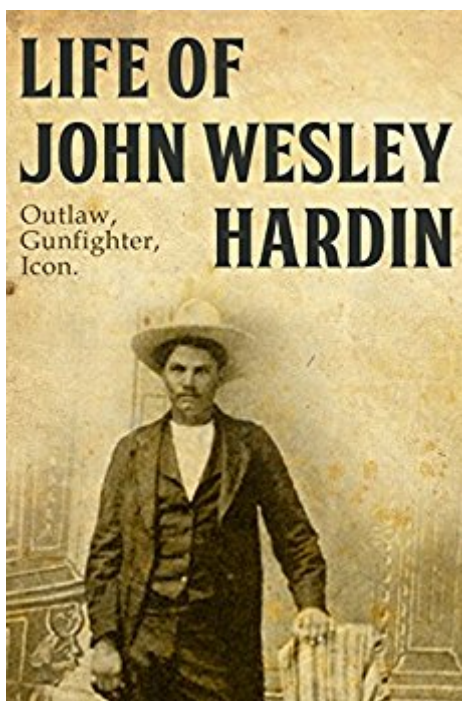


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# The Life Of John Wesley Hardin



## Synopsis

In an American Old West populated by fierce outlaws, badmen and gunslingers, John Wesley Hardin was perhaps the most notorious. Born to a Methodist preacher in 1853, near Bonham, Texas, Wes Hardin killed his first man, a former slave of his uncle's, at the tender age of 15. Fearing that he'd receive unfair treatment in a Union occupied state where one third of the police force were former slaves, Hardin went into hiding. The authorities wasted no time in discovering Wes Hardin, but when they sent three Union soldiers to arrest him, Hardin confronted his pursuers: "thus it was by the fall of 1868 I had killed four men and was myself wounded in the arm." Knowing he could not return, Hardin travels with outlaws, drives cattle, and gambles his way across the state. In his biography he details the mounting body count, and justifies every shootout, claiming to have "never killed a man wantonly or in cold blood." Throughout this lively account, Hardin narrates in meticulous detail the various troubles he runs into, including his encounter with the famous "Wild Bill" Hickock. He negotiates the quarrels and the blood feuds of his late teens and early twenties with surprising good fortune, even managing to find time to marry and have children, before capture in his mid twenties. In the ten years between his first killing in 1868 and his final capture, he killed more than a score of men and became the most wanted fugitive of his time. The imprisonment of Wes Hardin marks the end of the journal, which remains the only authentic autobiography of a wild west gunslinger to date. Written during his time in prison, it is an understandably biased tale, but nonetheless a unique and gripping first-person account of an interesting life and an interesting period in American history. This version of Hardin's autobiography also includes several other materials from the original publishers, dealing with Wes Hardin's release and subsequent shooting in 1895. John Wesley Hardin (May 26, 1853 – August 19, 1895) was an American Old West outlaw, gunfighter, and controversial folk icon. His memoir was published the year after his death in 1896. For details of other books published by Albion Press go to the website at [www.albionpress.co.uk](http://www.albionpress.co.uk). Albion Press is an imprint of Endeavour Press, the UK's leading independent digital publisher. For more information on our titles please sign up to our newsletter at [www.endeavourpress.com](http://www.endeavourpress.com). Each week you will receive updates on free and discounted ebooks. Follow us on Twitter: @EndeavourPress and on Facebook via <http://on.fb.me/1HweQV7>. We are always interested in hearing from our readers. Endeavour Press believes that the future is now.

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## Customer Reviews

As John Wesley Hardin wrote his autobiography he was, presumably, trying to present himself in a favorable light; shading things to make himself look good. That said, he still comes off as an utterly cold-blooded killer without conscience or a twinge of remorse. This makes the reading all the more interesting as he isn't holding back or trying to apologize for, or justify, the things he did. The story is very well-written (Hardin was a lawyer when he wrote it, during the brief time he survived once he was released from prison). As authentic western adventures go, this is a top-rate book. Hardin tells of cattledrives, chases by posses, encounters with the law including Hickok, and shootouts.

I am a great-grandson of John Wesley Hardin, so take special interest in reading about his life and comparing different stories on his life with those passed on by my relatives through the years. This book, because of its first-hand account of events, is very useful in trying to determine the truths in reference to his life and times. His account of events, i.e. killings, has to be tempered with the knowledge that he was a convicted murderer of a lawman and, apparently, prisons are full of characters who never did anything wrong. That is, at least, what they'd have us believe. Some historians hold he was a cold-blooded killer and others feel he was a Confederate hero, who did his best to kill Blue-bellies of the North, who were persecuting Texans in the years after the Civil War.

The facts, although they will probably never be uncovered at this late date, probably fall somewhere in the middle ground. All who know the facts of John Wesley Hardin agree on one thing: he was deadly with a six shooter.

This was an interesting book, if the reader is trying to get a feel for what life was like in some areas of rural Texas after the Civil War. I didn't read it expecting a book by a polished author, so the somewhat stilted writing didn't bother me. But I do live in the area where John Wesley Hardin traveled during his life and know it was a rough period in history. After finishing the book, it wasn't the numerous killings that effected me, but more of a realization of how and why many people were so angry during reconstruction. The book shows the point of view from the perspective of people who felt they definitely had grievances against the authoritative northern backed policies. John Wesley Hardin backed his extreme views with his gun. There were several other interesting things in the book, such as: the loyalty of rural families, the struggle to earn a decent wage, the difficulties of traveling over large areas, the excessive drinking and gambling, and finally, the way he managed to survive so long while being hunted, (knowing exactly who to trust, who would help him, and who to stay away from). Thus I came away with far more from the book than just reading about a notorious outlaw. I read about a time in Texas told by a violent man who lived through much of it. And as he slipped back into his old way of life, in saloons and gambling around other dangerous men, he paid the same price as his victims.

Hardin begins his narrative by acknowledging that he is very much a product of a particular time and place, a particular culture. He does not see any reason why he should attempt to transcend that, let alone apologize for it. He accepts himself for what he is and expects everyone else to do the same. He is above all a man of violence, ready and able to resolve all conflicts with physical - if necessary, deadly - force. Raised in Reconstruction Texas, he finds plenty to fuel his resentment, including carpetbagger politicians from the north and newly emancipated slaves appointed as police officers (an unquestioning racialism was part of his heritage). Nor is it in his nature to run from a fight. When he hears that Wild Bill Hickok, then Marshall of Abilene, has threatened to kill him if he ever sets foot in the town, what does he do? Goes immediately to Abilene of course, to face him. I would have been inclined to go anywhere but. Tough, fearless, uncompromising and cunning (at one point, he pretends to cry, in order to throw his captors off-guard) with an uncontrollable temper, he became the most formidable gunfighter of the Old West. How many men he killed no one knows for sure. Not even he knew. It was at least 20, probably 40 or more. His life story has the strengths and

weaknesses common to all autobiographies: it is the authentic voice, but it tells us a selective and heavily slanted story. It remains an invaluable primary source and should be required reading for anyone seriously interested in the history of the American West. Although not great literature, it is well written. The Western Frontier Library edition is good, with a useful introduction and postscript, but I would have liked a few footnotes, to save me having to go online for explanations of 'headright' and 'galluses', etc.

The original manuscript of this book was discovered after John Wesley Hardin's death. He was shot in the back of the head while standing at the bar in the Acme Saloon by John Selman in El Paso on August 19th, 1895. This book was published a year later by Smith & Moore Publishing in Sequin, Guadalupe County, Texas. It sold, in paperback, for fifty cents each. Hardin was one of the real, genuine hard cases, in those days. It is said that he killed at least a score of men. By some accounts, it was at least 40. Hardin was born in 1853, the son of a Methodist preacher, who proudly christened him after their faith's founder. No doubt he was expected to follow a spiritual path. It was not to be. He killed his first man, a freed negro who was full of his new freedom, and was going to chastise Hardin with a club out of anger for losing a wrestling match to the boy and his cousin the day before. Hardin killed him with a revolver. Texas was administered at the time--immediately after the War between the States--by Northern carpetbaggers, and Hardin's life as an outlaw commenced. He was captured, eventually, in Florida by Texas Rangers and brought back to Texas where he served time in prison. He was obviously intelligent and more literate than the average. After his release, he became a lawyer, and so his autobiography reads well, with probably no more self-justification and self-aggrandizement than most autobiographies. It is said that he had his pockets lined with leather, so that he could carry his pistols without wearing out his clothing. Not a carry method conducive to the idiotic Hollywood myth of the "fast draw." John Wesley Hardin was a dangerous man with an ungovernable temper. His story, as told by himself, is more literate than most and highly readable. How well it adheres to the absolute truth is anyone's guess. I found it most interesting. Joseph Pierre author, Handguns and Freedom...their care and maintenance

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