

James T. Dana

1870s sheriff gave his all to Yuma County

By B. JOHNNY RUBE
For Que Pasa

Not much is known about Yuma County Sheriff James T. Dana. He was a Kentuckian, fearless and handy with a gun. He had been appointed sheriff on January 6, 1869, making his office at the county seat at La Paz.

He must have been a very capable officer of the law and liked by the locals in Yuma County. This is evidenced by his election to the office twice. His job was to present at all District Court hearings, collect taxes, take the census and keep peace in the county.

His honesty and devotion to duty were reflected in a newspaper story in 1870, when it was reported that Sheriff Dana had arrived in Tucson with a prisoner named Francisco Maldonado, who had been brought there on a change of venue under an indictment of murder.

The newspaper had learned on good authority that Sheriff Dana had been offered a sum \$2500 if he would let the prisoner escape. Dana repulsed the offer with supreme contempt. The newspaper commented that "there were men who could not be bought, and the sheriff from Yuma County was known to be one of them."

On September 28, 1871, The San Diego Union newspaper reported that Sheriff James T. Dana had been killed by an Indian. This, according to available facts, makes him the only sheriff of Yuma County ever to be



Sheriff James Dana: only Yuma sheriff killed in the line of duty killed in the line of duty.

The fateful incident began when a Mexican woman was found horribly mutilated near Arizona City (now Yuma). The sheriff had learned from a

reliable source that a Yuma Indian named Big Charley was responsible for this crime. The sheriff and his posse, comprised of Oscar F. Townsend, Johnny McCann, John Markle, and Antonio Contreras, went to visit a

rancheria above Yuma to arrest Big Charley.

While Dana was searching one of the huts, a squaw struck him on the shoulder with an axe, making a large gash. This infuriated the sheriff, who drew his pistol and fired it at the squaw. As he got back on his horse, another Indian named Que-cha-co shot Dana with a glass tipped arrow, which embedded in his side. Dana died 2 days later on September 22, 1871. The post mortem examination showed the arrow had entered his liver. Death was slow and painful.

Que-cha-co was captured, went to trial and was found guilty of murder. On November 9, 1871, Judge Isham Reavis sentenced Que-cha-co "to hang by the neck until dead." Que-cha-co had other ideas, however, and escaped. His escape probably was partially responsible for the county building a better jail at the northwest corner of 3rd St. and Madison Ave.

But even the new county jail couldn't hold Que-cha-co, after he had been captured by the district attorney on December 11, 1872. The Yuma Indian had come into town and, in order to capture him, D.A. Gray drew down on him and shot him twice. After recovering from his wounds, Que-cha-co was lodged in the new jail, but on a dark night of October 28, 1873, he disappeared over the jail wall and was never seen again.

B. Johnny Rube is a Yuma County law enforcement historian.



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