

TEAL, LAFAYETTE

INTERVIEW

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W.T. Holland,
Interviewer.
Sept. 15, 1937.

An Interview With Lafayette Teal,
Cherokee Indian. 113 West 1st, Tulsa.

The first time I ever saw any of the Indian Policemen, was probably right after their appointment just after the enactment of the law by Congress which provided for the appointment of Indian Policemen. I was about grown and I was born in 1858 so if this act was passed in 1876, as I understand it was, I probably saw some of the first Indian Policemen.

The policemen whom I saw were in Muskogee. These policemen wore blue uniforms with brass buttons on them, and the letters U. S. on the collar bands. At that time, and for some time later, probably for several years.

Sam Sixshooter, Cherokee Indian, was the Chief of the Indian Policemen, and there were some ten or twelve policemen in Muskogee. These officers cooperated with the United States Marshals, but were not under their orders.

These Indian Policemen were allowed to and expected to arrest criminals wherever they were found especially in the absence of the United States Marshal. The chief concern when I knew them was to protect the Indians from the

white man's encroachment on the Indian lands.

This matter was one of concern to the Indians, as the white men were coming in in great numbers. Many of these white men claimed to be Indians, or part Indians, in order to get a foothold in the Indian country.

Jeff Watts and his brother had what they called an association to promote and protect the interests of their clients. Their place of operation was about ten miles west of Fort Smith at a town named Muldrow.

I think that a majority of the men who went to them thought they were entitled to land and rights in the Territory because of their Indian blood.

Jeff Watts would question each one in an outer office, while his brother, in an adjoining room with a curtain over the door, would take down the client's name, birth place, parents, age, and all necessary data.

Later on, this brother would come into the room from the outside, having gone around the building and be introduced to the claimant. Whereupon Jeff Watts would explain that his brother had the rolls of all Indians, and would see if his name was recorded. His

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brother already had all the facts concerning the man, from having heard the conversation. So he would say, "Well, of course I do not remember all names, but I will get the records and we will find out". So he would go into the other room and return with the book and from it would read all the facts as he had just recorded them, so of course the man was convinced of his rights, and paid his fee.

This was the point in the business for the fees, which were from \$50.00 to \$500.00, depending on an Indian's ability to pay. This money was paid to Jeff Watts and his brother. Of course, this filing and rights were not respected, but the Watts Brothers operated, more or less actively, until the allotment when practically all such cheating ^{men} found themselves out in the cold.

One job of the Indian Police was to fight just such movements as these. The Watts Brothers amassed a considerable fortune. Watts claimed to have the original Indian roll from North Carolina and Georgia but really got all information as shown above.

Later on, a copy of the original roll was had, and

I found my parents name enrolled thereon. I saw a copy of this roll in 1932. This roll not only named the person, but told the state and county from which he or she came, where they lived, and the number of acres, the kind of building the man or woman lived in, the number of rooms, kind and number of out-buildings, their size and construction and all such details so as to insure a perfect identification.

Another duty of the Indian Police was to apprehend bootleggers of whom there were many. The Indian Police would run these men down, confiscate their stock or cargo and arrest them and turn them over to the Federal officers at Fort Smith. The Indian Police had authority to arrest white men as well as Indians.

I remember mighty well when Sam Sixshooter, Chief of Indian Police, killed Coppell, a wholesale bootlegger of Muskogee. He got word that Coppell was approaching town with a load of liquor, so Sam Sixshooter went out to meet him. He met and called on Coppell to surrender and consider himself under arrest. Coppell had a shotgun on the wagon seat beside him, so instead of raising

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his hands, he reached for his shot gun, but was too late, as Sixshooter drew his pistol and killed him on the spot.

There were ten or twelve Indian Police in Muskogee.

These police were not as active as the United States Marshals and their deputies, that is, they did not travel over the country as much as the United States Marshals did. These Indian Policemen were stationed around settlements and towns. However, they had authority to go where the need arose.

They, as I understood it, were paid by the Federal Government, and supplied with their blue uniforms. I know they wore the uniforms, always.
