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I was there when the outlaws started shooting: Handwritten transcript of OK Corral's coroner's inquest found

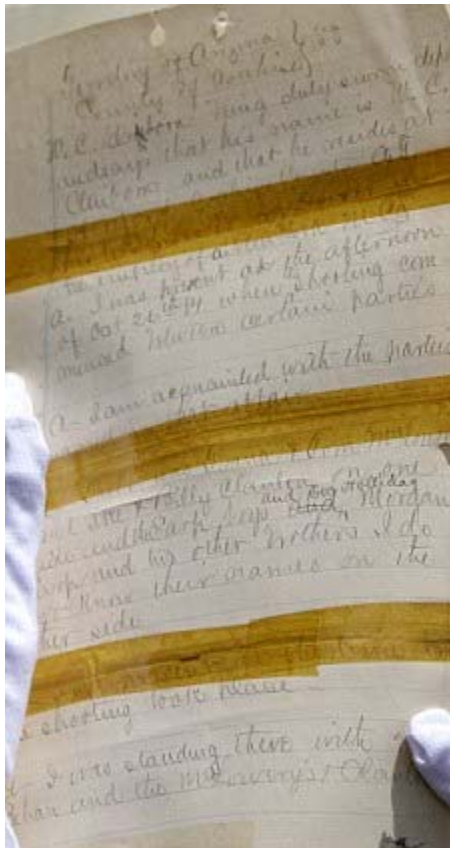
By [David Gardner](#)

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Handwritten records from an inquest into the gunfight at the OK Corral have been discovered - decades after the account of the most famous shootout in Wild West history went missing.

The 36 pages of yellowed and taped up documents were found in a dusty box in an old jail storeroom near Tombstone, the Arizona frontier town where the gun battle happened.

A coroner carried out the inquest days after lawman Wyatt Earp, his two brothers and Doc Holliday confronted a gang of drunken outlaws on October 26, 1881, leaving three of them dead.





Historical: The handwritten document, above, has not been seen since the 1960s. It details the shoot-out that made Wyatt Earp, shown right in 1885, a folk hero

The fight entered Wild West folklore and has been the subject of films and books including the 1957 movie starring Kirk Douglas and Burt Lancaster.

It was documented in detail during the inquest, which cleared the Earps and Doc Holliday of any blame for gunning down brothers Frank and Tom McLaurry and Bill Clanton.

But the papers were mislaid half a century ago and only emerged when court clerks found them in a manila envelope, marked 'keep', while they were reorganising old files.

Officials showed off one page of the transcript yesterday, a thick sheet of paper with blue lines and sloppy writing in dark ink.

It appeared to contain the beginning of testimony by William Claiborn, identified by a historian as a friend of the three dead outlaws.



From left to right: Court clerk Denise Lundin, Arizona Secretary Of State Ken Bennett and Arizona State library director Gladys Ann Wells show off the newly found transcript from a coroner's inquest after the gunfight at the OK Corral



Location: The OK Corral in Tombstone remains a popular tourist attraction

'I was present on the afternoon of Oct. 26th '81 when the shooting commenced between outlaw parties,' the testimony reads.

Other witnesses are thought to include a housekeeper who was shopping for meat when the shootout started and another who said Doc Holliday carried his gun under his coat.

The first pages are being digitised and could show up on the state archive library's website for historians to review as soon as next week.

It's unlikely the transcript will provide any shattering revelations about the gunfight because the documents were photocopied before they went missing in 1960. Newspapers also covered the inquest.



Hollywood history: The gunfight has been portrayed in numerous films including 1993's *Tombstone* (above) and *My Darling Clementine* (below) in 1946



Still, historians have long argued over who fired first and whether Tom McLaury was armed when he was shot. Earp and the other lawmen insisted they were defending themselves.

Friends of the outlaws called it murder.

Academics still debate who was right, even though a judge and grand jury found insufficient evidence to try Holliday and the Earp brothers, Wyatt, Virgil and Morgan.

But the transcript is still valuable.

'They were handled by the people of that moment, and they're the actual artifact that encapsulated that time,' said Gladys Ann Wells, Arizona's State Librarian.