

Tombstone by Tombstone

King Samuel Woolsey

King Woolsey epitomized everything that makes up what we think of as the old west. He was one of the most courageous of all the early pioneers of the southwest. He was a rancher, a leader among Indian fighters, an entrepreneur and, while not known as gunfighter, he would face down a gunfighter and send him packing.

Woolsey was born in Alabama in 1832 to a large land-holding family who moved to the Arkansas-Louisiana border. The family owned land in both states and Woolsey attended school in both as well. He was being prepared for the Catholic priesthood until the age of fifteen when he decided that wasn't the life he wanted and he escaped.

It is believed he joined a group of filibusters (1850s term for pirates and mercenaries) going to Cuba. There he was placed in jail, freed by the British Consul and put on a ship to California. In 1855, he joined William Walker on his ill-fated Nicaragua Expedition. After that he returned to California for a few years.

In 1860, Woolsey traveled by horseback from Calaveras County, California, to Yuma, Arizona, with two companions, a Colonel Jackson and a Mr. Benedict. They arrived in Yuma with \$5.00 between the three of them. Woolsey gained employment as a mule driver while his two companions moved on to Yavapai County, Arizona. Woolsey soon formed a partnership with a druggist by the name of George Martin and they bought the Agua Caliente Ranch. The ranch is located on the north side of the Gila River about 80 miles above Yuma, near the present site of Gila Bend, Arizona. The ranch was covered with spring-fed grasses and was a favorite stopping place for travelers between Tucson and Yuma.

When the Civil War broke out, Woolsey made arrangements to meet Colonel Albert Sydney Johnson of the Confederate Army in Maricopa Wells. A violent illness prevented Woolsey from traveling and making the rendezvous. He did not let his southern sympathies interfere with good business practices and when General James H. Carleton brought his California Column into Arizona, Woolsey made a great deal of money selling hay and other badly needed supplies to the Union Army.

During the act of filling one of his hay contracts to the Army in 1862, he and his two companions were attacked by 15 to 20 Apaches. They were only armed with one shotgun, so Woolsey coolly waited until the Indians were very close. Then he fired the shotgun, filled with buckshot, directly into the head of their chief. The warriors would not continue the battle without a leader.

In the spring of 1863, a group of prospectors known as the Walker Party stopped off at the Agua Caliente Ranch. Woolsey decided to join them as an independent prospector and look for gold along the Agua Fria River. He and a member of the party, John Dickson, decided to take up a ranch in a valley along the lower Agua Fria, about 25 miles from Prescott. The ranch would be known as the Agua Fria Ranch and the valley as Woolsey Valley. Woolsey did not remain in the valley long as he returned to the Agua Caliente Ranch where he began to build a wagon road from there back to the Walker Diggings on the Hassayampa River.



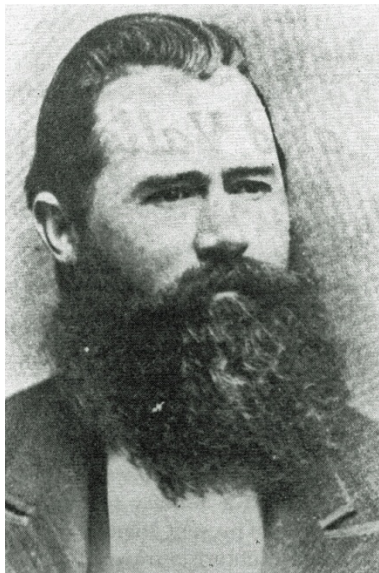
Agua Caliente Ranch as it appears today
Photo courtesy of Marshall Trimble

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The Tonto and Pinal Apache raids on the miners and settlers, and on his own Agua Fria ranch, convinced Woolsey that it was necessary to form a company of frontiersmen to mete out some justice to the marauding Indians. In January of 1864, Woolsey organized a company of 28 men who knew how to handle their weapons. On January 7th, with 10 days' rations, they set out in search of a group that had stolen some stock. After 12 days on the trail the group was out of supplies and had seen no Indians. Woolsey sent a small detachment of men into the nearby village of some friendly Pima Indians to get replenishments. On January 21st the men returned with the supplies and they were accompanied by a band of 16 friendly Maricopa warriors under the leadership of Chief Juan Chivaria, a close friend of Woolsey, and two white men named Cyrus Lennan and G. G. Fisher. A couple of days later they cut the trail of the Indians and Woolsey made camp near some small tanks of sweet water. Woolsey made contact with the Tonto and Pinal Apaches and invited them to come into his camp for a talk. The Apache delegation was led by a sub-chief named Paramucka. During the talks, a young Indian rushed in breathlessly and said that Wa-poo-eta, head chief of the Tonto band, known to the white man as Big Rump, was not going to come in and join the pow-wow. At this point one of the hostile Indians stuck a lance into the breast of Cyrus Lennan killing him instantly. Woolsey whipped out his revolver and shot Paramucka. The others followed his lead and the fleeing Apaches left twenty Tontos and four Pinals dead. Woolsey's band suffered only the one casualty, one slightly wounded Maricopa warrior and one horse killed. The battle site, near the present town of Miami, Arizona, has been since known as the "Bloody Tanks."

The Woolsey party immediately packed up and traveled 12 miles that evening as they were anxious to put some distance between themselves and Big Hump's larger band of warriors. As they proceeded home, on January 29th near the Agua Fria River they met two more Pinal Indians with two mules and a horse they had stolen from the Hassayampa Mine. They succeeded in killing one, badly wounding the other and recovering the stolen stock. They arrived safe at home on February 3rd having been absent for 27 days.

On February 25, 1864, Woolsey's Agua Fria Ranch was attacked and 30 head of stock driven off. The area around Prescott was also hit hard and the citizens responded. A fellow by the name of Robert Groom organized a band of 60 miners and Woolsey formed a band of 100 men. On April 2, Woolsey sent a letter to the governor saying he had found his cattle in an Apache rancheria the day before and killed 14 Indians and suffered only one casualty, a man wounded by an arrow. On April 4, they attacked another rancheria killing 16 Apaches. They returned to the Agua Fria Ranch on April 17.



King Samuel Woolsey

Photo courtesy of Marshall Trimble and Scottsdale Community College

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In 1865, Woolsey bought out George Martin's half of the Agua Caliente Ranch, but in May of 1867 he lost the Agua Fria Ranch to debtors to cover a \$56,000 deficit.

Historians are not sure if it was 1866 or 1867 when a cool, nery fellow by the name of Jack Standifer, looking to enhance his reputation, was making loud boasts that he was going to find and kill Woolsey. When the word reached Woolsey he went looking for the man and found Standifer in a bar in Prescott. When Standifer approached Woolsey with his gun in hand, but down by his side, he discovered that Woolsey's draw was lightning quick and he was looking down Woolsey's gun barrel. He quickly backed out of the saloon and was not seen in the area again.

On May 27, 1871, King S. Woolsey married Mary S. Taylor at the Agua Caliente Ranch. It was the first marriage ceremony held in the newly organized Maricopa County. It was the first marriage for both of them, but he had three children, two girls and a boy, by his Yaqui mistress. He never considered them as legal children or heirs to his estate.

When the Salt River Valley was being settled, Woolsey obtained a considerable amount of property in Phoenix. He opened a flour mill and experimented with sugar cane. He opened the first skating rink in Phoenix and charged \$.50 admission which included the skates. In spite of his activities of mining, building roads, ranching and fighting Indians, he found time for public office. He served first Yavapai County and later Maricopa County in the Territory's Council (upper house) in the first, second, seventh, eighth and ninth legislature. During the last two, he served as president of the Council. He was appointed as a military aide with the rank of Lieutenant Colonel under two governors.

On June 30, 1879, he died at the age of 47 and seemingly in great health. Apparently, it was a heart attack. The news of his death was received with great sorrow throughout the state. At his funeral, his close friend Chief Juan Chivaria brought all his braves and it was said that he cried like a child. Woolsey is buried in the City Loosley Cemetery in the Phoenix Pioneer and Military Memorial Park in downtown Phoenix.



Source: Documentation found at the Pioneers' Cemetery Association.