

Benjamin Franklin Daniels

Benjamin Franklin "Ben" Daniels was undoubtedly one of the most colorful characters in Southern Arizona history. But if you ask people to give you the names of those who they consider to be famous in Arizona history you will probably not hear the name of Ben Daniels. Generally what you will hear are names like Wyatt and Virgil Earp, Doc Holliday, or Ike and Billy Clanton. So just who was Ben Daniels and why was he considered to be "colorful". The following history of his life attempts to answer those questions.

Ben was born in Illinois on November 4 1852. He lost his mother, two brothers, and four sisters to cholera when he was still very young which made for a very rough childhood. When he was eleven years old Ben moved with his father and stepmother to Kansas and by the age of sixteen he was on his own. He worked as a cowboy in Texas and as a buffalo hunter in Kansas. By his late twenties, Ben had moved to Camp Carlin Wyoming where he had his first brush with the law. When he was 27 years old he was convicted of stealing army mules and sentenced to three years and six months in prison. On November 20, 1879, Ben Daniels entered the Wyoming Territorial Penitentiary as Convict No. 88.



Figure 1. Benjamin F. Daniels

When Ben was released from prison in August of 1883 he decided he had enough of Wyoming and headed for Dodge City Kansas to try his luck there. He quickly made friends with Bat Masterson and Dodge City Marshall Bill Tilghman. Masterson described Daniels as a "courageous officer" and when Tilghman's assistant was killed in a gunfight Tilghman recommended Ben Daniels for the position. On July 24, 1884 Daniels was appointed Dodge City Assistant Marshall at a salary of \$100 a month. When his term as Assistant Marshall expired on April 10, 1886 Ben decided to change careers and he opened the Green Front Saloon in Dodge. The Green Front was a typical Wild West saloon and it didn't take long before the loud noise and rowdy behavior of its patrons caused the owner of the adjacent restaurant to file a complaint with the city's town officials. In response, the Dodge City officials ordered Daniels to close his saloon on April 15, 1886. The saloon had been open for only five days. Daniels was so incensed over the order to close his saloon that he immediately went looking for the restaurant owner. When he spotted him he didn't call him out and face him, he shot him in the back. This was clearly murder but when Daniels' case went to trial a "friendly jury" acquitted him of the murder charge. Following the verdict, Daniels abandoned his career as a saloon keeper and quickly left town, possibly to avoid a reprisal from the restaurant owner's friends.

Ben's flight from Dodge took him east toward Missouri and the Kansas City area. In 1887 we find Ben in Blue Springs, Missouri, a small town just east of Kansas City, where he met 29 year old Anna Laura "Annie" Broadus. They were married in Blue Springs on March 6, 1887 and it didn't take long before they decided to move to Colorado. They ended up in the town of

Lamar which is located in Bent County, just west of the Colorado border with Kansas. In January 1888 Ben returned to a career in law enforcement when he accepted an appointment as deputy sheriff of Bent County.

He evidently didn't limit his interests to Colorado though because a year later he was involved in the Gray County War of western Kansas. This "war" was a dispute over which town would become the county seat of Gray County, Cimarron or Ingalls. Ben also had maintained his Dodge friendships with Bat Masterson and Bill Tilghman and joined them in the "Battle of Cimarron" which took place on January 12, 1889. This was one battle that Ben didn't win. Cimarron had won the county election to become the county seat but Ben and the other lawmen made an attempt to remove the county records and take them to Ingalls. The citizens of Cimarron won the gunfight though and ran the lawmen out of town. Cimarron remained the county seat of Gray County.

Ben and Annie stayed in Lamar for another 4 years after the Battle of Cimarron before getting the "wanderlust" again. This time it was to move in 1893 to the new boomtown of Cripple Creek, Colorado where gold had recently been discovered. Ben's primary interest there was in gambling but he also occasionally performed service as a lawman. In February of 1895 Cuba declared its independence from Spain. The ensuing struggle between Cuba and Spain would soon draw the United States into the conflict and eventually result in a significant impact on the life of Ben Daniels.

The US involvement initially involved diplomacy and a show of force but the sinking of the USS Maine in Havana Harbor on February 15, 1898 greatly heated things up. The result was a declaration of war between the US and Spain on April 21, 1898. The US Army raised three volunteer cavalry regiments to support the war effort.

One of these was the 1st United States Volunteer Cavalry under the command of Colonel Leonard Wood with Lt Colonel Theodore Roosevelt as his second in command. Roosevelt took on the task of recruiting volunteers for the regiment which eventually would become known as the "Rough Riders". He was looking for men mainly from New Mexico, Arizona, Texas and other hot weather states similar to Cuba. All candidates had to be skilled horsemen. It was a strange mix of retired and active lawmen, military veterans, cowboys, prospectors, gamblers, Native Americans, Texas Rangers, and Ivy League athletes who volunteered. Roosevelt experienced



Figure 2. Ben Daniels circa 1898

some difficulty in organizing the regiment since there were so many more volunteers than there were positions available. Just who should he reject? Ben Daniels was one of the volunteers who Roosevelt accepted. The cavalry unit arrived in Cuba on June 23, 1898 with very few of their horses due to transportation difficulties and ended up fighting most of the war as infantrymen.

It didn't take very long before the "Rough Riders" got their first taste of combat. The very next day they received orders to march toward Santiago in support of the 1st and 10th Regular Cavalries at the Battle of Las Guasimas on the 24th of June. After defeating the Spanish at Las

Guasimas Roosevelt was promoted to the rank of Colonel and assumed command of the “Rough Riders”. The regiment encamped for 6 days to resupply before continuing their march toward the San Juan Heights of Santiago. After playing a major role in the Battle for the San Juan Heights the “Rough Riders” participated in the Siege of Santiago until July 16th when the Spanish finally capitulated (they didn’t want to use the word “surrender”). The 1st US Volunteer Cavalry returned to the United States on August 14 and was demobilized at Camp Wikoff New York on September 15, 1898. Ben Daniels was now out of a job again but his performance with the “Rough Riders” during the Cuba Campaign so impressed Roosevelt that their relationship developed into a lifelong friendship. Following is a quote from Teddy Roosevelt’s book “Rough Riders” regarding Ben Daniels:

“Some of our best recruits came from Colorado. One, a very large, hawk-eyed man, Benjamin Franklin Daniels, had been Marshal [sic] of Dodge City when that pleasing town was probably the toughest abode of civilized man to be found anywhere on the continent. In the course of his rather lurid functions as peace officer he had lost half of one ear – ‘bitten off,’ as it was explained to me. Naturally he viewed the dangers of battle with philosophic calm. Such a man was, in reality, a veteran even in his first fight, and was a tower of strength to the recruits in his part of the line.”

Ben left Camp Wikoff and headed to southern Arizona, first to Yuma and then to Nogales where he met up with John Tremaine, another “Rough Rider”. The two ended up forming the Elephant Head Mining Company in 1899 with Tremaine establishing a mining camp in the Elephant Head area and Daniels establishing one in Madera Canyon. Daniels’ laid claim to over 100 acres of Madera Canyon and the mining camp was known as Camp Ben Daniels. It was on this property that he and Annie built their first cabin and Ben developed a mine in the Old Baldy Mining District that today we call Daniels Mine.



Figure 3. Daniels 1st Cabin Ruins

Figure 3 is a view of the site of Ben’s first cabin in 2015 when only the chimney and a portion of the houses’ rock foundation remained. For information pertaining to Ben’s Madera Canyon operation click on the following link: <https://www.gvrhc.org/Library/DanielsMine.pdf> .

In 1900, Roosevelt ran for the office of the Vice President under the William McKinley ticket and assumed that office on March 4, 1901. When McKinley was assassinated at the Pan American Exposition Roosevelt became the President on September 14, 1901. It didn’t take long for Daniel’s friendship with Roosevelt to pay off. In January 1902 Ben was appointed and confirmed by the US Senate as the United States Marshal for the Territory of Arizona. Within a week, Daniels’ appointment was called into question regarding his time in the Wyoming State Penitentiary. The pressure finally became too much for the Roosevelt White House and Ben submitted his resignation in February after holding the position for only a month.

Roosevelt was still determined to get Ben on the Federal payroll. In a letter to Ben’s wife Annie in March 1902 he implied that there were other possible positions for Ben. He collaborated with Alexander Oswald Brodie, the recently appointed Governor of the Arizona Territory who was also a former Rough Rider, and on the 1st of October 1904 Daniels was appointed Superintendent

of the Territorial Penitentiary at Yuma. Roosevelt still thought Ben deserved a better position and appointed Ben once again as the US Marshal for the Territory of Arizona. This time his efforts were successful and on July 1, 1905 Ben became a US Marshal. He held this office until 1909 when the incoming President Howard Taft asked him to resign.

In 1906 Ben's wife, Annie Laura Daniels, died suddenly while visiting Ben's older sister, Elizabeth (Daniels) Copple in Emporia, Kansas. Annie was buried in the Blue Springs Cemetery in her family's hometown of Blue Springs, Missouri. Ben married for a second time in 1908 when he was 56. His new wife was a 39-year-old widow named Anna Evaline (Stakebake) Seayrs. His new bride, who preferred to be called "Eva" was a schoolteacher and had a 10-year-old daughter by her first marriage.



Figure 4. Anna Evaline Seayrs

After Ben was forced to resign his position as US Marshal in 1909 his efforts were primarily concentrated on mining activities but in 1914 he decided to run for the office of sheriff of Pima County. He was defeated, ran again in 1916 and was defeated again. Ben evidently decided that if he was to win an election he had to have the right political party backing. He converted to the Republican Party and ran again in 1920. This time he won and was elected sheriff of Pima County. Ben, now 68 years old, was a lawman once again.

Ben had never bothered to file patents on his mining claims and he began to worry about what would happen to Eva when he passed on. He was, after all, 17 years older than her. On February 25, 1921 Ben started the process of patenting his claims. The process was completed on January 24, 1922 and Eva's monetary future was now secure. The timing was fortunate because Ben passed away from a massive heart attack just a year later on April 20, 1923. His burial was at the Evergreen Memorial Park in Tucson, Arizona. Click on the following link <https://www.gvrhc.org/Library/AnnieDanielsClaim.pdf> for details pertaining to the patenting of Ben Daniels mining claims.

Was Ben Daniels "colorful" and a "western legend"? You decide. Some western authors thought he was. Following is a quote from the book "A Rough Ride to Redemption: The Ben Daniels Story" by Robert K. Dearmint and Jack Demattos:

"Benjamin Franklin Daniels was a feared gunman who typified the journeyman gunfighter every bit as much as those whose names have become legend. He spent time on the buffalo ranges of Texas, in the roaring Cowntown of Dodge City, and in the mining boomtown of Cripple Creek, Colorado. He rose from an outlaw and convict to presidential protegee and high-ranking officer of the law. He was considered to be "the most controversial of Teddy Roosevelt's White House Gunfighters".

Prepared by T. Ferguson and T. Johnson in February 2024 from the following sources: Wikipedia; Find a Grave website; Rough Riders by Theodore Roosevelt; A Rough Ride to Redemption; The Ben Daniels Story by Robert K. Dearmint and Jack Demattos, Roosevelt letter to Mrs. Daniels; Photo Credits: Figure 1 from Wikipedia, Figures 2 and 4 from Find a Grave website; Figure 3 by T. Johnson.