

## To Hell on a Fast Horse: Billy the Kid, Pat Garrett, and the Epic Chase to Justice in the Old West

By: [Mark Lee Gardner](#)

**About the book:** Billy the Kid—a.k.a. Henry McCarty, Henry Antrim, and William Bonney—was a horse thief, cattle rustler, charismatic rogue, and cold-blooded killer. A superb shot, the Kid gunned down four men single-handedly and five others with the help of cronies. Two of his victims were Lincoln County, New Mexico, deputies killed during the Kid's brazen daylight escape from the courthouse jail on April 28, 1881. For new sheriff Pat Garrett, an acquaintance of Billy's, the chase was on. Mark Lee Gardner digs beneath the myth to take a fresh look at these two men, their relationship, and their epic ride to immortality.

**About the Author:** Mark Lee Gardner grew up in rural Missouri in the small town of Breckenridge in the heart of historic Jesse James country. He's written extensively about the American West, on subjects such as the Santa Fe Trail, George Armstrong Custer, Bent's Old Fort, Geronimo, Billy the Kid, and Crazy Horse. His book on the 1876 Northfield raid by the notorious James-Younger gang, *Shot All To Hell*, received the Western Writers of America Spur Award for best western nonfiction historical book, the Best Book Award from the Wild West History Association, and the Milton F. Perry Award for Best Nonfiction Book. His *Rough Riders*, published in 2016, received the Army Historical Foundation Distinguished Writing Award, the Father Thomas J. Steele Award for History, and the Colorado Book Award for Biography.

### People:

- Billy the Kid (Henry McCarty)- American outlaw and gunfighter linked to nine murders in the Old West.
- Pat Garrett- Sheriff of Lincoln County, New Mexico as well as an American Old West lawman, bartender, and customs Agent. Most notable for tracking down and taking down 'Billy the Kid'
- Charlie Bowdre-Part of Billy the Kid's gang and one of his closest friends. Dies in 1880 mistaken for Billy the Kid
- Dave Rudabaugh-Member of the 'Dodge City Gang' and linked to help robbing stagecoaches with Billy the Kid as well as being locked in and escaping prison together.
- John W. Poe and Thomas McKinney-Part of Pat Garrett's posse and help take down Billy the Kid
- Pete Maxwell-His property was where Billy the Kid was hiding out and was killed
- James B. "Jim" Miller-Still possibly connected to the murder of Pat Garrett

### Discussion Questions:

- How does Gardner's portrayal of the Lincoln County War shape your understanding of law, order, and power in the Old West?
- In what ways does the book challenge or reinforce your previous ideas about frontier justice?
- How important is historical context in judging the actions of figures like Billy the Kid and Pat Garrett?
- How does Gardner humanize Billy the Kid? Did this change your perception of him?

- To what extent do you think Billy was a product of his environment rather than a purely criminal figure?
- Why do you think Billy the Kid became such a lasting legend in American culture?
- How is Pat Garrett portrayed—as a hero, a villain, or something in between?
- What motivations do you think drove Garrett to pursue Billy so relentlessly?
- Do you believe Garrett’s actions were guided more by personal ambition or a sense of justice?
- Does the book suggest that “justice” in the Old West was achievable, or inherently flawed?
- How does the concept of justice in the book compare to modern ideas of law enforcement?
- Were there moments where you sympathized with both sides of the chase? Why or why not?
- How effective is Gardner’s storytelling style in blending historical research with narrative tension?
- Did the pacing of the chase enhance or detract from your engagement with the story?
- What sources or perspectives does Gardner rely on most, and how does that shape the narrative?
- What does the book say about how history turns real people into legends?
- How do power, loyalty, and betrayal function as recurring themes throughout the book?
- Why do you think stories of outlaws and lawmen still resonate so strongly today?
- Which character did you find most compelling, and why?
- After finishing the book, how do you personally define justice in the context of the Old West?

**Read Alike:**

- Butch Cassidy: the true story of an American outlaw By: Leerhsen, Charles
- Before Billy the Kid: the boy behind the legendary outlaw By: Groves, Melody
- Queen of all mayhem: the blood-soaked life and mysterious death of Belle Starr, the most dangerous woman in the West By: Huckelbridge, Dane Ibridge