

OKLAHOMA'S FRONTIER INDIAN POLICE

Part Three

Jackson William Ellis

By Art T. Burton

Possibly the most outstanding Indian policeman was Jackson William Ellis, born in Sweet Town, Cherokee Nation in 1849. He was known as Jack Ellis and was 5/8ths Cherokee. At the age of twenty-one, he stood six feet and four inches. As a teenager, it is said he rode as a posseman for deputy U.S. marshals out of Fort Smith. In 1870, Ellis was appointed deputy sheriff of Tahlequah district and also sheriff of commissioners court. In 1872, Ellis was made deputy warden of the Cherokee National Prison in Tahlequah. In 1876, he left the field of law enforcement to go into the mercantile business. But in 1887, he was given a commission as a deputy U.S. marshal and the same year joined the United States Indian Police under the direction of Captain William Fields.

On March 6, 1887, Bud Trainor, a reckless mix-blood Cherokee and his friends had been drinking heavily in Tahlequah. They rode their ponies up and down Muskogee Avenue, the main street, shooting their guns and causing the store owners to close up. Jack Ellis had been in the vicinity squirrel hunting and came into town during the turmoil.

Ellis gave Trainor an order to cease and desist. Trainor responded by telling Ellis to get his gun and deposited his horse at Wilson's livery stable. Ellis and Trainor met in the middle of Muskogee Avenue "Hollywood style." Trainor drew first and both parties got off three shots. One of Ellis' pistol shots struck Trainor in the center of the mouth and the bullet lodged in the rear of his throat. Bystanders had to turn Trainor over on his stomach so he wouldn't drown in his own blood. He was heard to exclaim "Oh, yes. God damn, he shot at my teeth that time." Ellis would have killed him if his pistol hadn't been loaded with squirrel shot known as bulldog cartridges. This occurred just six weeks after Ellis resumed his career as a lawman. Trainor lived to later be killed by shotgun toting black cowboys near Nowata on January 9, 1896.

Jackson Ellis moved to Fort Gibson, Cherokee Nation, later in 1887 and was stationed there as the deputy U.S. marshal for the town and near vicinity. Here he shot and killed Dick Vann while trying to arrest the fugitive. Vann was one of the murderers of Captain Sam Sixkiller, and a noted desperado. From Fort Gibson, Ellis was appointed officer of the peace in conjunction with the United States Indian Police at Atoka, Choctaw Nation.

During the time he was at Atoka, Ellis shot and arrested Daniel Fields, an escaped convict. Soon afterwards he shot and killed Harry Finn, a desperado who had killed his father in Missouri and was involved in peddling illegal whiskey in the Choctaw Nation. This was followed by the shooting and capture of Charlie Carter, an outlaw and murderer whom Ellis had hunted. Next, Jackson Ellis shot and captured two men named Watson and Whitrock, both bootleggers and notorious outlaws.

In 1890, Ellis went into partnership with D.J. Folsom to practice law in Atoka. This did not last long because he was appointed a deputy U.S. marshal for the second division United

States court at South McAlester in the Choctaw Nation. Ellis was given a commission as a special officer for the Missouri Pacific Railroad in the late 1880's when that road was building through the Indian Territory.

In the 1890's, after the tenure of Captain LeFlore, Jackson Ellis was made captain of the United States Indian Police with headquarters at Muskogee, but maintained his home at South McAlester. Ellis was in this position up through the turn of the century and was possibly the last captain.

Captain Jackson Ellis was known to be quiet and dignified in his daily discourse, but he was also known for his practical jokes. The following story gives an example of his lighter side. Captain Ellis had been given the duty of escorting the trains that carried the Indians payments. These trains originated at Paris, Texas and Captain Ellis met them at Wister Junction.

While waiting at the Wister depot for the northbound Frisco payment train, a southbound excursion train pulled into the depot. The train was full of tourist from back East. Captain Ellis struck a conversation with a young couple from Vermont. They were very eager to learn about the Indians of the "Wild West." Ellis informed them that he was a Cherokee Indian, the bride screamed, the young groom grabbed his own lock of hair and stepped back a few paces. Jackson Ellis exclaimed, "Oh Shucks, needn't be scared of me; I ain't savage any more; about the worse thing I do now is to eat a little dog occasionally; ever eat any dog? They keep it at the lunch stand over there. Wait, I'll get you a piece." As Captain Ellis walked away the young bride fainted and collapsed to the ground.

There is no doubt that Cherokee Captain Jackson Ellis was one of the most important lawmen of the Indian Territory. The law abiding citizens felt themselves indebted to this fearless officer for clearing the "nations" of so many "terrors to society." Hopefully, more information will come to light on this Indian lawman. His last years were spent in Marble City, Sequoyah County, where he was given a pistol by Cherokee lawman John C. West that belonged to the female Indian Territory outlaw, Belle Starr.

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ART T. BURTON, author of BLACK, RED AND DEADLY, will continue his extensive review of the frontier Indian police in Oklahoma history. In Part 4 the discussion will focus on other outstanding Indian Lawmen/Lighthorsemen, John C. West, Peter Conser, Edward A. Bohannon, Samuel Jonathan Haynes, Tiger Jack, Jesse Allen, Richard Berryhill, Daniel "Goob" Childers, Chilli Fish and Jacob Harrison.