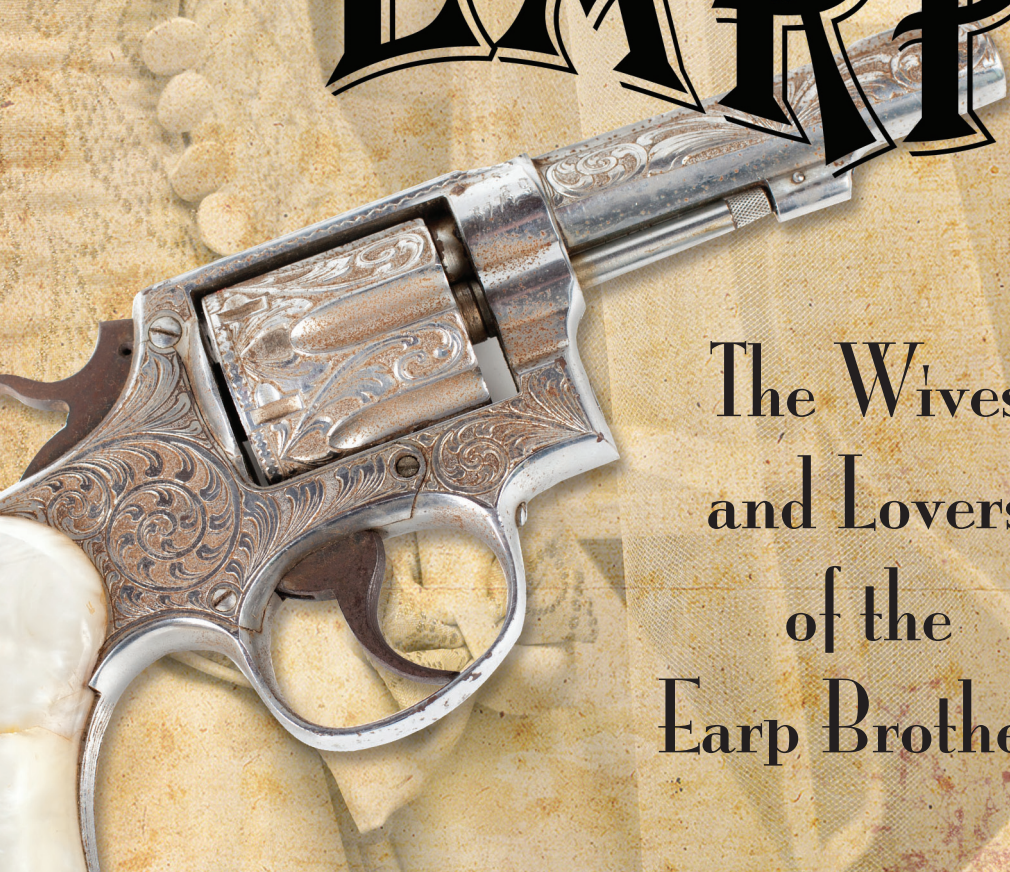


Sherry Monahan

MARSH

MRS.  
EARP

The Wives  
and Lovers  
of the  
Earp Brothers



MRS. EARP



# MRS. EARP

*The Wives and Lovers of the Earp Brothers*

SHERRY MONAHAN



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*To the very special women in my family—you make my days brighter  
with your laughter, support, friendship, and love.  
To all of you, especially my mom, Marilyn, my mother-in-law, Veronica,  
my sister Sue, and my nieces Jamie and Tiffany. I love you all!*



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## FOREWORD

I love this country—especially the history and traditions of the West. I come by this love naturally through my family heritage. My grandfather was the actor John Wayne—I am his oldest grandchild. I was very lucky to have spent quite a lot of time with my grandfather. He loved his family very much and shared his time, his love of his country, and his love of Western history with us. We were very blessed. Whenever we could, we spent time on location, at his house, at his ranch, on his boat—and he loved to talk. There was always someone else “special” telling stories, too. Growing up surrounded by real cowboys and their tall tales sends me running to the bookstore or movie theater when a new Western story comes out.

My love of the West led me to be involved in the Western Heritage Awards at the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum in Oklahoma City. Their annual awards honor outstanding writers, filmmakers, artists, poets, singers, and actors who preserve the values and traditions of the Western way of life. My reason for this explanation is that it was the scene of my first meeting with the author of this book, Sherry Monahan. While presenting her with a Wrangler Award for her appearance in a History Channel program called *Cowboys and Outlaws: Wyatt Earp*, we became fast friends over our love of history—especially the wild, Wild West—the fabulous stories of the people who settled this country we both love, and our love of the Earp brothers.

While Sherry was on the West Coast doing research for her book *California Vines, Wines & Pioneers*, she told me about her book on the Earp women. She mentioned a story about my grandfather and Wyatt Earp. During her research, Sherry said, she’d heard Wyatt had been on the set of a few John Ford movies, and my grandfather had modeled one of his characters on Wyatt Earp. Even though his meeting with Earp was very brief, he was an avid reader of historical fiction and

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nonfiction and listened closely to the stories of all of those wranglers and stuntmen on the sets. The actors who were very close to Earp were Tom Mix and William S. Hart, who were a bit older than my granddad. Probably most of his direction and knowledge came from John Ford, who also met Earp. I can tell you his library was filled with books on all the well-known lawmen and outlaws of the West. John Wayne would have admired any person who would put his own life in harm's way to protect the lives and rights of others—especially those of his family.

Sherry's book became even more intriguing to me because of the personal connection. Wyatt Earp was not only a good friend to both Tom Mix and William S. Hart, he was a regular fixture and adviser on many of the early Western movie sets. During the summer and on the weekends while we were growing up, the studio back lots or location sets were our playgrounds. We pretended to have shootouts at the OK Corral, making our way across the canyons and mountains, and back and forth to Tombstone. What an exciting concept that now we'll know more about the Earp women.

There are not many books about the women of the West, and certainly none that include all the Earp women under one cover. In *Mrs. Earp: The Wives and Lovers of the Earp Brothers*, the reader will finally learn about the women who followed these famous lawmen into the untamed frontier towns and sometimes had to leave them in pine boxes. Sherry's diligent genealogical research provides information on the women who have been in the shadows and sheds light on some who were previously unknown. The lives these women chose were hard; some of them were prostitutes, and it appears some of the brothers allowed their wives to continue working in this capacity. Just like their husbands' lives, some of the stories about the women were mysterious, and some remain that way. The popular movies about Wyatt Earp have told us a little about the women in the lives of Wyatt

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and Virgil, including Aurilla, Mattie, Josie, and Allie, but very little about the rest of the brothers' spouses except for their devotion to the Earp brothers and their migration west. The women of the Earp family helped to shape the famous brothers' lives. Hopefully the rest of them will become as well-known as the brothers they married.

—Anita La Cava Swift



## INTRODUCTION

When most people hear the name Earp, they think of Wyatt, Virgil, Morgan, and sometimes the lesser known James and Warren—in that order, which is how you’ll see them in this book. They also had a half-brother named Newton, who lived a fairly quiet, uneventful life. While it’s true these men made history on their own, they all had a Mrs. Earp behind them—some more than one.

For those who aren’t familiar with the Earp brothers, let me introduce you to them and share some highlights, along with some details about the most pivotal time in their lives in Tombstone, Arizona. These men came from a close-knit family and were there to back each other up—no matter the situation. Their lives were intertwined from their childhood to the boomtown days. More often than not, you could find at least two, if not more, of the Earp brothers living in the same town, despite the fact that they moved around like gypsies.

According to Mrs. Virgil Earp, when news reached Virgil in Prescott, Arizona, that a big silver strike was found in Tombstone, he sent letters to his brothers to join him. It would be that news that would forever alter the lives of the Earp brothers and their wives in ways they could never imagine. They arrived in Tombstone in late 1879 just as the boom was beginning and settled in. They began buying mining claims and because of their law enforcement backgrounds, they had a few opportunities in Tombstone. Wyatt became Pima County’s Deputy Sheriff in July 1880 for Charles Shibell, and Virgil, who was already a US deputy marshal, became the acting town marshal when Fred White was killed by Curly Bill Brocius that same year.

Tombstone not only had regular town folk and businesses, but also had a lawless element that frequently visited and harassed the locals. Curly Bill Brocius, John Ringo, the Clantons, and the McLaurys were known as the “cowboy” element in town. They were known cattle

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rustlers and, when drunk, tended to get loud in town. An 1887 *Police Gazette* article described just how ruthless they were:

*. . . a whole band of out-lawed cutthroats who had sought a safe refuge in Arizona's mountainous ranges. . . . They had until the advent of Earp and his three brothers done as they pleased, murdering and robbing with none to molest. This organization of the famous bandits was headed by the notorious "Curly Bill." They had for several years kept the portion of Arizona in which Tombstone is situated completely terrorized. The law was defied and the officials powerless to enforce it. Citizens were made to throw up their hands in broad daylight and hand over whatever of value they possessed. Wells, Fargo & Co. were at the mercy of these highway men, and many times their coaches were "held up" and their treasury box handed down to the merciless villains who did not hesitate to kill, when their demands were not complied with.*

*The express company officials had heard the Earp boys spoken of as a set of very resolute men, who had been officers of the law. They determined upon securing the services of at least one of them to act in the capacity of "shotgun" messenger. The duty of the messenger would be to protect the treasury box while in transit to the railroad at Benson, some thirty miles distant. Morgan Earp was accordingly employed, and it is needless to add that after he had assumed charge of the treasury box robberies became less frequent. Morgan's acceptance of position in the express company's employ was, however, the signal for an open declaration of war between the robbers and Earp boys. The cowboys declared that unless "Morg" Earp gave up his job as messenger they would "kill him." This declaration they made known to "Morg." The latter sent them word that he intended pursuing the even tenor of his way, and that any time they saw fit to kill him all they had to do was to commence hostilities. This so enraged the*

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*outlaw element that they concluded one day to beard the lion in his den and see what kind of mettle the Earps were made of.*<sup>1</sup>

By September 1880 the Earps had already become the enemy of the cowboys when a well-liked dandy arrived in Tombstone named John “Johnny” Behan. Behan had been in other parts of the territory and was politically connected. So when he learned a new county was being formed and Tombstone would be its seat, he saw opportunities and lit out for the silver mining town.

During the Pima County Sheriff elections massive fraud was found in the run between Charles Shibell and Bob Paul. Wyatt Earp resigned to support Bob Paul, and he and his brothers were successfully making money at their mining ventures. When it was announced that Cochise County was looking for a new sheriff, both Wyatt and Johnny Behan wanted the position. Behan approached Wyatt and said if he didn’t run and Behan won, he would appoint Wyatt as his undersheriff. The Cochise County sheriff position was a lucrative proposition and received a portion of the taxes collected in the county. Wyatt never ran for the position and when Behan won, he chose Harry Woods instead of Wyatt. With bad blood between the Earps and the cowboys and now between Wyatt and Johnny Behan, who supported the cowboys, it was just a matter of time before tempers, pride, and indignation got the best of all involved. By October 1881 the cowboys were publicly threatening the Earps, and the Earps were ready to defend themselves and uphold the law.

With the town hearing rumors that the cowboys were ready to have a go at the Earps, Virgil, acting as city marshal, along with his brothers Wyatt and Morgan who received special appointments as policemen, and their friend John Henry “Doc” Holliday, had no choice but to go out and meet the cowboys face to face. The Earps and Holliday proceeded to the empty lot behind the OK Corral to disarm the cowboys who were illegally carrying weapons in town. Some thirty

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bullets flew in less than twenty-five seconds, and the town quickly became divided about who was right and who was wrong. Tombstone chronicler Clara Brown described the incident:

*The inmates of every house in town were greatly startled by the sudden report of firearms, about 3 p.m., discharged with such lightning-like rapidity that it could be compared only to the explosion of a bunch of firecrackers; and the aspect of affairs grew more portentous when, a few moments later, the whistles of the steam hoisting works sounded a shrill alarm. "The cowboys!" cried some, thinking that a party of those desperadoes were "taking the town." "The Indians," cried a few of the most excitable. Then, after it was learned that a fight had been engaged in between Marshal Earp, his two brothers, a special deputy (Doc Holliday), and four cowboys . . . speculation as to the cause of the affray ran riot. In the midst of this, when the scene upon the streets was one of intense excitement, the whistle again sounded, and directly well-armed citizens appeared from all quarters, prepared for any emergency. This revealed, what was not before generally known, the existence of a "Vigilance Committee," composed of law abiding citizens, who organized with the determination of upholding right and combating wrong, and who agreed upon a signal of action from the mines. Their services were not needed, however, on this occasion.<sup>2</sup>*

When the smoke cleared, Frank and Tom McLaury were dead; Billy Clanton died shortly thereafter. Although Wyatt escaped unharmed, his brothers Virgil and Morgan Earp were wounded. Wyatt and his friend Doc Holliday were arrested, and a lengthy preliminary hearing ensued.

According to Judge Spicer, who presided over the hearing, Virgil Earp, as Chief of Police, Morgan and Wyatt Earp, and Doc Holliday, whom Virgil called upon for help, went to the site of the fight, near the OK Corral, for the purpose of arresting and disarming the Clantons

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and McLaurys. He did not feel there was enough evidence to support a trial. The “cowboys” did not feel justice had been served and they took matters into their own hands. In December, they made an unsuccessful assassination attempt on Virgil Earp that crippled him for life, and in March 1882, they murdered Morgan Earp.

After the murder of his younger brother Morgan, Wyatt went on a revenge ride that the newspapers coined “The Vendetta.” Fearing justice would not be served and spurred on by the pain of losing a close sibling, Wyatt went on a killing spree. His posse, which included his youngest brother Warren, hunted down three of the men implicated in the shootings and then they left the territory pursued by a posse led by Johnny Behan.

Although there seem to be as many variations of the Earps’ Tombstone chapter as there are storytellers, all accounts tend to have one thing in common: the noticeable absence of the women in the Earp’s lives. The Earp men, starting with the patriarch of the Earp clan, Nicholas Porter Earp, did not like being alone. Nicholas Earp was married three times, with his last marriage being at the age of eighty, his bride being fifty-three. Three of his sons would follow their father’s lead and marry more than once. It’s also possible these Earp brothers had additional brides or lovers that have yet to be discovered!

This book collectively introduces you to the lives of the known women who shared the title of Mrs. Earp either by name or relationship. Some of these women may have helped shape the future of the Earp brothers and may have even been the fuel behind some of the fires they encountered.

It’s interesting to note that while these brothers collectively had eleven wives, only Virgil, and possibly Wyatt, ever fathered a child. James’s wife Bessie is the only Mrs. Earp to have had children, but they were with her first husband when she was young. Were the Mrs. Earps sterile, were they all just that unlucky, did they practice abstinence, or was