

**William Floyd "Willie or Billy" Claiborne, a.k.a. "The Kid"**

Or was his name Calyborne? Clayborn? Or was it Claborn? Or did Billy even know. There are copies of his signature in at least two of these versions. All his trial documents list him as Clayborne. Viola Slaughter, wife of the noted Arizona lawman John Horton Slaughter, knew him well and spelled it as Claibourne. Well, we do know for sure that he was born in Mississippi. Or was it Louisiana? But more than likely it was in Alabama. The 1870 census shows records that would fit all three states. The record for Mississippi spells the name as Claborn, but the census takers were not the best for spelling. But this one seems to best fit the bill for Billy (Photo at right) and it shows that he was born in Alabama. He stated in court that he was born on October 21, 1860, and was from Mississippi. So we accept the date and the fact that he probably meant that he was raised in Mississippi.



He migrated to the Devil's River area of west Texas where some accounts say he killed two men. He became a cowboy and went to work for John Horton Slaughter. He was part of a crew that drove a Slaughter herd of cattle from Texas to Arizona and stayed.

On October 1, 1881, in Charleston, Arizona Territory (now a ghost town), he shot and killed a blacksmith named James Hickey at Harry Queen's Saloon. Exactly why he did it is not known. But Harry Queen, the saloon owner and eyewitness gave a good account of what happened. He stated: "I was present when James Hickey was killed. Hickey was standing close to the table where a game of cards was being plaid (sic) in my saloon. He turned to walk out at the same time this young fellow they called The Kid was coming into the saloon. When he saw Hickey he turned to walk out. Hickey said at that time he would like to see any Prick Eating Son of a Bitch stand in front of them. The Kid turned around and said don't follow me, you have been following me long enough and I won't stand it any longer. If you follow me any longer I will kill you. The Kid drew his pistol, raised it, and fires. Hickey turn (sic) partly around after the report of the pistol and fell on his face and left side. After The Kid told Hickey not to follow him any longer Hickey continued to advance."

Billy's indictment for the murder did not come down until November 26, and his time in Charleston permitted his acquaintance with the McLaury brothers and the Clanton brothers to become a friendship. Billy moved over to Galeyville where he first met "Curly Bill" Brocius and Johnny Ringo. There is much speculation that Billy

and Ringo were lovers. Could that be because they both wore matching pinky rings?

Reading about Billy's trial is almost like reading a comedy act. Almost every day that the court was convened there would be missing jurors, witnesses or attorneys. On the first day of trial only four jurors showed up. The following Monday three jurors were absent. When everyone was finally present, the jury debated for a bit, came back out and asked if they could convict on second degree murder. They were told they could not. So they declared a mistrial.

A new trial was set for May 11, and most of the defense attorneys were absent. The new trial date was May 15<sup>th</sup> and not enough jurors showed up. Again, they finally turned the trial to the jury for deliberations. After three days Billy was found not guilty and set free.



On July 13, 1882, Johnny Ringo (Photo at left) was found with a single bullet wound to the head. The death was too controversial to cover here. Lots of folks think suicide, others murder. What is important is that Billy was dead sure that Buckskin Frank Leslie killed him. And this thought was to get Billy dead.

No longer under indictment, he registered to vote as William Floyd Clayborne, age 22, on July 26, 1882, as a Tombstone resident.

Then, Billy apparently went up to Globe and was working in the mines. A friend reported that he ran into Billy and asked him what he was doing in Globe. Billy replied. "I'm working double shifts to get enough money to go to Tombstone and kill Frank Leslie." When asked what Frank had done to him, he replied, "Never done nothing to me personal, but I aim to kill him for murdering John Ringo."

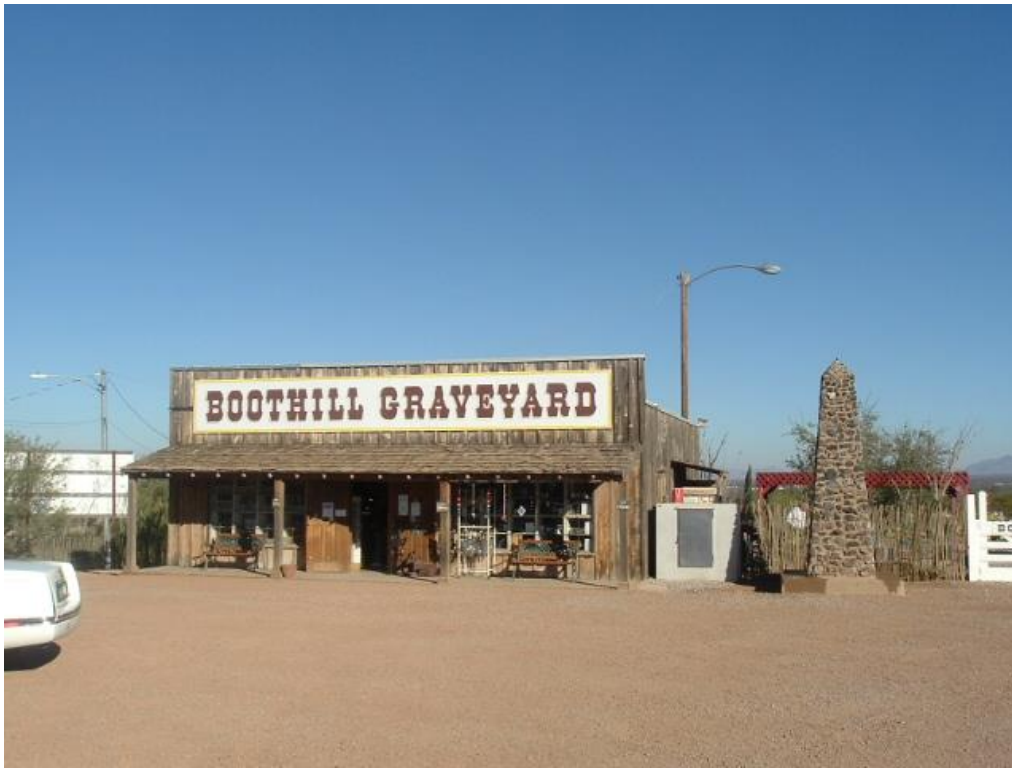
Billy did return to Tombstone and in the early morning of November 14, 1882, after drinking all night Billy went to the Oriental Saloon where he knew Leslie was tending bar. Billy began a verbal assault on Leslie who tried to calm him down. Finally, Leslie had to physically throw Billy out of the bar. Billy retrieved his rifle and hid behind a fruit stand and waited for Leslie to come out.

A friend warned Leslie of Billy's position and he took his own pistol and went out onto the street through a side door. He called out to Billy, "Don't shoot, I don't want you to kill me, nor do I want to have to shoot you." When he heard the voice Billy shot wildly and Leslie returned fire, striking Billy in the chest with a mortal wound. About noon on that day Billy died and his final words were supposed to have been, "Frank Leslie murdered John Ringo." Though Leslie denied

the murder, some years later while he was serving a life term in Yuma Territorial prison for killing his wife he is alleged to having confessed the murder to a prison guard.



Billy, Hickey, and Leslie are buried in Tombstone's Boothill Cemetery. Johnny Ringo was buried in Turkey Canyon, underneath the tree where he died.



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Young**