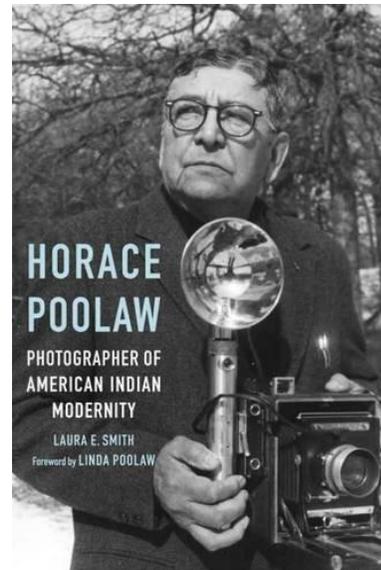


#27 March 2018 Cameraderie
Horace Poolaw (1906-1984)



Horace Poolaw was a Native American Kiowa from Mountain View, Oklahoma. He worked at many employments, including being a town arts and crafts supervisor. His photography was a part-time activity, carefully budgeted on limited funds. His great contribution was to photograph his family, friends, community, and other Native Americans of the plains for more than 50 years, viewing them from inside their culture, avoiding both stereotypes and propaganda.

The Wikipedia article is obviously written by a highly supportive person, but covers all the facts: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Horace_Poolaw

Last year, I viewed an exhibit of Poolaw's work at the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI): "For a Love of His People: The Photography of Horace Poolaw." The following Smithsonian Institution (SI) website displays 20 of the images from the exhibit, of which I will show you three below:

<http://www.nmai.si.edu/explore/exhibitions/item/?id=899>

Please read the following review in The New Yorker of the NMAI show, as it shows great sympathy for the culture and position of Native Americans. Here are two quotes from the article:

Gover [NMAI Director], a member of the Pawnee tribe, grew up not far from where Poolaw lived. "An outsider photographing a Native American community would, to a certain degree, be responding to expectations," he told me as we toured the exhibition. But Poolaw "was a Kiowa with a camera. People knew he's one of us."

Linda [Poolaw's daughter] recalls her father saying, "I do not want to be remembered for my pictures, but through my pictures I want my people to remember themselves."

Here is The New Yorker article:

<https://www.newyorker.com/culture/photo-booth/horace-poolaw-kiowa-nation>

A discussion of Poolaw's work must center on his cultural capture, more than drama or composition. All of his work is competent photo-journalism. What is special is his insider's view of his people, their history, their changes, and their adoption of many of the attributes of the majority. Here are a few of his images that particularly strike me, all from the Smithsonian Institution website.

This image of church elders is notable for the youth of the men in the image. There is no suggestion in the image of a commentary about that, but viewing it, I wonder whether these young men are the church elders for a cultural reason or because all the older men are dead, and if so, how did that happen. Note their thoroughly mainstream mode of dress.



In this next image, note the contemporary bobbed hairstyle of the young woman. It shows the influence of the cultural of the majority.



Here is a family picture, with the family car—evidently a possession of great pride and a status symbol for the family members. Everyone is dressed to the nines for this portrait.



A closing thought about Poolaw's home in Oklahoma—Oklahoma was a major end point of "The Trail of Tears," the forced relocation of Native Americans westward in the second quarter

of the 19th century. See the Wikipedia article here (or look at many other articles and books on the subject): https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trail_of_Tears