

STURM'S OKLAHOMA MAGAZINE

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF ALEX POSEY

By Ora Eddleman Reed

The Creek Indians have suffered the loss of two of their greatest men in the past year. When General Pleasant Porter died, so suddenly and without any warning to his people, the entire Indian Nation mourned, because a great Indian statesman and warrior had passed away. And now, the Creek Indian poet, Alex Posey, is dead -- as suddenly as General Porter -- drowned in the Canadian river during the flood, on May 27th.

The loss of these two men is a terrible blow to their people. The tragic death of the young poet Posey, has removed the only Creek Indian who has attained fame as a writer. He was one of the most brilliant men the Indians of any tribe have produced. His death is a thing to be lamented over, not alone by his own people, but by all who knew him and admired him for his deep, true, sturdy na-

ture. His friends were very ambitious for him, recognizing in him a rare power, and, had he lived, his name would unquestionably have become one of national prominence. Already he had won recognition here in the Southwest as "Chinnubbie Harjo" and "Fus Fixico." The former name he signed to his verse and the latter to his humorous writings. As "Chinnubbie Harjo" he was the dreamer, the lover of nature and all her moods -- in short, the Indian poet, who saw all things with clear eyes -- heard the music of the birds and the rippling of the streams, and, understanding, interpreted in words that were all music.

His writings were apparently as unstudied as his ordinary speech, and therein lay their greatest charm. His verse was the spontaneous expression of the soul within the man, and whatever he felt was felt deeply, seriously. A half-blood Creek Indian, he was a true child of nature, possessing also natural culture and innate refinement of character. Perhaps the intermingling of the Indian and Anglo-Saxon blood made more marked the race characteristics that were his heritage from both branches. He inherited much talent from his father, who was a white man, Hench Posey. His

mother is a full-blood Creek. She is an exceptional Indian woman, and it is said that her brilliant son inherited from her his rare sense of humor.

Posey stood out boldly for the Indian. Brilliant, educated and cultured, he might easily have won fame more quickly by going away, but he chose to stay among his own. Faithfully and accurately he depicted Indian life and characteristics as none other has ever been able to do. In sweetest verse he told of the deeper feelings of the Indians, their traditions, their folklore and religious sentiments. His understanding of human nature was marvelous. He saw at once from the viewpoint of the full-blood and that of the white man and their relations to each other were made startlingly clear in his famous "Fus Fixico Letters," in which the full-blood Indian gives his views, in Indian dialect, of the doings of the white man in the Indian's country. The "Letters" were humorous, satirical conversations between four Indian characters who would get together and talk over the events that were passing and swiftly changing the Indian country to that of the pale face. Putting himself in the place of the full-blood, Fus Fixico,

with his companions, Wolf Warrior, Hot Gun and Kono Harjo, the originator of the unique series of letters covered many subjects, driving his points home hard, with little waste of words or syllables. The "Letters" fairly scintillated with sarcasm, satire and humor.

Posey's work was strikingly original. He followed no plan marked out by any other, nor copied any other's style. He could not write "to order," as many a magazine editor found to his dismay. Much of his most brilliant work was "scribbled off," as he said, just wherever the thought came to him -- when he was riding alone in the woods, sitting beside a stream, or paddling his canoe. He wrote for pure love of it -- never with any thought of publication. What has been published of his writings just "happened" to get into print because of zealous editors who were continually writing to him for poems. His "Fus Fixico Letters" were first written for the Eufaula Journal, which Posey owned and edited. From the first, they were widely copied and brought him letters from every part of the United States. Eastern writers were intensely interested in the young Indian poet and humorist who,

it was evident, was a very promising writer.

Alexander Posey was born in the Creek Nation in 1874, reared in a Creek home where in his childhood nothing but his native language was ever spoken; and educated in the Creek schools. He was early identified with the government of his people and was prominent among them as a teacher and leader when he was a very young man. Later, the officials of the United States government found him a valuable assistant in the work of closing up the affairs of the Indians, and for several years he did faithful work for the government, at the same time exerting his influence in the interests of the poorer Indians.

At the time of his death he was interested with associates in buying lands in Oklahoma.

"So much," says the Indian Journal, "for the bare outline of a life that has left its impress in the history and literature of a young commonwealth. Alex Posey has sung the beauty and glory of his Indian country in verse that will live as long as the name of Oklahoma shall endure on her monuments. He has woven the names of her rivers, mountains, valleys and plains into song and story

which will inspire the young patriots of other generations and brighten the pages of the nation's literature."

The Canadian has claimed him, and somewhere in those shifting sands lies his body. In life he loved this turbulent river, and standing on its banks some of his greatest inspirations have come to him.

An Example of "Fus Fixico's" Style

Just after the election of delegates to the Constitutional convention last fall Mr. Posey wrote:

So it was Hotgun he sat on his ol' split-log bench under the brush arbor at Oche Apofa, an' smoke slow an' look 'way off in the Injin summer long time. Then he was spit ag'in' a scrub-oak an' tell Topafka Micco an' Wolf Warrior an' Kono Harjo: "Well, so the Great Spirit was manifest 'imself in lots o' different ways. In olden times in Isreal, He was showed 'imself in the burning

bush, an' in Babylon, He was showed 'imself in handwriting on the wall, an' in Egypt, in a pillar o' fire by night. He was appeared in different ways in different lan's to suit the occasion, an' He was appeared nowadays same as in the days o' Moses an' Pharoah an' Bill Shazzer. So Tuesday, November 6, 1906, He was manifest 'imself in Injin Territory an' Oklahoma in the ballot box, an' dumbfounded the carpetbaggers an' put an end to their iniquity. The mighty chiefs o' the pie counter an' the high priests o' Mammon was seized with big consternation, an' the people was delivered from the bondage o' Hitchcockism." (Tokpafka Micco an' Wolf Warrior an' Kono Harjo they paid close attention an' put near let their pipes go out.)

Then Tokpafka Micco he speak up an' say: "Well, so I think it was a Demicratic cyclone, for they was lots o' dead timber in the senatorial forest. Giant Plenty Sofar an' Monarch Duglast was uprooted an' prostrated an' they was no sturdy tree left standin' but Sequoia Haskell."

An' Hotgun he go on an' say, "Well, so statehood was a sad thing for the Injin, but I didn't had no tears to shed over lost tribal rule

like Crazy Snake; for the new state politician was my shepherd an' I got all I want. He was toled me off to one side an' had business with me for my local influence. He was cultivated my acquaintance for his party's sake. He was prepared the table before me in the presence o' the bartender an' hol' up two fingers an' call for a couple o' small ones. He was tell me, 'Eat, drink an' be game, for, maybe so, tomorrow I want you to vote for me.'

Then Tokpafka Micco he speak up ag'in. He say, "Well, so long time ago the white man was put his arm 'rouh' the Injin's neck an' give whisky an' big treaty medals for his lan'. But now it come to pass the white man was had ever-thing the Injin's got but his vote. So he was toled him off back in the alley, if it was in Muskogee, or to the corner saloon, if it was in Shawnee, an' set 'em up to him an' give him entertainment an' try to trade him out of it. The pale face was too cunning and the red man was too easy. He was sell his birth-right for a nip. You hear lots o' talk 'bout William Buzzabee, the coal baron, for senator, an' Bird Makefire for running mate, but if you was listened right close to hear what my ol' time friend

Nokos Elle an' my ol' time friend Hotulk Emartha was running for, you could heard a pin drop. The news gatherers wasn't lying in wait for ol' Cho Eka to interview him about his chances for congress, an' my ol' time friend Chepon Holata wasn't in retirement like John D. Rockyfeller, an' dodgin' the kodak fiends an' stayin' out o' the lime-light."

(Wolf Warrior an' Kono Harjo give big grunt an' Hotgun he look 'way off in the Injin summer ag'in an' smoke slow.)

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by O. P. Sturm

Always in life a child of nature, spending many a long day listening to the murmuring song of his favorite stream -- the Canadian river, it is a strange fate that Alex Posey, the Creek Indian poet, should have lost his life in the stream he so dearly loved, and that today his body lies buried beneath the shifting sands of that treacherous current. He loved the Canadian river to the extent that he selected his homestead on a great hill that gives a grand view of the river and the peaceful valley for miles . His favorite recreation was to take a small boat and drift for miles down the river leisurely absorbing the beauty and the picturesqueness.

Viewed by the Indian of a generation ago, his death would have resolved itself into a legend that the spirit of the river loved Posey and his love was requited in an eternal companionship, but

the Indian of today has so absorbed the white man's way of thinking that his tragic death is regarded as a most unhappy ending of what promised to be a most successful career.

Alexander Posey was the most widely quoted Indian writer in Oklahoma, and owed much of his fame to his "Fus Fixico Letters," which consisted of Indian dialect stories of a satirical nature, chiefly on political subjects. The strength of these consisted in his ability to portray in forcible Indian dialect true Indian ideas, habits and philosophy, a good example of which is seen in the following poem which appeared in this magazine in May, entitled: "Hotgun on the Death of Yadeka Harjo."

Posey was the only Creek Indian who has ever achieved any degree of fame through literature. This talent he probably inherited from his father, who was a Scotch-Irishman, Hench Posey, who was a deputy marshal and stockman at Fort Smith until he married a full-blood Creek woman, who is Posey's mother. Posey was educated at Indian university, near Muskogee, and as soon as he could vote he became a leader of his tribesmen. He was elected a member of the Creek council, and when the white man

came with a new brand of politics Posey was an apt pupil.

When the first conference of the Chiefs of the Five Civilized Tribes was held looking to the admission of Indian Territory as a separate state, Posey was present and was made the permanent secretary of the organization thus formed. Three years ago when the Sequoyah convention was held and a proposed constitution was written looking to the admission of Indian Territory, Posey was secretary of that convention.

It was when the white man's policies began to absorb the Indian that Posey commenced to write, and using the Indian dialect he could cover a subject and drive home a point harder without the waste of a word or syllable than any writer who ever attempted it. The Fux Fixico letters were supposed to be the conversation that occurred when four Indian characters got together. The Characters were Wolf Warrior, Hot Gun, Kono Harjo and Fus Fixico.

These characters gave to the notables in the Indian Territory what was supposed to be the Indian impression as well as the pronunciation of their names.

Tams Bixby was known as "Tams Big Pie."
Pliny Soper was known as "Plenty-so-far." Sec-
retary Hitchcock was "Secretary Its-cocked."
Governor Haskell was "Governor C. N. Has-it."
Senator Owens was "Col. Robert L. Owes-em."

Five years ago, long before there had ever
been any voting done in Indian Territory, at a meet-
ing of the Territorial Press Association, Posey was
on for a speech on the "Indian in Politics." Po-
sey's time came and he said:

"The Indian will vote the Democratic ticket."

That was all he said. It was characteristic
of him, and five years later, the first time he had
a chance, the Indian did vote the Democratic ticket.
One of the remarkable things about him was, lover
of nature that he was, gentle, humorous and kind,
he did not believe in the existence of a supreme
being or the existence of a soul. Of this he rarely
spoke and only his intimate friends knew it.

I have frequently talked to him about be-
coming a regular contributor to this magazine,
pointing out the fact that he would not only profit
by thus getting his writings before the best lit-
erary folk of Oklahoma, but that he would reach all

of the press of the state. He would appear pleased at the idea, and rather indefinitely promise to send in copy soon, but it never came. I wrote him often reminding him of his promise, and his duty to self and his people, but never a line of reply came. Thus he revealed his Indian instincts and habits, for with an experience with a dozen Indian writers in Oklahoma, especially in the eastern side, I have never found one that will stick to anything, not even his promise. Not that I think any of them deliberately break their promises, but they procrastinate.

Many years ago he wrote this little poem, which reveals additional evidence of his fondness for nature, and which he called "Shelter," and yet in his last home at the bottom of the Canadian he sleeps, never knowing that "The storm raps ceaseless at my door."

SHELTER

In my cabin in the clearing,
I lie and hear the Autumn showers
pouring slow;
Afar, almost out of hearing,
I lie and hear the wet winds thro' the
forest go.

Sense of shelter steals o'er me;
Into the evening dimness failing;
Into the night before me,
I lie and fancy I am sailing.

All night the wind will be blowing;
All night the rain will slowly pour,
But I shall sleep, never knowing
The storm raps ceaseless at my door.