

## OK Corral inquest transcript found in Arizona jailhouse store room

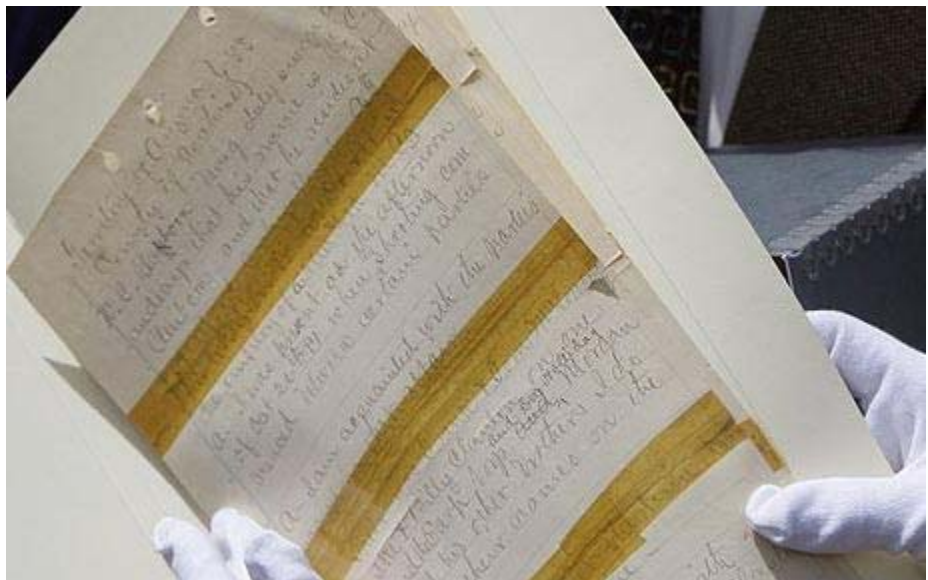
The real story of the Gunfight at the OK Corral, which shaped the mythology of the Wild West, has been unearthed in the words of the people who witnessed it.

By Anita Singh, Showbusiness Editor

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Two court clerks stumbled upon the original transcript from the 1881 coroner's inquest while reorganising files in a jail storage room in Bisbee, Arizona.

In vivid detail, it describes the fateful day that tensions between Wyatt Earp, the local lawman, and a gang of outlaws ended in bloodshed. The gun battle in the frontier town of Tombstone left three men dead and ensured Earp's place in Wild West folklore.



A page of original court transcripts from the 1881 Coroner's Inquest in the Gunfight at the OK Corral at the Arizona State Library Photo: AP

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The 1957 film, *Gunfight at the OK Corral*, starring Burt Lancaster as Earp and Kirk Douglas as his sidekick, John 'Doc' Holliday, presented the two men as heroes. To this day, however, debate rages over who drew their guns first.

Born in 1848, Earp worked in several professions – saloon keeper, farmer, boxing referee – and moved around the Old West before settling in the silver-mining town of Tombstone in 1879, where he established himself as a

tough-talking lawman.

Holliday was a once-respectable dentist who gave up his profession after being diagnosed with tuberculosis, and who turned to drink and gambling. According to legend, he met Earp in Dodge City and saved him from a gunman. That act cemented a lifelong friendship.

One of the eyewitnesses was Mrs MJ King, a landlady who was on her way to the butcher's when she sensed trouble. "I saw quite a group of men standing on the sidewalk with two horses, near the market," she told the inquest.

"I inquired what was the matter, and they said there was going to be a fuss between the Earp boys and cowboys."

The Earp boys were Wyatt and his brothers, Virgil and Morgan, who acted as deputy marshals. The "cowboys" – a name given to suspected cattle rustlers – included brothers Ike and Billy Clanton, and Frank and Tom McLaury.

Mrs King said: "I heard the man on the outside kind of stop or looked at Holliday. And said, 'Let them have it'. Holliday said, 'All right'. Then I thought there would be shooting, from what these parties said, and ran for the back of the shop, but before I reached the middle of the shop I heard shots."

According to the testimony of Ike Clanton, the Earps and Doc Holliday were the antagonists.

He claimed: "I stepped out and met Wyatt Earp; he stuck his six shooter at me and said, 'Throw up your hands!' The marshal also told the other boys to throw up their hands; Frank McLowry [sic] and Billy Clanton threw up; Tom McLowry [sic] threw open his coat and said he had nothing.

"They said, 'you's s---- of b----- came here to make a fight'; at the same instant Doc Holliday and Morgan Earp shot."

Barely 30 seconds later, Billy Clanton and the McLaury brothers lay dead. The inquest took place later that same day, on October 30, 1881. Earp and Holliday were cleared of wrongdoing by a judge but their reputations never recovered.

The transcript, discovered stuffed inside a modern manila envelope marked "keep", has been turned over to state archivists, who have begun the painstaking process of restoring the faded pages, said to be "as brittle as potato crisps". To GladysAnn Wells, Arizona State Librarian, the pages are a priceless piece of history. "They were handled by the people of that moment," she said.

Extracts taken from Coroner's Inquest, Oct 30, 1881: Further Testimony Regarding The Late Tragedy.

Ike Clanton:

"Frank said that he was leaving town, and that he would disarm if the Earps would; that he had business that he would like to do before he left town. Just at that time Doc Holliday and the Earps appeared on the sidewalk; the sheriff stepped out to meet them; he told them that he had this party in charge; they walked right by him. I stepped out and met Wyatt Earp; he stuck his six shooter at me and said, 'Throw up your hands!' The marshal also told the other boys to throw up their hands; Frank McLowry and Billy Clanton threw up; Tom McLowry threw open his coat and said he had nothing; they said 'you's s---- of b----- came here to make a fight'; at the same instant Doc Holliday and Morgan Earp shot; Morgan shot Billy Clanton, and I don't know which of the boys he shot; I saw Virg shooting at the same time; I grabbed Wyatt Earp and pushed him around the corner and then ran through the photograph gallery; at the same time I saw Billy Clanton fall; when I got away."

Mrs MJ King:

"I was coming from my home to the meat market, Mr Beuer's, to get some meat for dinner; I saw quite a group of men standing on the sidewalk with two horses, near the market... I inquired what was the matter, and they said there was going to be a fuss between the Earp boys and cowboys... I stepped into the market; the butcher was in the act of cutting the meat, when someone said: 'There they come'; then I stepped to the door and looked up the sidewalk, when I saw four men coming down the street; I saw and know one of the party; it was Doc Holliday; there were three others of the party which were pointed out to me as the Earp brothers; Mr Holliday was next to the building on the inside; he had a gun under his coat... what frightened me and made me run back? I heard the man on the outside kind of stop or looked at Holliday and said, 'Let them have it'. Holliday said 'all right'. Then I thought there would be shooting, from what these parties said, and ran for the back of the shop, but before I reached the middle of the shop I heard shots, and don't know what happened afterwards."

RJ Coleman:

"I was standing in front of the OK Corral and saw the two Clantons and McLowrys standing and talking in a stall in Dunbar's corral... when I got as far as Bauer's butcher shop, I met Wyatt, Morgan and Virgil Earp and Doc Holliday walking down the centre of the street; Sheriff Behan walked up to them and said, 'I don't want you to go any further'; I don't think they made any reply, but passed on down the street until they came opposite the Clanton party. The Earp party addressed them; I hear 's--- of b-----' but don't know which party spoke. Someone in the Earp party then said, 'Throw up your hands' or 'Give up your arms'. I thought I was too close, and as I turned around I heard two shots, then the firing became general... Frank McLowry came out in the street toward Holliday, some words passed between them; Frank said, 'I've got you now,' firing a shot at the same time, which struck Holliday on the hip or his scabbard; I hollered to Holliday, saying, 'You've got it now'; he answered, 'Yes, I'm shot right through'."