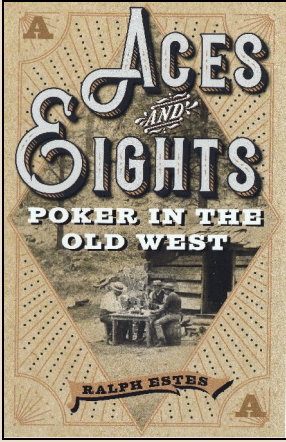


Aces and Eights: Poker in the Old West  
by Ralph Estes  
Two Dot/Globe Pequot

Poker in the Old West, the Wild West, wasn't like poker today.

They didn't play Texas Hold 'Em or Seven-Card-Stud. The stakes ran much higher - five-figure pots were routine. Professionals - male *and* female - sported golden and jeweled accessories worthy of a royal ball. And most were armed, some very obviously, others hidden deringers and holdouts.



The pistoleros - those famed for proficiency with a pistol, still spent more time at the poker table than in the street at high noon.

Doc Holliday, Belle Starr, Bat Masterson. They didn't go west to seek fame with a six-gun. They went for the gambling, mostly poker.

Without poker, the West would never have seen the likes of Wyatt Earp, John Wesley Hardin, Calamity Jane.

In fact, without poker the Old West wouldn't have been the Old West.

For every place there's a separate saga: Mississippi River, Fort Griffin, Abilene, Dodge City, Santa Fe, Tombstone, Deadwood - a list with no end.

For every famous character there's a separate legend: Wild Bill Hickok, Luke Short, Lottie Deno, Madame Mustache, Pat Garrett, Billy the Kid.

*Aces and Eights* tells, with a light touch and gentle humor, the story of poker and other diversions in the Old West like it's never been told before. You can't know the history of the West if you don't know the critical role played by poker.

Order *Aces and Eights* from Amazon or Barnes & Noble

Excerpt #1

When she strolled into Fort Griffin's Bee Hive Saloon, that groggery blossomed - from a smoky dive into an elegant ballroom. Or so it seemed to the rowdy cowpokes, buffalo hunters, and muleteam drivers, whose heads turned as one to eye Lottie Deno. Lottie Deno, a true beauty, attired as though for a Parisian salon.

The bartender handed her a new deck of cards and she gracefully took her seat at the poker table.

A couple of buffalo hunters and a professional gambler quickly joined her game. The buffalo men, though starting with wads of payday money, were soon busted. The gambler was Doc Holliday, who "daylighted" as a dentist.

Lottie and Doc went heads-up for several hours, until finally Doc stood with a sigh, "Well, I guess today is not my day, Miss Deno. Would you care to join me for dinner before my last two dollars are gone?"

"Doc, as I've so often said, I do not join men for dinner - or anything else. Although I am happy to take your money."

“Perhaps you won’t object, Miss Deno, if I consider your winnings today as only a temporary loan. Tomorrow is another day, and the cards may run quite differently. Good day to you.”

Although Doc seemed calm, inside he was seething. He could stand losses at faro - that game was, after all, mainly luck - but he wasn’t used to losing at poker.

Seething would also describe Big Nose Kate, who barged in with smoke pouring from her ears. Doc’s consort, Kate wasn’t worried about Doc losing, but she didn’t want another woman messing with “her man” and she so told Lottie.

Lottie let ‘er have it, verbally. Women in the Old West were every bit the equal of men in their cursing abilities. Though, in substantial contrast to Kate, Lottie appeared to be every inch a lady, her response was direct: “Why you stinkin’ slut! If I should step in soft cow manure, I would not even clean my boot on that bastard!” With that Lottie whipped out her derringer, but Doc separated them, and they all lived to play poker and participate in historic gunfights another day.

## Excerpt #2

Amarillo Slim played against big players and also big names: presidents Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon, mobsters and drug czars (Slim was once robbed and left standing in his underwear in a Houston street - until he put in a call to his friend Benny Binion, after which the robbers drove by again and gave him back his money and his trousers), And then there was Willie Nelson - Slim took him for \$300,000 in a game of dominoes.

*Laughin', jokin', dinin', dancin'*

*Plannin' parties and romancin', havin' fun regardless of the price*

*Eatin' caviar and chicken, strummin' his guitar and pickin'*

*Playin' dominoes and shootin' dice*

From Willie Nelson’s Grammy-nominated “Rainbow Connection” album

Slim bet he could outrun the champion racehorse Seabiscuit over 100 yards - if he could choose the track. He selected a 50-yard course, which meant both Slim and Seabiscuit would have to do a U-turn at 50 yards then race back home. In the time it took the jockey to slow the horse and turn around, Slim had sprinted to victory.

It never hurts for potential opponents to think you’re more than a little stupid and can hardly count all the money in your hip pocket, much less hold on to it.

- Amarillo Slim

And he won the World Series of Poker. Of course, with Amarillo Slim you know there’s a story here. Slim was a very good poker player - he had to be to survive in the rough environment of the Texas Road Gamblers. But, at least in tournament play, he wasn’t as good as some of his Texas pals.

In 1972 the WSOP was in just its third year. A small number of players was soon reduced to three, all Texas Road Gamblers: Puggy Pearson, Doyle Brunson, and Amarillo Slim. Brunson was in the lead with Pearson close behind; Slim was a distant third with the short stack of chips.

Brunson was starting to get worried. Running with the other Texas Road Gamblers, he had been an outlaw most of his life. To protect his wife and three kids he had tried, successfully, to stay out of the spotlight – any big winnings were known only to the other players at the table.

And of course he didn’t want to attract the attention of the IRS. So Brunson is beginning to think that the honor and prestige of winning the WSOP wasn’t going to be worth the possible problems with the feds, plus having nonstop spotlights shining on him and his family for days following.

Pearson liked the limelight but he didn't really want his dealings made public either. Winning the championship was beginning to look, for him, much like it was looking for Brunson. When the three of them were chatting about the upcoming finish, Brunson and Pearson said they didn't really want to win. Slim popped up, "Well, I do."

This was starting to look like a good solution. They ran it by Jack Binion (Benny's son), who was overseeing the WSOP. Binion was worried that it would look to the public and the media like a fix, so Brunson just decided, "I think I'm getting sick - my stomach's acting up. I'm going home." That left Pearson and Slim. They began to fight it out, fair and square (for the moment, at least). And Slim began to talk. And talk. The media loved it, finally a poker player who could give good quotes and engage the media in wonderful repartee. Binion began to see the value of Slim becoming the winner.

Slim, a bit out of character, later acknowledged that the final championship was a fix and that he did not actually win the WSOP fair and square. But, the record books say "1972: Amarillo Slim," and that's the way history has recorded it.