PART I

Tombstone:
Bawdy and Rowdy,
Tender and Tough
Principal Tombstone Characters

The Miners
Charles DeBrille Poston
Edward “Ed” Schieffelen

The Cattleman
Henry C. Hooker

The Cowboys (Rustlers)
William “Billy the Kid” Claiborne
Newman H. “Old Man” Clanton
Phineas “Phin” Clanton
Joseph Isaac “Ike” Clanton
William “Billy” Clanton
“Old Man” Hughes
Jim Hughes
Robert Findley “Frank” McLaury
Thomas Clark “Tom” McLaury
William R. “Will” McLaury
John Ringo
Curly Bill Brocius

The Earp “Gang”
Wyatt Earp
Virgil Earp
Morgan Earp
John Henry “Doc” Holliday
The Earp Partisans
John Clum, mayor, editor, *Tombstone Epitaph*
Fred Dodge, Wells Fargo undercover agent
Marshall Williams, Wells Fargo resident agent
George Parsons, gentleman miner

The Gamblers
James, Virgil, Warren, Wyatt, and Morgan Earp
Doc Holliday
Bat Masterson
Luke Short
Charlie Storms
Buckskin Frank Leslie

The Earp Wives and Courtesans
Alvira Packingham Sullivan “Allie” Earp, wife of Virgil Earp
Nellie Bartlett Ketcham “Bessie” Earp, wife of James Earp
Celia Ann Blaylock “Mattie” Earp, wife of Wyatt Earp
Josephine Sarah Marcus “Josie” (“Sadie”) Behan Earp, paramour of John Behan and Wyatt Earp
Louisa Houston Earp, wife of Morgan Earp
Mary Katherine Harony “Big-Nosed Kate Elder,” paramour of Doc Holliday

The Suspected Stage Robbers
Frank Stilwell
Jim Crane
Billy Grounds
Curly Bill Brocius
Doc Holliday
Zwing Hunt

The “County Ring”
John Behan, sheriff of Cochise County
John Dunbar, stable keeper
Milton Joyce, saloon keeper
Harry Woods, publisher, *Tombstone Nugget*

**The Townsmen**
George Goodfellow, surgeon
Milton Joyce, saloon keeper
William M. “Billy” Breakenridge, deputy sheriff
George Parsons, gentleman miner and diarist
Endicott Peabody, minister

**The Coroner and Judges**
Henry Matthews, coroner
Wells Spicer, lawyer, justice of the peace
William Stillwell (no apparent relation to Frank), associate judge for Arizona
J. H. Lucas, probate judge

**Law Enforcement**
Fred White, first Tombstone city marshal
Ben Sippy, second Tombstone city marshal
Virgil Earp, third Tombstone city marshal and deputy U.S. marshal
John Behan, first Cochise County sheriff
William M. “Billy” Breakenridge, deputy sheriff
Frank Stilwell, deputy sheriff, suspected stage robber
Crawley P. Dake, Arizona federal marshal
Bob Paul, Pima County sheriff
Jerome L. Ward, second Cochise County sheriff

**The Lawyers**
Lyttleton Price, prosecutor
Ben Goodrich, prosecutor
Will McLaury, prosecutor
Thomas Fitch, Earp lawyer
T. J. Drum, Holliday lawyer
Coroner’s Inquest Witnesses
John Behan
R. F. Coleman
Martha King
P. H. Fellehy

Preliminary Hearing Witnesses
Henry Matthews, coroner
Billy Allen
Martha King
Wes Fuller
Wyatt Earp
Virgil Earp
H. F. Sills
Addie Boland
J. H. Lucas

The Vendetta Riders
Morgan, Warren, and Wyatt Earp
Doc Holliday
Sherman McMasters
Charlie Smith
Dan Tipton
Turkey Creek Jack Johnson
Texas Jack Vermillion

The Vendetta Victims
Frank Stilwell
Florentino “Indian Charlie” Cruz
Curly Bill Brocius (?)
CHAPTER ONE

Pasteboard and Ivory

History is an argument without end.
—Pieter Geyl, in Napoleon: For and Against (1949)

The Tombstone city marshal and his vagabond posse strode down Fremont Street, pausing just long enough for a few words with Sheriff Johnny Behan before brushing past him. They were dressed for town but loaded for bear.

Thus began the famous march towards destiny. Virgil, Wyatt, Morgan and Doc walked slowly down Fremont Street toward the confrontation that would become known as the gunfight at the O.K. Corral. Virgil carried a walking stick in his right hand and a six-gun in his waistband. Wyatt and Morgan were carrying pistols, and Doc was concealing the Wells Fargo shotgun under his undercoat.

As they came within ten feet of the Clantons and McLaury brothers, Virgil called out, “Boys, throw up your hands, I want your guns.” Then something went terribly wrong. Someone fired a shot, and as Ike Clanton put it, “the ball opened.” Within thirty seconds, six men had been shot. Billy Clanton and both McLaury brothers were dead or dying; Virgil and Morgan Earp were seriously wounded, and Doc Holliday was slightly hurt. Wyatt was unscathed. So was Ike, the instigator of it all, who had run away when the shooting began.1

Forty-seven years later, an old man rested in a small,
nondescript Los Angeles tourist cottage, attended by his wife, a kitten, and a doctor. Wyatt Stapp Earp died early on the morning of a bright mid-January day. His last words raised more questions than answers. “Supposing—supposing—” he had said to no one in particular before falling back on a pillow with an exasperated “Oh well.”

We can easily suppose what might have happened to that wide spot in the road called Tombstone, Arizona, were it not for Wyatt Earp and a long-ago gunfight whose details and aftermath are vigorously argued by knowledgeable historians to this day. Tombstone—the O.K. Corral—a place and time many only slightly familiar with the American West think they know all about. And yet, there are still many questions. Who started the fight? Did the McLaurys or Clantons try to surrender? Did the Earp brothers and Doc Holliday get away with murder? Why were all these people in the middle of the desert anyway?

One word answers the last question: silver. An early Tombstonian could see the source of most money in the town by looking towards the surrounding hills from Fifth and Toughnut. The Grand Central and Contention Mines, as well as the Toughnut Mine, near the Tombstone water tank, could be seen in the distance, as could the West Side Mine and the Lucky Cuss.

The early life of Tombstone, the most famous place in the American West, was not much different than that of an earlier boomtown called Gila City nearby. Men “hurried to the spot with barrels of whiskey and billiard tables. . . . Traders crowded in with wagonloads of pork and beans; and gamblers came with cards and Monte tables.” In 1861, just months after its first residents arrived, Gila City had everything but a church and jail. Three years later, a traveler reported, all that was left of that boomtown was “three chimneys and a coyote.”

The silver strikes that began in 1878 assured that
Tombstone would be more, much more than that. And where there were miners, there were gamblers. Among the early Tombstone gambling men were Luke Short and Charlie Storms from Texas, Lou Rickabaugh and Ed Clark from Colorado, and many lesser lights. Deputy Sheriff William Breakenridge considered Bat Masterson, Doc Holliday, and Wyatt, Virgil, Morgan, and Warren Earp “from Kansas and Oklahoma” to be among the most conspicuous gamblers. Attorney Wells Spicer observed in February 1880 that the town boasted “two dance houses, a dozen gambling places, over twenty saloons and more than five hundred gamblers. Still, there is hope, for I know of two bibles in town.”

The Crystal Palace and Oriental Saloon sat astride the corner of Fifth and Allen. The Palace was anything but, merely a narrow, false-fronted structure with scarcely a window. The next year the Crystal Palace became the Golden Eagle Brewery, often just called the Eagle. A second story was added to house the offices of Deputy U.S. Marshal Virgil Earp and Dr. George Goodfellow, a man destined to become a prominent West Coast surgeon. The proprietors were the Tribolet brothers of Switzerland. Godfrey Tribolet came to Tombstone with nothing, accumulated enough money to start a new business, and then sent for his brothers, with whom he built a fortune in booze and beef. The brothers became politically prominent and were even involved in futile peace negotiations between the Apache chief Geronimo and Gen. George Crook.

The Oriental Saloon was started by Milton Joyce and William Crownover Parker, the son of a prominent Oakland, California, family. The Oriental opened on Thursday, July 22, 1880, and was described at the time as the “finest one in town.” The place was run by Lou Rickabaugh, who eventually hired Wyatt Earp to keep order. The faro dealers at the Oriental would eventually include Morgan Earp, Luke Short, and Buckskin Frank Leslie.
Of course, Tombstone was not inhabited exclusively by gamblers. Mining engineer and Yale graduate John Jay Hammonds, a nephew of legendary Texas Ranger John Coffee Hays, was among the early visitors. Noted surgeon John Goodfellow practiced in the early camp, as did Kentuckian Mark Smith, a lawyer who eventually became the first senator from Arizona. Wyatt Earp claimed many years later that the law enforcement environment in early Tombstone “was not half as bad as Los Angeles” in 1926.9 Through the early boom years, Tombstone even boasted of appearances by such stage stars as the father of playwright Eugene O’Neill, James O’Neill, who had the misfortune of catching “silver fever” during his visit. One historian noted that James O’Neill proved an easy mark in 1880 when he fell into the clutches of a swindler named George M. Ciprico. Himself a sometime amateur actor, Ciprico in 1879 salted a claim in Tombstone known as the Cumberland Mine; then as was the custom, he issued a handsome prospectus offering shares for sale. John E. Owens, an actor with little knowledge of mining, visited the site, failed to detect the swindle, invested in the property, and then persuaded O’Neill and a third actor, Louis Morrison, to buy shares. They invested to the point of ownership, only later to file for bankruptcy after losing their savings. Local wits later dubbed the site “The Actor’s Mine.”

Nearby Charleston made no such claim of respectability. Deputy Sheriff Breakenridge observed the peacekeeping skills of saloon keeper Jim Burton:

Charleston had very little law and order, and was . . . well known as a wild and wicked town during 1879 and ’80 with a killing there frequently. Jim Burton was justice of the peace, and a saloonkeeper named Jerry Barton was constable. Barton was a powerful man, and it was
reported that he had killed several men with his fist; he was well known as a man-killer, with many notches on his pistol handles. He stuttered badly, and at one time, when he was asked why he killed so many men replied: “Why, m-my tri-tri-trigger finger stutter-stutters.”

The life and times of early Tombstone were chronicled by William M. “Billy” Breakenridge, an adventurer who arrived there in late 1879, perhaps in November, the very month the new town was incorporated. The Breakenridge autobiography, *Helldorado*, is far from objective but provides one of the most detailed accounts of frontier life available. Breakenridge was born in Watertown, Wisconsin, itself a reputed hotbed of horse thieves, on Christmas Day, 1846. During the second year of the Civil War, Breakenridge worked as a civilian employee of the U.S. Army Quartermasters Department stationed at Rolla, Missouri, freighting supplies to Springfield by mule. He quit that job then traveled to Denver City, Colorado, and met William “Buffalo Bill” Cody at the mouth of the North Platte River.

By the summer of 1864 he had joined the Third Colorado Cavalry at Central City, Colorado, for one hundred days’ service in a campaign against Indians following a massacre of the Hungate family about thirty miles from Denver on Cherry Creek. During the pursuit, the expedition received valuable information from Elbridge “Little” Geary, a great-grandson and namesake of a signer of the Declaration of Independence and married to a Cheyenne. According to Geary, a combined force of Cheyenne, Arapaho, and Sioux were assembled at the head of Beaver Creek, some one hundred miles from Denver. When the Indians learned that Geary was an informant, they retaliated by stealing his livestock and the violence escalated.

Breakenridge was present during a late November 1864 army attack on the Cheyenne at Sand Creek, about ten
miles north of present-day Chivington, Colorado. He killed one brave he came upon while scouting for a place to treat wounded soldiers. Later, when his sister requested a locket of his hair, a common practice at the time, Breakenridge sent two scalps home. The attack was an out and out massacre of some two hundred mostly friendly Indians, two-thirds of whom were women and children.14

Breakenridge also became acquainted with Thomas J. “Bear River Tom” Smith, who was serving as city marshal of Kit Carson, Colorado, then a shipping point for Texas cattle. Breakenridge later adopted Smith’s law enforcement methods, which emphasized getting along with everyone as long as possible.15

During the American centennial, Breakenridge traveled from La Junta, Colorado, to Prescott, Arizona, with a colonization party organized by outfitting merchants. The party traveled through present-day Trinidad, Colorado; Albuquerque, New Mexico; and Fort Defiance to Sunset Crossing (now St. Joseph), Arizona. Upon arrival, Breakenridge discovered he had been cheated out of his pay but went into business with Sam Hunt, a fellow employee who had obtained a bill of sale on the horses and equipment used in the venture.

Breakenridge observed an unusual lynching in Phoenix two years later. Accused murderers William McCloskey and John Keller were removed from the jail by a local vigilance committee. After the first man strangled to death, his partner jumped off the back of the wagon on which he was standing in order to break his own neck. Meanwhile, the under sheriff, Hi McDonald, stayed behind to shoot a few rounds into the jail ceiling for appearances.16 Such vigilance committees were hardly unusual in the West. The San Francisco California Committee of Vigilance, formed in 1850, was particularly notable for the ruthlessness with
which it disposed of accused criminals. Dodge City and other Kansas cow towns used vigilance as an extrajudicial law enforcement method.\textsuperscript{17} “Vigilance” would also become a major influence in Tombstone.

Breakenridge arrived in Tombstone shortly after Christmas 1879. He was there to prospect a claim about 15 miles away, near the Cochise Stronghold.\textsuperscript{18} Among the ranchers who resided nearby was Newman H. “Old Man” Clanton, who had lived in Missouri, Texas, and California before arriving in Arizona. His family consisted of five sons and three daughters when he established himself about 1868 on the Gila River in southwestern Arizona, claiming a watering hole between Yuma and Phoenix still known as Clanton Well. Four years later he was ranching near Camp Thomas about 140 miles north of present-day Tombstone, near the San Carlos Indian Reservation, which purchased over three million pounds of beef annually. The general consensus among researchers has been that Old Man Clanton was a rancher, farmer, freighter, and cattle rustler. Eventually he moved to a spot fourteen miles southwest of Tombstone. His sons Phineas (Phin or Fin), Joseph Isaac (Ike), and William Harrison (Billy) associated themselves with the rustling operation.

Robert Findley, Frank McLaury, and Thomas Clark “Tom” McLaury were born in New York State, lived with their parents in Iowa, and arrived in Arizona about 1877, perhaps as cattle drovers. Their older brother Will was a Fort Worth attorney. Frank and Tom established a ranch on Babocomari Creek near its junction with the San Pedro River, near the small hamlet called Fairbank.\textsuperscript{19}

Wyatt Stapp Earp arrived in Tombstone in late 1879, the very year a post office was established and the town was formally organized. The streets had been laid out the prior year. Earp later gave this brief account of his arrival:
I have been in Tombstone since December 1, 1879. I came here from Dodge City, Kansas, where, against the protest of businessmen and officials, I resigned from the office of City Marshal, which I held from 1876. I came to Dodge City from Wichita, Kansas. I was on the police force in Wichita, from 1874 until I went to Dodge City.20

He was born March 19, 1848, at Monmouth, Warren County, Illinois, and was named for his father's Mexican War company commander. Nicholas Porter Earp (1813-1907) fathered six sons, three of whom served in the Union army during the Civil War. Nicholas moved his family from Missouri to Pella, Iowa, in about 1850, then on to San Bernardino, California, when Wyatt was sixteen. The family returned east to Lamar, Missouri, around 1868. There, Wyatt defeated his half-brother Newton Earp for the town constable post, married in early January 1870, then lost his wife to either childbirth or disease.

He resolved to leave Lamar but had a legal problem to resolve. A litigant charged that Earp had altered an execution writ to extract twenty dollars from him. Wyatt left Lamar before his trial date.21 Within a few months, he was in trouble again, this time in Indian Territory, to the southwest of Lamar. A Wyatt S. Earp and Ed Kennedy were alleged to have stolen some horses near Fort Gibson, and a grand jury in Arkansas delivered a true bill against them in May 1871. Ed Kennedy was acquitted, but Wyatt S. Earp posted bond. Although he was never seen there again,22 several months later, he met Ed and Bat Masterson on the Salt Fork of the Arkansas River during a buffalo-hunting expedition. One tradition relates that by August 1871, Wyatt was a law officer in Ellsworth, Kansas, where he had a confrontation with Texas shootist Ben Thompson. Although documentation is nonexistent, the story circulated for years.23 He then surfaced at Wichita, a wide-open cow

Wyatt Earp, famously remembered for the shootout at the O.K. Corral. (Courtesy Arizona Historical Society, Tucson)
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town started in 1872 on the Arkansas River opposite a sin city called Delano. Contemporary documents indicate he became a deputy city marshal on April 21, 1875, but apparently had served as a law officer the prior year, according to newspaper reports of the time. One tale relates that Wyatt led townspeople who confronted a Texas cowboy contingent coming from the Delano side of the bridge and backed down Mannen Clements, a cousin of John Wesley Hardin. Although Wyatt had some success in Wichita, he ended his stint as a policeman there under a dark cloud. After an altercation with city marshal candidate Bill Smith on April 2, 1876, Wyatt and his brothers became the target of vagrancy charges proffered by the city council, perhaps to discourage the Earps from becoming troublemakers.

That month, Wyatt Earp was appointed to serve as policeman with Bat Masterson in Dodge City, Kansas, which catered to the buffalo-hunting trade. During the next four years there, Wyatt served as an assistant city marshal between gambling excursions into South Dakota and Texas. Wyatt met John Henry “Doc” Holliday and Mary Katherine “Kate” Harony, sometimes called Kate Elder, on one such Texas trip, possibly in the fall of 1877 at Fort Griffin while Wyatt was pursuing rustler Dave Rudabaugh.

Wyatt and Bat were not universally admired in Dodge. Some wags of the time described them as “the Fighting Pimps” because of their affinities for prostitutes and other women of questionable morality. Wyatt Earp balanced this specialty with service as church deacon.

Although an experienced law officer, Earp was not in any serious gunplay until July 26, 1878, when a cowboy named George Hoy galloped at full speed down the Dodge City streets towards the Comique Theater, then fired three rounds into the building. Wyatt responded immediately with gunfire that shattered Hoy’s arm. He died August 21.

Most historians agree that Wyatt, James, and Virgil Earp
probably arrived together at Tombstone on December 1, 1879, with bags, baggage, three wives, and nary a marriage license among them.29 Years later, Wyatt explained his reasons for leaving Kansas in a newspaper interview: “In 1879 Dodge City had begun to lose much of the snap which had given it a charm to men of restless blood and I decided to move to Tombstone, which was just building a reputation.” Wyatt claimed that he became a deputy U.S. marshal at Prescott on his way there, which was an apparent invention. He estimated that in the early years, the Tombstone population was ten to twelve hundred, including some three hundred cattle thieves, stage robbers, murderers, and brigands.30

James Cooksey Earp, known as “Jim,” the firstborn of his siblings, was about forty years old that December of 1879. He had enlisted in the Union army at the beginning of the Civil War and was seriously wounded and disabled at Fredericktown, Missouri. He worked as a bartender and professional gambler in many of the towns where Wyatt Earp lived.

Virgil Walter Earp was two years younger than James, also served in the Union army, and worked in Council Bluffs, Iowa, as a stagecoach driver after the war. His domestic life was exotic, to say the least. He eloped at a young age with Ellen Rysdam of Lamar, Missouri. Ellen assumed he died in the Civil War, married another man, then moved to Kansas City and later Oregon, taking with her a daughter whom Virgil met only years later.31 When he arrived at Prescott, Arizona, in about 1877, Virgil was accompanied by a second wife, Alvira “Allie” Sullivan Earp. Virgil had several occupations in Prescott, including driving a mail wagon, working as a night watchman, and some service as a constable. Arizona Territory’s U.S. marshal Crawley Dake appointed Virgil Earp a deputy U.S. Marshal on November 27, 1879, but the office was non-salaried and largely honorific.32
Morgan Earp, age twenty-eight, arrived in Tombstone on December 7 and so closely resembled Wyatt that Wells Fargo agent Fred Dodge had some difficulty telling them apart. Morgan, too, had been born in Pella, Iowa, moved to California with his parents, and then moved back east sometime around 1870. Some stories place Wyatt and Morgan together in a gunfight with Wyatt’s former in-laws that year in Lamar, Missouri. Years later, Wyatt also claimed that Morgan had served as marshal of Butte, Montana. More certainly, we know that Morgan had joined his brother in Wichita, Kansas, in time to be the target of 1875 vagrancy charges after Wyatt left the police force there.

Only seventy miles away from Tombstone, the Southern Pacific reached Tucson on March 20. The officials were greeted by Charles DeBrille Poston, “the father of Arizona.” No one seemed to notice when frontiersman, Indian fighter, and former Texas Ranger William Oury lamented during a welcoming speech that his way of life was over. Many Tombstonians hoped for a railroad of their own, but though the Arizona and Mexico Railroad and Telegraph was organized in April 1880 to run a railroad line through Tombstone into Mexico, it was never successful. Since Tombstone had no railroad and never would, from time to time, Kinnear’s Tombstone and Tucson Express stagecoach would race through the streets for effect, coming to a stop in front of the Cosmopolitan Hotel. Two new citizens of note evidently arrived with such a flourish in May 1880.

James Reilly announced in the May 13 issue of the Tombstone Nugget that he had opened his legal practice, specializing in collections. Born about 1830 in Ireland, Reilly had served in an army regiment stationed in Texas and worked as a freighter before buying a newspaper which he moved from Yuma to Phoenix before finally settling in Tombstone.

The day before Reilly announced his law practice in
the *Nugget*, one J. Marcus checked into the Cosmopolitan Hotel. This most certainly was Josephine Sarah Marcus. She described herself years later as a Brooklyn native who migrated to San Francisco with her family at age seven, in the late 1860s. She was the daughter of a prosperous Jewish merchant but decided upon a theatrical career early in life. She was in Tombstone to be with Sheriff John Behan, who had met her in San Francisco and with whom she shortly made domestic arrangements.36

Taking advantage of the increasing traffic to the region, Wyatt Earp began working as a stagecoach messenger for Wells Fargo. When he became a Pima County deputy sheriff in mid-July 1880 he relinquished the stagecoach job to his brother Morgan. Yet Wyatt was really there for another reason altogether, as he explained while giving a deposition forty-seven years later in Los Angeles. “I intended to start a stage line when I first started out from Dodge City, but when I got there [Tombstone] I found there was [sic] two stage lines and so I finally sold my outfit to one of the companies, to a man named Kinnear. But I intended to start this stage line when I went there.” After confirming that he worked as a deputy sheriff and marshal, he also recalled, “I dealt awhile in *pasteboard and ivory.*” He was a faro dealer.37 Wyatt worked as a dealer from time to time at the Oriental Saloon, which Milt Joyce (Joice) opened on July 21, 1880, according to a newspaper report the next day in the *Tombstone Epitaph*. Earp acquired a one-quarter interest in the gambling department of the Oriental Saloon that October for providing security.38

Wyatt was not alone in mining the miners more than the mines. The Earps soon began dealing in mining claims, as did many Tombstonians, starting with a prospect sponsored by Robert “Uncle Bob” Winders, a Fort Worth saloon owner. Soon they sold a claim to Harry Finaty of Dodge City and a six-thousand-dollar lease to a San Francisco investor.39
Much of the Tombstone citizenry dealt in mine claims while working far removed from the dirty, gritty work of prospecting, an approach that was replicated a few decades later in oil boom towns.

The Earp brothers also made new friends such as Marshal Williams, the Tombstone agent of Wells Fargo, and Fred Dodge, who arrived the same month as the Earps. Dodge was a special agent of Wells Fargo working undercover, initially as a gambler. Among the most consequential, long-term relationships Earp established that year was one with John Clum, a pivotal Tombstonian who edited the *Epitaph*, a leading newspaper in the boomtown. Clum was born in New York State, attended Rutgers College, then went west in the Army Signal Corps. He organized the San Carlos, the first Apache Indian reservation in 1874, and then served several years as agent.40

William M. Breakenridge later noted in passing that at least initially, “the outlaws, stage robbers and certain of the gamblers were good friends.” He recalled that the Clantons ranched above Charleston on the San Pedro River. He described nearby Galeyville as a “refuge for all outlaws,” which sported some eleven saloons. According to Breakenridge, in the early 1880s, cattle rustlers moved stolen Mexican herds through the Guadalupe and Skeleton Canyons and the San Simon Valley to the Galeyville area. John Ringo and Curly Bill Brocius were prominent leaders among the rustlers, who brought stolen herds to the Clanton place. “The McLaurys looked after all the stock brought up from Mexico through Agua Prieta, where Douglas now stands, into the Sulphur Spring Valley.” He also described Frank Stilwell, Jim Crane, Harry Head, Billy Grounds, Pete Spencer (Spence), Zwing Hunt, and Billy Leonard as “stage robbers, hold-up men and other outlaws” that made these places a refuge.41

Traditional stories relate that John Peters Ringo was
born in Ringoes, New Jersey, or perhaps Missouri, where, a myth states, he attended William Jewell College. More probably, he was born on May 3, 1850, in Greenfork, Wayne County, Indiana, to Martin Ringo and Mary Peters Ringo and received only a rudimentary education. The family moved to Liberty, Missouri, where some members of the Ringo clan already lived. John Ringo’s aunt, Augusta Peters, married Col. Coleman Younger, uncle and namesake of the notorious train and bank robber Thomas Coleman “Cole” Younger. According to the journal of Mary Peters Ringo, the year 1864 found Martin Ringo, his wife, and five children in a wagon train headed west. Martin was killed in a gun accident along the way on July 30, leaving Mary to take the young family on to San Jose, California, where they arrived that October. John Ringo reputedly left California in 1869, perhaps joining some of his father’s kinsmen who had settled in Texas.

About six years later, Texas newspaper accounts indicate that John associated with Scott Cooley in the “Hoodoo War,” a Mason County range conflict. Cooley’s interest in the feud was pure revenge. Tim Williamson, his former employer and mentor, had been killed by German factionist Peter Bader with the collaboration of former Mason County deputy sheriff John Worley (Worhle). Cooley, Ringo, and other associates found, killed, and scalped Worley at Mason, Texas, in 1875. Ringo apparently participated in two more Mason County War killings, those of a hireling named Cheyney and Charley Bader, who had been mistaken for his brother Peter Bader, the presumed murderer of Tim Williamson. The Bader killing landed Ringo in the Travis County, Texas, jail in 1877. Fellow inmates included Bill Taylor, John Wesley Hardin, and Mannen Clements, participants all to one degree or another in the infamous Sutton-Taylor Feud.

Ringo reportedly escaped and then briefly served as a
Loyal Valley, Texas, constable before seeking his fortune in New Mexico. His first publicly reported introduction to Arizona society about two years later was less than promising. Ringo took offense when saloon denizen Louis Hancock refused to accept a proffered drink, then pummeled and shot him, leaving poor Hancock seriously wounded on December 14, 1879.

Ringo associated himself with the “cowboy” faction—Arizona outlaws selling stolen horses in Mexico and bringing stolen cattle into Arizona—along with Curly Bill Brocius, another man of mystery. Stories now largely discounted say Curly Bill started life in Missouri as a different bad man, William Graham. More certainly, Brocius punched cattle in Texas and then drifted through New Mexico into Arizona. There he and Ringo, contemporaries believed, led the cowboy element, whose primary targets were Mexican ranchers and smugglers.42

During this period, “The rustlers generally roamed between Charleston on the San Pedro and distant Shakespeare, a bleak little mining town in western New Mexico. The landscape they occupied was rough and mountainous.” Yet the region included “canyons and extensive valleys that afford the finest sort of range for cattle.”43 Their favorite haunt the year after the Earps arrived was Galeyville, which Breakenridge described as yet another focus of outlawry in southeast Arizona: “Galeyville was a small mining town with a smelter, and employed some thirty or forty men in the mine and smelter. It was here where some sixty or more rustlers, who were engaged in stealing cattle in Mexico, and bringing them across the line into New Mexico and Arizona in large herds, made their headquarters; they knew no law but their own.”

Breakenridge further described the criminal opportunities available: “There was no port of entry between El Paso and Nogales, and the only Mexican custom house, outside
of these places, was on the San Pedro River where it flows from Mexico into the United States. Cattle were cheap and plentiful in Mexico, there were few line riders [cowboys watching the herds] and it was very easy for smugglers to get across the line from both directions.” The economic cycle was completed by “Mexicans [who] smuggled Mexican silver into the United States to buy goods, and then smuggled the goods into Mexico, as the duty on merchandise was very high and so was the export duty on silver.”

Yet another opportunity was presented by American cattle ranchers in the area who needed stock and did not ask many questions. Their source of supply was a rustlers’ ring that operated out of Galeyville. There were lots of cattle to be stolen in Mexico then driven through Skeleton or Guadalupe Canyons and up through the San Simon Valley. The rustlers, being good businessmen, had scattered corrals along the route anyplace there was water, and there they branded the stolen beef and drove them on for sale to the ranchers of the valleys.

The rustling was bad enough; worse was the considerable bloodshed that was part of the price. Since the cowboys had no compunction about shooting Mexicans, much violence accompanied these raids before they returned to Galeyville to drink up the profits.

They also robbed Mexican smugglers bringing in silver across the border as a lucrative sideline in which they traded for goods to be taken back to Mexico. There was little expense since the smugglers avoided government duties on both sides of the border. As for the cowboy ambushes, Billy Breakenridge was probably right in saying that most of the time they killed the smugglers.

Curly Bill Brocius and John Ringo were the acknowledged leaders of the Galeyville mob. They and their followers lived well on their misguided deeds for a time, but trouble was coming.
Wyatt Earp investigated the July 1880 theft of some mules from nearby Camp Rucker. He recalled the incident in November 1881 during court testimony:

The difficulty which resulted in the death of William Clanton and Tom McLaury originated last spring. . . . A little over a year ago, I followed Frank and Tom McLaury and two other parties who had stolen six Government mules from Camp Rucker—myself, Virgil, and Morgan Earp, Marshal Williams, Captain Hurst, and four soldiers. We traced the mules to McLaury’s ranch.

They had branded the mules DS changing the US to DS. After we arrived at McLaury’s ranch, Captain Hurst came to us boys and told us he had made a compromise. By so doing he would get his mules back. We insisted on following them up. Hurst prevailed upon us to go back to Tombstone, so we came back. Hurst told us, two or three weeks afterward, that they would not give up the mules to him after we went, saying that they only wanted to get us away so they could stand the soldiers off. Captain Hurst cautioned me and my brothers Virgil and Morgan to look out for these men, that they had made some hard threats against our lives.

The 1928 memoirs of Deputy Sheriff Billy Breakenridge quoted this narrative but related a second version of events. According to “old-timers,” Curly Bill, Zwing Hunt, and Billy Grounds “stole the mules and ran them down into the Sulphur Spring Valley near the McLaury Ranch.” The trio sold the mules to a freighter, who in turn used them to fulfill a government contract at Camp Rucker, from which the livestock had been stolen.

On July 30, 1880, Captain Hurst published a notice in the *Tombstone Epitaph* offering a reward for the return of the livestock. The notice stated that the mules had been secreted with the assistance of the McLaurys at or near their ranch fifteen days earlier. Six days later, Frank McLaury
responded in the *Tombstone Weekly Nugget*, calling Hurst “a coward, a vagabond, a rascal and a malicious liar.”

Even so, signs of growing Tombstone prosperity were everywhere, even as potential danger lurked in the nearby hills. Telegraph operations began in July 1880 and local telephone service was available early the next year.49 The Mimbres Apache leader Victorio escaped from the San Carlos Indian Reservation and had to be recaptured, while dirt-floored saloons and hotels were being replaced by permanent structures back in town. Soon, Tombstone boasted four theaters and the Can Can restaurant, which one enthusiast compared favorably to Delmonico’s of New York. Still there were some limitations to all this progress. The nearest train station was Benson, some twenty miles away, and water piped in from the Dragoon Mountains was only available intermittently.50 The growing population was attended by several physicians then, yet tragedies still occurred. Diarist George Parsons recorded the death of Mary Clum from complications of childbirth.51 Soon, the Tombstone medical community would be tending other needs.

George Parsons recorded on July 30 that Tombstone had been attracting a hard element, and that there were petty criminals and small-time gamblers associating with the cowboys. A peculiarly notable incident of violence occurred the month before. Handsome, square-jawed “Buckskin” Frank Leslie was a Tombstone bartender with a strong side interest in the ladies. His flirtations took a fatal turn on June 22, 1880, as described by Deputy Sheriff Breakenridge. That day Leslie “attended a dance at the opera house, and walked home with Mrs. Killeen, the Commercial House housekeeper, who had separated from her husband. While they were sitting on the front porch of the hotel above the street, her husband, Mike Killeen, also a bartender, came out onto the porch, and after a few words, either Leslie or his associate George Perine shot and killed Killeen. Leslie
was discharged by the first judge who examined the case and soon married the widow.”

Before he died, Killeen said that he was shot by Leslie associate George Perine, not Leslie. On June 27, Parsons observed that there was some talk of vigilantes “going for Frank Leslie if Killeen were to die.”

Perine was arrested on August 14. Three days later Perine appeared before Justice of the Peace James Reilly, who had arrived in town only three months before. Perine appeared with attorney Harry Jones. This was a problem. Justice Reilly had warned Harry Jones not to come back after an argument the previous day regarding Reilly’s deciding before he assumed the bench a case in which he had an interest. When Deputy Sheriff Wyatt Earp declined to remove Jones from the courtroom, Reilly proceeded to do so himself. After the resulting fracas, both Harry Jones and the judge faced criminal charges.

Eventually, George Perine was arrested, but he was cleared by a grand jury in Tucson.

The only Earp stalwart not in Tombstone yet was John Henry “Doc” Holliday. Years later, Wyatt told the San Francisco Examiner that he met Doc Holliday and Big Nose Kate (Kate Elder) at Fort Griffin in 1877 while Earp was assistant city marshal of Dodge City, Kansas, in pursuit of cattle thieves. He also claimed that Holliday saved him from an ambush at the hands of an unnamed assailant who was preparing to shoot Earp when Holliday dropped him.

John Henry Holliday was the son of a Griffin, Georgia, businessman. Educated in dentistry in the early 1870s, he moved to Dallas, Texas, for health reasons and initially practiced his profession with success. A series of difficulties, coupled with his own propensities and his senior partner’s disdain for Holliday’s gambling habits, led him to turn his hobby into an occupation. Doc followed the gambling circuit, which then included Texas stops at Denison, Fort Griffin, and San Angelo. Still, as the years went by he continued to practice dentistry from time to time.

Buckskin Frank Leslie. (Courtesy Arizona Historical Society, Tucson)
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Holliday established a reputation as a fearless gunfighter, an asset in his new occupation. His first gunfight of record in Dallas pitted Holliday against a saloonkeeper in a dispute over card handling. Although shots rang out, neither man suffered any injury. Doc was in at least two more gunfights, these at Las Vegas, New Mexico, the year before he arrived at Tombstone. On July 19, 1879, Holliday killed former army scout Mike Gordon with a single round after Gordon shot up a saloon in which Holliday was a partner. Gordon’s former paramour had refused to quit her saloon job and join him, prompting the gunplay. Almost a year later, in June, bartender Charlie White was seriously wounded by Holliday. Months earlier, Holliday and White had clashed in Dodge City, forcing White into a rapid exodus. When Holliday heard White was in Las Vegas, he sought him out, and a gunfight quickly erupted. After White crumpled behind the bar, Doc left him for dead. White, however, did not die and made a full recovery.57

Holliday arrived in Tombstone in September 1880.58 A Captain Malgan had been killed in the streets on Wednesday, August 25, and Parsons reacted for many: “Things are getting to a pretty pass. The death toll since I came here, I mean violent deaths—shootings and poisonings—foot up fearfully large. I have not recorded all. This last shooter will probably be hung if caught by the boys. Something must be done. Lynch law is very effective at times in a community like this.”59

The level of violence in Tombstone was about to rise again.