



Wyatt Earp: Frontier Marshal

Stuart N. Lake , Doug Grad (Editor) , Loren D. Estleman (Foreword by)

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Wyatt Earp: Frontier Marshal Stuart N. Lake , Doug Grad (Editor) , Loren D. Estleman (Foreword by) Wyatt Earp was the greatest gun-fighting marshal of the Old West, and in his time he was branded both a hero - and a killer. With his brothers Morgan and Virgil, and sidekick Doc Holliday, Wyatt Earp brought law and order to the frontier outposts of Wichita, Dodge City, and Tombstone. He went mano a mano with the era's most notorious outlaws, but he always said he never shot a man he didn't have to. Today he stands for the wild adventure, reckless courage, and forty-five caliber justic of America's cowboy days.

Wyatt Earp: Frontier Marshal Details

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From Reader Review Wyatt Earp: Frontier Marshal for online ebook

G.R. Williamsom says

For a long time this book was thought to be the best biography of Wyatt Earp.

Shoot, the author interviewed the legendary lawman, so it had to be the straight poop on Earp.

Then, as others researched the life of Earp, they found many inaccurate accounts as presented in the book. After awhile, it was discovered that Earp died before the author could finish his book. So, then he interviewed Earp's wife, Josie. Researchers found that most of Josie's accounts were circumspect.

All-in-all, the book is short on factual information and long on mythology.

Debra says

Interesting but slow.

Dennis O'Daniel says

Very interesting book on his life. Clarifying a lot about his life. An enjoyable read.

Jack Tyler says

This is really a strange book, a product of its time (1931), and difficult to categorize as fact or fiction. Here are the facts, as modern researchers have established them: Wyatt Earp was a frontier lawman. He was also a saloon and brothel operator, occasionally lived in brothels, and was arrested and fined multiple times for offenses that would today be enforced by the Vice Squad. He was, in short, a brave but rather ordinary man of his time who *knew* right from wrong, but like so many before and since, found it easier to have a philosophy than to live by one.

As to the book, it purports to be the true, complete, and unabridged biography of one of the White Knights of the American west, written with the assistance of said White Knight, a man who put his life on the line every day to ensure that shopkeepers and homesteaders could live free of fear in an untamed land. Yeah, group hug and all that. The basic fact about this book is that everything from the title onward was fabricated by the author to create a hero. The title? Yep. Wyatt Earp never rose above Deputy Marshal during his on-again, off-again law enforcement career. The dialogue in the book? Made up. The interviews with Earp? There were eight of them conducted with a vaguely coherent octogenarian on his death bed who may or may not have been able to remember his own name by that point. Before Lake's book, mainstream Americans knew nothing of the gunfight at the OK Corral, and Earp's famous gun, the Buntline Special? Well, Colt's records,

which are some of the most thorough on earth, contain no record of any special orders from Ned Buntline with a 12" barrel, or any other length. All that is known is that he definitely carried a Smith & Wesson with an 8" barrel during the OK Corral fight, and that his widow remembered his fondness for a long-barreled gun, which may or may not have been the S&W. So viewed as history, this book is worse than worthless, and if you're studying the Old West, run as fast as you can.

But I have chosen to review this book as fiction, which it clearly is, and as fiction it is a thundering fine Old West adventure that can stand alongside any work of Zane Grey and his followers. But one must tread as if in a minefield, because unlike some stories, especially in the steampunk genre for example, where Queen Victoria is sometimes portrayed as a closet vampire hunter, this purports to be factual, and the danger arises if you start to believe it. I did when I first read it back in the 80s, and to this day, it is hard to let go of this image of the heroic, squeaky-clean paragon of justice. That is compounded by the fact that virtually everything we think we know about the Earp brothers is derived from this work, from a half-dozen Hollywood movies to the TV series, *The Life and Legend of Wyatt Earp*. He was apparently pretty obscure in his own lifetime, which makes the closing "quote" from Earp doubly ironic: *"The greatest consolation I have in growing old is the hope that after I'm gone they'll grant me the peaceful obscurity I haven't been able to get in life."*

Now I am compelled to offer a summary. A book of this sort, fiction masquerading as fact, couldn't be foisted off in today's internet-savvy society (not that that stops people from trying). I have warned off scholars, and I will do so again: If you are a serious student of the Old West, avoid this book like the proverbial plague. But if you are a fan of the Western adventure yarn, you could do worse than pick up this particular tome. There is a thrill on virtually every one of its 375 pages, and if you approach it like the fiction that it is, you won't be disappointed.

Steven says

Wyatt Earp was an amazing fellow, and the basis of this book is a series of interviews with Mr. Earp in the late 1920's before his demise as well as documents and statements from people who witnessed the events. The book is a classic. Loved it.

Laynie says

I picked up a 1950s copy in a used bookstore. The price printed on the cover is 35 cents. The book is old a just shy of falling apart.

I didn't have great expectations but found the writing surprisingly good! I would recommend it to any reader with an interest in western literature and/or Wyatt Earp fans.

Karen Jones says

I found this book dry and hard to read. This man led an exciting and interesting life, but you wouldn't know it from this book!

Howard says

As Western legends go, Wyatt Earp was a latecomer. The general public did not become aware of him until 1931 when Stuart Lake published *Wyatt Earp: Frontier Marshal*. It became a best seller and it established the O.K. Corral in the public consciousness and created the image of Earp as an incorruptible paragon of saintly morality who fought for truth, justice, and the American way (No, wait, that was Superman. No matter. Lake's Earp successfully fought the same battles, but without the benefit of super powers.) What Lake began, Hollywood finished. Four movies were based on the novel as well as a popular TV series that ran from 1955 to 1961. Lake served as screenwriter and/or adviser on all four movies and the TV series and thus profited financially from his book right up until his death in 1964.

Lake wrote in the foreword of the book that "Wyatt Earp was a man of action. He was born, reared, and lived in an environment which held words and theories of small account, in which sheer survival often, and eminence invariably, might be achieved through deeds alone."

Furthermore, "[t]he man won from contemporaries who were his most competent judges – from intimates, from acquaintances, and from enemies alike – frontier-wide recognition as the most proficient peace officer, the greatest gunfighting marshal the Old West knew."

Okay, but if that recognition was frontier-wide why was Earp virtually unknown in 1931? The answer is that not only was he not known frontier-wide during his days as a peace officer and, with the exception of some old-timers in the southwest, very few people had even heard of him fifty years after the showdown at Tombstone's O.K. Corral in 1881. It was Lake's book that made him famous – and legendary – and mythical. As with all mythical legends some of what Lake wrote was based on fact, but much of it fell into the category of tall tale.

However, what made it believable to so many readers for so long is the fact that Lake had the co-operation of Earp in writing the book. Not only was Lake able to interview Earp on several occasions and quotes him verbatim in long passages that go on sometimes for pages, but he also claimed that "[s]cores of eyewitnesses to the scenes portrayed have been interviewed to verify circumstantial details; thousands of miles have been traveled to unearth substantiating material; hundreds of time-worn documents and files of frontier newspapers have been examined for pertinent content; literally thousands of letters have been exchanged with competent old-timers in developing this work."

Then why in light of all that conscientious research described above is the book today shelved in the fiction section? The answer is because that is where it belongs.

My reprint copy of the book, published in 1994, has this blurb on the front cover: "The only authorized biography of the legendary man who inspired two of the year's biggest movie events!" That would be *Tombstone*, starring Kurt Russell, and *Wyatt Earp*, starring Kevin Costner. Both films are fictional of course, but even at that they are more historically accurate than Lake's authorized "biography."

Bill says

Wonderful book.

A good place to start a study of the old west.

Then move on to the many more recent excellently researched books to separate the fact and fiction in Lake. Much of this book has been found to be absolutely true.

The quotes attributed to Earp, however, have been shown to be made up by Lake.

Lake later admitted that Earp was very difficult to interview.

He said Earp was " delightfully laconic" and he had to pry every word from him.

Valis Umbra says

Originally written back in the 1930's when the author spoke to Earp's surviving friends, relatives and acquaintances, this is kind of true action-adventure biography that just couldn't be written now.

It is pointless to speculate about how accurate or exaggerated the stories and anecdotes presented here are.

What is obvious is that the character at the center of them had acquired an almost mythical status within his own lifetime - as the hardest man in a very, very hard place.

My dad bought this edition when it was published in the '50's and I know it made a huge impression on him - I remember him telling me some of the stories twenty years later when the western had become unfashionable. I've read it several times since, and lent it to friends, and I'll be passing it on to my son when he's older.

None of the film versions of Earp's life are a patch on this - strangely, I think the only film to come close to the spirit of it is 'The Big Country' which makes no reference to Earp at all.

Great stuff - highly recommended.

Mike Jensen says

This is one of those books I picked up for information, but ended up loving. Lake interviewed every one he could find who knew Earp as well as Earp himself. The result seems a very fair and accurate account. As a scholar myself, I did not expect this degree of rigor from someone who is essentially a fan. I know that the book has been questioned by (usually) non-professional history buffs who find something to pick at then frame a theory that usually discredits Earp. Either a lot of people lied to Lake, or these revisionists are silly. All recorded history is something of a creative act, and I'm sure this is no exception, but the book seems more solid than its reputation suggests. This is the perfect book for someone who wants to believe the legends, and they may very well be true.

K.C. Gardner says

I'm a big fan of the movie Tombstone, so I wanted to read this. What a story! What a legend! Thank you for writing it, Mr. Lake. I'm afraid you're as well known in death as in life, Mr. Earp, though it's true you'd probably really like some peace.

Christopher Westley says

Read this many years ago when I was in the Army. This is a quintessential must read for the cowboy/country

reader. More than just a view of the legend. Entertaining and satisfying.

Stephen Rynkiewicz says

"Get your facts first, and then you can distort them as much as you please," Mark Twain quipped to Rudyard Kipling in 1899. Western fans have had their choice of facts about Wyatt Earp long before the film roundups of Kurt Russell, Kevin Costner and Hugh O'Brian. In 1996 I visited Tombstone, Ariz., 30 miles from the Mexican border and scene of Earp's 1881 OK Corral gunfight, to tell Twain's frontier journalism tales and dedicate the Tombstone Epitaph newspaper office as a Historic Site in Journalism. (The Epitaph still covers local news as a University of Arizona journalism project.) There I sampled the Republican Epitaph, published by the mayor who backed the Earp brothers, and the Democrat Nugget, owned by the sheriff sympathetic to the Clanton clan. Stuart Lake's own findings backed the Earp narrative 50 years later but would be unlikely to resolve their debate, as he was punching up Earp's unpublished autobiography to duel with Billy Breakenridge's unflattering "Helldorado." Lake is charged with embellishment, and his prose certainly shows plenty of embroidery: Boot Hill victims are "buried with their footgear in place," and there's no need for horse or jail when words like cayuse or calaboose are available. Newspaper prose of the day was just as purple though, and twice as opinionated. Much of the fun therein lies. Lake is skeptical of elements of the Earp legend, noting for example that keeping Dodge safe was a job limited to the more prosperous side of the tracks, but does not plumb dark corners of his subject's resume as peace officer, law student, surveyor, teamster, buffalo hunter, politician, miner and owner of casinos and racehorses. Earp ranged widely, which makes this a satisfying survey of frontier life, and the author comes as close to capturing cowboy cadence as any writer before David Milch. Out of print and pricey on Amazon, I picked up the paperback for a buck at a Newberry Library book fair.

Jake says

This is a popular novelization of the Wyatt Earp story. It's fast-paced, flashy and full of action. Some of it may even be accurate. Who knows!? As I remember, it was an enjoyable read. If you are looking for something less pretentious than Kevin Costner's portrayal, and more sober than the vaudevillian film *Tombstone*, you might enjoy this novel.

Incidentally, as film adaptations go, I recommend John Ford's masterful *My Darling Clementine*. In this case, the filmmaker wisely decided history wasn't compelling enough, and produced a heavily fictionalized version that made no serious attempt at accuracy. The result was a great movie. If you want to turn Wyatt Earp into a western version of the Greek hero, that's what you have to do: fictionalize.
