



*William E. Kidd*

## *Dakota Images*

A brilliant journalist, William E. Kidd nurtured a prophetic vision of a fairer social order, which he called Christian socialism. Always an advocate for the common man, Kidd wielded "the ablest pen" in Aberdeen, championing the downtrodden, the disinherited, the poor, and the helpless. He despised corruption and was a constant foe of saloons and gambling parlors.

Known on the streets as Billy the Kid, the journalist was born in Kiddville, Michigan, on 3 December 1849. He married Mary E. Bellamy in 1872. In 1882, they moved to Brown County, South Dakota, where they farmed for seven years before William Kidd began newspaper work in Aberdeen. Kidd first leased the *Aberdeen Republican*, then created the *Star*. He subsequently merged the *Star* into the *Dakota Ruralist*, which he had joined as an editor in the mid-1890s and which he ultimately purchased from Henry L. Loucks. The paper flourished under Kidd's "fearless editorial management," becoming popular throughout the Dakotas and neighboring states. Kidd used the paper to advocate socialism, expose political corruption, target social inequities, and promote the Farmers' Alliance movement.

Enthusiastically radical, Kidd was a member of the Populist party, serving as chairman of its State Central Committee for two years. He was elected in 1896 to represent Brown County in the State House of Representatives, where he proved to be an able statesman. Under Kidd's direction, the legislature drafted a constitutional amendment that provided for the initiative and referendum, thus restoring control of the lawmaking process to the people.

William E. Kidd's life was marked by personal sacrifice and a profound commitment to improving the human condition. He carried his principles into his personal life, sharing his home and meager income with orphans. On his death, the editor of the *Aberdeen Daily News*, his longtime political opponent, remarked that Kidd "worked for others, for ideals, and in business matters he seemed to prefer losing a dollar to making one." Kidd died of Bright's disease on 27 April 1902.

by ROBERT W. EDELEN

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