

PRESS RELEASE
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Frankly My Dear, You're My Huckleberry

What do Rhett Butler and Doc Holliday Have in Common?

Hollywood loves celebrations, and this year offers two that have a remarkable, and mostly untold, connection. The blockbuster film version of Margaret Mitchell's *Gone With the Wind* has a 75th birthday, while the cult classic Western *Tombstone* marks its 20th. And one name belongs on the guest list for both parties: Doc Holliday.

Although mostly remembered for his friendship with lawman Wyatt Earp and his part in the gunfight at the OK Corral, Holliday was raised in Georgia during the Civil War and was kin to author Margaret Mitchell. According to family stories, John Henry Holliday (his real name) had a teenaged romance with a cousin named Mattie, who would later become a nun and take the name Sister Melanie. That relationship is alluded to in the concluding scenes of the movie *Tombstone*, when a dying Doc Holliday remembers the cousin he loved and left behind in Georgia. "She was all I ever wanted," he tells Wyatt Earp, "she entered a convent over the affair."

Whether the romance was real or just a family legend may never be known. What is certain is that Margaret Mitchell, cousin to Sister Melanie, borrowed the name for *Gone With the Wind*. Supposedly, she went to visit the now elderly nun and ask if she might name a character in the book after her. The nun answered as sweetly as the fictional Melanie might have done, "Just make her a nice person." Mitchell always considered Melanie the heroine of her novel, although Scarlett stole most of the scenes while trying to steal Ashley away from Melanie. And interestingly, Ashley and Melanie were first cousins, as were Doc and Mattie/Sister Melanie.

So where is Rhett in all this family intrigue? There's some Doc Holliday in him, as well, being the blacksheep of a fine old Southern family who had to leave home under shadowy circumstances. Rhett and Doc shared a penchant for poker, whiskey, and wild women. Doc even had his "Belle Watling" in Kate Elder, his Western mistress.

"It's like the Old South meeting the Wild West and falling in love," says historian and author Victoria Wilcox, whose own novel trilogy, *Southern Son: The Saga of Doc Holliday* plays on the relationship between Doc and his cousin Mattie, and shows how a Southern boy ended up as a Western legend. Wilcox discovered the family connections in her work as founding director of

Georgia's Holliday-Dorsey-Fife House Museum, the antebellum home of the Holliday family. "It was a story too good to be true, yet likely was true." Wilcox spent eighteen years researching Doc Holliday and his Southern roots and Western life. "As his cousin Mattie said, he was a much different man than the one of Western legend – an even more interesting man!"

Wilcox's *Southern Son* saga opens with *Inheritance*, set during the Civil War and Reconstruction. "If there are echoes of *Gone With the Wind*, that's because the real people behind Margaret Mitchell's masterpiece were kin to Doc Holliday, and this is a family story." With the release in May 2014 of *Gone West*, the saga of Doc Holliday moves into more familiar Western territory, as Holliday arrives in Texas as a young man with a troubled past hoping to regain his place as a Southern gentleman, and win back the respect of his family and the love of the girl he left behind. The story concludes in *The Last Decision* with the OK Corral and the events that made Doc Holliday a legend.

As for Mattie/Sister Melanie, her story runs through all three books. "Their relationship lasted throughout Doc's life," says Wilcox. "Sister Melanie was as loyal as her fictional counterpart. She really was the heroine of the story."

Appropriately, the release of *Gone West* will be celebrated with a book launch at the Margaret Mitchell House Museum in Atlanta, where *Gone With the Wind* was written. And as for birthdays, Wilcox shares the date of November 8th with Margaret Mitchell herself – ironically, the same date that Doc Holliday died. "Sometimes truth really is better than fiction."

Southern Son: The Saga of Doc Holliday is published by Knox Robinson Publishing, London & New York. Book One *Inheritance* was released in 2013. Book Two *Gone West* will be released in May 2014. *The Last Decision* comes in May 2015. All are available wherever books are sold. For more information about Doc Holliday and his *Gone With the Wind* connections, visit the author's website at victoriawilcoxbooks.com.

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