

INDEX CARDS:

Choctaw Nation
Katy Railroad
Spring Hill National School
Choctaw Official
Indian Police
Enrolling Commissioner
Snake Indians

Field Worker: Gomer Gower
June 10, 1937.

Interview with Sweeney Folsom,
Poteau, Oklahoma,
601 Clayton Ave.

Born April 22, 1867,
Sugar Loaf County, Choctaw Nation.

Parents Ellis W. Folsom, father,
Mississippi. Served as Justice of
Supreme Court, Choctaw Nation.
Belina Folsom, mother, (Celina Perry).

BIOGRAPHIC SKETCH
SWEENEY FOLSOM
POTEAU, OKLAHOMA.

Sweeney Folsom was born April 22, 1867, on Fort Towson road, fourteen miles south of Fort Smith, near Pacola, Scullyville County, Choctaw Nation. He is the son of Ellis W. and Celina Folsom, whose families were among the voluntary emigrants from Mississippi prior to the general removal of the Choctaw Indians.

His grandfather was Watt Folsom, who was related to Joe P. Folsom, Chief of the Choctaws at Doakville in 1850. His mother, before her marriage to his father, was Celina Perry of the prominent Choctaw family, Perry, and who first settled in Black Fork Creek in Sugar Loaf

County, near a settlement occupied by the Shawnee Indians, who soon thereafter moved somewhere north of the Arkansas River.

This location was selected by the Perry family because of the abundance of game which it afforded at that time.

In 1872, his father moved to Tobucksey County, in which the city of McAlester is now located, and which at that time was a new town on the new Missouri, Kansas and Texas Railway; and soon thereafter he became collector of coal and asphalt royalties, and also served as Justice of the Supreme Court for the Choctaw Nation, which position he held for some years.

He attended school at McAlester and later at Spring Hill Choctaw National School near the present town of Howe, where he attained the eleventh grade. He missed an opportunity to attend Roanoke College, Salem, Virginia, through intrigue on the part of a cousin by marriage as a certificate had been granted by Edmond McCurtain, the then Superintendent of Education of the Choctaw Nation, permitting him to attend that college.

In 1896, he was appointed by Principal Chief, Jefferson Gardner, as chairman of the Commission to enroll Choctaw citizens in Sugar Loaf County. The other members of the commission were: Elum McCurtain and Jeff McElroy. The enrollment was held at the Sugar Loaf County Court house which was located about two miles east of what is now Somerfield.

In 1900 he was appointed deputy sheriff, serving under Charles T. Perry for two years.

In 1903, he was appointed as a member of the Indian Police Service by J. Blair Schoenfelt, United States Agent, in which position he served two years. In 1905 he served in the same position by appointment under Dana H. Kelsey, United States Marshal for the Central District of the Indian Territory, for a term of two years, during which time he served as Indian Police and as Deputy United States Marshal.

On July 23, 1920, he was appointed "Private" in the United States Indian Service, by Gabe E. Parker, Superintendent for the Five Civilized Tribes of Oklahoma. This appointment continued in effect until June 30, 1921.

During his long official career, he was frequently called upon to serve as interpreter in both the tribal and United States Courts and in still another, a Special Court presided over by Judge Brown, which held its sessions at Ardmore and Durant. It was the special province of this court to pass upon appeals from the decisions of the enrolling commission.

In 1934, he was appointed by Lee Hall, under direction of the Indian Service, to take a census of all citizens of the Five Civilized Tribes, together with a statement of their economic standing.

Later, he was appointed by Ben Dwight, Principal Chief of the Choctaw Nation, to distribute cattle which had been purchased by the Federal Emergency Relief Administration, for needy Indians, under the supervision of Joseph A. Duke, Assistant United States Field Clerk, with headquarters at Tahleah.

From the foregoing it will be seen that the subject of this sketch has been officially closely identified with the transition from the territorial period on

through and after statehood and is, therefore, in a position to throw much light on events which came under his personal observation in that transition. Among these are his experiences while serving on the enrolling commission. It will readily be seen that it was a position which required rare ability, as many spurious claims for citizenship were presented. When it is taken into consideration that records of births, deaths and marriages were indeed rare, the difficulty of determining the status of some of the applicants for enrollment is apparent. It was a position of great trust and responsibility, as it became the duty of the commission to see that each applicant was given all his rights under the law and at the same time to withhold benefits from those not legally entitled to them.

In his experience as a member of the Indian Police he recalls that on one occasion he was one of a party of sixteen Indian Policemen sent to Tishomingo under the direction of John W. West, Captain of the Indian Police, to collect the head tax on cattle owned by a man named Miller who was resisting the payment of the tax.

The party of Indian Police were accompanied by Chief Revenue Inspector, "Pussyfoot" Johnson, who was determined to collect the tax or have the cattle driven out of the Territory. Miller, in his defiance of the authorities, had gotten together a band of twenty-one cowboys to aid him in his futile effort to intimidate them. However, he finally became convinced that further resistance was useless; paid the tax and thereby relieved a very tense situation.

He also recalls that during the transition period feeling upon the question of whether or not the land should be held in severance or as communal property was very tense, and in the southeastern part of the Choctaw Nation, a group of Indians had organized for the purpose of resisting a partition of the land. This group of Indians, owing to their underhanded methods of dealing with the matter, were called Snake-Indians and gave the authorities a great deal of trouble. It was the practice of the group to intimidate, by threats of violence, all those who showed a disposition to conform with existing

agreements. The result was that the Department of the Interior was often forced to urge the Indian Police to curb the activities of the group and to protect those who evinced a desire to file for an allotment of land. This condition was such that a high type of diplomacy had to be exercised in order to avoid open warfare between the two factions. That the matter was handled by the Indian Police in such a manner as to avoid any serious clashes is a glowing tribute to the efficiency and loyalty of the men who were members of that distinguished body of peace officers.

On another occasion, while riding on a passenger train on the Rock Island - then the Choctaw - railroad, he was "tipped off" that a casket in the express car and consigned to Krebs, contained, not a body as it was made to appear, but a quantity of whiskey. On the arrival of the train at Krebs, the casket was unloaded from the express car, with all the silence and reverence which usually is stressed in the presence of death. In the meantime, Mr. Folsom had arranged with the conductor to hold the train, pending an investigation of the matter. He then demanded of the express agent

that the casket be again placed aboard the train so that it could be turned over to the United States deputy marshal at McAlester. To this demand, the agent demurred, but upon being presented with the credentials of Mr. Folsom as an officer of the law, he finally complied with the demand and the train proceeded on its way to McAlester, where the casket was turned over to the proper authorities and upon being opened, was found to contain the contraband whiskey, just as it had been reported to Mr. Folsom.

The Indian Police were kept quite busy preventing the introduction of whiskey into the counties bordering on the State of Arkansas and would, especially in holiday seasons such as Christmas and the Fourth of July station themselves on roads or trails leading into the Territory, in order to intercept and search parties having a suspicious appearance. On one of these occasions, Mr. Folsom had secured the assistance of a cowboy in watching his station. After a time, they discovered that a lone horseman had taken "roundings" on them and could be seen at some distance within

the territorial line urging his horse to the utmost. The cowboy immediately gave chase and after an exciting run of six miles, he captured the supposed culprit on whose person he found a lone pint of alcohol and which the offender insisted he was taking home for his grandmother who was very sick. The cowboy refused to be dissuaded from the faithful performance of his official duties and returned the devoted grandson to the State Line so that Mr. Folsom could be given an opportunity to dispose of the weighty matter. Following an eloquent appeal on the part of the offender, Mr. Folsom accepted his statement concerning his grandmother as being the truth and, therefore, permitted him to proceed to his home and admonished him to be sure that the liquor was used only by his sick grandmother. This incident will show that the Indian Police, while possessing unlimited authority, were not wanting in gallantry and sentiment.

Mr. Folsom also relates that he was told by Green McCurtain, who was District Chief of Moshulatubbe

District at the time the Terrell band of outlaws was slain near Cavanal mountain, of that occurrence and that he, as District Chief, called all those who had participated in the affair together and reprimanded them severely for taking the lives of the band without first giving them a trial by jury as the law directed.

Mr. Folsom has in his possession a picture of a whipping post in which is shown a culprit being punished and in which he himself is shown holding one arm of the party being whipped. In this case, a tree is used as the post. The offender is shown, facing the tree, with arms extended, as though attempting to reach around the tree; his back bared. Two officers are shown on the opposite side of the tree from the offender, holding his arms and drawing him close to the tree, while a third officer applies the lash to his bare back. On the opposite side of this picture appears one of a freedman receiving the same sort of punishment at the same tree and by the same officers.

He also has in his possession several relics of those bygone days in the form of Indian Police uniform buttons, belts, buckles and guns, and some very interesting documents, all of which he prizes very highly. Of the documents, there is a memorandum of the names of those outlaws who were slain near Cavanal mountain and many others, while very interesting, do not possess historic value.

Mr. Folsom has served on precinct election boards in practically all state, county and city elections since statehood and has taken a leading part in all the affairs of his home town, Poteau. With this long record of public service, honorably performed, it is indeed difficult to find, among those now living, one who has been so closely identified with all the significant changes in the march of progress of his native state since he entered upon the services attendant on effecting those changes, which began in 1896 as Enrollment Commissioner and continued on through the years, when he can now rest upon his laurels and view with just pride what he has assisted in creating.