

LEWIS, S. R.

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INDIAN POLICE IN INDIAN TERRITORY  
A personal interview with S.R. Lewis  
(Alexander Building, Tulsa, Okla.)

(At the suggestion of Mr. Meagher I called on S.R. Lewis in order to make inquiries concerning former members of the Indian police in Indian Territory. Mr. Lewis informed me that to the best of his knowledge there was only one member now living, Noah Frank, and he resides at Sapulpa. Mr. Lewis however offered to furnish me with such facts as he recalled, including the names of former members together with a little personal history of each. Mr. Lewis's story follows.)

Provision for the Indian police was made by a special act of Congress, passed May 23, 1876. It provided for such police in the Indian Territory and on all Indian reservations in the United States. The police in Indian Territory were men appointed by the Indian agent of the Five Civilized Tribes with headquarters in Muskogee. There was thus created a force of peace officers in Indian Territory long prior to statehood.

The force as the narrator recalls consisted of about forty-five or fifty men, organized with a captain, first lieutenant-

ant, and second lieutenant. These officers were assigned to duty in the various towns and thickly populated districts in Indian Territory. They were considered United States peace officers and were commissioned and empowered to act as peace officers, preserve peace, apprehend whiskey peddlers, destroy liquors, disarm non-citizens unauthorized to carry weapons, and to enforce laws enacted for the protection of Indians, and under the authority of the Indian agent, such laws as the Indian agent was authorized to enforce by acts of Congress. (These Indian police were not tribal officers and had no authority to enforce tribal laws, such as the laws of the Cherokee or Creek Nations or others of the Five Civilized Tribes.)

The first Indian police appointed for Tulsa was William Burgess, appointed by Col. Robert L. Owen, then Indian agent for the Five Tribes (afterward United States senator from Oklahoma), under the first Cleveland administration, about 1886. He lived near the foot of old standpipe hill on the Cherokee side, now North Cincinnati Avenue, Tulsa, in an old log house now no longer standing. Later on, his nephew, William Sunday, applied to assist him. These two, especially Burgess, were strong believers in prohibitory laws. Some of Burgess's children and grandchildren still reside in

the vicinity of Tulsa.

Some of the police were men of great courage and rendered splendid service in enforcing such laws as they were called upon to enforce. Some of those worthy of mention are:

Captain Sam Sixkiller, Cherokee, killed in Muskogee while attempting to make an arrest. Captain Sixkiller is known in history as the man who killed and captured the notorious Dick Glass band of Negro outlaws and murderers in the famous battle at Limestone Gap in the Choctaw Nation, near where the new state subprison now stands.

Captain John West, Cherokee, was captain of the force for twenty years. He was a very large man, an ex-Confederate soldier who served under General Stand Watie. He died at the age of eighty-six a few years ago in Muskogee.

Captain Jack Ellis, Cherokee, served as captain for several years. He was instrumental in breaking up several outlaw gangs. At the time of his death in 1924 Captain Ellis was six feet, three inches in height. He died in Adair County.

Captain Charles LeFlore was a famous policeman. He

was a descendent of Greenwood LeFlore, at one time governor of the Choctaw Nation. He also was an ex-Confederate soldier, having lost one eye in a Civil War battle. He was the father of the famous twin beauties, Chic and Choc LeFlore, one of whom married Lee Cruise, second governor of the state of Oklahoma.

Captain LeFlore lived at Limestone Gap on the M.K.&F. near where the battle occurred between Captain Sixkiller and the gang of Negro outlaws mentioned above.

John Brown, Cherokee, had formerly been a deputy United States marshal in Indian Territory. He too was an ex-Confederate soldier. He engaged in many battles with law violators and had the reputation of bringing in his man alive or dead. He lived in Muskogee during his later years.

Noah Frank, Creek, is the only surviving member that the narrator recalls. He lives near Sapulpa.

E. P. Parris, Cherokee, served a long period of time. He was stationed at Tahlequah and continued to serve until some time after statehood. He was with the U.S. marshal

on two different occasions when officers were in pursuit of Red Christie, notorious Cherokee bandit. He was present when the Christie residence was surrounded by officers and he was also a member of the party when the Christie home was destroyed by explosives.

Parris rendered valuable services to the U.S. marshal in Muskogee in ejecting intruders from the Indian lands. He served a term as Cherokee sheriff before statehood. His death occurred a few weeks ago in the Masonic home in Guthrie.