

PHORNTON, H. W.

INTERVIEW

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Billie Byrd,
Journalist,
March 22, 1938.

United States Marshal's Interview
of H. M. Thornton, Quarter-blood.
Cherokee Negro, Born 1864,
Boley, Oklahoma.

The title of United States Marshal sounds like a big name with a big job. They were appointed by the Department of Justice of the United States and on appointment were given six-shooters, a badge, ordered to trail the outlaws, to help in putting an end to them and their lawlessness and to bring them in dead or alive.

Any petition for the position of United States Marshal had to be signed by the different people who recommended a man on his good work, reputation, and record as a good law abiding citizen. The petition was submitted to the Department of Justice who would approve or disapprove an appointment.

The outlaws were the desperadoes and were the most feared men being sometimes more feared than the United States Marshals because the outlaws didn't have any certain rules to go by. They could fight to any side, right and left, and could

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shoot with their six-shooters to kill anyone and anything that came within their distance.

I have had the experience of trailing the outlaws, running them down and bringing them in before the court. Most of the outlaws were from outside of the Territory for many of them came in from the other states. Any outlaws from places outside of the Territory were safe so long as they remained in the Territory, but were only alive while away from the officers or away from the court but they were usually dead when they were turned over to the relatives.

In my days as United States Marshal, from 1888 to 1889, in those two years I had as much duty with bad men as any man did in four years' time. I was not the most feared man, nor was I quick on the draw, but I did manage to get my man first before he got me. I could be shooting while the other man would be shooting from another place but in those exchanges of shots I would get the man and take him into the officers.

I never did see how I ever went through all these things in being so lucky and coming out without a scratch

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but I felt as if I was a coward because I was scared and nervous all the time. Everytime I reached for the gun, it happened to be in my hands.

A prisoner, after being sentenced at Wewoka, was taken to the prison at Fort Smith. At several times I took men to Fort Smith, either in a wagon or on horseback.

Those trips were dangerous for the United States Marshals because they could be ambushed and if not killed, could aid the prisoners in being released and becoming free. I am only one of the United States Marshals who have been out in service in carrying out the law and aiding it in the Territory.

I, also, served as a special Lighthorseman in the Wewoka district under Captain George Long but that was after the Green Peach trouble. In that district there were Indians and whites who were just as bad as the outlaws, but the tribal courts of the Indians had a better way of turning an outlaw into a better man or of teaching him a lesson so that he could remember it the next time. They hardly wanted to put an Indian out of existence

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and they had the real method of punishing their criminals for violating a law either by penalty of death or by whipping and they showed real love for them in punishing them this way. This was done so that they would remember the hickory whip that was lashed on their bare backs but which was delivering them from a death sentence.

In the Seminole country, John Brown was chief there and Jackson Brown was the treasurer. When I first landed in Wewoka in 1884, there was only a one-room shack owned by John Brown while Jackson Brown owned a store at Sasakwa. A white family named Smith lived around Wewoka as also did Dr. Buren. They were the only white people around there. Tom Markham was another white man who was well-known all over the Territory because he was skilled in clearing many criminal cases.