

OKLAHOMA'S FRONTIER INDIAN POLICE

Part Four

Other Outstanding Indian Lawmen

By Art T. Burton

John C. West was the last captain of the United States Indian Police, and a member of the Cherokee Lighthorsemen. West stood six feet five and weighed 200 pounds. He was undoubtedly Sam and Belle Starr's biggest nemesis, arresting them on several occasions. West's brother Frank, also an Indian policeman, was killed in a shootout with Sam Starr, with Starr also dying from wounds.

One of the most famous of the Choctaw Lighthorsemen was Peter Conser, born in 1852 near Eagletown in present day McCurtain County. His original name was Coinson, his father was a French trader and his mother a Choctaw Indian. Evidently Conser was easier to say than Coinson. In 1877, at the age of twenty-five, Conser became a deputy sheriff in Sugar Loaf County. He was later appointed a captain of the Choctaw Lighthorse for the Moshulatubbe District. Conser served as a representative and senator to the Choctaw Council. He also owned a large farm, a blacksmith shop, grist mill, saw mill and a general store with a post office. Conser died in 1934 and his home was donated to the Oklahoma Historical Society.

Edward A. Bohannon was another notable Choctaw policeman. He was born in Blue County, March of 1863. In 1889, Bohannon became a member of the United States Indian Police stationed at Muskogee. He also received an appointment as special peace officer for the town of Caddo, for which he received an income from the citizens. Bohannon was able to keep Caddo free from lawlessness and rowdiness for a long time.

Creek Lighthorsemen of note included Samuel Jonathan Haynes who was born January 8, 1857, near Okmulgee. At first he became a special deputy in the Lighthorse and was soon elected to full membership in the police troop. Haynes rose to the rank of captain. He took part in the Green Peach War of the Creek Nation; in brief, a political civil war among the Creek Indians. Haynes was involved in engagements on Pole Cat and Pecan Creeks. Later he was appointed a deputy U.S. marshal. Along with Captain Edmund Harry of the Lighthorse and Deputy U.S. Marshal N.B. Irwin, Haynes was involved in a shootout and capture of the notorious Yuchi Indian outlaw, Rufus Buck, and his gang in 1895. Haynes later served as a delegate for the Creek Nation in discussions with the Bureau of Indian Affairs in Washington, D.C. In this role he made sixteen trips to the nation's capitol. He passed away at Newtown, near Okmulgee on April 4, 1948.

Another very important Creek Lighthorseman was the Yuchi lawman, Tiger Jack, who was noted for his tracking abilities. He worked with Deputy U.S. Marshal Heck Thomas in the pursuit of the Dalton gang and with Deputy U.S. Marshal Scott Huffvine in the hunt for the Bill Cook gang in the summer of 1894. Two other Yuchi Indians who were members of the Creek Lighthorse were Jesse Allen and Johnson Pickett. They were also deputy U.S. marshals. In August of 1894, they led a posse that caught the Bill Cook/Cherokee Bill

gang near Sapulpa resting after the gang robbed the Chandler bank. In the ensuing gunfight they captured Curtis Dayson and killed Henry Munson and Alonzo Gordon. The rest of the gang got away. This was the most famous gang in the history of Indian Territory.

In 1898, Tiger Jack and Jesse Allen were members of a posse that also included Deputy U.S. Marshal Bud Ledbetter. Jack lived south of Kellyville and Allen had a ranch southeast of Bristow. The posse was in pursuit of the notorious Hughes gang, led by three brothers named Hughes. After tracking the gang, the posse caught up with them early in the morning and a gunfight ensued. One of the Hughes brothers were killed in the fight. One of the brothers was captured by Jesse Allen. Ledbetter caught one of the brothers later in the day. This gunfight took place near the Tuskegee stomp ground in the Creek Nation. The last brother escaped but was later captured when he tried to check on his brother who had been arrested. Other famous Creek Lighthorsemen were Richard Berryhill of the Eufaula District and Daniel "Goob" Childers of the Weeletka District. Childers, a mixed blood Cherokee adopted by the Creek tribe, was involved in many gunfights and died a violent death.

Among the Seminole Lighthorse, Captain Chilli Fish and Jacob Harrison were noted for their leadership abilities. Fish later became the Principal Chief of the Seminole Nation in the 1920's.

Art T. Burton, author of BLACK, RED AND DEADLY; BLACK, BUCKSKIN AND BLUE; and BLACK GUN, SILVER STAR will conclude his extensive review of the frontier Indian police in Oklahoma history in Part 5 focusing on other outstanding Indian Lawmen/Lighthorsemen such as Dennis Cyrus, Cumsey Bruner, Ceaser Payne, Thomas Bruner, John Dennis, Tom Payne and Samuel Robert Wilson.

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