

Photo of the Month

John Black and Hugh “Tater” Black



Hugh “Tater” Black, left, Bentonville Chief of Police
and John Black, Arkansas State Police,
mid 1950s
Courtesy of Gary Black

Many dedicated peace officers have served the people of Benton County. Pictured at right are two brothers who have a long history of service to the people of this area. Hugh “Tater” Black is shown at left in the picture with his older brother, John, in the mid 1950s. “Tater” is wearing the uniform of the Bentonville Police Department and John is wearing the uniform of the Arkansas State Police. This wonderful hand-tinted image is courtesy of John Black’s son, Gary Black.

John Black was born August 15, 1914 and grew up in Pea Ridge. In 1944, he entered the Army and served in Europe during World War II. Following the war, he returned home to his wife Maxine and

a career in law enforcement. In 1947, Black was hired as chief deputy under Sheriff Charles Womble. He served in this capacity through 1950, when he ran on the Democratic ticket and won the election for the Office of Sheriff of Benton County.

During those years, Black earned \$5,000 per year as Sheriff, with an allowance of 75 cents per day to feed prisoners held in the county jail. Sid Jackson and Earl Rife served as Deputy Sheriffs and the annual Sheriff's budget was only \$18,000. In fact, Black provided his own vehicle until several years into his term, when the Quorum Court allocated funds for a Sheriff's car. But during this time, the practice of individual peace officers providing their own vehicles was common throughout the country for many small law enforcement agencies.

One of the most dramatic incidents of his tenure as Sheriff occurred in 1953. In October of that year, Ora Knight and George Wayne Knight robbed the Bank of Kingston of \$7,155. Ora Knight was finally captured about a mile northeast of Rogers on Highway 12 following a pursuit and brief gun battle with State Troopers and neighboring Sheriffs. The bandits, Ora Knight reported, had hid the money in a hill-side stump about 200 yards from the highway. Sheriff Black assisted in the capture of the bandits and was featured in a news photo breaking open the tree stump. Only a portion of the money was found in the possession of the robbers, but the balance of was not found at the hill-side location.

In 1954, Black lost re-election as Sheriff to Joe Means. However, John joined the Arkansas State Police in 1955 and served with that police agency until 1973. In that year, he accepted the post of Bentonville Police Chief, which he held for four years. In a 1986 news paper article, Black said "that in his days as Sheriff, nine times out of ten a few well-chosen words to a young lawbreaker would suffice to put him on the right path." John Black passed away May 18, 1998.

Hugh Black, well-known by the nickname "Tater," was born August 27, 1925 in Pea Ridge. He graduated from Bentonville High School in 1943 and served in the Navy during the war before attending the University of Arkansas and the College of the Ozarks. "Tater" began his law enforcement career around 1950 as the night patrolman in Bentonville. He was soon elected as Bentonville City Marshal, later called Chief of Police, and held this post for eight years. In 1951, the department acquired a Plymouth as its first police car. The 1951 department also included Bill Criner and Charles Kirby. Joe Brewer and Dick Hoback served the Bentonville Police Department as well during the early 1950s. By the mid 1950s, a jailer was added to the department.

In 1958, "Tater" was 33 years old, married, and had two children in addition to 10 years of law enforcement experience. He also served the community through civic organizations and was very active in youth athletic leagues. During that year's election, he ran against four other candidates for the Office of Sheriff and won 3,746 of the 6,550 votes cast.

At the end of his term of office in 1964, "Tater" became a Deputy United States Marshal and served the federal court until 1984. The duties of deputy marshals include the apprehension of federal fugitives, the transportation of federal prisoners, protection of federal courts, operation of the Witness Security Program, and seizure of criminally acquired property. In 1993, he was nominated to serve as United States Marshal for western Arkansas by President Bill Clinton. "Tater" Black passed away February 9, 1996.