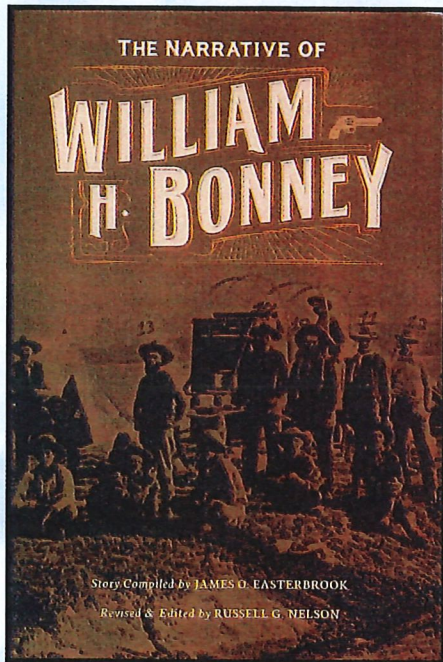


# BOOK REVIEW

By Dave Ehrig, Editor

## *"The Narrative of William H. Bonney" a.k.a. "BILLY THE KID!"*

by **Russell G. Nelson**



Russell G. Nelson is a lifelong student of the American Frontier, his primary interest being the Rocky Mountain fur trade and the pre-settlement West. An early member of the American Mountainmen, he taught himself many frontier era skills including how to tan leather and pack and shoe horses. He has hunted the Rocky Mountains and trapped from the upper Arkansas River to the Gunnison River.

Nelson revised and edited the original narrative by James O. Easterbrook (1936-2011). Easterbrook was a lifelong student of Wm. H. Bonney and the Lincoln County War. He began his research on Billy the Kid while in his teens and never stopped digging and investigating the life of the most maligned cowboy in the history of the Southwest. It was Easterbrook's seminal work, his final iconic contribution to America's lost frontier.

Of the 457 page narrative of William H. Bonney, Russell Nelson says, "I tightened it up as much as possible without changing content. And I stand by the colorful syntax for it reflects the way Bill used the language."

When I began reading this book, I wasn't sure how my review should start. After all, my prejudices against looking favorably at Billy the Kid began with the earliest black-and-white TV. Not once was William H. Bonney ever lauded as an iconic pillar of westward migration; in truth, I like many, just heard the name and immediately thought, "Oh, that demonic gunslinger!"

Not having ever studied this man as Easterbrook tirelessly

had, I was soon shocked to learn that I may have been duped by the dime store novelists out to make a quick sensationalist dollar at the Kid's expense.

But one thing that was important to me was that Billy the Kid started practicing with a black powder cap 'n ball. He graduated to black powder cartridges. And his history went down as one who was one of the most accurate shootists of the Old West.

From the very first pages of this modern tome, Easterbrook and Nelson lead the reader down a different trail. One meets the real Irish immigrant who not only led a remarkable life, he actually survived it. To quote Billy from the book's epilogue, "I guess everything I witnessed from 1859 to 1887, well if you look back you'll see it's not only the story of the west; it's the story of how the Industrial Revolution changed our lives . . ." I've seen old tintype photographs, and I've seen silent pictures. Clara Bow, Douglas Fairbanks, Tom Mix, William S. Hart and Charlie Chaplin. And I've seen tractors, plowed land, rubber tires, The War to End All Wars, the Woodrow Wilsons and the Kaiser Wilhems, the Teddy Roosevelts and the Spanish-American War. I've seen the people of my West—Wyatt Earp—pass on. So many names. . ."

And Nelson's Easterbrook/Postscript: William H. Bonney was last observed in public at the first Billy the Kid Pageant held in Lincoln, New Mexico on Saturday, August 3rd, 1940. Costumed local residents reenacted known episodes from Billy's life, notably his April 28th, 1881 escape from the Lincoln County Courthouse. . . Bill sat in the bleachers . . . His reaction to the play is not recorded.

You as the reader of this terrific, action-packed narrative will need to fill in all of the events of his life and draw your own conclusions.

My conclusion is that The Kid, William H. Bonney, lived a larger-than-life epic journey through history of the West; and the book is one terrific read! See the ad in MB for pricing/delivery; [www.BillytheKidlivedon.com](http://www.BillytheKidlivedon.com).

A graduate of OCS, Fort Benning, Georgia; Mr. Nelson is a retired U.S. Army infantry officer (Regular Army.) He is a life member of Disabled American Veterans and the National Rifle Association; he is also the author of the 20th Century Western novel "Pals." MB