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First-hand accounts of gunfight at the OK Corral come to light after 125 years

Nico Hines in Washington

On yellowed, crumbling pages, the first-hand accounts of the gunfight at the OK Corral have been uncovered, more than 125 years after the famous shoot-out. The handwritten testimony — lost for decades — describes the sense of menace and tension sought by generations of Hollywood filmmakers.

Papers found at the Cochise County courthouse include a description of “Doc” Holliday by a witness at a 19th-century inquest. “Mr Holliday. . . had a gun under his coat. He had a long coat. The way I noticed the gun is that his coat would blow open, and he tried to keep it covered.” The battle became one of the defining moments of America’s lawless push to the Pacific. Wyatt Earp, his two brothers and Holliday faced a gang of cattle-rustlers, leaving Frank and Tom McLaury and Bill Clanton dead in the streets of Tombstone.

Documents from the inquest held into the incident had been missing for decades. They were last seen when they were photocopied in the 1960s.

Officials have so far released one page of the transcript, a thick sheet of paper with blue lines and handwriting in dark ink. The papers have been passed to state archivists who will restore the paper and ink, and make digital copies of the pages.

The transcript is not expected to provide many new details about the gunfight since historians have already seen photocopies of the papers.