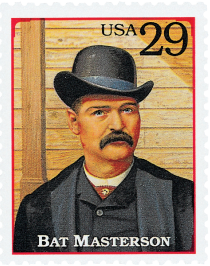
This Day in History… November 26, 1853

Birth of Bat Masterson



From the 1994 Legends of the West Sheet

Bartholomew "Bat" Masterson, who later used the name William Barclay Masterson, was born on November 26, 1853, in Henryville, Quebec. His career took him from buffalo hunting and frontier law enforcement to newspaper columns about boxing in New York.

Masterson's family moved west as he grew up, living in New York and Illinois before settling near Wichita, Kansas. In 1871, he left the family farm to hunt buffalo. He later worked on construction of the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad. In 1874, Masterson was among the hunters at Adobe Walls, Texas, when the trading post came under attack. He then served as a civilian Army scout during the Red River War.

A January 1876 shooting in Sweetwater, Texas, helped establish Masterson's reputation as a gunfighter. He was badly wounded in a confrontation in which a soldier and a woman were killed. After recovering, he worked as a policeman in Dodge City, Kansas, and became associated with Wyatt Earp. In November 1877, Ford County voters elected Masterson sheriff by three votes. His brother Ed served as Dodge City marshal.

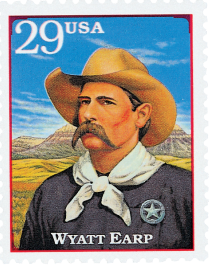


From the Great Americans Series

In early 1878, Masterson and a posse captured most of a gang linked to train robberies near Kinsley, Kansas. That April, cowboy Jack Wagner shot and killed Ed while he was on duty. A gunfight followed. Bat Masterson and other lawmen were involved; Wagner was mortally wounded, and another man was injured. Masterson lost his bid for re-election as sheriff in 1879.

In 1880, Masterson traveled to Ogallala, Nebraska, to help his friend Billy Thompson, who faced possible lynching after a shootout. Masterson helped him leave town and went to Buffalo Bill Cody's ranch near North Platte. Cody provided them with transportation back to Kansas.

Masterson joined Earp and Luke Short in Tombstone, Arizona, in 1881. He worked at the Oriental Saloon's gaming tables. Later that year, he returned to Dodge City and took part in a gunfight in the town plaza, wounding saloonkeeper A.B. Webster. He was arrested and fined eight dollars. Masterson later served as a deputy sheriff in Las Animas County, Colorado, and as marshal of Creede, Colorado, in 1892.



Masterson met Wyatt Earp in Dodge City.

In 1885, he tried newspaper publishing with *Vox Populi*. The paper stopped after one issue. Masterson spent much of the 1890s in Denver, where he gambled and became involved in boxing. In the late 1880s, he managed and later bought the Palace Variety Theater, but left theater management after a short time. He worked boxing events as a timekeeper and gambler, and helped promote fighters John L. Sullivan and James J. Corbett. In 1899, he founded the Olympic Athletic Club, which hosted boxing events.

In 1902, Masterson moved to New York City. Journalist Alfred Henry Lewis helped him get work at the *New York Morning Telegraph*. Beginning in 1903, Masterson wrote a column called "Masterson's Views on Timely Topics," covering sports, especially boxing. Lewis also encouraged him to write about his frontier acquaintances for *Human Life* magazine. Masterson profiled figures including Wyatt Earp, Doc Holliday, Luke Short, and Buffalo Bill Cody.

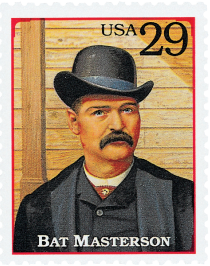


This stamp paid the rate for letters to foreign countries.

In 1905, President Theodore Roosevelt appointed Masterson a deputy US marshal for the Southern District of New York. He held the post until 1909, then returned to writing full time. His column continued until October 25, 1921. That morning, after completing what became his final column, Masterson suffered a heart attack and died at his desk. He was 67. He was buried in Woodlawn Cemetery in the Bronx. His grave marker bears the words "Loved by Everyone."

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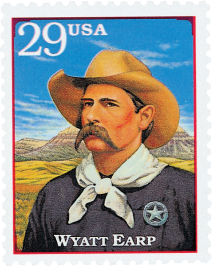


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