

Wild Bill Hickok and Calamity Jane: Deadwood Legends (South Dakota...

by [James D. McLaird](#)

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Anyone who enjoys reading about the American West will enjoy Professor McLaird's quick study on Wild Bill Hickok and Calamity Jane. His writing is concise and to the point, exploding myths about the two Western characters as he takes you through the chronology of their lives. The structure of the book helps to highlight the minimal connection between the two. Taking Hickok first, Professor McLaird discusses specific events in his life, balancing what is popularly known and historical accounts. Calamity Jane enters towards the end of the Hickok section, as she did in real life, and the remainder of the book discusses her life. The chronological perspective emphasizes how relationships and facts that are considered common knowledge about the two, actually developed - or were created - and changed over time.

The book is particularly rich with newspaper accounts and diary entries from the time period. In fact, Professor McLaird's footnoting is exceptionally thorough, making this volume ideal both for the reader wanting a quick Western fix and for the history maven who wants to dig deeper. The sources are particularly interesting because they would be relatively unavailable to the average reader - contents of historic newspapers, archival materials - or even the average researcher. Professor McLaird includes illustrations from his own collection, supplementing photos of "Bill" (James) and "Jane" (Martha). Anyone who appreciates language will enjoy the flair and colorful language found in the newspaper accounts included in the text.

Professor McLaird deals subtly with the celebrity and publicity aspects of these two. He highlights how a few influential writers developed the foundations for these legendary characters, in spite of the extensive documentation refuting those legends. The parallels to modern celebrity, achieved on the basis of retold stories rather than

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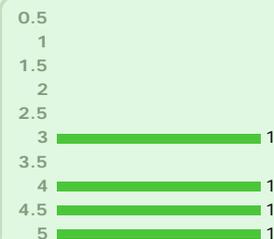
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available facts, is interesting. But it does not distract from a well written story about two intriguing, if perhaps not quite so admirable, people whose history has become far more exotic than the reality ever was. (★★★★★)

[davidpwhelan](#) | Oct 22, 2008 |   | [flag](#)

I found this book about Wild Bill Hickok and Calamity Jane very interesting. It gives details of the known, provable facts of their lives, and how they became legends during and after their own lifetimes. The author shows that a lot of the stories told about them were, at best, exaggeration, and at worst, total fabrication. This book is very readable, I feel, and gives a glimpse into the real lives of two people we've all heard of, but few know anything much about.

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I received the Early Reviews book, so this review is not based on the final version. I found that this book was well research, full of information but it was condensed into an uncomfortable dense book. This is a scholar level book, and I must say, I found my self drifting off. I found the layout also harsh on the reader with the writing close together and not many pictures or graphics. While the book was well written, they should definitely revise the layout for an easier read. (★★★)

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