSween's cattle. Members of this

posse, meeting Tunstall alone on the road, killed him in a most brutal manner. This act was the beginning of the Lincoln county war. Billy the Kid, hating Chisum, nevertheless ranged himself with Chisum's lieutenant, McSween, in the feud, and swore to avenge Tunstall's death by killing every member of the posse that had murdered his friend. Tunstall's foreman, Dick Brewer, became leader of the McSween fighting men, and Billy the Kid was his chief lieutenant. They organized a band and started for Murphy's range to seek revenge on him and his friends. On the way they came across a party of five men, two of whom, Morton and Baker, had been present at the killing of Tunstall. The pair surrendered to Brewer on promise of safety, and were held for a time at Roswell.

Kills Two Prisoners

The Kid had not forgotten his vow to kill all of Tunstall's slayers, but he bided his time. In the posse under Brewer was one, McClosky, who had promised the prisoners, Morton and Baker, his protection. On the trail between Roswell and Agua Negra, a member of the posse, Joe McNab, turned suddenly on McClosky and shot him dead. The two captives, fearing the worst, threw themselves from their horses and fell on their knees, begging to be spared. The Kid then shot them both and their dead bodies were left on the plain.

Murder having now been committed on both sides, the countryside began rapidly to line up with one faction or the other. Every man must make his choice or be under suspicion by both.

The next fight took place when Brewer's band attacked a house in which Buckshot Roberts, a Murphy man, was staying. Roberts was killed, but first shot and mortally wounded Brewer. His death left Billy the Kid as chief of the Chisum and McSween forces.

A term of the circuit court was to be held at Lincoln, but the district judge, Warren Bristol, knew that the McSween men planned to kill him, and sent word to the sheriff that he would not hold court at the time. The sheriff, Brady, was on his way to the courthouse to open court and adjourn it when he fell dead under a volley fired from ambush by the Kid and five of his men. A deputy sheriff was also killed.

A Pitched Battle

Three months later, in July, 1878, the Kid and his gang were rounded up at the McSween home at Lincoln, there being a dozen white desperadoes and some Mexicans in their party. In two other dwellings down the street 40 Mexicans, also identified with the McSween party, likewise barricaded themselves. At once the Murphy forces surrounded the McSween house and a pitched battle began, the Kid and his men firing from the windows and from loopholes at their foes, who had taken cover across the street. For three days the battle kept up, some 60 men on the Kid's side and 40 on the side of the Murphy men.

To keep the McSween men from leaving their fortifications, the

leader of the Murphy forces, Peppin, stationed three men on a steep hillside behind the McSween house. With long-range buffalo guns they threw many bullets into the Kid's fort. At last a Mexican, Herrera, who was one of the best shots with the Kid, fired at a distance of 900 yards and broke the back of one of the men on the hillside, Charlie Crawford, who died the next day in great agony.

The following morning a troop of negro cavalry from Fort Stanton, entered Lincoln, but declined to take a hand in the combat, the commanding officer saying that the sheriff (a Murphy man) was there and in charge of his own posse. Mrs. McSween, who was in the besieged house with her husband, came out and begged the officer to stop the fighting. He merely offered her a safe escort to the fort, but she refused to go and returned to her husband for what she knew must be the end.

Escape of the Kid

That evening the Murphy forces set fire to the house in front and rear, and set a keg of powder where the flames would reach it. With the blaze under way there was an explosion which made the house untenable. McSween, his nerve gone, for a time refused to try to escape, but was finally sufficiently heartened by his wife to make the effort. The Kid said the time had come.

Suddenly out of the back door of the burning dwelling there burst forth a group of desperate men, followed by the one woman. Ahead ran Billy the Kid and half a dozen of his followers. There was a flashing of six-shooters at close range. McSween fell dead with three other men. Mrs. McSween escaped unharmed, as did also the Kid and several of his men. The Murphy forces lost one or two of their number.

This fight cost McSween his life at a time when his star seemed on the ascendant. Four days before the siege began he had word that the president had deposed Governor Angell of New Mexico because the latter had appointed a Murphy man, Peppin, as sheriff. General Lew Wallace, the famous soldier and author of *Ben Hur*, was sent to Lincoln to replace the governor. He promised Mrs. McSween protection, but he quickly reached a decision that any legal settlement of the Lincoln county war was impossible.

General Wallace Meets the Kid
Governor Wallace recognized, however, that the most important figure in the feud that had embroiled an enormously big county was Billy the Kid. He asked the Kid to come into Lincoln for a conference, promising him protection. The Kid came in fully armed and the governor was surprised to meet a bright-faced, pleasant-spoken boy. In the presence of witnesses General Wallace asked the Kid to lay down his arms and promised to pardon him if he would stand trial and should be convicted in the courts.

The Kid laughed in his engaging manner, but declined. "There is no justice for me in the courts of this country now," he said. "I've

gone too far." He left the room and returned to his outlaw band and the certain fate that awaited him sooner or later.

The Lincoln county war at this stage involved international complications. The British government demanded indemnity for the killing of Tunstall and the United States finally paid it.

Just before the fight at Lincoln, Major Murphy had died at Santa Fe. McSween had now been killed, and many of the fighters, ruined by the long feud, were willing to lay down their arms and call it quits. There seemed to be little reason or excuse for continuing the bloodshed. A conference was arranged in which the McSween forces were represented by Billy the Kid and two of his followers; and the Murphy forces by Murphy's partner, James Dolan, and by two other men. Each man entered the conference room with a pistol in his belt and a cocked Winchester in his hand. They talked it over and finally shook hands all around, agreeing to end the war then and there. As they started across the street for the nearest saloon, to seal the bargain with a drink in frontier style, they met a Los Vegas lawyer, Chapman, who had been retained by Mrs. McSween to aid her in her quest for revenge for the death of her husband. Seeing him, a Murphy man, Campbell, accused the attorney and accused him of being there to stir up trouble between the two factions. Pulling a pistol, Campbell shot Chapman through the heart. Campbell was later arrested, but escaped and left the country.

The End of the Kid

A few months after this, in January, 1880, the Kid justifiably killed a bad man from the Texas Panhandle of the name of Grant, who had come to New Mexico to kill the Kid. The youthful outlaw had by this time gathered a formidable band of bad men around him and was going in for cattle stealing on a large scale. In November, 1880, a posse set forth from the town of White Oaks to bring in the Kid dead or alive. They surrounded the Kid and his gang at the Great-house ranch and laid siege. One of the posse, Jimmy Carlyle, after some parley, took off his pistol belt and went unarmed into the ranch house for a conference. Two hours later Carlyle was seen by the rest of the posse to break through a window and start to run. Several shots followed and Carlyle fell dead. This murder had a big effect in sealing the doom of the Kid, for Carlyle was popular in that district.

Pat Garrett, the new sheriff of Lincoln county, organized a posse of such size and strength that the Kid finally was run to earth in a ranch house and forced to surrender. His first trial for murder ended in his acquittal, but a second trial for the killing of Sheriff Brady at Lincoln resulted in his conviction and sentence of death. He was held under guard in the second story of a store building, from which he escaped after killing both of his guards. Then the chase was on again and Sheriff Garrett after some weeks rode with two deputies into the little town of Sumner. The trio went to the house of a mixed-blood, Pete Maxwell, who was a friend both to Garrett and to the Kid. The two deputies remained on the porch, while Garrett entered Maxwell's bedroom to talk to him. A few minutes previously the Kid had ridden into the yard and had started to go to bed in a cabin behind the house. Being hungry he went to the Maxwell kitchen to get food. He was bare-headed and bare-footed. His pistol hung at his side and in his hand he carried a butcher knife with which to cut the meat. The night was dark, and as the Kid stepped onto the verandah, one of Garrett's deputies moved his foot, jingling a spur. This made the Kid suspicious, and he stepped into Maxwell's bedroom to inquire who was on the porch. Garrett was sitting on Maxwell's bed. The Kid spoke to Maxwell. As he did so Garrett fired at the dim form between him and the door. The Kid fell dead. He was 21 years and seven months old, and had killed 21 men. The date of his death was July 14, 1881.

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