
ARIZONA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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MS 1252

William Timberline Sparks Family and Arizona Rangers Collection
ca. 1902 - ca. 1922

DESCRIPTION

These photographs came from the estate of William Timberline Sparks. The bulk of the collection is photographs of the Sparks family, but the 13 images in Folder 2, dating to ca. 1905, are considered the most important in the collection. During this time, Sparks was a member of the Arizona Rangers.

1 box, .5 linear ft.

ACQUISITION

This collection was purchased by the Arizona Historical Society in October 2003.

RELATED MATERIALS

See also PC 007 and MS 1063; *The Apache Kid, A Bear Fight, and Other Stories of the Old West* by William Sparks

ACCESS

There are no restrictions on access to this collection.

COPYRIGHT

Requests for permission to publish material from this collection should be addressed to the Arizona Historical Society-Tucson, Library and Archives Department

PROCESSING

The collection was processed by Dena McDuffie in November 2003.

ARRANGEMENT

The collection is arranged topically.

HISTORICAL NOTE

The Arizona Rangers were established in 1901 as an act of the 21st Territorial Legislature, charged with controlling smuggling and rustling in the territory. The Arizona Rangers, modeled after the Texas Rangers, were selected from law, military officers, and ranchers. During their 9½ years in existence, they apprehended lawbreakers, stopped disturbances in Ajo, Gila Bend, Globe, Williams, and Holbrook. They also stopped the Morenci Miners' Strike of 1903 and the strike in Cananea, Sonora, Mexico in 1906

Burton Mossman was named the first captain of the Rangers; he established its headquarters in Bisbee where he was a butcher. The original Rangers were made up of 14 men: 1 captain, 1 sergeant and 12 privates.

In 1902, Thomas H. Rynning succeeded Mossman as captain of the Rangers. He moved the headquarters to Douglas. In 1903, the numbers were increased to 26: 1 captain, 1 lieutenant, 4 sergeants and 20 privates.

In 1907, Captain Rynning resigned and was succeeded by Harry C. Wheeler. Wheeler had been with the Rangers since 1903. After the Rangers were disbanded in 1909, Wheeler became sheriff of Cochise County.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

William "Timberline" Sparks was born in Iowa around 1862. He married and had two daughters, Evelyn (Effie) and Ava. He owned the Lone Star Saloon in Naco. Sparks was enlisted into the Arizona Rangers as a private in 1903 when he was 42 years old. He served several terms of enlistment in the Rangers and attained the rank of sergeant.

Sparks is perhaps best known for pressing charges of mutiny and murder on the high seas against Lee Cobb, a deputy sheriff stationed in Clifton. The charges stemmed from Cobb's stint aboard a British freighter where he led an uprising among the crew and killed the captain and first mate. Cobb escaped and laid low for a couple of years while British officials conducted an exhaustive search. As a result of Sparks' whistleblowing, Cobb was arrested and extradited for trial. But Cobb was a lawman and a nephew of Sheriff Jim Parks of Greenlee County and the case resulted in bad feelings against the Rangers.

In 1906, fighting broke out in Naco among a group of hobos who were drinking along the railroad tracks. Sparks and Jeff Kidder, another Ranger, tried to stop the fighting, but were assaulted by the crowd. As one of the hobos attacked the men with a knife, Sparks shot him in the hip, ending the fight. When the Rangers were discontinued in 1909, Sparks returned to civilian life.

In 1917, Sparks killed his mining partner and subsequently was in prison until 1926. During this time, he wrote his memoirs, published in Los Angeles by Skelton Publishing Company around 1926 as *The Apache Kid and Other Old West Stories*.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The bulk of the photographs in this collection portray the Sparks family, especially his daughter Evelyn (Effie). The 13 images that portray the Arizona Rangers are considered to be the significant portion of this collection.

SERIES NOTES

The Arizona Rangers Collection has been separated into two series: Series 1: Arizona Rangers; Series 2: Sparks Family photographs.

BOX & FOLDER LIST

Box 1

Biographical Materials

F. 1 Biographical Material

Photographs

F. 2 Arizona Rangers [Originals of these images are housed in Rare] [Note: Included in this folder is an inventory of these images, provided by the photo dealer. The numbers on the inventory have been included on the images for reference; however, the information contained in the inventory is largely speculation and should not be taken as fact.]

F. 3-4 Family-Evelyn (Effie) and Ava Sparks, 1892-1922

F. 5 Family-Miscellaneous

F. 6 Family-Children

F. 7 Family-Group Portraits

F. 8 Family-Men-George Forrester

F. 9 Family-Men-Miscellaneous

F. 10 Family-Men-Mickey O'Toole

F. 11 Family-Men-George Whitesell

F. 12 Family-Women

F. 13 Family-Places-Miscellaneous

F. 14 Family-Subjects-Miscellaneous