Tombstone and the Old West

Tombstone established itself as a boomtown after silver was discovered in a local mine in 1877. It quickly became a prospering community which attracted all walks of life.

The American Old West has captured the minds and imaginations of Americans since the West became more civilized in the late 1800s to early 1900s. In the early 1880s, a specific event occurred that would capture the essence of the old west in one story. A walk of life.

Tombstone established itself as a boomtown after much historical accuracy as possible from the historical truth. The Earp Trials

Murder on the streets of Tombstone

The Earp party did not receive retribution from the Cowboys through the legal system. Retribution was enacted in other ways. About four weeks after the trial, there was an assassination attempt on Wyatt, which survived. He saw, but did not use his left arm for the rest of his life. The Earp party was finally justified in their actions due to the threats made by the Clantons.

The People

Wyatt Earp

The tragedy that occurred at Tombstone, Arizona involved characters who were as interesting as the time period. From lawmen turned silver prospectors, dentists turned gamblers, outlaws and scoundrels, these men all had their stake in the events at Tombstone. Following are short descriptions of these men.

Wyatt Earp has been most often characterized as a strict, no-nonsense person who preferred to settle disputes with words rather than confrontation.

The O.K. Corral

This is the main event that catapulted Wyatt to near-legendary fame in the stories of the Old West and sparked the inspiration for a plethora of Hollywood renditions of the events in Tombstone. The gunfight at the O.K. Corral actually happened in an empty lot behind the Corral itself, next to Fly’s Photography Studio.

The night before the gunfight, many of the men involved in the conflict were playing poker at the Oriental Saloon. Wyatt, Morgan, and Holliday were part of the game. Ike Clanton and Tom McLaury, two members of the Cowboy gang, were also in attendance. Sheriff John Behan was also involved. Due to prior tensions between the two groups, Ike and Tom threatened the Earps during the night. As a result, the next day the Cowboys were well armed, which was learned in Tombstone. Team law prohibited the open carrying of arms within the city limits.

The Aftermath

Although acting with the powers of a United States Marshal, Wyatt's vengeance eventually facing charges for murder in the Arizona territory. The group then fled to the New Mexico territories before splitting up. The justice system in New Mexico, however, was still less defined and was dependent on the social standing of the United States, and the Earps feared for an unfair trial so they relocated to Colorado to face legal charges but Colorado denied the request.

The Shootout

On a cold October 26th afternoon in 1881, Sheriff John Behan confronted the Cowboys and made a fruitless attempt to disarm them. Later, the Earps, who were charged with entering the law in Tombstone at the time, sought to disarm the man and then enforce the city law. Wyatt, Virgil, Morgan, and Holliday met on Fremont Street, which is a little past 2:30 pm turned the corner to confront the Cowboys at about 2:45.

After a short verbal confrontation, Tom McLaury drew his gun which set off a barrage of about thirty shots during a span of less than a minute. After the dust settled, Virgil, Morgan, and Holliday were wounded. Billy Clanton, Frank, and Tom McLaury were dead. Wyatt Earp remained unharmed. This prompted various forms of retribution from the surviving members of the Cowboys against the Earp family and Holliday.

Sources: