

4-1-1986

A Note on Billy the Kid Artifacts

William E. Tydeman

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/nmhr>

Recommended Citation

Tydeman, William E.. "A Note on Billy the Kid Artifacts." *New Mexico Historical Review* 61, 2 (1986).
<https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/nmhr/vol61/iss2/3>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by UNM Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in *New Mexico Historical Review* by an authorized editor of UNM Digital Repository. For more information, please contact disc@unm.edu.

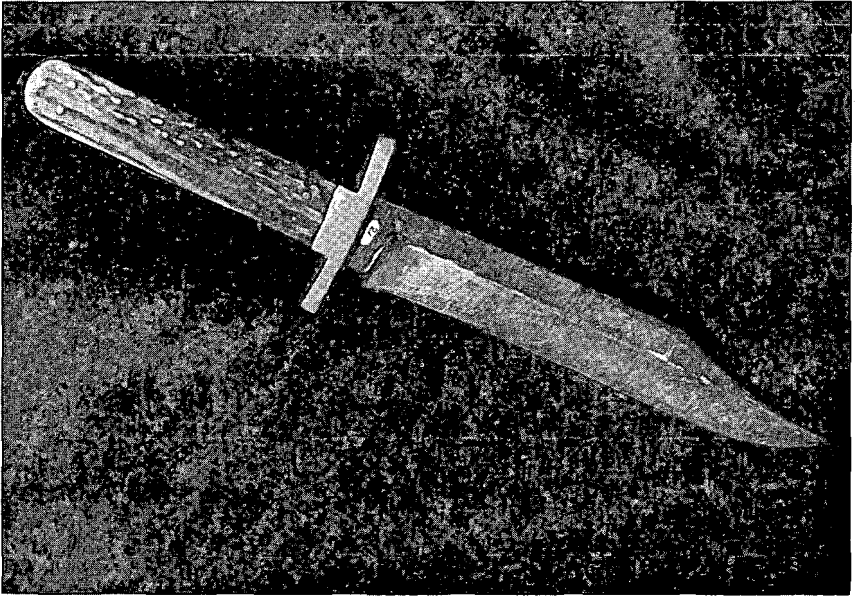
A Note on Billy the Kid Artifacts

WILLIAM E. TYDEMAN

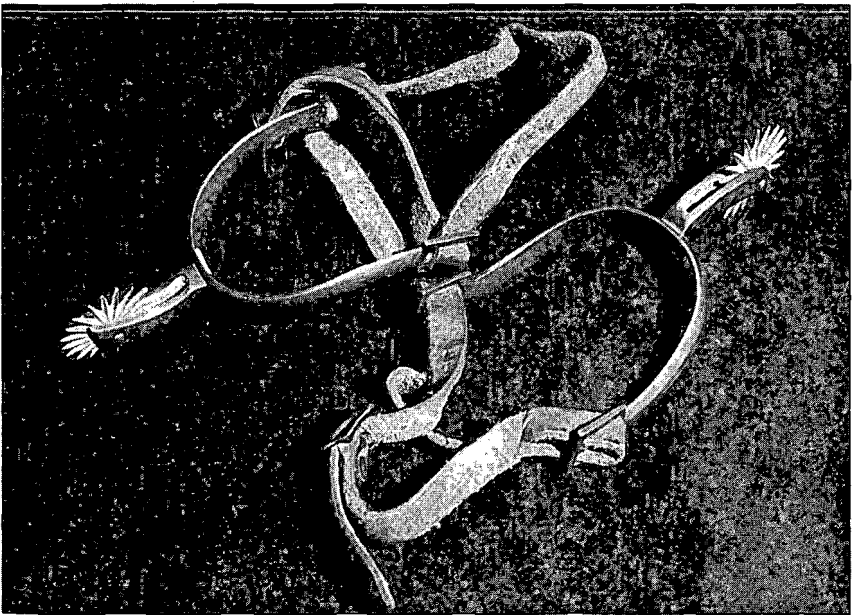
Collections rarely grow with the precision curators would like. Boundaries blur and the collecting scope often exceeds original limits. Libraries often accept realia and museums, upon occasion, accession manuscripts. Usually these materials bear a relationship to the more conventional collections, but over the years an interesting assortment of good items accumulate. In the Special Collections Department of the General Library of the University of New Mexico are such curiosities as the walking cane of President Franklin Pierce, handcuffs used on the Bell Ranch, and the spurs and knife of one William H. Bonney. These particular artifacts were all part of a larger manuscript collection given to the library in 1939 by Mr. and Mrs. Miguel Otero, Jr.

Otero was a great collector and, of course, a serious student of the legend of Billy the Kid. In *The Real Billy The Kid* Otero states, "In Santa Fé, we were allowed to visit The Kid in jail, taking him cigarette papers, tobacco, chewing gum, candy, pies and nuts. He was very fond of sweets and asked us to bring him all we could. The Kid's general appearance was the same as most boys of his age. I was just one month older than Billy. I liked The Kid very much, and long before we even reached Santa Fé, nothing would have pleased me more than to have

William E. Tydeman is director of the Special Collections department of the University of New Mexico Library.



The Billy the Kid knife. Photo by Richard Pelletier.
Courtesy Special Collections, University of New Mexico.



The Billy the Kid spurs. Photo by Richard Pelletier.
Courtesy Special Collections, University of New Mexico.

witnessed his escape."¹ But Otero says nothing about a gift from the Kid. The 1939 note accompanying the two brass spurs (containing rows of 20 barbs and manufactured by Oakes) bears the following inscription: "The spurs were given to Gov. Miguel Otero by William H. Bonney in the Old Santa Fe Jail, Dec. 30, 1880. . . ."²

The knife has a different history. It is a bone-handled knife twelve and one quarter inches long and made by G. Wostenholm and Son of the Washington Works, Sheffield, England. The cryptic letters TX *1 appear near the hilt. The original tag which accompanied the knife states in what appears to be Otero's handwriting: "Billy The Kid lost this knife in a horse bet to Chavez y Chavez, famous bandit of the Silva gang of outlaws. When Chavez was captured in 1895, Rafael Lucero, a mounted policeman, got the knife. The knife was secured from Rafael Lucero of El Pino, New Mexico."³

Providing proper exhibition security for these artifacts has been a difficult problem. Visitors come from long distances wanting to examine the pieces. Letters arrive. "Do you still have them?" "Can I see them? How much are they worth?" In the last year the library has begun to explore a loan agreement with the Lincoln County Heritage Trust of Lincoln, New Mexico. If the difficult questions of transfer, insurance, security and commercial use can be settled, the Kid's spurs and knife may have a secure museum environment where they may be enjoyed by a wide audience. As a result we may finally have an answer to the question that pervades the entire transaction and is asked by every correspondent and visitor. How much are they really worth?

1. Miguel Antonio Otero, *The Real Billy The Kid: With New Light on the Lincoln County War* (New York: Rufus Rockwell Wilson, 1936), 178.

2. Museum Catalog Record, catalog no. 25, accession no. 3, August 18, 1966, Zimmerman Library, University of New Mexico.

3. Museum Catalog Record, catalog no. 21, accession no. 3, August 18, 1966, Zimmerman Library, University of New Mexico.



Charles C. Perry presented this photograph of himself to Annie Ballard on February 19, 1891. Courtesy Morgan Nelson and William Gibbs, Roswell, New Mexico.