Today in History - April 28

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Today's Stories: **Billy the Kid** | **Henry Reed** | **Billy Bitzer and the Biograph**

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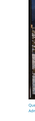
Billy the Kid

Billy the Kid escaped from the Lincoln County, New Mexico jail house on **April 28**, 1881, killing two deputies on guard. He avoided capture until July 14, when he was ambushed and killed by Sheriff Pat Garrett at the ranch home of Pete Maxwell. Billy the Kid is buried in Fort Sumner, New Mexico.

Although he has become synonymous with the legendary Wild West, Billy the Kid was probably born on New York City's East Side, in 1859 or 1860. By the time he was a young teenager, he had moved with his family to New Mexico, by way of Kansas and Colorado.



Jal Interior, [McDermitt, Nevada], Carl Fleischhauer, photographer, May 1981; Buckaroos in Paradise: Ranching Culture in Northern Nevada, 1945 to 1982, American Folklife Center

While still a boy, Billy the Kid became involved in petty thievery, and later horse theft. In an August 1877 altercation at a saloon in Camp Grant, Arizona, he shot and killed a man for the first time. Reputed to have been responsible for the murder of 21 men by the time he was 21 years old (the actual total was between four and ten), he had been convicted of murder and sentenced to hang when he made his dramatic escape from the Lincoln County jail.

José Garcia y Trujillo recounts his memories of Billy the Kid and expresses his belief in the myth of Billy the Kid's survival in a 1936 interview taken in New Mexico:

> *You think Billy the Kind let himself be shot in the dark like that? No! Senora — Billy the Kind — never. I say Billy the Kind with these eyes. Many times, with these eyes. That Billy, tenia un aglitea en su mentre — en su mente aqui.* [1] *understood he meant that Billy The Kind had an extraordinary quickness of mind. Again he pointed to his forehead and then with a quick motion to the sky. "Una funcion electrica," he said. Something that worked like lightnings.* [2] *I don't want to dispute against you Senora, but in my mind which is the picture of a man I know it is not true, — Everybody like Billy The Kind — to viste penetrate el corazon de toda la gente... his face went to everybody heart. Muy generoso hombre, Billy The Kind — a very generous man. All the Mexican people, they like him. He give money, horses, drinks — what he have. To whom was good to Billy The Kind, he was good to them. Siempre muy caballero, muy senor — always very polite, very much of a gentleman.*
>
> "Interview with Jose Garcia y Trujillo," Jane Smith, author; New Mexico, August 26, 1936, American Life Histories: Manuscripts from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936 to 1940, Manuscript Division

There are many more stories about this legendary outlaw in American Life Histories: Manuscripts from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936 to 1940. Most, however, do not portray him in such a positive light. To find them, search the collection on Billy the Kid.

Billy the Kid's true identity is still a matter of speculation. Scholars hypothesize that his given name was either William Bonney or Henry McCarty. There are those who believe that after he escaped, he became a performer in Buffalo Bill's Wild West Parade under the name of "Brushy Bill" Roberts.

Quanah, Tard County, New Mexico, John Collier, photographer, Spring 1943, Farm Security Administration/Office of War Information Color Photographs, Prints & Photographs Division

Learn More

- To see more images of Billy the Kid's stomping grounds, search on *New Mexico*, or a Southwestern state of your choice, in these collections:
  - Map Collections
  - Panoramic Photographs
  - Detroit Publishing Company
  - Farm Security Administration/Office of War Information Black-and-White Negatives
- To sample the rich musical heritage and cultural traditions of northern New Mexico and southern Colorado, browse the site Index in Hispanic Music & Culture from the Northern Rio Grande. The Index is a dual-language, a digital collection documenting the religious and secular music of the Spanish-speaking residents of this region.
- Also, don't miss the Today in History features for western novelist Owen Wister, outlaw Jesse James, and independent frontiersman "Wild Bill" Hickock.
- Read the Library of Congress Blog post Young Gun for more information about the exploits and legends surrounding the life of Billy the Kid.

Henry Reed

James Henry Reed Reed, born as Henry Reed, was born on **April 28**, 1884, in the Appalachian Mountains of Monroe County, West Virginia. Reed was a master fiddler, banjoist, and harmonica player whose amazing repertoire consisted of hundreds of tunes, as well as multiple performance styles. His music conveyed tradition while setting new directions, and became a touchstone for academic research into the history of U.S. folk music.

Henry Reed was the narrow neck in the hourglass of tradition, through which tunes were guided back out into the wider currents of circulation.

Alan Jabbour

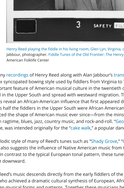
Jack and Henry Reed, ca. 1955; Henry Reed, age 19, plays banjo and his older brother Jack plays fiddle. Photograph from the collection of James Reed, reproduced with permission, Carl Fleischhauer, photographer, 1975, Fiddle Tunes of the Old Frontier: The Henry Reed Collection, American Folklife Center

Henry Reed learned the overwhelming majority of his tunes by ear and retained them by memory. He learned from elderly musicians such as Quince Collins, who was born around 1850 and served as a fiifer in the Mexican War and the Civil War. As a youngster, Reed learned to read music, played dits horn in a local band, and picked up a few additional tunes from sheet music. Though he never played professionally, he played occasionally for local dances and in countless home music sessions. Musical talent ran in his family, several of Reed's children accompanied him.

Henry Reed playing the fiddle, accompanied by Bobbie Thompson of the Hollow Rock String Band in guitar, at the Harrison (Virginia) Fiddlers Contest, Katherine B. Dixon, photographer; Summer 1967, Fiddle Tunes of the Old Frontier: The Henry Reed Collection, American Folklife Center

Reed's musical influence broadened significantly after 1966 when Karen and Alan Jabbour, graduate students at Duke University, began to audio tape his fiddling. Although he originally recorded Henry Reed for academic purposes, Alan Jabbour, an accomplished fiddler himself, also introduced members of the Hollow Rock String Band to the tapes. Tunes such as "Over the Waterfall," "Kitchen Girl," and "George Booker" soon became core elements of the band's repertoire, and Henry's name was credited. Since the band was at the epicenter of an old-time instrumental music revival that emerged in the Durham/Chapel Hill, North Carolina area in the late 1960s, Reed's music was passed from musician to musician through Jabbour's audiotapes as well as at fiddlers' conventions, festivals, and jam sessions. At the age of eighty-three, Reed began to enjoy greater recognition for a lifetime's labor of love.

The titles of Henry Reed's fiddle tunes are redolent of the old Appalachian frontier. Tunes such as "Cabin Creek" and "Shooting Creek" commemorate the arterial network of Appalachian rivers and creeks. "Kinked Horn," "Ducks in the Pond," and "Hoe Among the Peatings" evoke the woods and countryside. "Santa Anna's Retreat" and "British Field March" conjure up episodes in American military history.



Henry Reed playing the fiddle in his living room, Glen Lyn, Virginia, ca. 1967, Karen Singer Jabbour, photographer; Fiddle Tunes of the Old Frontier: The Henry Reed Collection, American Folklife Center

The many recordings of Henry Reed along with Alan Jabbour's transcriptions exemplify a complex syncopated bowing style used by fiddlers from Virginia to Texas. This style of fiddling, an important feature of American musical culture in the twentieth century, appears to have evolved in the Upper South and spread with westward migration. The style's syncopated patterns reveal an African-American influence that first appeared during the early 1800s, when perhaps half the fiddlers in the Upper South were African American. Syncopated patterns have influenced the shape of American music ever since—from the minstrel stage of the 1840s through ragtime, blues, jazz, country music, and rock and roll. "George Camp Meeting," for example, was intended originally for the "Lake walk," a popular dance of the ragtime era.

The melodic style of many of Reed's tunes such as "Shady Grove," "Duck Old Hen," or "Berry Lavora" also suggests the influence of Native American music from the Eastern Woodlands and Plains. In contrast to the typical European tonal pattern, these tunes begin in a high pitch and cascade downward.

Henry Reed's music descends directly from the early fiddlers of the Upper South, both black and white, who achieved a dramatic cultural synthesis of European, African and, possibly, Native American musical forms and patterns. Together these musicians helped to create and shape the character of what some claim is America's greatest cultural contribution to the world: American music. Fiddler Henry Reed, who died on February 8, 1968, embodied that music's varied vitality and ensured its continuance.

Learn More

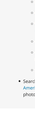
- Fiddle Tunes of the Old Frontier: The Henry Reed Collection is a field collection of traditional fiddle tunes performed by Henry Reed. These tunes evoke the history and spirit of Virginia's Appalachian frontier. Some strains by Germans, in the repertory of a few elder musicians, until their rediscovery and wider circulation by the next generation. Listen to Reed's version of "Lay Down," a tune recorded by Bill Monroe and his Bluegrass Boys in 1964 under the title "Salt Creek," and the piece "Breakdown in A" which joined the modern bluegrass repertory after Ralph Stanley and the Clinch Mountain Boys recorded it as "Clinch Mountain Backstep."
- Uncover the historical and musicological dimensions of Henry Reed's tunes by reading the "NOTES" written in item records in *Fiddle Tunes of the Old Frontier: The Henry Reed Collection*. For example, the bibliographic records for "Santa Anna's Retreat" and "West Virginia Gals" contain fascinating details about each piece.
- Get "goin' down to Cripple Creek and have some fun" by comparing Henry Reed's version of "Cripple Creek" in Fiddle Tunes of the Old Frontier: The Henry Reed Collection with a banjo version in Tending the Community: Folklife and Landscape in Southern West Virginia. Compare Henry Reed's version of "Barbara Allen" with accompanied and unaccompanied vocal versions by:
  - Lois and Nathan Judd in Voices from the Dust Bowl: the Charles L. Todd and Robert Sonkin Migliore Worker Collection, 1940 to 1941
  - Hule "Queen" Hines in Southern Mosaic: The John and Ruby Lomax 1939 Southern States Recording Trip
  - Virginia Meade in California Gold: Northern California Folk Music from the Thirties,
- Many people use sheet music to learn tunes that Reed most likely acquired by attentive listening. View the sheet music for instrumental and early twentieth-century tunes such as "My Little Girl," "Absence Makes the Heart Grow Fonder," and "Arkansas Traveler" in Historic American Sheet Music. Then, search on these same titles in Fiddle Tunes of the Old Frontier: The Henry Reed Collection to hear Reed's uniquely rendered versions.
- The American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress has digitized many of its collections. Some of the music collections are:
  - Hispano Music & Culture from the Northern Rio Grande: The Juan B. Rael Collection
  - Omaha Indian Music
  - Woody Guthrie and the Archive of American Folk Song: Correspondence, 1940 to 1950
  - Captain Pearl R. Rayl, Life on the Ohio and Erie Canal
  - California Gold: Northern California Folk Music from the Thirties Collected by Sidney Robertson Cowell
  - Southern Mosaic: The John and Ruby Lomax 1939 Southern States Recording Trip
- Search on *Monroe County, West Virginia*, in Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record/Historic American Landscapes Survey for black-and-white photographs and data pages for a variety of buildings.

Billy Bitzer and the Biograph

Cameraman G. W. "Billy" Bitzer filmed Professor Lovendes and his troupe of dogs and cats in the film short Stealing a Dinner on **April 28**, 1899. The film was shot on the rooftop of the Biograph Studios at 841 Broadway in New York City.

Stealing a dinner

Stealing a dinner by dogs



Stealing a Dinner, G.W. "Billy" Bitzer, camera; filmed April 28, 1899, United States: American Mutoscope and Biograph Company, 1903, Library of Congress Motion Pictures and Recordings and

Motion Pictures. Niver (Kemp) Collection. Motion Picture, Broadcasting & Recorded Sound Division

CONTINUOUS ENGAGEMENTS.

KEITH'S THEATRE, New York.
KEITH'S THEATRE, Boston.
KEITH'S THEATRE, Philadelphia.
KEITH'S THEATRE, Providence.
ORPHEUM THEATRE, San Francisco.
ORPHEUM THEATRE, Los Angeles.
COLUMBIA THEATRE, Cincinnati.
GRAND OPERA HOUSE, Indianapolis.
EMPIRE THEATRE, Cleveland.
PALACE MUSIC HALL, London.
FOLIES BERGERE, Paris.
WINTER GARDEN, Berlin.

6th SEASON OF THE AMERICAN BIOGRAPH.

Better and Stronger Than Ever.

We are still showing in the principal Music Halls and Vaudeville Theatres of the w rld. The only machine in existence using large film and showing large pictures.

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No such act has ever before been produced.

Do not confound the Biograph with inferior moving picture shows that tire the eye s and disappoint the audience.

THE BIOGRAPH IS AN ACT BY ITSELF AND WITHOUT A RIVAL.

AMERICAN MUTOSCOPE and BIOGRAPH COMPANY, 841 Broadway, New York.

Advertisement for the American Mutoscope & Biograph Company, *The New York Clipper*, September 7, 1901, page 601. Content and Historical Context. Variety Stage Sound Recordings and Motion Pictures. Motion Picture, Broadcasting & Recorded Sound Division

Three years earlier, Billy Bitzer assisted as newly formed American Mutoscope Company founder and former Edison associate, W. K. L. Dickson, developed a camera to rival the Edison Company's Kinetograph (and its kinetoscope viewer). One of only a few who understood the camera's operation, Bitzer filmed 1896 presidential candidate William McKinley, whose brother Abner was an investor in Biograph. He also filmed the actor Joseph Jefferson, another investor, doing scenes from *Rip Van Winkle* in 1896, aspects of the Spanish-American War in 1898, and the Jeffries-Sharkey championship fight in 1899. Although the company entered the commercial entertainment field with an offering of only six films, by 1902 their catalog listed 2,500 motion pictures, many shot by Bitzer.

Bitzer also photographed dramas enacted by the Biograph's stock company which included Mary Pickford, Blanche Sweet, Mack Sennett, Dorothy and Lillian Gish, Henry Walthall, Lionel Barrymore and D. W. Griffith. In the summer of 1908, Griffith moved to directing for Biograph and over the next 16 years one of his closest collaborators was Bitzer.

Together, Bitzer and Griffith forged the grammar and syntax of film. Bitzer pioneered lighting effects and developed camera innovations. Griffith enthusiastically encouraged actors to move from the histrionics of the Victorian stage to more subtle expressions before the camera. They perfected or introduced techniques including the iris effect and mattes, traveling and tracking shots, extreme long distance shots, and close ups. Griffith also edited for continuity, realized cross cutting, and developed multiple story lines.

When Griffith left the Biograph in 1913, he recruited Bitzer to shoot his historically flawed and profoundly controversial epic about Reconstruction, *The Birth of a Nation*. Although the Bitzer-Griffith collaboration continued for many years, the Biograph lost momentum and by 1917 was a part of the American memory.

Roosevelt's Rough Riders
Roosevelt's Rough Riders at drill

Share

Roosevelt's Rough Riders. United States: American Mutoscope and Biograph Company, c1903. The Spanish American War in Motion Pictures. Motion Picture, Broadcasting & Recorded Sound Division
From the *Biograph Picture Catalogue*: "A charge full of cowboy enthusiasm by Troop 'I,' the famous regiment, at Tampa, before its departure for the front."

In 1898, Edison cameraman William Paley and the Biograph's Billy Bitzer and Arthur Marvin filmed the first war-related actualities. To learn more, see the online presentation The Motion Picture Camera Goes to War in the collection The Spanish-American War in Motion Pictures.

Learn More

- *Stealing a Dinner* is just one of over 60 motion pictures available online in Variety Stage Sound Recordings and Motion Pictures. The majority of the films in this collection are drawn from the Library's extensive Paper Print Film Collection. The remaining films were produced by Hans A. Spanuth in Chicago from 1919 to 1920 for the series "Spanuth's Original Vod-A-Vil Movies." Browse through the list of motion pictures in this collection to find films featuring animal acts, burlesque, dance, comic sketches, dramatic excerpts, dramatic sketches, physical culture acts, and tableaus. See the Special Presentation on Content and Historical Context to learn more about the production of motion pictures as vaudeville acts.
- Learn more about the Biograph's rival in the early film industry. See the essays on the History of Edison Motion Pictures, a section of the collection Inventing Entertainment: The Early Motion Pictures and Sound Recordings of the Edison Companies.
- The collection Inside an American Factory: Films of the Westinghouse Works, 1904 features a series of 21 industrial films, among the world's first, filmed by Bitzer.
- Life in turn-of-the-century America is depicted by Bitzer and other cameramen in the film collections The Life of a City: Early Films of New York, 1898 to1906 and America at Work, America at Leisure: Motion Pictures from 1894 to 1915.

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