



BARNEY BENJAMIN DAY

Soldier-Indian Fighter-Buffalo Hunter-Gold Miner-Homesteader-Father-Politician

by David Carter

Barney Benjamin Day is a little known but true hero of the Old West. His life is a story for a great western movie. He was born in Ohio in 1832 and grew up in rural Illinois. In December 1857, Day was married to Sophronia Neff in Vermillion, IL.

At the beginning of the US Civil War he joined the 8th Regiment Illinois Volunteer Infantry from Griggsville, IL, for 3 months as a Volunteer Private. However, in July 1861, he joined the Union Army as a member of the 35th Regiment Illinois Infantry Company D from Catlin, his home town, again as a Private. He was involved in long and brutal campaigns from Missouri to Georgia until being mustered out in September 1864.

Day was described as a man of splendid appearance and medium height who stood very straight and was of even temper. General George Forsyth said of Day that he was "a capital man and an A-1 scout. Brave, active, and energetic. He helped take care of me when I was wounded and anything Barney said was the simple truth as he was reliable." He went to Kansas after the Civil War where he worked as a professional hunter and purveyor of rations for the Kansas Pacific Railroad.

During the summer of 1868, the Indians became so hostile in Kansas that something had to be done. General Sheridan ordered Colonel George Forsyth to employ 50 frontiersmen as "scouts" to ride against the Indians. They were issued new Spencer carbines, ammunition, and supplies, but provided their own horses and tack. On September 6, 1868, they headed west following tracks for 10 days. On the 16th they made camp on the North side of the Arickaree River. At dawn on the 17th, Indians stampeded some of the horses and mules and Forsyth gave the order to move to an island in the middle of the river. The island (later called Beecher Island after Lieutenant Beecher who died in the battle) was approximately 250 feet long with about 15 feet of stream on each side. Shortly, hundreds of Indians arrived on the hills overlooking the island and started shooting at the scouts, killing the horses and wounding some of them. They built bulwarks out of dead horses and sand. Day sustained wounds of such severity that Forsythe (25 years later at the dedication of the Beecher Island Monument where Barney was listed

as a survivor) stated that Day had died as he saw him wounded three times and he could not have lived through the ordeal. However, he did survive, losing only his right index finger.

There are dairies of many of the scouts at Beecher Island and they mostly agree that:

1. Day was one of the best shots and was at the apex of their fortifications.
2. He knew they were going to die if they did not provoke the Indians into attacking because they were surrounded and were running out of food and ammunition.
3. He went out in front of their meager fortifications and "mooned" the Indians, which was a serious insult to their manhood and provoked them to attack.
4. Armed with Spencer carbines, the scouts drove back numerous attacks by the Indians coming on horseback down the river.
5. In addition, during a lull in the fighting, he went out into the carnage and scalped an Indian, further infuriating the Indians to attack again and again.

Finally, when losses exceeded 100 and with both chiefs killed, the Cheyenne left the field. According to the Kansas State Historical Society, by letter of donation, a scalp of Chief Little Crow of the Cheyenne was donated in 1948 by Miss Isabel Smith; she had been given the scalp by Mrs Barney Day in 1906. Mrs Day stated that her husband, Barney, had taken the scalp at Beecher Island during the fight. Miss Smith later corresponded with Forsyth (who had become a General by that time) and he wrote to her that Little Crow had been second in command during the battle, but he had become the leader after Chief Roman Nose was killed. He also noted that Day had gone out and collected a scalp and a silver belt during the fight. Day was granted a pension as a civilian scout in July 1870.

Day recovered from his serious wounds after the battle and stayed in Kansas. He lived in Sheridan and Ellis from



Serial Number C53055



1872-74. During this period he began hunting buffalo under contract.

According to a letter from Ray G. Sparks in the Kansas Historical Society collection, a buffalo runner by the name of Galveston Taylor equipped a large outfit to hunt near Fort Harker and Hays, Kansas. Among others, he hired Barney Day. In a diary, Sparks wrote about the trip and said that Day only killed 25 the first day for each crew as not to overwhelm the new skinners. He also wrote that Day preferred Curtis & Harvey powder as it did not leave residue cake inside the barrel, even though it cost 50% more than DuPont.

Day and Taylor killed 126 buffalo that first day. Seeing that the skinners knew their business, Taylor wanted at least 250 killed each day after that. The second day, Taylor and Day went out together and after the third buffalo fell, about 15 Cheyenne scared the buffalo and rode to within 400 yards, mocked the hunters, and acted like they would attack. Taylor and Day each choose an Indian on horseback and as they rode back and forth on the far side of their ponies, both shot through the horses, killing both horse and Indian. At which point the Indians withdrew and did not appear again.

When hunting was done for the day, they went to Fort Hays and drew ammunition and supplies from the US Army. The army allowed this because they believed that killing the buffalo would subdue the Indians in the end. The hunters were issued 50/70 ammunition, which they disassembled and traded the powder and brass for other supplies and melted the bullets down into .44-90s for their Sharps.

Serial Number C53055

Day ordered a Sharps Sporting Rifle serial #C53055 with a telescopic sight in .44-90 weighing 16 1/4 pounds, at Catlin, IL, when he returned to his home town with his wife for a vacation, or winter break in hunting. It was shipped to Catlin on February 6, 1873. He continued to hunt buffalo and ordered other Sharps rifles, mostly military muskets. At least one of his purchases, a 16-pound rifle, was returned to the factory in 1875 by J.L. Thompson, Buffalo Station, KS, to be re-bored or re-barreled into a .50/90. Day ordered a total of eight Sharps rifles from the Sharps Rifle Manufacturing Company factory over his lifetime. He is also the only buffalo hunter named in "Sharps Firearms" by Frank Sellers.

Serial Number 158264

At some time in the mid-1800s, Barney and Sophronia Day moved to Georgetown, CO, a mining town 45 miles west of Denver. He apparently was somewhat successful at mining as it was reported in a local newspaper that they had gold plated door knobs in their home. He ordered another Sharps Sporting Rifle from the factory, serial #158264, an 1874 rifle in .40/70 caliber weighing less than 10 pounds that was shipped to Barney Day, Georgetown, CO, on November 17, 1876.

Day marked the butt-stock of this gun with the name and number of what he killed with it. Two things stand out about this gun. There are NO buffalo listed, he had killed and probably eaten enough for a lifetime, but there are 22 alligators listed in the carving on the stock. I assumed that someone had irresponsibly enhanced the gun with the carved list later, until I found copies of the Rocky Mountain News from the 1870s in the Denver Public Library with articles that stated "after the railroad arrived in the late 1860s, those who could, spent time in the South during the winter and while there enjoyed hunting alligators." There are numerous references about different individuals traveling south for a vacation to hunt alligators. So, I believe the carving in the butt-stock is correct and truly done by Day during that time.

The carvings on the butt-stock read:

Antelope
Elk IIII/
Deer IIII/
Wildcat IIII/
Bear I
Panther I
Alligator IIII/
IIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIII

Also about this time, Day ordered additional guns and requested a discount because he had ordered numerous guns and thought that he should get the same discount (15%) as a dealer. The factory complied. All guns ordered by Day after that were discounted.

Comfortable and probably bored with the "quiet life," Barney and Sophronia Day joined several others in 1877 and moved "over the hill" (meaning Berthoud Pass today) to Middle Park, which would later become Grand



Serial Number 158264
Right Side Top
Left Side Middle





Serial Number 161514
Right Side Top
Left Side Middle





Photographs of Barney Day, (Top Left) his wife Sophronia (Top Right) and their son Barney Hulse (Judd) Day (Right)

courtesy
Grand County
Historical Association
Probably about 1881-1882

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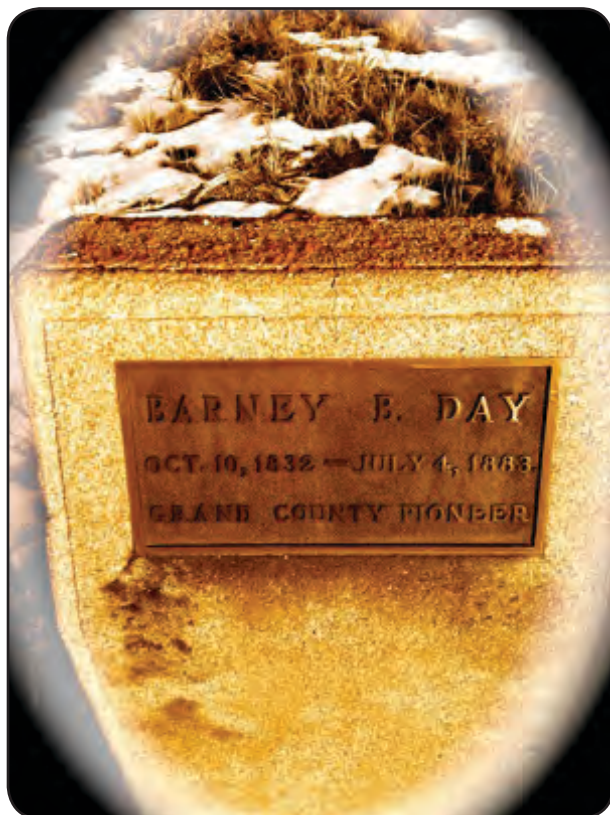
Galveston Taylor, Buffalo Runner, by Ray G. Sparks, date unknown

Letter from Miss Isabel Smith to Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas, May 24, 1948.

Richard Labowskie, MD, owner of Original Records of Sharps Rifle Manuf. Company

Ron Paxton, Photographer par excellent.

The complete cooperation of the Grand County Historical Association, Hot Sulphur Springs, Colorado (including photos of the Days) and the Denver Public Library, 5th floor West



Barney Day
and his wife
Sophronia Day,
buried side by side
in the
Hot Sulphur
Springs Memorial
Cemetery.

