



The Real Billy the Kid: With new light on the LINCOLN COUNTY WAR; Facsimile of Original 1936 Edition

Miguel Antonio Otero

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Miguel Antonio Otero served as the first Hispanic governor of the U.S. Territory of New Mexico, from 1897 to 1906. He was appointed to the office by President William McKinley. Long after his retirement from politics, Governor Otero wrote and published his memoirs in three volumes, a major contribution to New Mexico history. But he also published a biography in 1936 titled “The Real Billy the Kid.” His aim in that book, he proclaimed, was to write the Kid’s story “without embellishment, based entirely on actual fact.” Otero had known the outlaw briefly and also had known the man who killed Billy in 1881, Sheriff Pat Garrett. The author recalled Garrett saying he regretted having to slay Billy. Or, as he bluntly put it, “it was simply the case of who got in the first shot. I happened to be the lucky one.” By all accounts, Billy the Kid was much adored by New Mexico’s Hispanic population. Otero asserts that the Kid was considerate of the old, the young and the poor. And he was loyal to his friends. Further, Martin Chaves of Santa Fe stated: “Billy was a perfect gentleman with a noble heart. He never killed a native citizen of New Mexico in all his career, and he had plenty of courage.” Otero was especially admiring of Billy because as a boy in Silver City, “he had loved his mother devotedly.” Such praise must be viewed in the context of the times. Other people, of course, saw Billy as an arch-villain. MIGUEL ANTONIO OTERO rightly distinguished himself as a political leader in New Mexico where he raised a family and lived out his life as a champion of the people, but he is also highly recognized for his career as an author. He published his legendary “My Life on the Frontier, 1864-1882” in 1935, followed by “The Real Billy the Kid: With New Light on the Lincoln County War” in 1936, “My Life on the Frontier, 1882-1897” in 1939, and “My Nine Years as Governor of New Mexico Territory, 1897-1906” in 1940.

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