

Wyatt Berry Stapp Earp Biography

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Biography

Wyatt Earp was the legendary lawman-turned-vigilante of Tombstone Territory, Arizona, during the days of America's "Wild West" (the latter half of the nineteenth century). His name is often associated with other well-known figures of the era, such as Bat Masterson and John ("Doc") Holliday.

Born Wyatt Berry Stapp Earp in Monmouth, Illinois, in 1848, Earp and three brothers headed west for glory and adventure. While working as a buffalo hunter, Earp met Masterson and the eventual friends became peace officers in the area of Dodge City, Kansas. Earp developed a reputation, not as a famous gunfighter, but as one who was able to keep order without firing a gun. After serving as deputy marshal and deputy sheriff for many years, in 1879, Earp and his brothers left for Tombstone, close to the Mexican border. In this lawless territory, they became caught up in repeated clashes with the local criminal element, cowboys who stole cattle back and forth over the border and regularly raided stagecoaches.

On October 26, 1881, three of the Earp brothers and Holliday fought four men in the famed shootout at (although in reality, it was only nearby) the OK Corral. The other four men, Ike and Billy Clanton and Tom and Frank McLaury, were cowboys whose general lawlessness had grown into a full-fledged feud with the Earps. The fight left the McLaurys and Billy Clanton dead; Wyatt Earp was unhurt, though his brothers and Holliday all suffered gunshot wounds. At this juncture, Hollywood has immortalized Earp. However, shortly thereafter, he lost two brothers to gunfire in revenge, and he began a mission of retribution with Holliday that led to the shooting deaths of the suspects. He then rode out of Arizona, beyond the jurisdiction of the then-local law. Earp lived out his remaining days in California with his common-law wife, Josephine, dying of natural causes in 1929.