

FINDING BILLY BATTLES

An Account of Peril, Transgression and Redemption (Book 1 of a Trilogy)

Ronald E. Yates

INTRODUCTION

Kansas City, 1948

My full name is William Fitzroy Raglan Battles, but most folks call me Billy Battles. My good friends call me Billy "Rags" Battles. More on that later.

Let me begin by owning up to some pretty terrible things I did during my life. That way, you can make up your mind right now if you want to read further.

I have killed people. And I am sad to say the first person I killed was a woman. It was entirely unintentional, and to this day, the incident haunts me. The next person I killed was that woman's grown son, and that *was* intentional. If you decide to read on, you will learn more about these two people and how they came to die at my hands.

You will also learn about other things I did—some of which I am not proud of, some of which I am. In the course of my life, I got into a lot of brawls where I had to defend myself and others in a variety of ways. I did so without regret, because in each case, someone was trying to do me or someone else harm.

Now I know the Christian Bible says it is a sin to kill, and in some of these imbroglios, I probably could have walked away and avoided the ensuing violence. I chose not to because I learned early in my life that walking away from a scrap is too often seen as a sign of weakness or cowardice and simply incites bullies and thugs to molest you later on. There were a few individuals who tried their damndest to put an end to me, but fortunately, I was able to dispatch or incapacitate those malefactors before they could apply the coup de grâce.

So there you have it—a forewarning about me and my sometimes-turbulent life. As the Romans used to say, "Caveat emptor," if you decide to continue reading.

I don't know if anybody will ever read what I am putting to paper here, but I figure I should do it anyway. A few folks have told me my experiences are fascinating because they show what it was like in Kansas and a lot of other places in the last century, when life could turn violent and capricious without warning.

As I am writing this, I am eighty-eight years old, and the year is 1948. I am not sure how much longer I will be on this earth, so I figure I had better write pretty fast before I join the Great Majority. I have been fortunate in that my memory still serves me quite

well, but I must admit that for much of my life, I kept several journals, and it's those journals that have kept my mind on the trail when it was inclined to wander off into the brush.

It's also those journals that helped me make sense, now that I am an old man, of some of the things I saw and did during my life. It's a funny thing, but as you grow older and you have time to look back on your life, things begin to make more sense to you. I guess that's what they call wisdom—not that I'm necessarily a wise man. I'm just somebody who had the good fortune to see and do a lot of things—some pretty awful, some pretty wonderful—and the good Lord has blessed me, or cursed me, with the capacity to remember most of them.

There are some things I wish I could forget—things other people did and things that I did. But I cannot. Consequently, I have lived for decades with many ghosts—not the kind that appear as apparitions in the night, but the kind that grab hold of your mind and force you to remember even when you don't want to.

I know what it is like to be a hunter of men, and I know what it is like to be hunted. I can tell you, I much prefer the former over the latter. I have known and caused terrible fear. I have experienced and inflicted dreadful pain. I have loved and been loved, and I have been, without doubt, hated by some.

But I have always tried to live my life as my mother taught me—with uprightness, reliability, and consequence. I wasn't always successful. Sometimes my disposition turned dark, and I did things I truly regret today. I am, after all, one of God's wretched creatures—a simple mortal with all the imperfections and deficiencies of that species.

Now, I don't claim that my life was any more important than anybody else's. Most folks who lived in the nineteenth century had their share of adventures—some more than others. But what I think is important is that the truth about certain things be told—or at least the truth as I witnessed it in those days. There has been so much fiction and fabrication passed along as fact about things that happened in places like Kansas, Oklahoma, Missouri, Arizona, Colorado, and so on that people today have no real idea of what really went on back then.

For example, the moving-picture people have gotten it almost all wrong—not that they were ever trying to get it right. After all, they are in the entertainment business—not the truth-telling business. They have made some folks so much bigger than life that I have trouble figuring out if they are talking about the same people I used to know or had some acquaintance with. And some folks have been either forgotten or turned into the worst kind of villains. I am not sure which is worse.

Hell, they even got a lot of our history wrong. The Spanish-American War, for example. A lot of that was fought in the Far East, and most Americans don't even know it. I know it because I was there fighting in the Philippines. That is a dark chapter in our history, I can tell you. I was also privileged to have spent time in other parts of the Orient at a time when that part of the world was still pretty exotic and mysterious to most Americans.

And that's not all. There was a lot of skirmishing later on down in Mexico that we were mixed up in after Doroteo Arango, alias Pancho Villa, and his little army invaded the United States back in 1915. He led the U.S. Army on a merry chase throughout Mexico and leveled an American town in New Mexico. The late General George S. Patton (in those days just a shave tail lieutenant) even brought back the body of the

commander of Villa's bodyguards tied to the hood of his car like a big buck deer. I know that, because I was there. But I wager students today don't read anything about any of that in school.

The folks in Hollywood and those who write books and radio programs have added so much twaddle and claptrap to things that happened that I sometimes have to ask myself if I missed something. Because what they are depicting is so far away from the truth as to be mythology. I never thought much about that until now, when I realized that all the rubbish `coming out of Hollywood and over the radio and in books and magazines and on these new contraptions called televisions is being passed off, or at least being accepted, as fact.

Sometimes we just don't see things the way they really are until we can stand back from them and look at them with the viewpoint of time and distance. That's what a professor at the University of Kansas once told me when I was a student there for a while back in the 1870s. I never finished my college education—a fact that troubled my mother until her dying day. Nevertheless, I learned just enough at that place to be a modest man of letters, but not enough to be a danger to anyone or myself, except on a few singular occasions. My time at college may have been the two most important years of my life because it gave me a leg up on a lot of folks back then who couldn't read or write or study things out in a logical way.

I was no warrior. Never wanted to be. Nevertheless, I got pushed or pulled into some regretful scraps. I did serve a hitch in the army, and that was a true adventure. In fact, I was a scribbler, a newspaperman for most of my life. But in those days, there were no precise lines between journalists and the people they were writing about. I was just fortunate that I was able to write about what I saw and what I experienced. Not many men or, for that matter, women, in those days had that opportunity. I consider myself most fortunate in that regard.

Now that my life is drawing to a close, I am eager to put as much of it to paper as I can. Maybe someday my descendants will be able to pass it on to their children, and they to their children. Even better would be if a larger audience might read it, but I am not an author of great literary works, so I cannot expect that to happen. I guess my modest wish is that I be able to share what I humbly regard as an eventful life with those who follow me and anybody else who might pick up these pages. But mostly, I want to set the record straight on a few things and about some of the people I got to know when I was much younger.

My life started off pretty slow, like most lives do. There was nothing special about my childhood years except for the fact that I had no father and it was up to my mother to keep me on a short leash. But about the time I hit eighteen or nineteen, things got to moving pretty fast—faster in fact than I ever thought possible. It was around that time that I met some folks, some good and some not so good, who would reenter my life many times over the next several decades. And it was around that time that I began my journey down the owl hoot trail.

But I am getting ahead of myself. I had best start from the beginning.

* * *

CHAPTER 1

I don't remember much of anything about my life before I was eight or nine. Most of what I do recall comes from conversations with my mother and her memories. There were some old letters and my mother's diary too. But mostly it's me piecing people, places, and events together as best I can to describe the foundation for all the years that followed. It was a strong foundation, put down by many people whom I will talk about later on.

Of course, the person who was most responsible for laying a sound foundation for my life was my mother. She was born Hannelore Kluge, April 6, 1836, on a farm in eastern Illinois at a time when Illinois was still considered the frontier. Her parents were German immigrants from Germany's Harz mountain region. Mother was tough as buffalo hide, with strong hands that never seemed to stop working. I can still hear that little poem she used to recite whenever she thought I was behaving like a shirker:

*Each morning sees some task begun,
Each evening sees it close;
Something attempted, something done,
Has earned a night's repose.*

I found out later that it came from Longfellow's "The Village Blacksmith," but as far as I was concerned, the sentiment belonged to my mother, who never stopped working until the day she died.

I was born around nine o'clock at night on February 28, 1860, in a three-room wood plank and sod house in what is now Ford County, Kansas. I was named after FitzRoy James Henry Somerset, otherwise known as Lord Raglan.

My father, who was born in England, thought Lord Raglan was one of England's greatest heroes. Raglan was with the Duke of Wellington at the Battle of Waterloo in 1814, where he was wounded. His right arm had to be amputated. At the end of the surgery, which was performed without any anesthesia, he told an orderly to bring him his amputated arm so he could remove a ring that his wife had given him. Later he commanded the British troops during the 1854 Crimean War, where he died.

My mother remembered that the night I was born, it was so cold out that the door froze shut and my father had to climb out a window to get to the well. When he did, he had to hack through a good four inches of ice with an iron pick to get to water. He found three of our hens frozen flat against the outdoor privy. They had gotten out of the coop during the night and couldn't figure out how to get back in.

Our house was on about 160 acres of hardscrabble prairie land near the Cimarron Cutoff of the Santa Fe Trail. In those days, there was nothing around there but prairie dogs, Kiowa's and Cheyenne's. And of course, wagons moving southwest over the cutoff from the Santa Fe Trail. Most folks who traveled through the area called it the Great American Desert because it was so barren. In 1859, my father and my mother were part of a wagon train moving west from Westport, Missouri.

They had met and married in Lawrence, Kansas—sometime around 1857, as I recall. My father's family moved onto some pretty good land there along the Kaw river around 1852. My mother and her family had moved to Lawrence from Illinois around 1856. Lawrence was founded in 1854 by the New England Emigrant Aid Society in an effort to keep the Kansas territory free from slavery. It is said that Lawrence is one of the few cities in the United States founded strictly for political reasons. My mother and her family were ardent abolitionists, as were most of the folks who moved to Lawrence around that time. As a teenager, my mother was actively involved in the Underground Railroad that moved slaves to freedom through Lawrence.

Like most folks back then, my father's family was looking for a better life, and the west was the place to find it. Moving west meant more land to farm because in those days, your wealth was most often measured by how much land you owned. The Battles were not folks who liked to stay in one place very long. It's a trait that I no doubt inherited. There was always something better over the next hill, some new opportunity. So less than a year after my father and my mother were married, the Battles decided to sell out and head west.

My father used \$175 of the money from the sale of his share of the family farm to buy a new Studebaker wagon. He and mother loaded up their belongings and hooked up with a wagon train that had started out from Westport. As they got deep into western Kansas, most of the train went north along the banks of the Arkansas River toward Colorado, but my father didn't want any part of the mountains. He and a few others chose to head southwest toward the Cimarron instead.

My mother and father didn't get very far. They busted an axle and wheel on what turned out to be some pretty decent land, which is saying a lot because land out there is mostly rolling prairie grass, bluffs, and sand hills. In those days, you could go for miles and never see a tree. Our land had timber on it—not a lot, but enough cottonwoods and box elders to make life easier. Most important of all, though, was the underground spring that supplied us with good freshwater. I learned later that the spring was fed by the Ogallala Aquifer, which lies under parts of Nebraska, Kansas, Oklahoma, and Texas.

My father and my mother planted vegetables, potatoes, wheat, and some corn, though growing corn out there was a challenge. My father had ideas of raising cattle, and he collected enough longhorn range stock to start a cow camp. He traded with the always-unpredictable Kiowa and Southern Cheyenne Indians; and when the weather cooperated, we had enough to eat and wear. Our place became a kind of stopover for a lot of the fur traders and buffalo hunters who roamed Kansas and Colorado in those days. They always brought us meat and hides in return for my mother's home cooking. Soon our house grew into a kind of outpost, with folks stopping by and trading for grain, hides, and other necessities. Our farm became known as Battles Gap because to get to it, you had to pass through a long narrow valley flanked by eighty-foot limestone bluffs. To leave, you had to pass along a small rivulet that ran through another ravine.

I am pretty sure a couple hundred wagons passed through Battles Gap during the time we lived there. But even with all the wagons coming through, it was hard on my mother. The nearest neighbors were about fifteen miles away. My mother was a sociable woman, and she missed the more civilized kind of life she had back in Lawrence. I think those folks stopping by probably kept my mother from drifting into madness. It gave her something to look forward to, and most of all, it allowed her to catch up on the news, no

matter where it came from. In those days, you didn't find out anything for months after it actually happened. We didn't learn about William Quantrill's 1863 raid on Lawrence—in which almost two hundred people (mostly men and boys) were shot down by Quantrill's four hundred bushwhackers—until three months after it happened. That's when my mother learned one of her brothers and his son were two of the victims.

It was about that time that my father went off to war. He fought on the Union side. He never came back. We learned from a letter written by an officer that he had been killed just as the war was ending in 1865. He had made it through two years of fighting, including Gettysburg, only to die when a rebel sharpshooter shot him in the back while he was currying his horse. I guess that was the final blow to my mother.

Even though she had managed to keep the farm going in the two years my father was gone, by 1866, it was all too much for her. I was no help, being only five or six at the time. So she packed up what she could, and we headed east in our old Studebaker wagon. Our destination was Lawrence, where my mother's sister, my Aunt Em, was still living. We had three mules and two horses. She sold off the longhorn stock to some of the wagons that came through and to the U.S. Army, which had put up an outpost in 1865 that later would become Fort Dodge about a day and half ride from our place just off the Santa Fe trail. My mother later told me that we stopped off at Fort Dodge. The reason was that after about two days on the prairie with that wagon and those mules, my mother could see that it was all too much for her. At the fort, she asked the captain if there was anybody around who would be trusted to help us get back to Lawrence. The captain had a better idea. Why not stay at the fort and help operate the small sutler's general store?

Years later, my mother recalled her conversation with the captain—Pierson or Pearce, I think my mother said his name was.

"We could use an educated woman's touch around here, Mrs. Battles," the captain told my mother, who had attended a small college for women back in Illinois. "Why, the men out here are barely more than savages themselves— lawless miscreants without a spattering of propriety and civility. A fine, cultivated woman such as yourself would be a considerably good influence on them."

My mother was flattered, even tempted. But while she was considering the captain's words, she looked at me, barely six and already showing signs of turning into a little savage myself. She also was keen set on getting to Lawrence, where the rest of her family lived—including my aunt, who was now a widow lady because of Quantrill and his band of Missouri bushwhackers.

"I couldn't possibly stay," my mother said. "You see my boy there? Look at him. Why, he already has the makings of a coarse and rude savage, and if I stayed here that's exactly what he would become. No, sir, I will have none of it. My man was lost in the war. I don't want to lose my son to this rough country. I want him to be an educated gentleman."

When the captain couldn't convince my mother to stay on at Fort Dodge, he agreed to find a reliable man to accompany us east across the prairie to Lawrence. In those days, no woman would dare make such a trip alone, with just a boy at her side.

That man was Luther Augustus Longley. Luther was a buffalo hunter and had spent the past year or so hunting and scouting for the army. The colonel told my mother that Luther had quit his position and wanted to get back to Lawrence, Kansas, where he had family. Luther's activities before his work with the army were sketchy. I can't recall what

Luther looked like back then; but of course, during the next several years, I came to know him very well.

Luther was a black man—the first I had ever seen. And I can recall he scared me. He had a wild look to him. His hair was frizzled, and he had hard black eyes that looked like they had been dropped into two pools of milk. He had big, almost perfectly formed white teeth that he took good care of. He brushed them after every meal, as I recall. He was a big man—probably six feet five inches tall, and maybe 230 or 240 pounds. I had never seen anybody so big in my life. Like most men in those days, he was polite to all women and elders. He had arrived with his mother and his father in Kansas City in the 1840s, which in those days was known as Westport. They had moved west from Pennsylvania and were, in that part of the world in those days, rare free black folks in Missouri, a slave state.

In the 1850s, he and his folks moved to Lawrence, Kansas. Antislavery Jayhawkers from Kansas frequently fought with proslavery Bushwhackers from neighboring Missouri. The conflict grew in 1861 after war broke out and Kansas chose to become a free state. Lawrence, the headquarters of the Jayhawkers, was the scene of several bloody encounters, including Quantrill's raid, in which about two hundred men and boys in Lawrence were shot down like dogs and some seventy-five business buildings and one hundred private homes were burned to the ground. Luther's family managed to survive that raid because they were well outside of town to the west and Quantrill and his boys came from the east and then retreated to the southeast after they finished their butchery.

I can't recall too much about our trip from Fort Dodge to Lawrence, but my mother often talked about it, so I know a little of what happened. I know there were some folks at Fort Dodge who thought it was mighty peculiar that a white woman and her boy would be accompanied on the lonesome trail east by a big black man. A few of the ladies tried to talk my mother out of going, telling her that to do so would most certainly lead to some horrible kind of violation of her person.

The captain would hear none of it. "Luther is a good man—why, I would trust him with my own wife and child," he told my mother. "You needn't worry about what any of those clucking hens say."

Years later, my mother told me the trip to Lawrence from Fort Dodge—a distance of almost three hundred miles—took about two weeks. Along the way, we linked up with a few other folks who were traveling east to Kansas City. One of those families was the Tilghmans, who were on their way to Atchison, Kansas, where they had a farm along the Missouri River.

Now I don't recall anything about that trip, but it is notable to me because of the friendship my mother had with Mrs. Tilghman. When we got to Lawrence, the Tilghmans stayed with our family before heading out for Atchison. It would be a friendship that would have a big impact on my life later on.

Lawrence, Kansas, in 1866 wasn't much to look at. Sure, the town had been rebuilt and the new buildings were bigger and better than the ones Quantrill and his raiders had burned down. But the town still had a "wild, unsettled look about it," my mother always said. Still, Lawrence was where she decided to put down roots.

One reason my mother put down roots was that up on a hill overlooking Lawrence, a single fifty-foot-square building housing what would eventually become the University

of Kansas had been built in 1866. It wasn't known then as the University of Kansas but as North College.

Lawrence lies in the Kaw Valley, bordered on the north and south by the Kansas (Kaw) and Wakarusa rivers and overlooked by Mount Oread, the hill on which the University of Kansas campus is built. Early settlers called the hill Hogback Ridge, but it was later renamed after the Oread Academy in Worcester, Massachusetts. The word *Oread* comes from the Greek, meaning "mountain nymph."

Lawrence is smack between the Santa Fe and Oregon Trails. The Oregon Trail ran through what is now the city and the University of Kansas campus, while the Santa Fe Trail ran just south of the city, along what are now county roads and farmland.

The streets were named after the states in the order they came into the Union, beginning with Delaware. Massachusetts Street was designated the main street because Lawrence's founders were from Massachusetts. But any resemblance between Massachusetts and Kansas was purely imaginary, my mother used to say.

When we got to Lawrence, we settled in with our relatives. Eventually, my mother took up sewing and made women's dresses for the local general store. Her dresses were popular with the ladies of Lawrence—almost as popular as the store-bought dresses they could get in Kansas City, which was just about forty miles away.

My childhood years were pretty uneventful as things go. I didn't get into much trouble, though I did cause my mother quite a bit of difficulty with a few pranks now and again. Along with a few friends, I tipped over some outhouses, stole apples from Mr. Bimbrick's orchard, and got caught smoking cigars Bobby Kummel swiped from Filsinger's tobacco shop. I was rightfully punished for those misadventures.

Nevertheless, by the time I was eleven or twelve, my mother was barely able to contain that little savage she was convinced was eating away at my soul. I guess I was pretty incorrigible, not having a father and all. My mother was no push over, but she also wasn't a father who could take a son to the woodshed when events required it.

The closest person I had to a father was Luther. When I got out of hand, why, my mother would have me spend some time with him. He wouldn't lecture me, but he would take me out into the countryside for a long day of hunting or fishing. During those times, he somehow managed to set me straight about my behavior and my responsibilities to my mother.

"You know what a hobbadehoy is, Billy?" Luther asked me one day while we were fishing. I had threatened to run off one day after an argument with my mother. I was probably fifteen at the time.

I shook my head.

"That's a young man who has ceased to think of himself as a boy but is not yet regarded as a man. That's what you are, a hobbadehoy. It's a right hard time for a young man like yourself. Me, why, I am between hay and grass—that is somewhere between youth and old age. So you see, we are never anywhere for very long. We are always moving toward something. And that's what you're doing. Moving toward being a man. You ain't there yet, but you want to be. And of course, most mothers are dreadful fearful of losing their young'uns. Your mother is specially dreadful because you are all she has. Can you understand that?"

I nodded. "I guess so. I wouldn't shin out, but sometimes I feel my tether is too short."

"You will lose that tether soon enough, and then someday when you are in a heap of hurt and trouble, you are going to reach for it and wish your mama was on the other end."

Luther was right.

Luther taught me to shoot a rifle and a revolver. I especially looked forward to shooting Luther's Big Fifty Sharps .50 caliber buffalo rifle. It had a powerful kick to it, and my shoulder would be pretty sore after firing a few rounds. But it was a fine piece of weaponry. Some hunters said you could hit a target at five miles, and Luther said you could fire it today and kill something tomorrow. Of course, both of those claims were just a load of prairie chips.

My mother wasn't much pleased with my shooting lessons, but she relented because she knew Luther was shoving sense into my skull. She was hard-pressed to keep me in school. It was difficult for a boy like me to concentrate on school when every day I could see wagons moving west along the Oregon and Santa Fe Trails. I longed to join them, and there were a few occasions when I almost did. But then I thought about my mother and how it would hurt her, and I stuck it out. My mother was a stickler for school. She made sure I studied and learned my letters and numbers. But what she mostly did was read to me when I was very young. It taught me to appreciate literature and writing, and it activated my imagination quite a bit.

By 1877, I was almost seventeen, and I was eager to set out on my own. I planned to go to Fort Riley, Kansas, to join the Seventh Cavalry. It was just a year after George Armstrong Custer and his command had been wiped out at the Little Big Horn, and like a lot of young men at the time, I felt a strong need to avenge that slaughter. It wasn't until I was much older and more experienced that I understood the deeper political and economic undercurrents of the so-called Indian Wars and the issues that led to what the world today calls Custer's Last Stand.

Go to Fort Riley and join the cavalry? My mother wouldn't hear of it. "You will do no such thing. You are going to get an education. I didn't spend all those days and nights sewing dresses so you could turn out to be some coarse ruffian."

I argued. I sulked. I threatened to run off. But that was that. I spent the next two years taking classes up on Hogback Ridge. I must admit, it was good for me. I learned some Latin, some algebra, some English literature, some German, some philosophy, a little history, and geography. But most of all, I learned that having an education back then in the west was a little like being the one-eyed man in the kingdom of the blind. Those who could read and write and reason things out with logic had a leg up on just about 80 percent of those you ran into back then.

Then one spring day in 1879, after classes ended for the semester, I was called into the editor's office of the Lawrence Union, where I had been employed part-time as a printer's devil and sometimes as a reporter. The editor was a beefy, round-bodied man named Horace K. Hawes. A thick crop of shaggy white hair covered his head and spilled down over his ears. Fierce blue eyes peered at you from under graying russet eyebrows that resembled sheaves of wheat. The left side of his ruddy, pinched face was creased by a threadlike crimson scar, the result of a Confederate sniper's bullet at Antietam.

"William, I have a proposition for you," he said. Hawes sat behind a small wooden desk at the back of the two-room Union office. As usual, his white sleeves were rolled up to his elbows and secured with garters in an effort to keep them free of printer's ink. He wore a dark brown vest and a blue bow tie around a high white collar.

I looked at Hawes, not knowing what to expect. Was I being sacked? Hawes cleared his throat. "I have already discussed this with your mother, and she is in agreement, up to a point."

He paused, and I was sure my mother had asked Hawes to sack me, fearing that I might waste my life as a no-account, deceitful scrivener, which was the way a lot of newspapermen were viewed in those days.

Hawes cleared his throat once again. "That is to say, she feels this opportunity would be beneficial for a lad like you. But there are some conditions."

I was fully confused now. What was he talking about?

"Judging from your mute demeanor, I must assume your mother has not mentioned this to you, is that correct?"

I was still standing in front of Hawes's desk, holding my hat and a book strap that held a volume of Shakespeare's sonnets, an algebra book, and a digest of geographic maps.

"No, sir, she hasn't," I said.

"Well, my boy, sit down," Hawes said. "We have some important things to discuss."

It would be a discussion that would alter my life in ways I could never have imagined at the time.

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MORE ABOUT:

Finding Billy Battles: An Account of Peril, Transgression and Redemption

What others are saying:

Finding Billy Battles is a powerful introduction to what promises to be a gripping saga, and is especially recommended for fans of historical fiction who seek accuracy and depth as much as entertainment. (There is) more than casual attention to historical accuracy in the course of this story. Ronald Yates has created the first in a trilogy that is marked by swift action, strong characters, and settings and a history firmly based on real events. **D. Donovan, Senior Reviewer, Midwest Book Review).**

The novel's narrator is the great-grandson of Billy Battles, whom he meets for the first time when the old man is nearing the end of his days. The story unfolds from there, in this case, underpinned by letters and diaries as well as the old man's recollections, fact about taking the reader on a rollicking romp through the Wild West. There are artefacts about the historical characters who appear throughout this first volume of what is designed as a trilogy. The book conveys a real-life ambience through the author's diligence in whipping up authentic Kansas dialogue. **Palmetto Reviews**

Wendy Scott Multi-Award Winning Author

[5.0 out of 5 stars](#) Historical Gem

Format: Kindle Edition **Verified Purchase**

I waited until the third book in this series was released before I started reading book 1, as I suspected once I embarked upon Billy's journey I wouldn't want to stop. Not only is this a story about one man's adventures on the frontier, it is also brimming with historical antidotes, and real-life famous characters. Having delved into a bit of historical research myself, I appreciate how much effort Ronald E Yates invested in this timeline to ensure this was an authentic read.



Mary A. Adler

[5.0 out of 5 stars](#) You will be happy you found Billy Battles!!

Format: Kindle Edition **Verified Purchase**

I grew up with radio and television shows that glamorized the old West. The good guys wore white hats-- except maybe for Paladin -- and they always bested the bad guys. Ronald Yates' wonderful novel, Finding Billy Battles: An Account of Peril, Transgression, and Redemption, recreates the real old West with its powerful animal smells, unwashed cowboys, and threats to the law-abiding from cruel and greedy outlaws who often fled to the west because they were wanted by the law elsewhere. Happily for the reader, his characters wear grey hats: those of good character are still flawed, and many, with reputations as hard men willing to kill, display loyalty and courage and a willingness to sacrifice themselves to help their friends and to right some rather horrible wrongs.

The author takes the reader on a journey from frontier Kansas to Chicago and the 1893 Columbian Exposition, and we see how many of Billy's frontier friends adapt to the changing times and carve out new lives for themselves. I truly appreciate the author's deep research and attention to detail, from descriptions of the interior of railway carriages to the technical reasons a bullet lacked the power to kill.

I cared about Billy Battles, his friends, and his family, and at times I pushed through the book in that "what happens next" intensity. I particularly found the scene of reckoning compelling, not only for the action, but because the author allowed the highly diverse characters to drive the plot in keeping with their own experience and skills. (I don't want to say too much about that and give something away.)

The book is a masterpiece, totally seamless, and filled with great writing, great characterization, great themes, and wonderful details. Billy makes a choice at the book's end that is totally in keeping with his character. I wish he had chosen differently, but if he had, we would not have the next two books in the trilogy to look forward to.

I highly recommend this book to readers who like history, those who enjoy good storytelling, and those who like to spend time with unforgettable characters.



Mark Bierman

[5.0 out of 5 stars](#) One word comes to mind . . . more!

Format: Kindle Edition **Verified Purchase**

I have just finished reading, 'Finding Billy Battles' the first book of the Billy Battles trilogy and just one word comes to mind . . . more! This novel had been the cause of my sleep deprivation, simply because I was unable put it down!

History fascinates me and Mr. Yates does an excellent job of transforming the "Old West" from words to three-dimensional reality. Job well done, Mr. Yates.

I look forward to losing more sleep! I highly recommend this book to, well, everyone.

TowTruck & the Mrs.

[5.0 out of 5 stars More than a book about the Wild West](#)

Format: Kindle Edition **Verified Purchase**

Was there more to the "Wild West" than gunfights and saloons? In the novel "Finding Billy Battles" Ron Yates gives a remarkable insight into the lives of those persons living at that time. He adeptly weaves fact and fiction into a compelling and entertaining story. We meet Bat Masterson, the Earp brothers and many more people known to have lived in the Wild West. It was a dangerous time with gunfighters, Indians and lawless people moving from place to place.

A young man is born on the plains of Kansas. Billy Battles is very young when his father leaves to fight in the Civil War. His father is killed at the end on the Civil War by a shot to the back while brushing his horse. His wife and son await his return. Young Billy Battles begins his life of adventure when his widowed mother leaves the family farm behind and returns to Lawrence, Kansas. She wants Billy to grow up in a town and be a civilized person. Billy does his best to do what is right but his actions tend to land him in trouble. Yet it is in dealing with trouble that he becomes a man.

This book describes the difficulties of life in the 1880's. The familiar historic names are in context and live in the correct time period. To help understand the buying power of money at that time, the author notes 1880's value and current day value of money. Throughout the book, Billy hints of bigger adventures to come. This first book ends with him starting another adventure. As exciting as the first 30 years of his life are, I can't begin to imagine what experiences he will have next. I know one thing for sure...I plan to follow along.

Available at:

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