

The Execution of Walla Tonka

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On July 13, 1899, Walla Tonka, a 24-year-old full-blooded Choctaw aboriginal and outstanding baseball player from Eagle County in the Indian Territories, is executed at the Alikchi courthouse in the Choctaw nation.

Considered a "five-star" player and a star on his tribe's touring team, Tonka (also known as William Goings) is allowed to tour the country with the team while under sentence of death.

Convicted in the summer of 1897 of murdering his uncle Lampson Young, Tonka is sentenced to death by a tribal judge ... the judge's August execution date "greatly perturbs" the local sporting crowd, coming as it does in the middle of the baseball season.

Yielding to public sentiment, the judge delays the date of Tonka's execution until the end of the season ... Tonka's sentence is postponed until April 1898, and then again until February 1899 ... having given his word to return for his execution, he is allowed to play in both home and road games.

There is speculation that Tonka will go on a road trip and not return but the tribal sheriff relies on Tonka's word that he will appear for his execution when summoned.

August 13, 1897
Kansas City Daily Gazette

TO PLAY AND RETURN TO DIE.

Walla Tonka will Play Ball at Fairmount Park, and then be Executed.

One of the members of the Indian ball teams which will arrive in Kansas City Saturday morning over the Pittsburg and Gulf road, is sentenced to be shot in the Choctaw nation on Friday, August 25, for the murder of another of his tribe. In accordance with the Indian custom, Walla Tonoqua, after having been sentenced, was paroled on his honor, and he will be expected to present himself for execution on the date.

Like all other Indians, Walla Tonoqua goes right along with his daily occupations during the time, intervening between his sentence and his death. Being a young brave and a member of the aristocracy of his tribe, he belongs to one of the teams of Indian ball players, and he continues to play ball as if nothing were wrong.

The team to which he belongs is to play at Fairmount park in Kansas City on Saturday, August 14, and according to statements of officials of the Missouri, Kansas and Texas Trust company, who have secured the ball teams, Walla Tonoqua will not only come with his team, but will play ball.

He keeps his word.

On the day before the execution is to take place, Federal Judge John R. Thomas grants a writ of habeas corpus staying the execution ... the following morning a Deputy Marshall arrives at Alikichi with the writ, however Sheriff Thomas Watson refuses to receive it.

The deputy marshall is told "Judge Abner James, the Choctaw judge, alone could stop the execution."

A runner is sent to the home of Judge James, 16 miles away, notifying him of the Judge Thomas' writ ... James, ill and confined to his bed, tells the sheriff to proceed with the execution.

It is rumored that there had been feuds between the James family and that of Walla Tonka's and that James is "anxious" for the execution to be carried out.

July 14, 1899
Ottawa, Ontario, Canada Journal

SIGHT WAS SICKENING

Execution of Walla Tonka
Badly Bungled.

Victim Lived an Hour and
had to be Strangled.

Sheriff who did the Shooting Missed
the Heart. Shot Entered Chest
and did not Kill.

Goodlands. I. T., July 14.—The execution of William Goings, "Walla Tonka," the Choctaw Indian, took place at 2 o'clock yesterday, and was a sickening sight. The brave young Indian walked to the place designated by Sheriff Watson without a tremor. A few minutes before Goings was led out, four Choctaws appeared bearing his coffin. It was deposited in front of the Court House. Near it a quilt was spread.

The condemned Indian, accompanied by Sheriff Watson and a deputy and escorted by 20 light horsemen, marched down the line of spectators.

Goings then knelt on the quilt blindfolded. The sheriff bared his bosom, painted a spot over his heart, stepped back four paces, rested a rifle across a bench and fired. The bullet entered the breast, but missed the spot. Goings fell backward and moaned for an hour before expiring. Water was poured down his throat a number of times to hasten death by strangulation. While the execution was proceeding, District Attorney Clay remarked: "We are making history."

Walla Tonka [2 of 2]:

On the morning of July 13, Tonka comes alone to the place of his execution ... led to an open casket with a quilt in front of it, his shirt is removed and a target is painted over his heart.

According to reports, Sheriff Watson takes four paces back and shoots, *and misses*, hitting Tonka in the abdomen.

Tonka withers in pain for up to an hour (some reports say he was shot three more times and still lived) ... water is then poured down his throat in an attempt to hasten death by strangulation.

Walla Tonka would be the last capital punishment case carried out by a tribal council.

As a result of their refusal to abide by the decision of Federal authorities, several Choctaw officials are placed under arrest for murder, with the offense being the execution of Tonka.

On July 20, 1899, in a preliminary hearing in Antlers, I.T., all charges are dismissed on the grounds that the Choctaw Nation had jurisdiction within their territory.



Walla Tonka and His Wife.