





## THE VALUE OF HISTORY

The proverb "a picture is worth a thousand words" refers to the idea that complex stories can be told with just a single image. Thus is the case for the three photographs before you. The images were described as showing the hanging of Jack McCall, the convicted murderer of James Butler Hickok. As such, they were and still are a topic of debate among western historians. While researching the origins of the photographs, two newspaper articles from Yankton, Dakota Territory were discovered. Both articles provide insightful details, such as the time and location of the hanging, the weather, the position of the crowd, and the construction of the gallows. When compared to the photographs, these details point to a revealing conclusion - the hanging as documented in the photographs may not be that of Jack McCall.



"... He [Jack McCall] placed in the center of the platform facing east... U.S. Marshal Burdick, with Deputy Ash, Rev. Father Dascher and his assistant, Mr. Curry were the only parties on the platform."  
Yankton Press and Union and Dakotian, March 1, 1877



"Sheriff Baker and Marshal Leeper had charge of police regulations at the ground, and had so efficiently discharged their duties in this respect that there was no overcrowding or other unseemly conduct at the scaffold."  
Yankton Press and Union and Dakotian, March 1, 1877



"... the Gallows was a frame eight by ten feet square. The Platform in which the trap was arranged was eight feet from the ground. ... the platform to the ground was closely boarded up, so it was impossible to see the last death struggle for the unfortunate man."  
Yankton Press and Union and Dakotian, March 1, 1877

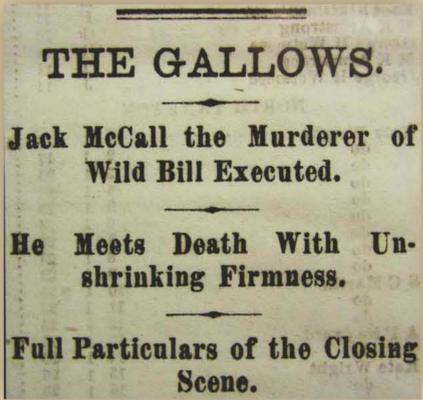
"... U.S. Deputy Marshall Ash, clad in white gloves (as was also Marshall Burdick) took McCall's left arm, and mounted the stairs. The Reverend Father, dressed in his white robe, also ascended, as did also Mr. Curry, Mr. Geo. Mathieson, and the U.S. Marshall."  
Dakota Herald of Yankton, March 6, 1877

Notice the location of the crowd in the relation to the platform in the photographs. In addition, there is no reference to trees or the people in the trees on either side of the gallows, a detail that would have caught the eye of all those present.

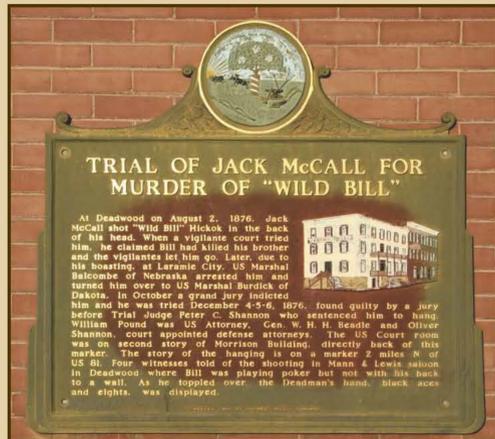
"The gallows consisted of four upright posts, 6X6 inches, 8 feet 10 inches apart on the ground. 15 feet 4 inches high, on the top which were plates which supported a cross-beam in the center, the whole being well braced. It was closely boarded up to the ground, which was 7 feet 10 inches from the drop, the lower part thus presenting the appearance of a huge dry-goods box, with a door facing east."  
Dakota Herald of Yankton, March 6, 1877

Upon reading the above quotes from the newspaper, the number of people on the gallows platform varies between both newspapers and the photographs. This leads to the question, how many people were allowed on the platform?

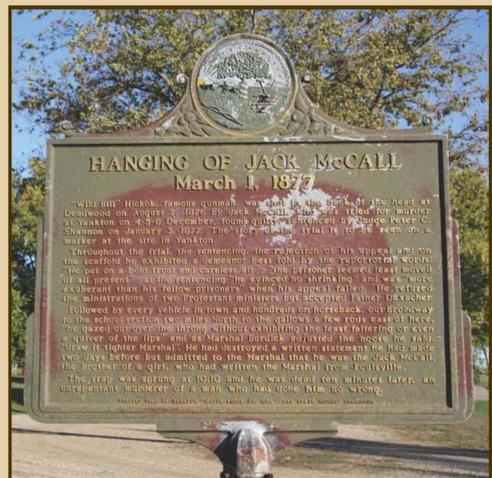
One of the most intriguing details is the description of the gallows. Upon close inspection, both newspapers provide specific details on the size and construction of the gallows. How do these differ from the photographs?



Additional questions arose upon this discovery. Since the photographs and the newspaper articles capture a precise moment in time, can historians take these resources as an absolute truth? What other undiscovered documents are available to confirm or refute the discrepancies between the newspapers and the photographs? Are there any minute details which have been overlooked to lead to a conclusion?



South Dakota Historical Marker showing the location of the second trial of Jack McCall in Yankton, South Dakota.



South Dakota Historical Marker showing the location of the hanging of Jack McCall outside Yankton, South Dakota.

What we do know is that western characters are surrounded by a mystique that begs to be believed but must nevertheless be examined and re-examined. Research on these photographs will continue, which will hopefully separate the facts from the fiction.

The newspaper descriptions used in this exhibit are from the Yankton Press and Union and Dakotian, dated March 1, 1877 and the Dakota Herald of Yankton, dated March 6, 1877. These articles record in detail the hanging of Jack McCall. Research has yielded several discrepancies between the newspaper articles and the photographs. Does it matter that the more descriptive newspaper article was published five days after the hanging? This is just one of the many questions which need to be answered. Can we accurately say that these indeed are the last moments of Jack McCall? You be the judge.

Re-enactment of the assassination of James Butler Hickok in Deadwood's Saloon #10, circa 1950.





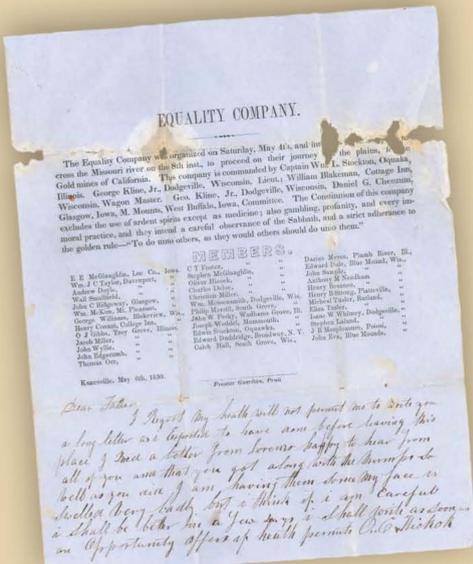
## WILD BILLS BIG BROTHER

Legendary American frontier heroes can sometimes seem like comic book characters; their exploits over-sized, their emotions held in check, and they usually lack family connections. But research reveals the truth surrounding the *real* individuals around whom western legends were spun. Deadwood is fortunate to have such a resource in the form of letters from the family of James Butler "Wild Bill" Hickok.

Oliver Cromwell Hickok, the oldest son of William Alonzo and Polly Butler Hickok, was born on May 1, 1830 in Homer, (Troy Grove) Illinois. Oliver is just a footnote in the records until he expressed interest in joining the California Gold Rush in 1849. Because of family obligations, Oliver's departure to the West Coast was delayed two years. In 1852, as part of the Equality Company expedition, Oliver and 37 men departed from Kanesville (Council Bluffs), Iowa and began their trek west as documented in the Equality Company Proclamation (seen here in this exhibit). This same spirit of adventure must have run through the entire Hickok family; Oliver's younger brothers Lorenzo and James, also set off on their own travels and toward very different fates.

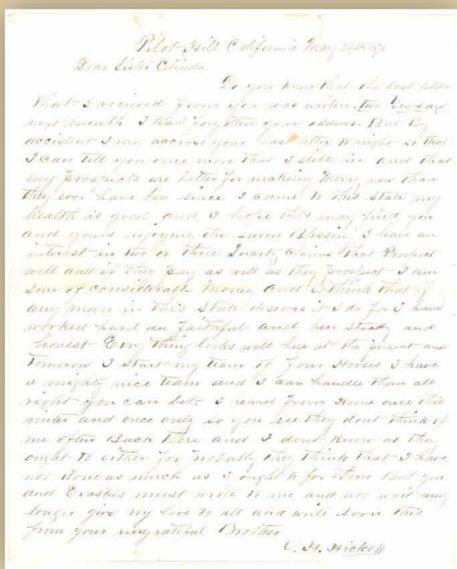


Oliver Cromwell Hickok  
May 1, 1830 - June 29, 1898  
Image courtesy of the Mendota Museum and Historic Society, Mendota, Illinois



Equality Company Proclamation  
Kanesville (Council Bluffs), Iowa  
Imprinted May 6, 1850

Oliver Hickok was not alone when he traveled to the California Gold Fields. Nine of the thirty-seven man Equality Company party originated from Troy Grove, Illinois. The accounts of this expedition have been chronicled in the 1932 book entitled *Stories of Pioneer Days in La Salle County*, by W. R. Foster.



Letter from Oliver Hickok  
Pilot Hill, El Dorado County, California  
May 24, 1871

Letters are the primary source of documentation recording the lives of the Hickok family. The letter (to the left) was written almost twenty years after Oliver left Illinois. It provides insight into his life at Pilot Hill, near Placerville, in El Dorado County, California. But similar to thousands of other prospectors, he made a life for himself in another way, becoming a teamster and eventually a breeder of horses.

*"...I have an interest in two or three quartz claims that prospect well and if they pay as well as they prospect - I am sure of considerable money and think that if any man in the state deserves it - I do for I have worked hard and faithful and been steady and honest..."*

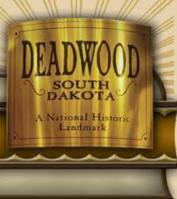


Oliver was a man of his time and adapted successfully to what opportunities and challenges the California frontier offered. Despite the intentions of "striking it rich", Oliver married and raised five children. A kind man with an apparent love of poetry, Oliver lived a life largely forgotten to history. Living almost thirty years longer than his famous younger brother, he died on June 29, 1898 and is buried in Lakeside Memorial Lawn Cemetery in Folsom, Sacramento County, California.

Placerville, California, circa 1849  
Courtesy of El Dorado Historical Museum, Placerville, California

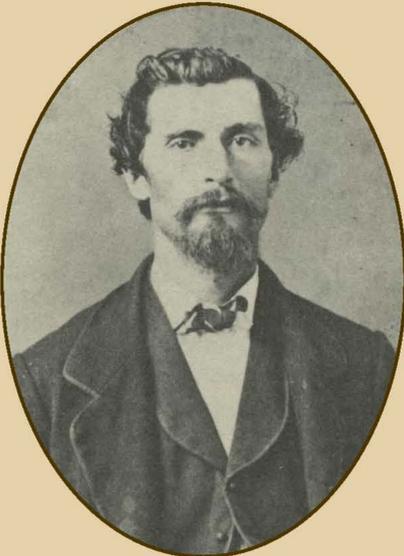


HANGTOWN - 1849, NOW PLACERVILLE, CALIF



## WILD BILL'S "TAME" OLDER BROTHER

Lorenzo Butler Hickok was the second oldest brother to James Butler Hickok. Born on November 23, 1832 at Union, New York, Lorenzo emerged as the steady, measured, and responsible older brother amidst a set of wandering and fatefully adventurous siblings. He felt an immense responsibility towards his family after his father's death on May 5, 1852. Lorenzo and his younger brother Horace pooled their finances together and purchased a home for the Hickok family in Homer (Troy Grove), Illinois. For ten years, Lorenzo put his own ambitions on hold to provide for his mother and sisters and urged his brothers to do the same.



Lorenzo Butler Hickok  
November 23, 1832 - May 11, 1913  
Image courtesy of the Mendota Museum and Historical Society, Mendota, Illinois

### CIVIL WAR

Still, the sense of adventure which ran through the Hickok family did not escape Lorenzo completely. In 1862, Lorenzo found employment with the U.S. Government as a wagon master during the Civil War. Several letters written to his family from 1863 to 1864, provide insight about his job, military activities in Missouri, and time spent with James Butler.

"...I have just returned from Springfield where I had been with a train loaded with forage and ordinance. I saw James there... He is scouting for Genl. Sanborn and is getting five dollars per day. The work he is doing is very dangerous. Something that would not suit me."

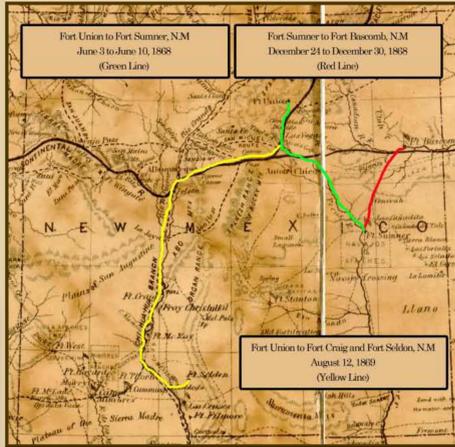
"... So I am tired of the work here and if I had a little money [money] I would go to Idaho but the wages that I get now are pretty good..."

Letter from Lorenzo Hickok  
Rolla, Phelps County, Missouri  
April 15, 1864



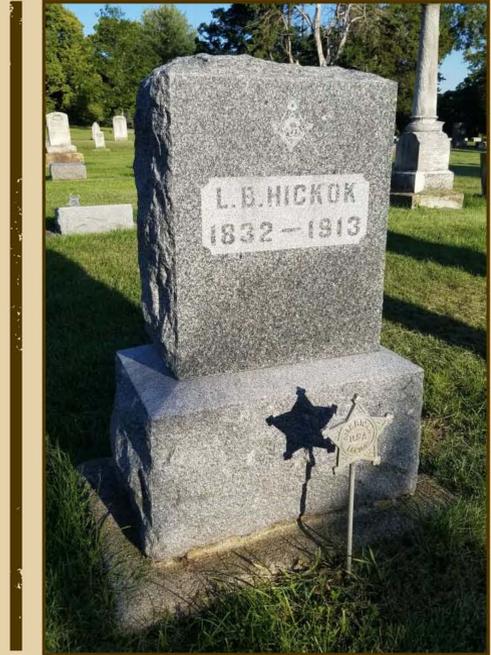
### AFTER THE WAR

Following the Civil War, Lorenzo's job took him to the southwest where he was stationed at Fort Union, New Mexico. Several documents including military orders and letters of correspondence recount these later travels. In a letter to his sister dated June 12, 1868, Lorenzo reminisces about his role in transporting the Navajo Indians from Fort Sumner to their tribal homelands in New Mexico. The controversial events are known as the Navajo "Long Walks" and occurred from 1863 to 1868.



Portion of the 1868 map titled: Map of the Route of the Southern Continental R.R.  
Map courtesy of the Library of Congress, Geography and Map Division, Washington, D.C. Digital ID: g3707p00599

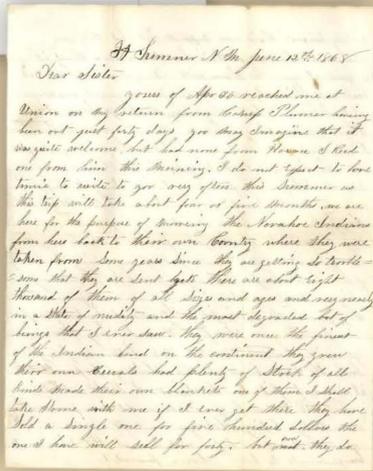
The map and military orders from Fort Union, New Mexico chart Lorenzo Hickok's travels during the years from 1868-1869. A total of seven military orders addressed to Lorenzo Hickok accompanied the Wild Bill Collection. These documents provide interesting detail into the life of a wagon master including salary, occupational duties, distances between forts, and residing commanding officers.



Lorenzo Butler Hickok's monument at Troy Grove Cemetery, Illinois.  
Image courtesy of Ehan Salander

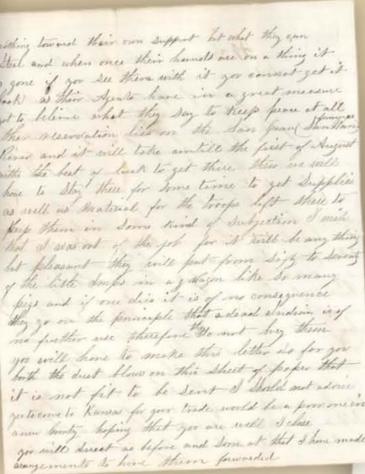


"... We are here for the purpose of moving the Novahoe[Navajo] Indians from here [Fort Sumner, N.M.] back to their own country where they were taken from some years since[.] ... there are about eight thousand of them of all sizes and ages..."

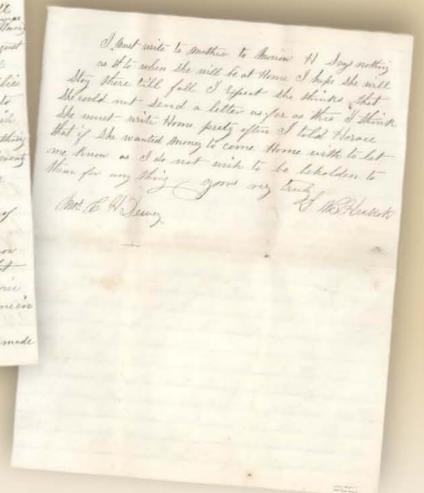


Letter from Lorenzo Hickok  
Fort Sumner, New Mexico  
June 12, 1868

"... their reservation lies on San Juan (pronounced San Won) River and it will take until the first of August with the best of luck to get there[.] then we will have to stay there for some time to get supplies as well as material for the troops left there to keep them in some kind of subjection[.] I wish that I was out of the job it will be anything but pleasant[.]"



After ten years of government employment, Lorenzo returned to Illinois in 1871 and found employment as a farmer, lumberman, surveyor, and justice of the peace. Lorenzo died on May 11, 1913 and was interred in the Hickok family plot at the Troy Grove Cemetery.



Fort Union, New Mexico, circa 1870  
Courtesy of Fort Union National Monument



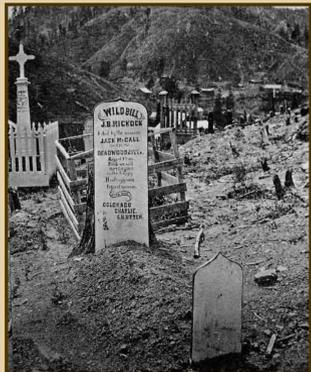
No. 123 Fort Union  
from the Hill N.M.



## IMMORTALIZING OF A WESTERN LEGEND

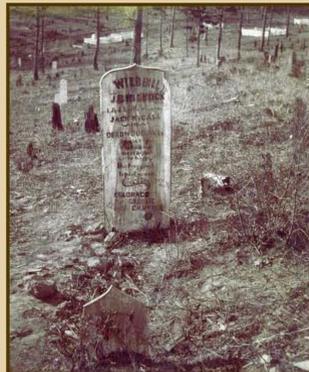
The fascination with honoring the dead has been and still is an intricate part of the human psyche. Over the course of the millennium, humans designated areas and created monuments with the sole intention of preserving the memory of a loved one or significant person. Mount Moriah Cemetery, in Deadwood is no exception. Upon the untimely death of James Butler Hickok on August 2, 1876, measures were taken to venerate the memory of this western legend through a series of cemetery monuments.

### 1876 TO 1879



James Butler Hickok's grave at the Ingleside Cemetery, circa 1876 to 1879  
Courtesy of Adams Museum and House Inc.

On August 3, 1876 James Butler Hickok was buried in the Ingleside Cemetery (today's Presidential neighborhood) below Mount Moriah Cemetery. The first monument to Hickok was a wood plank propped up against a stump of a tree. One year later, Hickok's business partner Charlie Utter replaced the wood headstone with a painted wood monument. On August 3, 1879, Hickok's remains were moved to Mount Moriah Cemetery and were reinterred in Section 1 Lot 71.



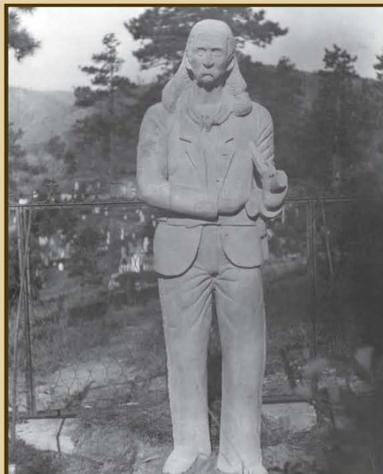
James Butler Hickok's grave in Mount Moriah Cemetery, circa 1880  
Courtesy of City of Deadwood Archives

### 1891 TO 1903



New York sculptor J.H. Riordan poses beside Hickok memorial, 1891  
Courtesy of City of Deadwood - Archives

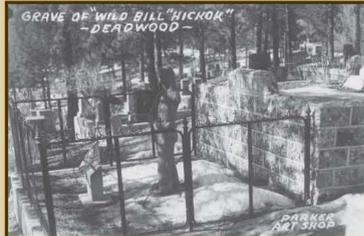
In 1891, New York sculptor J. H. Riordan was commissioned to create a new monument for Hickok's grave. Upon its completion on September 19, 1891, the monument stood six feet tall and was made from native Black Hills sandstone. A wrought iron fence was installed around the grave to protect the monument. By 1901, this memorial was heavily vandalized by souvenir hunters and was removed.



Life-sized sculpture of James Butler Hickok by Alvin Smith, 1903  
Courtesy of Black Hills Studies

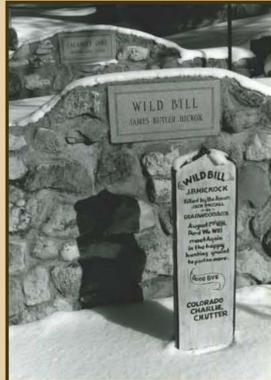
In 1902, sculptor Alvin Smith began work on a life sized statue of James Butler Hickok. Upon its completion on April 30, 1903, the statue was installed on Hickok's grave. As an added security measure, the statue and grave were enclosed within a wood and wire cage. This however did not deter from the destruction of the monument by souvenir hunters.

### 1936 TO PRESENT



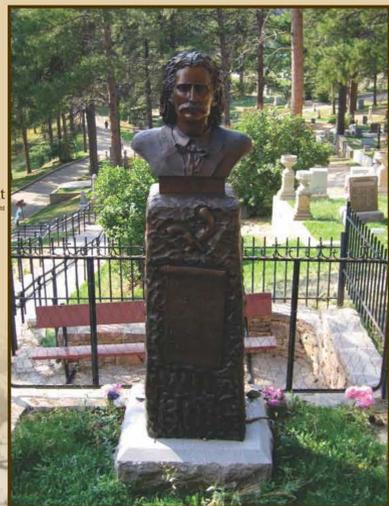
Photographic postcard of James Butler Hickok's grave, 1936 to 1953  
Courtesy of City of Deadwood - Archives

By the 1930's, the Deadwood Chamber of Commerce became involved with the preservation of Hickok's grave. In 1936, the Deadwood Chamber received permission to construct a retaining wall using native Black Hills stone. On the exterior surface of the retaining wall, the name "Wild Bill" was spelled out using a colorful mosaic of stone. In 1953, the mosaic retaining wall was replaced again. A granite block that read, "Wild Bill-James Butler Hickok," was centered in the new retaining wall. Hickok's grave would remain the same for the next forty-nine years with the exception of the removal of Alvin Smith's statue in 1955 to the Adams Memorial Museum.



James Butler Hickok's grave, dated 1993  
Courtesy of City of Deadwood - Archives

In 1998, Mount Moriah Cemetery underwent a \$4.1 million dollar restoration. As part of the project, Nebraska sculptor David R. Young was commissioned to design a new bronze monument in the likeness of the 1891 Riordan monument. On August 2, 2002, the new monument was unveiled commemorating the 126th anniversary of Hickok's death and completion of the cemetery restoration.



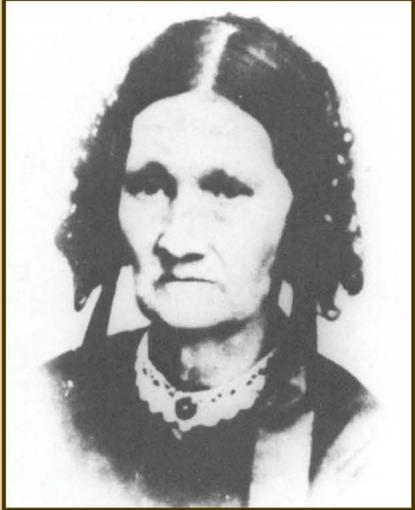
David R. Young's bronze monument  
Courtesy of City of Deadwood - Archives

William Cody (in center) and group of men paying respect to James Butler Hickok, January 1906  
Courtesy of City of Deadwood - Archives





## HISTORY FROM HOME

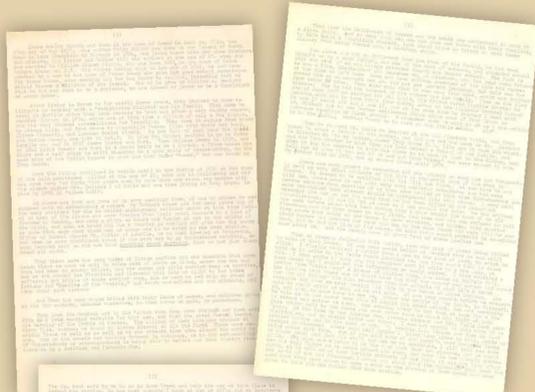


Polly (Butler) Hickok  
August 4, 1804 - September 28, 1878  
MOTHER  
Image courtesy of Mendota Museum and Historical Society, Mendota, Illinois

Polly Hickok, Wild Bill's mother, followed her sons' exploits as any mother would and worried about their safety. This was evident in the personal letters which chronicled Oliver's travels west to the California gold fields, James's exploits during the Civil War, and Lorenzo's journey with the United States Cavalry in the southwest. We can anticipate that she eagerly awaited letters from her sons. Upon hearing the news of James's murder in Deadwood, she suffered a physical collapse and grieved until her own death two years later.

### WOMEN OF WILD BILL'S LIFE

From ancient Greek Literature to the mass media of today, the families of legendary characters have often had to deal with the consequences of fame. The women of the Hickok family were no exception and vigorously labored to preserve the memory and reputation of the men they knew as sons and brothers.



Manuscript (typed)  
Celinda Hickok manuscript concerning James Butler Hickok, the Hickok family, and the Rock Creek Incident  
Date Unknown

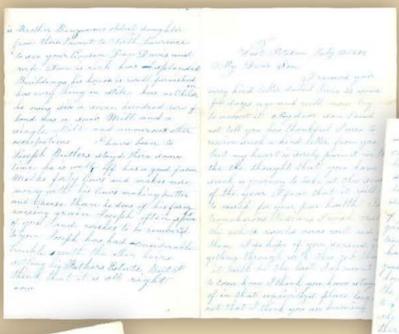
This document is a typed transcript of a twelve page hand written letter composed by Wild Bill's sister, Celinda (Hickok) Dewey. Hickok authority, Joseph Rosa called this document the "piece de resistance" of Wild Bill. The Hickok family was inundated with requests from souvenir hunters and biographers almost immediately after Wild Bill's death. Rosa's research revealed that even Celinda was unable to completely separate fact from fiction regarding the exploits of her famous brother.



Celinda (Hickok) Dewey  
September 3, 1839 - November 8, 1916  
SISTER  
Image courtesy of Mendota Museum and Historical Society, Mendota, Illinois

Celida, or "Cindy" to her family, took on the media of her day directly. She was largely responsible for upholding the name and honor of James Butler after his death. Her letters and articles are a historians treasure, revealing the humanity and character of her brother as no other documents do. This is evident in the three page unpublished manuscript which recounts how James acquired the name "Wild Bill" during the Rock Creek incident.

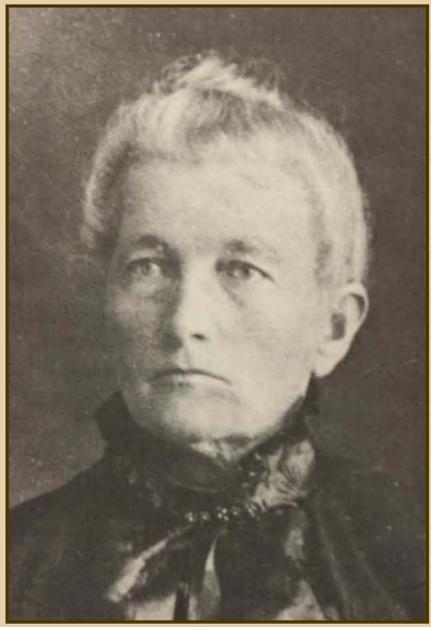
Letter (hand written) To Lorenzo Butler Hickok from Polly Hickok [mother] from West Potsdam, New York. Dated July 12-14, 1864



Written by Polly to Lorenzo Butler Hickok, this is a heartfelt letter of concern from a mother to her son on the frontier. It reveals both the human face of family separations that were typical of the westward expansion and attitudes about that movement. Polly Hickok showed understanding anxiety about her son's work in dangerous conditions. It also reveals what was probably common disdain for Native people who were, by then, thought to be merely obstacles in the way of westward growth.



Lydia, the youngest of the Hickok children, who was said to share the temperament and blue-grey eyes of her famous brother, left her own legacy as a much-loved community servant and midwife. Still, she never ceased to be amazed at the myths of Wild Bill's exploits and refuted many of the wildly inflated accounts about him.



Lydia (Hickok) Barnes  
October 29, 1842 - January 30, 1916  
SISTER  
Image courtesy of Mendota Museum and Historical Society, Mendota, Illinois



The accounts of Oliver, James, and Lorenzo, written by the woman on their lives, are invaluable. These documents serve as a solid foundation for the lives of a family whose fame continues to be exacerbated by romantic exaggerations. For historians, they may also be the most valuable part of Wild Bill Hickok collection owned by the City of Deadwood.

Hickok family home in Homer (Troy Grove,) Illinois, circa 1900.

