

CHAMBERLAIN, JOHN C. SECOND INTERVIEW.

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Interview with John Chamberlain

Tulsa, Oklahoma  
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Field Worker, W. T. Holland  
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I knew about, and I knew personally quite a number of Indian Police, in the early days. Almost every town had them. They all dressed alike, in blue uniforms with brass buttons and with the letters U. S. on the neck bands of their uniforms.

Here in Tulsa, I remember, two policemen, Pru Sunday and Sam Childers, both Cherokee Indians. Claremore had a policeman by the name of Denbo, who is now living and is still on the police force of Claremore. Sapulpa's police, or one of them was John Sapulpa, Creek Indian. Joe Brown, Creek, also served there. I have seen policemen at Vinita, Muskogee, Okmulgee, and at other places, but do not remember their names. The names given here are just those which I recall now, and does not mean that these men were all who served as police. Headquarters of the police were in Muskogee and these

various towns had their quota of Indian policemen. These police had as their main duty, that of protecting the rights and property of their tribes from aliens, be they Indians or whites. Any Indian, caught outside of his reservation, violating any law, was on the same footing as a white man and subject to arrest.

The biggest job the Indian Police had was in watching the white settlers and in protecting their land, timbers and other property from being occupied unlawfully and in keeping the timber from being cut and sold. Great numbers of white men came in and leased lands from the Indians on twelve to fifteen years time. These white men, according to an agreement paid a little, maybe every year, and in the meantime, built houses, barns and fences and turned the sod and made crops and did all this work, of course, with only a rental contract from the Indian. However, any number of men failed to move at the end

of the lease period and claimed the land as their own.

An Indian, under these circumstances would make complaint to the Agency at Muskogee, and each case was passed on and word sent to the police in that vicinity to remove the man, who did not own the land, from the premises. This was done in many cases. The Indian could report the theft of timber and such reports would be investigated and the offender would be arrested and taken before the Federal Court.

The Indian Police served as game wardens. The Indians had a law "that you could kill but not destroy" game. This meant that you could kill all the game you wanted or needed for your personal use, but could not legally kill or "destroy" just for the sport.

The white men were prone to kill for sport. The Indians called this "destroying" the game.

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The Indian Police tried to enforce this law.

There were thousands of prairie chickens killed here and shipped to Kansas City and St. Louis. At first the hunters claimed they hunted only on the railroad right-of-way, but they did not confine their hunting to that narrow strip of land, long. They, the sports, would come down on the trains and hunt, and frequently stop the trains and hunt for prairie chickens and turkeys. This loose hunting soon exterminated the prairie chickens and turkeys, too.

I served as a deputy marshal in 1890, or 1891. I was under Sam Checote, Creek Indian deputy, who in turn was under Marshal John Porter. John Freeman was another deputy. I made several arrests, one was the arrest of a rather noted bootlegger and horse thief. I finally had to arrest a personal friend of mine and take him to Fort Smith. He talked so pitifully and I felt so sorry for him, I decided I

wasn't a very good officer, so resigned after serving about one year.

These Indian Police had a wide range of power and authority, and while not usually mounted, could get horses and go out after men, when called on.

One source of trouble was the bootleggers. The Indian Police arrested many of them and to the best of their ability tried to keep horse thieves, bootleggers and white land grabbers out of the country.

I, as an officer, have seen several men executed for stealing horses and for other crimes.

These Indian policemen were a good lot of men and did good work in protecting the rights, lives and property of the Indians from the unlawful occupation and deeds of aliens.