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## OLD PROBLEM – NEW ANSWERS

PHILIP J. RASCH

SINCE THE PUBLICATION OF Pat Garrett's *The Authentic Life of Billy, the Kid* in 1882 it has been generally accepted that William H. Bonney, alias Billy, the Kid, was born in New York City on November 23, 1859. In 1862, said Garrett, the Bonney family, which now included a younger son, Edward, started west. The father died in Coffeyville, Kansas; the widow and her sons proceeded to Colorado, where she married a man named Antrim.

During the succeeding years biographers of the Kid searched in vain for any legal record of these events. It was not until somewhat over ten years ago that the first success was achieved. At that time Rasch and Mullin uncovered the legal and church records showing that Antrim married Mrs. Catherine McCarty in the Presbyterian Church at Santa Fe on March 1, 1873. Witnesses to the ceremony included the bride's two sons, Henry and Joseph McCarty. These writers also called attention to the fact that Coffeyville did not come into existence until 1871.<sup>1</sup>

There was little difficulty in demonstrating that Henry McCarty and William Bonney were one and the same individual, and the discrepancy in the names of his mother was apparently satisfactorily resolved by Miss Lois Telfer. Miss Telfer, who claimed to be a collateral descendant of the Bonney family, stated that her family's tradition recounted that the Bonney marriage had proved an unhappy one and that the wife had resumed her maiden name following the death of her husband. Because, she said, she planned to write a book about her notorious kinsman, she could not make any data from the family records available to other researchers. To

date her book has not appeared and no substantiating evidence has been forthcoming, which has raised serious doubts of its existence.

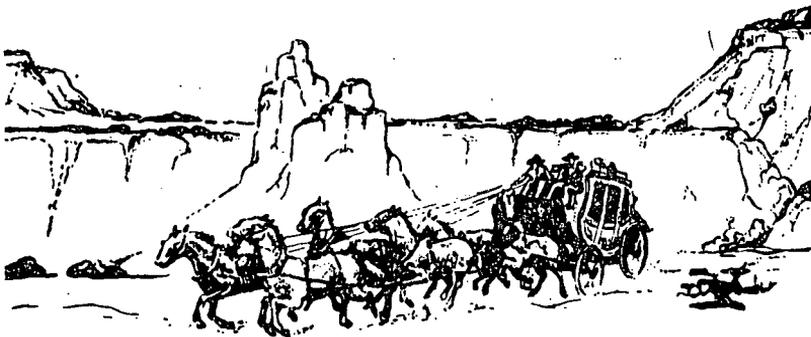
In 1964 the question was reopened by William H. Carson. Acting on a suggestion made in a second paper by Rasch and Mullin,<sup>2</sup> Carson undertook a study of the documents relating to two New York residents of the 1860's—Patrick McCarthy and Catherine Devine. He was able to show that they had been married in the Church of St. Peter, in New York City, on June 19, 1851, and that a son, Patrick Henry McCarthy, had been born in that city on September 17, 1859. Further, the residence of the family was in an area which has traditionally been claimed as the birthplace of the Kid. On the basis of his findings Carson proposed the hypothesis that Henry McCarty and Patrick Henry McCarthy were the same person.

There were some rather obvious difficulties with this theory, such as the fact that McCarthy is not quite the same as McCarty; but it seemed attractive enough to warrant further investigation. It occurred to Rasch that if a census listing could be found for the Kid it might contain clues which would be useful in settling the problem. The obvious records to search were those of San Miguel County for 1880. For once the obvious solution was the correct one, but the answer which resulted was disconcerting to say the least.

The returns reveal that in June, 1880 the Kid was living with Charles and Manuela Bowdre at Fort Stanton. He told census enumerator Lorenzo Labadie that he was twenty-five years old and had been born in Missouri. Both his father and his mother were natives of Missouri!<sup>3</sup> Was he deliberately misleading the enumerator, or is this the reason for his biographers' inability to find record of him in New York? At this time it is not possible even to venture an intelligent guess, but the picture is now more confused than ever before. Biographers are now confronted with three theories—what might be called the Telfer, Carson, and Missouri hypotheses. How they can be resolved—if at all—is certainly far from clear.

## NOTES

1. P. J. Rasch and R. L. Mullin, "New Light on the Legend of Billy the Kid," *New Mexico Folklore Record*, 6 (1953), 1-5.
2. P. J. Rasch, and R. N. Mullin, "Dim Trails: The Pursuit of the McCarty Family," *New Mexico Folklore Record*, 8 (1954), 6-11.
3. Census for San Miguel County 1880. Page No. 22, Supervisor's Dist. No. 86, Enumeration Dist. No. 37, Dwelling House No. 240, Family No. 286.



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