

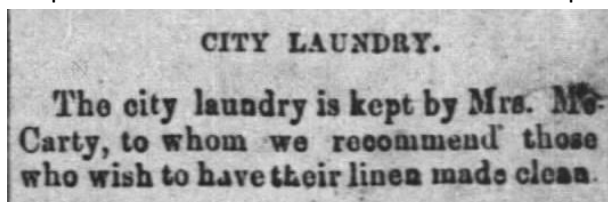
DISPELLING A MYTH

By Lori Halfhide

Not all of my research projects are searching for Orphan Train riders, their birth parents and or long-lost information. Sometimes my work involves deeper historical research to prove (or disprove) stories that have been passed around. As with any sort of gossip or rumor, the longer it goes on and the farther it is spread, the more convoluted it becomes. This week I have been dispelling one of those myths.

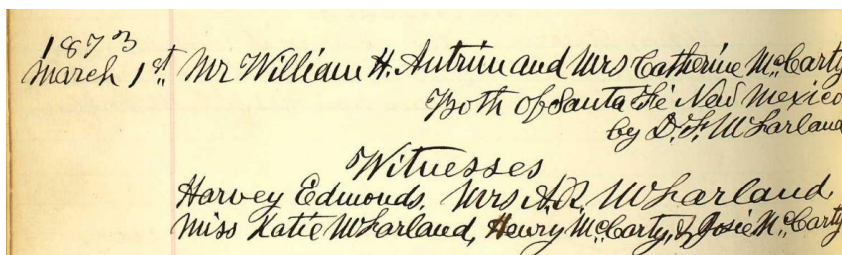
There are always questions for us here at the National Orphan Train Complex. One that comes up occasionally is, "Was Billy the Kid an Orphan Train Rider." We hadn't been asked about Billy for quite a while, then last week we were asked twice if Billy the Kid was an Orphan Train Rider. It was time to investigate and discover the truth.

Outlaw Billy the Kid was born William Henry McCarty in the Hell's Kitchen neighborhood of New York City. He was the older son of Patrick McCarty and Catherine Devine. Another son was born to the couple in 1862 in New York. His name was Joseph but he would be known as Josie. Patrick enlisted in the Union Army around that time and never made it home; he died the 25th of May, 1865. in Kentucky and is buried at Nashville National Cemetery.



Wednesday, 15 March 1871 ad for Catherine McCarty's laundry services appearing in the *Wichita Tribune*.

believe they may have been on the move at the time the census taker made his rounds. I did find a small ad in the *Wichita Tribune* on 15 March 1871, advertising City Laundry, run by Catherine McCarty. In Wichita she met William H. Antrim and the small family moved in with him. In 1872 Catherine was diagnosed with "consumption" (now known as Tuberculosis) and the family left Wichita, looking for a better climate to improve Catherine's health. They moved to Santa Fe, New Mexico, where Catherine and William were married on the first of March, 1873. Their marriage certificate was a small, handwritten document. It was a bit of a thrill to read through it and see the witnesses to the marriage listed at the bottom. The last two were (William) Henry and Josie McCarty! As a young man, Henry McCarty was a rather nerdy type of boy. He read the many books that he borrowed from neighbors and that Catherine supplied for her boys. He loved to sing and dance, and was said to be able to speak Irish fluently. He was popular with everyone, a friendly boy with a ready smile. But Henry's carefree days were over.



Marriage record of Catherine McCarty and William Antrim. Henry and Josie McCarty are listed as witnesses.

William Antrim was a poor excuse for a husband or step-father. He was rarely home; he spent most of his time prospecting and gambling, neither one of which he was very successful with. Catherine still took in laundry and also took in boarders and baked bread, cakes, and pies to supplement the family income. All of the hard work exacerbated her illness, and for four months prior to her death, she was bed-ridden. All this time, due to his step-father's absences, young Henry was the man of the house. He took care of his mother and brother. Catherine McCarty Antrim passed away in Silver City, New Mexico, on the 16th of September, 1874, at the age of 45. Antrim didn't even bother to show up for the funeral. He left town, but not before leaving each of the boys in a different foster home. Henry was not quite 15 and Josie was 12. When Antrim returned, he sold the cabin and took off for Arizona to prospect again.

William Antrim was a poor excuse for a husband or step-father. He was rarely home; he spent most of his time prospecting and gambling, neither one of which he was very successful with. Catherine still took in laundry and also took in boarders and baked bread, cakes, and pies to supplement the family income. All of the hard work exacerbated her illness, and for four months prior to her death, she was bed-ridden. All this time, due to his step-father's absences, young Henry was the man of the house. He took care of his mother and brother. Catherine McCarty Antrim passed away in Silver City, New Mexico, on the 16th of September, 1874, at the age of 45. Antrim didn't even bother to show up for the funeral. He left town, but not before leaving each of the boys in a different foster home. Henry was not quite 15 and Josie was 12. When Antrim returned, he sold the cabin and took off for Arizona to prospect again.

Henry McCarty was first arrested a year after his mother's death for stealing cheese. About two weeks later, on September 23, 1875, he was arrested for stealing a basket of clothes from a Chinese Laundry. He went to jail for that crime, but didn't even make it a day there. He escaped by shinnying up the chimney.

He turned 18 in late 1877 and sought out his step-father. Antrim had never liked Henry and would not allow Henry in the house. Henry then assumed the name William H. Bonney. He found work as a sheepherder and ranch hand outside of Fort Grant, New Mexico. He fell in with a gang of horse thieves and that was truly the beginning of Billy the Kid's reign of terror. On August 18, 1877, Billy the Kid killed for the first time; he was nineteen. His victim was Frank "Windy" Cahill, the town bully who was picking on Billy and had physically attacked him. This first murder was considered by some to be in self defense and a service to the community. Windy Cahill was a bully to all and no one liked him.

Billy the Kid spent the next two years cattle rustling, gun fighting, and living on the run. In November of 1880, he killed Deputy James Carlyle. On December 15, the Governor of New Mexico put a price on his head, \$500 for the capture or murder of Billy the Kid. Sheriff Pat Garrett set off with a posse, determined to bring in the Kid. He captured him on the 23rd. Billy spent several months in jail awaiting trial. On the ninth of April, 1881, he was convicted of the murder of Sheriff William Brady and sentenced to hang on May 15. On April 28 Billy escaped from jail, using a gun left for him in the outhouse. He killed two deputies on his way out. Instead of leaving the area, Billy stayed in Lincoln County. Sheriff Garrett found him and murdered him on the 14th of July, 1881. Billy is buried at Fort Sumner with two of his friends.

These are the basic facts I found about Billy the Kid. I read a lot of newspaper articles and was shocked by the total disregard for information that the newspapers of the time used when writing articles about him. I found many stories that were totally not true. One said he used the alias because he had a mother and two sisters in Texas he was protecting. They used numerous names for him: Billy Smith, Henry McCarthy, Michael McCarthy, and William Antrim (his step-father's name) to name a few. The number of people he murdered varies greatly, from 8 to 33. Billy himself said that he killed "one man for each year of my life." He was twenty-one at the time. Henry McCarty had been well-liked in Lincoln County, New Mexico, and many people there sincerely mourned the loss. Under other circumstances, Henry could have had a promising future.

I actually found the beginning of the Orphan Train myth in an article called "Claiming Billy the Kid," credited to the *New York Sun* after his death and printed in newspapers across the country. The reporter interviewed a New York City policeman named Thomas Dwyer who based it all on a vague resemblance between the Kid and a man in NYC who murdered another on Dwyer's watch. The article had the entire timeline of Henry McCarty's life wrong, deaths of his parents wrong, and more. Here is the beginning of a myth: "McCarty was bad from a child, and had some Western experience before he fled West in 1876. When 13 or 14 years old, he was sent to the House of Refuge, and through the Children's Aid Society, I think he was bound out to a Western farmer. He stayed a year or so, and then escaped and came back to this city." I contacted our friend and Orphan Train scholar Clark Kidder, who has access to the records of the House of Refuge, just to verify. He looked up all of the aliases and no, Henry McCarty did not go to the House of Refuge. After he left New York with his mother as a small child he never returned to the city.

Based on the facts derived from U.S. Census records, birth and death records, and newspaper articles, I can safely say that Billy the Kid was NOT an Orphan Train Rider. Myth dispelled.



Billy the Kid in a photo taken a few months before his death.