

## **William Matthew "Bill" Tilghman, Jr.**

Bill Tilghman, Jr. was born on July 4, 1854, the 78<sup>th</sup> birthday of our country in Fort Dodge, Webster County, Iowa. Tilghman, Sr. was the sutler at Fort Ridgely, Minnesota, for a brief time before he homesteaded near Atchison, Kansas, where he raised Bill, Jr.

As a young man growing up, Bill, Jr. (hereinafter Bill) had no formal education through the school system, but he was well trained in all those skills that were necessary for life on the frontier. In his lifetime he was to be a buffalo hunter, a farmer, an army scout, law officer, rancher, saloon keeper, state senator and a businessman. It was as a law officer that he was to excel and become famous.

As a boy he casually met James Butler Hickok and in 1871 he left home at the age of sixteen and became a buffalo hunter. Over the next five years he claimed to have killed over 12,000 buffalo. In September, 1872, he killed four of seven Cheyenne pilfering his camp. But not all was goodness in his early life. In 1873, he began a lifelong friendship with notorious horse rustler Dutch Henry Born. He was also a friend of a noted desperado known as William "Hurricane Bill" Martin. In 1874, he narrowly escaped lynching on a false charge of murder. After ending his career as a hunter, in 1875 he moved to Dodge City, Kansas, and became a saloon owner, although he was a teetotaler. While in Dodge City, he was a participant in the Dodge City War with Wild Bill Hickok, Wyatt Earp, Bat Masterson, and Dave Mather. The Cheyenne Indians went on a raiding surge in September of 1878, and Bill signed on with the United States Cavalry as an Indian scout. In 1878, he was

twice arrested for theft. Later that year, he accepted an offer from Bat Masterson to be his deputy sheriff. His reputation took a turn to the good in 1878 when he married Flora Kendall, who died in 1900.

For most of the rest of his life Bill Tilghman was a lawman, and according to many, the greatest in frontier history. In 1884 he was appointed as Dodge City marshal. He served the city well and friends presented him with a badge made of \$20 gold pieces.

By 1889 he had moved on to Guthrie, Oklahoma, and was appointed deputy U.S. marshal by Judge Isaac Parker (the Hanging Judge). Bill, and two other deputy U.S. marshals, Chris Madsen and Heck Thomas were known as the Three Guardsmen and were largely responsible for eliminating organized crime in the Oklahoma Territory.

One of Bill's more famous accomplishments was his single-handed capture of Bill Doolin in Eureka Springs, Arkansas. Doolin was later to escape and was shot to death by Chris Madsen and a posse of U.S. Marshalls.

In the early 1900s, Bill became fed up with the way Hollywood was glamorizing the outlaws of the day. So, he and his friends, E. D. Nix (the U.S. marshal) and Chris Madsen wrote and starred as themselves in the film, **Passing of the Oklahoma Outlaws** to show how things really were back then. They even managed to get one of their old outlaw nemeses, Arkansas Tom Jones, released from prison to act as a consultant.

Bill retired from law enforcement in 1910 and was elected to the Oklahoma State Senate. In 1911, he accepted the position of police chief of Oklahoma City. Again he retired, but in 1924, at the age of 70, the citizens of

Cromwell, Oklahoma, managed to talk him into cleaning up their corrupt city. He reluctantly took the job as city marshal. In less than a year he had virtually cleaned up the city, but on November 1, 1924, a corrupt, drunken Federal probation officer, Wiley Lynn, got into a struggle with him. Lynn, the official behind much of the city's corruption, pulled a concealed weapon and shot him in the stomach. He died 20 minutes later.





**Bill Tilghman's original marker**

**Sources: *Encyclopedia of Frontier Biography*, by Dan L. Thrapp, and *Encyclopedia of Western Gunfighters*, by Bill O'Neal.**