

## Daniel Bonelli and Ann Haigh Bonelli

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Daniel Bonelli was born in Bussarg, Thurgau, Switzerland February 23, 1836. He was a Swiss descendant and very well educated, speaking English, Italian, Swiss and German fluently. His parents were Hans George and Maria Amman Bommeli.



Johann Daniel Bonelli and Ann Haigh

Ann Haigh Bonelli was born February 14, 1834, in Huddersfield, Yorkshire, England. Her mother was Mary Hartley Haigh and her father, Benjamin Haigh, was a woolen goods manufacturer.

Daniel and Ann were church converts, immigrating to the United States about August 17, 1859. They met on board ship and were married soon after arriving in this country. They settled in Salt Lake City, where the family carried on a weaving business started by Daniel's father.

Daniel was called to lead a company of Swiss pioneers to Southern Utah. They arrived in Santa Clara November 18, 1861, with winter upon them and no food or shelter except what they had brought with them. Brush covered dugouts served as homes until a fort could be built. Even these crude shelters were destroyed by a flood on January 1, 1862.

Daniel moved on to Beaver Dam and a short time later was flooded out again. Daniel then traveled further west with a group called to settle the Muddy Valley. A son, Daniel Leonard, was born in 1865, and here

also Ann gave birth to her third child, Mary Isabelle, who became the wife of Ross Blakely. Their fourth child, George Alfred, was also born in the Muddy Valley on January 22, 1869. He later married Effie Tarr of Kingman, Arizona.

Daniel Bonelli planted fruit trees, a vineyard, field of alfalfa and a vegetable garden on his St. Thomas allotment. A strong family man, he built a five-room adobe house, thatched with tules from the swamp. The floor was hewed cottonwood limbs held down with wooden pegs.

When the Mormon settlers had cleared the mosquito-infested swamps and mesquite-covered land, they were under the impression the valley was in Utah. Actually it was part of New Mexico Territory at first.

Indians were a constant menace to the settlers, stealing stock and destroying crops. Church authorities gave some thought to recalling the mission. However, a council with some of the chiefs was called to settle this problem, and expansion of the Muddy Mission went ahead.

Some time prior to 1869 the church authorities had directed that land be staked and settled at the junction of the Colorado and Virgin Rivers. Some land was cultivated, but the project was not prosperous and the settlers left it because of constant Indian harassment.

Soon after this taxes became a major problem. The settlers were told they were in Arizona Territory, Pahute County; then in Lincoln County, Nevada. They were threatened with foreclosures on their land for three years back taxes, and they had no money to pay.

When the survey in 1870 definitely placed Moapa Valley in Nevada, the church leaders gave permission for the Mormons to abandon their valley. They met on December 20, 1870, and the letter from Brigham Young was read and discussed. A vote was taken with only two votes against leaving. These two votes were cast by Ann and Daniel Bonelli.

The date of February 1, 1871, was one the Bonelli's never forgot, as on that morning all the other settlers departed. On the same day, Ann Bonelli gave birth to a son, Benjamin Franklin Bonelli.

The nearest settlement was St. George, 90 miles away, over desert and mountains. The Indians were not exactly friendly, although Dan Bonelli had gained their respect through honest and fair dealings.

In a short time, Daniel visualized the possibilities of a ferry across the Colorado. Eldorado's diggings were booming; Pioche was booming too. There was a traffic up and down the valley road and the river crossing was difficult at times, especially when the stream was high from the annual run-off.

He retained his St. Thomas holdings, but decided to move the major portion of his operation down the river. He cleared a homesite on the mesa on the east bank of the Virgin above the Colorado. His first home was constructed of driftwood logs. Later he replaced it with a nine-room structure built of stone, with walls two feet thick. The place was named Rio Ville, but was more often called Bonelli's Ferry.

Irrigation was a major problem with the waters of the Virgin constantly changing course and washing out the brush and rock dams. However, Dan Bonelli succeeded in raising hay which, along with vegetables from his St. Thomas garden and meat from his herds, supplied the new mining towns of Eldorado, White Hill and Chloride.

He filed on various salt locations and furnished this much-needed chemical to the mines in every direction. Rio Ville became an important place in the mining economy of the area. River steamboat captains brought more and more paddle wheelers through Boulder Canyon to haul back supplies and salt.

The Bonelli establishment expanded and as more cattle and agricultural production was developed more hands were needed. Bonelli's help consisted of out-of-work travelers, as well as Indians and some local help was hired.

It was a Pony Express station for mail riders traveling from Kingham and the mining centers to Pioche. It remained an important place in Southern Nevada activities right up to the turn of the century. Its official post office was opened November 2, 1881, and continued until June 30, 1906.

The Bonelli's had two children born at Rio Ville, Edward, who died in infancy, and Alice Maud, born October 16, 1874. Alice Maude married Joseph F. Perkins, who was foreman on the Bonelli place. During these years death also claimed the Bonelli's son, Leonard, at the age of 18.

Through the later decades of the century, Rio Ville was a busy and prosperous place. But the constant growing agricultural development of Upper Moapa Valley used up more and more water and the stream sometimes went dry before reaching Rio Ville.

Bonelli's large fields withered and died, due to the lack of water. He leased his land and ferry, but the new operator left in a year. The new railroad across Southern Nevada was handling most of the travel and shipping by this time.

About 1903, he leased the place again and made a trip to Pioche to see about the title to his salt mines. While returning home he suffered a stroke from which he never recovered. He died a short time later, and was buried on the mesa overlooking the river and the farm he had carved from the wilderness.

The second leaser also left, tying the big ferry, large enough to handle a wagon and team of six horses. One night in high water, the ferry broke its moorings, floating down the river to break up in the rapids.

Ann Bonelli later went to Kingham to live with her son George and family. She passed away there on March 19, 1911.

Daniel Bonelli named many landmarks along the Colorado that still bear the names he gave them. Among these are The Mormon Temple, Temple Bar, and Napoleon's Tomb.