

“Wild Bill” Elliott

I suppose that every boy that grew up in 40s and 50s was a big fan of the Saturday afternoon western matinee. I can remember as just a tow-headed kid in Arkansas going out in the cotton fields on Saturday morning and picking 12 pounds of cotton to get 25¢. The price of the ticket to get in was 15¢ and the popcorn and coke were a nickel a piece. It was pure childhood heaven. And I loved all those old cowboy stars that now are riding the big range in the sky, Roy Rogers, Gene Autry, Lash LaRue, Johnny Mac Brown, The Durango Kid and too many more to mention all of them. But, I do believe my absolute favorite was “Wild Bill” Elliott. I have visited many of their gravesites and I promise I am not going to write about all of them.

Wild Bill was born as Gordon Nance in Pattonsburg, Missouri, and the date has been clearly identified in records as October 16, 1903, or 1904. He was the real thing, unlike some of my other favorites. He grew up on a ranch as a riding, roping, cattle busting youngster idolizing William Hart. He attended Rockingham College, but the lure of Hollywood was just too great. In California he enrolled in the Pasadena Community Playhouse for stage performances. A talent scout signed him for movies, but few of them came anywhere near westerns, and he was a far cry from an overnight sensation. He did become the most prolific of the ‘B’ grade western star in Hollywood history. And he went through a whole series of name changes. He would appear, not star, in 209 films over his career. He was Gordon Elliott in 131 films, Wild Bill Elliot in 37, Bill Elliott in 31, William Elliott in 10 and he was never billed as William “Wild Bill” Elliott or with the name Nance. Only 77 of that 209 were westerns and he also appeared in some of the old matinee serials. The name Wild Bill came about as a result of a serial, *The Great Adventures of Wild Bill Hickok*, in which he played the starring role.

He is probably most noted for his role in making Fred Harman’s cartoon, Red Ryder, come to life. The role of Little Beaver, his Indian boy sidekick, was played by Bobby Blake, who we all know now as the grown up Robert Blake of Baretta fame, and the only suspect in the murder of his wife, Bonny Lee Blakely.

The popularity of the western movie began to fade and Wild Bill was aging. He semi-retired and moved to Las Vegas where he hosted a local television show interviewing guests and showing his old movies. He also became a pitchman for a cigarette company. In 1961, his 34-year marriage to Helen Josephine Meyer ended and he took Dolly Moore as his second wife. He died of lung cancer in 1965. Wild Bill was cremated. His ashes rest in a Mausoleum in Palm Desert Memorial Park in Las Vegas, Nevada.



Source: <http://www.b-westerns.com/elliott.htm> - The Old Corral