

DANIELS, ELEANOR (1886 - 1994), actress

Name: Eleanor Daniels
Date of birth: 1886
Date of death: 1994
Parent: David Daniels
Parent: Margaret Daniels (née Jones)
Gender: Female
Occupation: actress
Area of activity: Performing Arts
Author: Stephen Lyons

Eleanor Daniels was born on 28 December 1886 in Llanarthney, Carmarthenshire, the daughter of David Daniels, a hay merchant and publican, and his wife Margaret. She was brought up at the Fountain Inn, 36 (now 40) Thomas Street in Llanelli. The family were members of Capel Newydd Methodist chapel, and Welsh was her first language. She learnt to recite in chapel and achieved her first success in a local eisteddfod at the age of 13. She entered the teaching profession and continued her success as a reciter, winning numerous other medals, cups, chairs and prizes. She won first prize in three National Eisteddfodau at Swansea in 1907, London in 1909 and Carmarthen in 1911, when she became a member of the Gorsedd of the National Eisteddfod under the bardic name Ellyw.

Having achieved a Licentiate of the London Victoria College of Music and Drama in 1910, she attended Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree's Academy of Drama in 1912, winning the gold medal for elocution. The same year she had the honour of reciting at the Carmarthenshire Dinner held at the Criterion in London in honour of the **Right Honourable Lloyd George**, for which she was highly commended.

In 1913 she was tempted to transfer her allegiance to the stage and became part of a movement towards a National Welsh Drama. She appeared in a touring production of *Little Miss Llewelyn*, in *The Joneses* at the Strand Theatre and also in *The Mark of Cain*. In 1914 she toured to the USA with the Welsh Players, together with **Gareth Hughes** also from Llanelli, to perform **J. O. Francis's** prize-winning play *Change*. Eleanor's excellent notices throughout the tour ensured her return to the USA where she settled for the rest of her life.

For a number of years she was involved in the productions of the well known Broadway firm of Comstock and Gest. She appeared, among other plays, in *Heart of the Heather*, *Kitty McKay*, *Loyalty*, and with Richard Bennett in *Zach*. A spell in musical comedy followed: she sang and danced in *Kitty Darling* and appeared in *Lassies and La La Lucille*. She also appeared with Florence Reed in *Ashes* and with Jeanne Eagels in *Rain*.

She appeared in a number of silent film productions in New York between 1914 and the mid-twenties but is to be remembered for her appearance in *If Winter Comes* with Percy Marmont and Bebe Daniels in 1923. In 1930, along with Gareth Hughes, she was awarded Gorsedd Honours for her contribution to the drama. In later life she worked as a vocal coach in New York, and in 1951 she took an office job with an American diabetes organisation and worked there until she was 87.

From the 1940s onwards she developed a friendship in New York with a likeminded group who shared an interest in religion, philosophy and the arts. The friends would split their time between New York and a house in Connecticut, which was owned by a wealthy member of the group, Alice DeBuys. They would perform concerts and plays for each other at the house. On her death in 1981, Miss DeBuys left the house and estate to six members of the group, including Eleanor.

In an interview she gave to the American Welsh magazine *Ninnau* at the age of 103, Eleanor Daniels remembered her theatre days with great fondness. 'I was an actress' she exclaimed proudly. 'I started acting when I could talk.' Like many performers she suffered dreadfully from stage-fright. 'I used to skip rope to get it out of my mind, but it gripped me. But when I placed my two feet on the stage, everything became fine. Only the stage was real. The stage is the most important of all. Its message is carried to the people.'

Eleanor Daniels died at the age of 107 on 18 March 1994 at the house in Darien, Connecticut. In 2011, a blue plaque was unveiled by her niece at the house where she grew up in Llanelli.

Author

Stephen Lyons

Sources

Eleanor's personal scrapbook (courtesy of Val Kane, Eleanor's niece)

Stephen Lyons, **Eleanor Daniels**, Llanelli Community Heritage website

'Llanelly's stage star', *The Llanelly Mercury and South Wales Advertiser*, 16 September 1920

'An Interview with Eleanor Daniels', *Ninnau: The North American Welsh Newspaper*, 1 November 1993

BBC News: "**Silent film actress Eleanor Daniels' plaque in Llanelli**", 2011-10-09

Further reading

Welsh Curtain Calls: **Eleanor Daniels** (accessed March 2022)

Wikipedia Article: **Eleanor Daniels**

Images

NLW LLYFRAU FFOTO 3926B: Eleanor Daniels and Lillian Mason the Welsh Players in *Change* at the Booth Theatre, New York

Additional Links

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