

Squaw Canyon Ranch

Local History, Culture, and Heritage



Situated in the heart of historic outlaw country and stomping grounds of Sheriff Pat Garrett, the notorious Lincoln County Wars and the legendary Billy the Kid, Felix River Ranch and Felix Canyon Ranch offers guests an opportunity to explore this fascinating heritage and relive the events of the Old West. The Dolan house, owned by Jim Dolan, the man almost single-handedly responsible for the famed Lincoln County Wars, is located on the grounds of Felix Canyon Ranch! Indeed, the entire surrounding area is steeped in Wild West history.

Start of the Lincoln County Wars

In 1877, an Englishman named John Tunstall came to town to create competition for the local monopoly that owned the main store and had a corner on the lucrative contracts to deliver cattle to the military.

History has revealed in his letters home that he planned to put his competition out of business and then create a monopoly of his own. Tunstall never had the opportunity, since he grossly underestimated the ruthlessness of the lawless West.

The prominent partner in the competing Murphy store, Lawrence Murphy, and his most ambitious young partner, Jim Dolan, had Tunstall killed on February 18, 1878. Tunstall's employees who had escaped their employer's fate wanted revenge. The most notable of these was a youth of sunny disposition, William Bonney, who would become known as Billy the Kid.

Tunstall's death set into motion the Lincoln County War that caused as much as a quarter of the population of Lincoln to be murdered over the next 5 months. This conflict came to a head over four days in the middle of July when the two warring factions barricaded themselves in local houses and stores and shot it out. There was actually very little blood shed, until the US Army showed up

and took sides with the ex-army cronies of the Murphy/Dolan camp.

After Tunstall's death, a young lawyer named Alexander McSween led what became known as the Regulators. When the US Army showed up, the Regulators were holed up in McSween's adobe house. The house was slowly burning from being torched.

At this point, a dispirited McSween gave up all hope and an enthusiastic Billy the Kid took charge. Billy and a group of volunteers created a diversion to allow the others hole up in the house to escape. Although successful in creating a diversion, the others waited too long. They finally did make a run for it, and they were all shot. Only a badly wounded 15-year-old managed to escape. Only one of Billy's group died, a young law student who had ironically come out west for his health.

This shoot out basically ended the Lincoln County Wars; both sides ended up losing. There was tremendous bloodshed on both sides, Tunstall was dead, and Dolan was bankrupt. The citizens of Lincoln put down their arms and made peace with each other.

