



CIGARS IN THE OLD WEST WESTERN TOBACCO TRAILBLAZERS

by Sean Chaffin



HICKOK MAY HAVE ALSO BEEN THE JAMES BOND OF HIS TIME—AN ADVENTUROUS MAN WHOM WOMEN ADMIRER FOR HIS GOOD LOOKS, LONG FLOWING HAIR, AND GENERAL BAD-ASSERY.

It's the late 1800s, and several men are gathered around a weathered poker table in a smoky saloon. A few puff on cigars as they toss chips into the pot with a clink. Players chitchat between draws on their stogies, six-shooters strapped to their sides just in case things get a little unruly—or a cheater is discovered.

The hours drift away, and more cigars are smoked until the game finally breaks up. Players finish off their shots of whiskey and head to the door. That Colt .45 may come in handy if someone tries to take some liberties with a player's winnings as he makes his way home.

When it comes to Old West heroes and lawmen, cigars were a part of life on the wild, untamed frontier. By the early 1800s, American smokers had grown accustomed to lighting up Spanish cigars. But a relaxation of Spanish laws monopolizing the industry in the 19th century soon led to a growth in Cuban production.

"American demand for Cuban cigars created a boom in the Spanish colony," Iain Gately noted in his history book, *Tobacco: A Cultural History of How an Exotic Plant Seduced Civilization*. "More and more land was planted out to tobacco, and cigar factories dominated Havana's skyline. Already a mystique had attached itself to Cuban cigars. Americans considered them superior in manufacture and flavor to their own creations."

Whether they were robbing a train, gambling to earn a living, or jailing another outlaw, lighting up a cigar was routine. Here's a look at some real-life Wild West characters who were known to light up.

WILD BILL HICKOK

Born in Illinois in 1837, Hickok was a lawman, gambler, gunslinger, folk hero and actor. Much of his life was spent shooting it out with criminals and arresting outlaws, but he also spent a large amount of his time subsidizing his income with poker winnings. Hickok may have also been the James Bond of his time—an adventurous man whom women admired for his good looks, long flowing hair, and general bad-assery.

What sets Hickok apart is that he was usually the good guy, putting outlaws in jail or six feet under. A crack shot, Hickok is believed to have killed several men, and was part of one of the only known real-life gunfights like the ones depicted in western movies. The duel took place on the morning of July 21, 1865, after a disagreement with fellow gambler David Tutt about a debt. The two men met on opposite ends of the public square and fired simultaneously. Tutt's shot missed, but Wild Bill's met its mark, with deadly consequences. Hollywood filmmakers have been inspired by the event ever since.

Puffing a cigar was part of the action for Hickok, who spent so much time at saloon poker tables. An 1863 photo shows Hickok with a steely-eyed stare, a bag of tobacco in one hand and a lit cigar in the other. Gunfights, gambling, collaring outlaws, and even cigars—Wild Bill epitomizes what many think of the Old West.



BILLY THE KID

This infamous outlaw wasn't a Robin Hood of the West as many outlaws have been portrayed throughout history. The Kid killed numerous people in his short life—he was dead by age 21—as a rowdy gunfighter and outlaw. Known as a sharp dresser and jovial bad guy, Billy the Kid was born Henry McCarthy in 1859, but by 1877 was referring to himself as William H. Bonney, thus earning his more famous moniker.

Like many of his colleagues, Billy is believed to have been at least an occasional cigar smoker. However, only two authenticated photos actually exist of him. But in 2015, a North Carolina man believed he found a third after purchasing a tintype at a flea market a few years earlier. After examining the photo more closely, he believed it featured Billy. In the photo, in which Billy is pictured behind Pat Garrett, the five men are smoking cigars.

The photo is believed to have been taken in 1879 or 1880 and what makes it unique is the fact that the Kid is pictured with Garrett at all. As sheriff of Lincoln County, N.M., Garrett would capture the Kid, and later shoot and kill him after an escape. According to the *Associated Press*, facial recognition software experts were able to determine it's more than likely Garrett and Billy the Kid. The photo may now be worth millions of dollars, and the owner may need a celebratory smoke himself if it fetches that at auction.

PAT GARRETT

The sharpshooter who brought Billy the Kid to justice was a sharp-dressed man, and a photo of him from his lawman days has him staring at the camera in a pinstripe suit. His trademark thick moustache stands out, as does the cigar in his right hand. It's a great Old West cigar-smoking visual.

Throughout his career, Garrett worked as a sheriff, a lieutenant in the Texas Rangers, and a federal customs collector. Garrett was shot and killed in 1908 at age 57. His murder remains shrouded in mystery, and seems to have come as a result of a business disagreement related to a cattle lease. One man was charged in the murder, but was later acquitted, and the case was never officially solved.

James Coburn played the lawman in 1973's *Pat Garrett & Billy the Kid*, complete with sharp suits and lit cigars. Kris Kristofferson played Billy, and both the famous lawman and infamous outlaw have been played by numerous actors through the years.



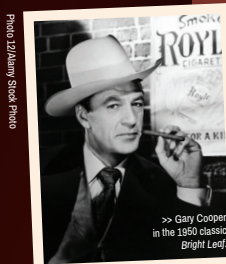
THE BIG SCREEN, CIGARS AND SIX-SHOOTERS

STETSON HATS, BOOTS, A SIX-SHOOTER AND A NICE CIGAR. The Old West was full of good guys and bad guys looking to light up. Whether it complemented a celebratory night of whiskey at the saloon, a ride on the cattle trail, or organizing a posse to nab a train robber, a good smoke was part of westward expansion.

That history has been celebrated in film, complete with the smoking, the occasional lawlessness and the taming of the West. Here's a look at some Western-themed films featuring characters known to take a Hollywood-cool draw on a nice cigar.

BRIGHT LEAF (1950)

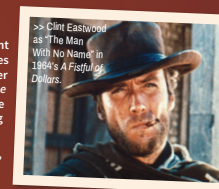
The name of the film itself is a tobacco reference, referring to the type grown in North Carolina following the Civil War. The leaf plays a major role in the film, which focuses on the battle between tobacco tycoons. Gary Cooper plays Brant Royle, who invests in a machine to mass-produce cigarettes and is forced to face off with rival tobacco plantation owners, whose crop is hand-rolled into cigarettes and cigars. The film was one of many Westerns produced at the time and mostly remembered for its tobacco-themed action.



A FISTFUL OF DOLLARS (1964)

This was just one of three "spaghetti westerns" featuring Clint Eastwood and directed by Sergio Leone. Eastwood epitomizes the meaning of cool as the lead gunslinger, whose name is never revealed. He plays the same role in *For a Few Dollars More* and *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*, and is known as "The Man With No Name." The films were produced in Italy and other European countries on a shoestring budget, this one for \$200,000 with a \$15,000 salary for Eastwood.

The unnamed stranger helps the small Mexican town of Rojos, shooting it out with a gang of outlaws. Events culminate in a classic scene where Eastwood's character conceals a steel plate beneath his pancho. He survives a shot to the heart and ends his opponents' time in Mexico and in life. The Man With No Name is seen throughout the films with an Italian-made Toscana cigar. It became a mainstay for this iconic Old West character.



TRUE GRIT (1969, 2010)

This Old West classic features John Wayne in the first version of this film as aging U.S. Marshall Rooster Cogburn, a lawman known for capturing some of the worst of the worst. He joins forces with a Texas Ranger played by Glen Campbell to bring in a murderer. The film was well received by critics, and included an amazing cast that also featured Robert Duvall and Dennis Hopper. Wayne won his only Oscar for the film as well as a Golden Globe. Jeff Bridges, Matt Damon and Josh Brolin starred in the 2010 remake, with Bridges in the Rooster Cogburn role. This version was also a box office and critical success, with 10 Oscar nominations. Cogburn is no stranger to spirit or smoke, and smokes cigars in both films. With plenty of action and adventure, the movies are must-sees for Western fans. Wayne revived his character in 1975's *Rooster Cogburn* with Katherine Hepburn—and revived the cigars and booze too.

CHISUM (1970)

This film is loosely based on the Lincoln County Cattle Wars of 1878 in the New Mexico Territory, and features well-known characters like Billy the Kid and Pat Garrett. John Wayne plays John Chisum, who is at odds with fellow landowner Lawrence Murphy. Garrett and the Kid work to defend Chisum's ranch and bringing law and order to Lincoln County. The sight of Wayne's character atop a horse smoking a long cigar adds to the Duke's persona of true masculinity and machismo.

TOMBSTONE (1993)

Wyatt Earp (Kurt Russell) lands in the town of Tombstone, Arizona, along with brothers Virgil (Sam Elliot) and Morgan (Bill Paxton) as well as Doc Holliday (Val Kilmer). Originally planning to leave his career in law enforcement behind, Earp is forced back into the role to help eliminate the Cowboys, a band of outlaws that has been terrorizing the town.

Throughout the film, Earp can be seen with a cigar. It adds some realism to the film, which was received well by critics, and has been a favorite of Western fans—smokers and non-smokers alike. Russell is also a cigar smoker in real life, and this is a great more recent Western.

THE QUICK AND THE DEAD (1995)

Sharon Stone plays the Lady, a quick-draw sharpshooter who rolls into the fictional town of Redemption. She's quick with a gun and also with a smoke, favoring thin cigars between shootouts. The movie not only includes plenty of action, but also a stellar cast featuring Gene Hackman, Russell Crowe, Leonardo DiCaprio and Gary Sinise.

— Sean Chaffin

>> Poker Alice



POKER ALICE

Born Alice Ivers in 1851 to Irish immigrant parents in Devonshire, England, Alice moved to the U.S. with her family when she was only 12. She spent much of her early life in Virginia, but later moved to Leadville, Colorado. This was where she earned her nickname after her first husband, Frank Duffield, taught her how to play poker. He died a few years later, but she continued playing cards in Colorado and New Mexico to earn a living.

Alice also spent time as a dealer in Deadwood and claimed to have won \$250,000 during her poker career—quite a sum in those days. A whiz at math and calculating odds, her skills at the table became legendary at the time. Beyond poker, Alice was arrested several times for bootlegging and operating a brothel. A cigar was a regular part of life at the tables for Poker Alice, and she even lit up in jail. According to Deadwood.com, her favorite saying was believed to be: "Praise the Lord and place your bets. I'll take your money with no regrets."

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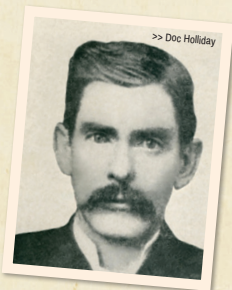
DOC HOLLIDAY

Born John Henry Holliday in 1851, this gambler and gunfighter became one of the more colorful characters in the Old West. Holliday was part of the Earp crew that shot it out at the O.K. Corral, and earned his nickname "Doc" after a career as a dentist. Contracting tuberculosis cut that career short, however, and he spent much of his life moving from town to town in the Southwest, gambling to earn a living.

Gunplay occasionally entered the picture when a cheater was discovered or someone made a play for his winnings away from the table. Fans of the Old West will recall Val Kilmer's brilliant portrayal of the gunman in *Tombstone*, which included lighting up a few cigars. There's no doubt Holliday smoked at least some cigars with so many hours at the poker table, but as a sufferer of tuberculosis, it may not have been as many as his contemporaries. "I rather doubt that a serious consumptive like Doc smoked too many cigars," said R.W. Boyle, a Holliday educator and re-enactor.

One additional cigar-related note: In 1884, Holliday once hid behind a cigar case during a shootout with a man over a \$5 debt. It was his last gunfight, and he died of complications of tuberculosis in 1887 at age 36. His friend Wyatt Earp remembered Holliday as "the most skillful gambler, and the nerviest, fastest, deadliest man with a six-gun I ever saw."

>> Doc Holliday



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>> Calamity Jane

CALAMITY JANE

Fans of HBO's *Deadwood* series and film no doubt remember Calamity Jane, not only for her frequent drunkenness, but also for her propensity for cursing. Both of those were true in real life. A frontierswoman and scout, Martha Jane Canary was born in Missouri in 1852, and was forced to care for her five younger siblings after her parents died by the time she was 14.

Fact or fiction isn't easy to nail down when it comes to Calamity Jane's life. She was known to embellish. One fact was her love of alcohol. One tale is that in 1867, she rented a horse and buggy for a one-mile trip from Cheyenne to Fort Russell. Apparently drunk, she overshot her destination by 90 miles.

It was a rough life for Jane, and she gave off no airs or made any attempts to be "ladylike." She often wore men's clothing, and cigars were a complement to her whiskey swilling. One interesting photo from 1885 shows her sitting on a kitchen counter. A wooden stove is just behind her, and Jane is dressed in a bonnet and long dress. There's no sign of a whiskey bottle, but a cigar is held tightly in her left hand.



Everett Historical/Shutterstock.com

JESSE JAMES

Along with his brother Frank, Jesse James worked as a guerilla fighter for the Confederacy during the Civil War, attacking soldiers and civilians to counter what they saw as the Union's unlawful aggression. When the war was over, the James gang turned to armed robbery.

Newspapers across the South found the James gang's exploits of robbing banks and trains to be popular with readers. James enjoyed his life in the spotlight as well as a good smoke. Many viewed James and his gang as folk heroes, but that changed in 1881 during a train robbery. A ticket taker was shot in the back and a passenger was also killed.

Brad Pitt lit up playing the outlaw in *The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford*. Crowned Heads even offers a J.D. Howard Reserve cigar—an homage to the outlaw, making use of one of his aliases. After the state of Missouri put a \$5,000 price on James' head, a member of his own gang did him in with a bullet to the back. James' life as an outlaw—and cigar smoker—was over at age 34. His tombstone read: "In Loving Memory of my Beloved Son, Murdered by a Traitor and Coward Whose Name is Not Worthy to Appear Here."

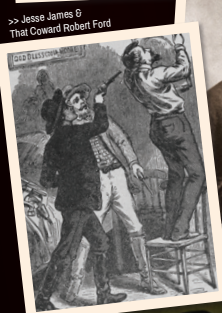
WYATT EARP

Like Hickok, this lawman has been depicted in films, books, comics and other media through the years. One of the most famous is *Tombstone*, with Kurt Russell playing the famed good guy doing plenty of cigar smoking. Also like Wild Bill, Earp was no stranger to a gambling table, where he also smoked many cigars.

During his career in law enforcement, Earp served as a U.S. Marshall, deputy marshal, and police officer. Along with his brothers, Virgil and Morgan, and Doc Holliday, Earp helped in the famed shootout at the O.K. Corral. The group killed many members of the Cochise County Cowboys, an outlaw gang that terrorized the Arizona Territory town.

Earp was also a businessman, and owned several saloons and mining interests throughout his life. He ran racehorses as well. While managing a store in Alaska in 1899, he even sold beer and cigars for the Alaska Commercial Company. He died in 1929 at the age of 80. Many remembered his fearlessness and expertise with a gun. The Tombstone Epitaph once noted of the lawman: "Bravery and determination were requisites, and in every instance proved himself the right man in the right place."

Sean Chaffin is a freelance writer in Crandall, Texas, and senior writer for *Casino Player* and *Strictly Slots* magazines. His work appears in numerous websites and publications. Follow him on Twitter @PokerTraditions.



>> Jesse James & That Coward Robert Ford



>> Jesse James



>> Wyatt Earp

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