

Dora Hand

Dora is one of the more notable victims of being in the wrong place at the wrong time. No one seems to be sure where Dora came from. Some say Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania, and some St. Louis, Missouri. There are even folks that think she came from a proper Boston family. She did drift into Dodge City from the east, probably St. Louis and again there is a difference. Was it May of 1877, or the summer of 1878? Whichever, she came into Dodge City on the suggestion and with her best friend, Fannie Garretson. She has been reported as born in 1840 and 1844. If her age of 34 is correct, then around 1844 would be most accurate.



Dora Hand (Fannie Keenan)

Perhaps she studied music in Europe and had even sung opera in New York City. She was certainly a performer and captured the heart of Dodge City in a very short time. If she arrived in the summer of 1878 and died in the early morning hours of October 4, 1878, she had a very few short months to gain all the popularity that she enjoyed. She may have been suffering from tuberculosis and agreed to come west for that reason. She was described as beautiful and gifted. Ham Bell, the owner of one of Dodge City's watering holes said her beauty was marred only by a small scar on her forehead which she vainly kept hidden. Her maiden name is unknown and she was estranged from her husband, Ted Hand,

and went by her stage name, Fannie Kennan. When Bell once asked her what her real name was, she said, "Well, Mr. Bell, take your pick, one's just as good as the other."



Dora's friend Fannie Garretson (photo at left) had played Dodge City previously and was a friend of Mayor James H. "Dog" Kelley. This friendship landed the two ladies an engagement at the Lady Gay Dance Hall and Saloon for a very rewarding \$40.00 per week each. The saloon was owned by Ben Springer and Jim Masterson. Masterson was the brother of Ed Masterson, the late Dodge City Marshal and Bat Masterson. She was an overnight sensation at the Lady Gay where she not only won the hearts of all the rowdy cowhands; she also won the mayor's.

The two were often seen together around town and she became the featured performer at the Lady Gay and was now making \$75 per week. That compares quite favorably with Wyatt Earp who was making the same salary per month. Then Kelley worked out an agreement with the Alhambra so that Dora could sing there five nights a week for two hours. This increase in income allowed her to begin doing charity work in earnest. She would help nurse the sick, feed the poor and bankroll down and out cowboys. It was as an angel of mercy that Dodge would remember her. She was one of the most respected persons in Dodge.

But not everybody felt the same way about her. Some members of the Ladies Aid Society resented such a person doing better deeds than they. Reverend Mr. Wright invited her to solo at the Sunday evening services. The church was totally packed and an hour later she was back in the saloon singing. Some called her a "soiled dove" though there was no evidence of her being a whore. She was often seen going and coming from Dog Kelley's home.

James "Spike" Kenedy was a rowdy 23-year-old cowboy from one of Texas' most wealthy families. He was born in Brownsville, Texas on February 25, 1855. His father, Mifflin Kenedy, a Quaker from Pennsylvania, was the owner of a 172,000 acre ranch. His mother Petra was the daughter of a Mexican governor under the Spanish rule and a devout Catholic. Some called Spike the handsomest boy in the panhandle. Spike did not share the religious beliefs of either of his parents. Bat Masterson's biographer, Robert DeArment, said Spike "liked whiskey, whooping, and whoring, and as heir to the Kenedy fortune, he considered himself immune to arrest by cow-town marshals". His father made attempts to straighten him out and for a time it would work. But every time he got into Dodge City he would revert to his wild ways. The difference between Spike and Dora couldn't have been more widespread.

Dora captured Spike's heart just as she had Dog Kelley's. But there was no reciprocation in Spike's case and he was extremely jealous of Kelley. One night he hung around the saloon so long that he was really drunk and so attentive to Dora that Kelley threw him out. Spike was arrested and this developed into a deep hatred for the Dodge City lawmen. He was, of course, too cowardly to take it up with the lawmen and instead shared his grievances with Mayor Kelley. When Kelley informed Spike that the lawmen had acted under his orders and that he had better behave himself when in town or the treatment would get worse, Spike flew into a rage and jumped at the mayor. Kelley beat Spike thoroughly and threw him into the street. He made a lot of threats against the mayor's life before mounting up and riding out of town.

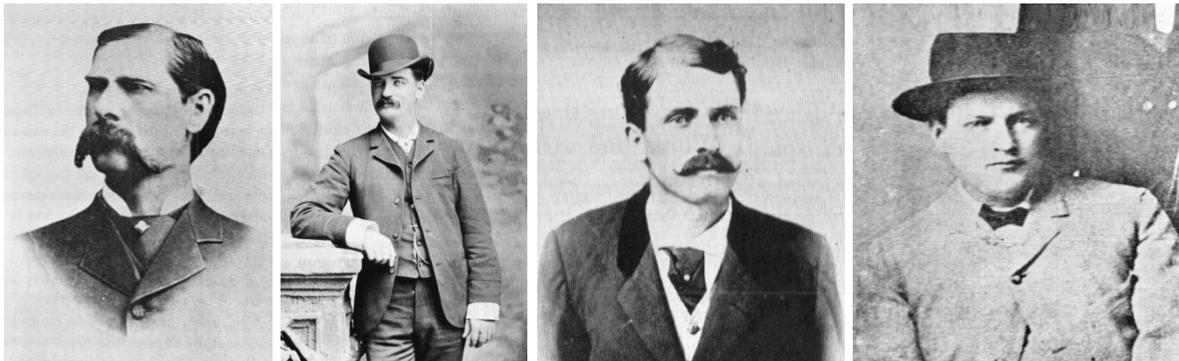
Spike couldn't carry a gun in Dodge City, so he had to make contingency plans. He closely watched Kelley's movements until he learned Kelley's nightly routines. He then

boarded a train for Kansas City, bought the fastest horse he could find and returned to Dodge. Kelley's cabin stood behind the Great Western Hotel and was the same home that Dora had been seen going and coming many times. Spike's great plan was to shoot Kelly through the thin wall of the two-room cabin while he slept. He knew that Kelley slept in the front room of the house.

Spike chose to do the nasty deed in the early morning hours of October 4, 1878. What Spike didn't know was that Kelley was suffering from some internal sickness and needed an operation. Kelley was not on good terms with the town doctor and had gone to nearby Fort Dodge to have army surgeons perform the operation. Fredric R. Young in his book tells us that Fannie Garretson and Dora had been sharing the back room of Kelley's cabin and in his absence Fannie was going to move into the front bedroom while Kelley recovered.

On or about 4 to 4:30 in the morning a lone horseman rode up and fired into Kelley's cabin. Once again reports differ. Some say that it was .44 caliber pistol used and some a .45. It really matters not as the results are the same. Some say that two shots were fired and some say four. If it was four, two of them missed the house entirely, quite unlikely. The trajectories of the bullets indicate that the shots came from a man on horseback who then galloped off. The *Ford County Globe* reported on October 8, "The first shot, after passing through the front door, struck the floor, passed through the carpet and the facing of the partition and lodged in the next room. The second shot also passed through the door, but was apparently more elevated, striking the first bed, passing over Miss Garretson, who occupied the bed, through two quilts, through the plastered partition and, after passing through the bed clothing of the second bed, struck Fannie Keenan in the right side, under the arm, killing her instantly.

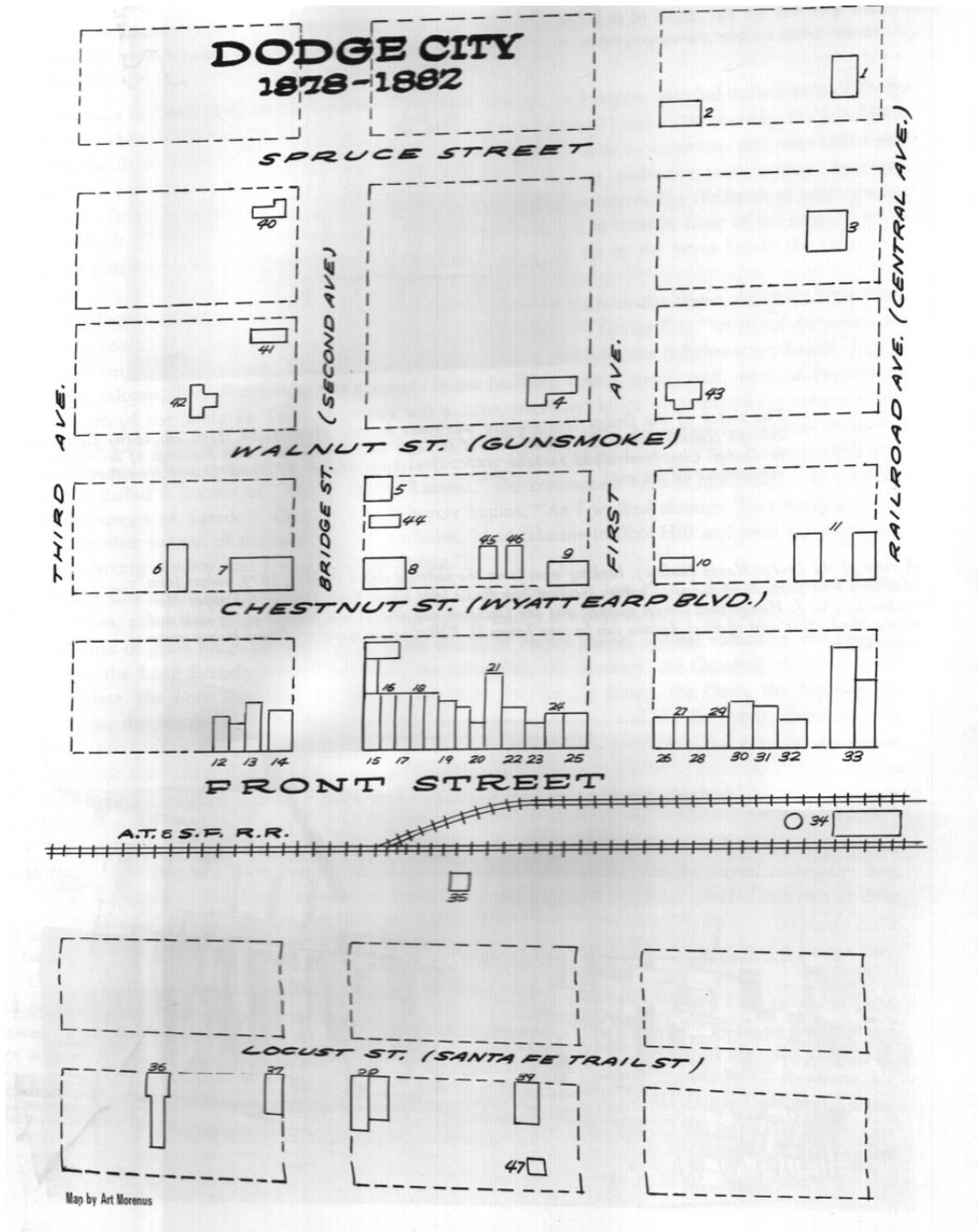
Bat Masterson and Wyatt Earp immediately responded to the gunshots and, though there were no witnesses, were told that Spike did the shooting. Later that day, arguably, the most famous posse ever assembled went after Spike. The posse consisted of Ford County Sherriff Bat Masterson and his deputy William Duffy, Marshal Charlie Bassett, Assistant Marshal Wyatt Earp and Bill Tilghman who would become one of the Deputy US Marshals under Judge Isaac Parker.



L to R: Wyatt Earp, Bat Masterson, Bill Tilghman, Jr. and Charlie Bassett

The posse guessed Spike would head for his father's ranch near Tascosa in the Texas Panhandle. They devised a route that would get them well ahead of Spike. By riding through a tremendous rain storm they reached his trail ahead of him near Meade City and waited. Spike caught sight of the lawmen and tried to gallop away. The old buffalo hunter Bat Masterson put a .50 caliber round through Spike's left shoulder and Wyatt shot the horse from under him. When the posse pulled the wounded man from under his horse he asked, "Did I kill him?" Upon hearing that it was Dora that was dead, Spike took out his rage on Masterson for not making his shot a fatal blow.

Dora's funeral was one of the largest in Dodge City's history. Every business in town closed and over 400 people appeared in the procession that carried her body to Boot Hill. Was she buried there? Probably. Was her body exhumed and reburied in Maple Grove? Maybe. On the internet, the Maple Grove official website claims that she is buried there. Apparently no one knows where as there is no tombstone or monument to mark her passing.



17. Long Branch Saloon
39. Great Western Hotel

23. Alhambra Saloon 38. Lady Gay Saloon
47. Mayor Kelley's cabin where Dora died.

Spike was arrested and brought back to Dodge City on October 6, 1878, and kept him in jail for his own protection from angry citizens and to keep him from trial. His arm was so badly damaged that local doctors took five inches from his left arm and left him permanently disabled. His rich daddy rushed to Dodge City with a bag filled with money. The secret trial or hearing took place in Bat Masterson's office which was too small for spectators. It was decided that there was not enough evidence to convict him. The story is that when daddy left town his bag was \$25,000 lighter. I would never say that Bat and Wyatt took a payoff, but someone surely lined their pockets. Fannie Garretson was seen fleeing town as soon as the verdict was known.

Mifflin Kenedy saved his son from a murder charge this time, but he couldn't save him forever. In April, 1884, less than six years after murdering the Queen of Dodge City, he was indicted for murdering a trouble maker on his ranch. While awaiting trial he died of malaria or tuberculosis on December 29, 1884. He is buried in Buena Vista Memorial Park in Brownsville, Cameron County, Texas



Thanks to Angelica a fellow Find a Grave member from Texas for the photo.

Sources: *Dodge City: Up Through a Century in Story and Pictures*, by Fredric R. Young; and *The Killing of Dora Hand*, by Sharon L. Silva and Lee A. Silva in December, 2009 issue of Wild West Magazine.