



Robert Robertson (aka Johnny Slick)

Johnny Slick: Author of -

'Henry Appleton – Boy Hero and the Burgess Gang'

'Shootout at Dead Man's Creek'

'Wild Bill and the Indian outlaw'

'Gunfight on the High Plateau'

'Masters of the Prairie'

PICTURE: This is the only known photo of a man who may be Robert Robertson. Its authenticity has been widely challenged.

Little is known about the American novelist Johnny Slick (real name Robert Robertson). He claimed to be – and probably was – a prolific writer, and often bragged about it. But it is very unlikely he penned more books than his contemporary Colonel E Z C Judson. Under the pseudonym Ned Buntline, Judson is reputed to have written some 300 dime novels, including *Buffalo Bill and his adventures in the West*.

Slick's novel, *'Henry Appleton – Boy Hero!'* is the only one which can reliably be attributed to Robertson, although Henry Appleton was in no doubt that Robertson was the author of *Shootout at Dead Man's Creek* and *Masters of the Prairie*.

It is possible Robertson was born around 1820 somewhere in Oklahoma, but the place and date of his death are unknown. We know he was in New Zealand in 1866, because of his extensive writings about the Burgess Gang, and some believe he may have died here. But he was certainly back in the United States by 1875, when he published his novel *'Henry Appleton – Boy Hero!'*

Robertson led a colourful life, punctuated by frequent brushes with the Law, and if he is to be believed he was often in the company of some of America's most famous sons. As he told Henry Appleton, he once challenged the outlaw Wild Bill Hickok to a duel which ended in farce because both men were too drunk to aim effectively.

There is one unverified report that a gravestone, possibly that of Robert Robertson, was located in New Zealand in the early 1900s. Its inscription read *'Here lies the famed American author Robert Robertson, also known as Johnny Slick, who died heroically rescuing a young mother and her children from the raging Waikato River.'* It is possible this report was just a story as unreliable as any of Johnny Slick's adventures, and even if it were true is it likely the inscription was drafted by the dime novelist himself.

This writer would welcome more information about Robert Robertson and his alter ego Johnny Slick. Sometimes one wonders if he ever existed.

- John Harris, author of *The Physician's Gun*.



Illustration from *The Physician's Gun*