



"Chief" Joseph Bayhyle Shunatona

Photographs of Native American Musician, "Chief" Joseph Bayhyle Shunatona(1901-1969) and His Family

[Tulsa, Oklahoma, other locations]: (1921-1969)

\$3500



A group of 84 gelatin silver photographs, mostly black and white; 45 are affixed to loose album leaves, the rest are loose; some are captioned on the versos. Various sizes from 1" x 1" to 8" x 10". Photos generally very good or better with a few faded, creased, or torn; the album leaves chipped.



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Images of an important Native American musician, Joseph “Chief” Shunatona (1901-1969), a Pawnee-Otoe, who attended the Chilocco Indian School which followed the U.S. government policy of censoring Native American music to force assimilation. Trained classically, in 1917 he transferred to the Wichita College of Music, became known as “The Indian Boy Singer,” and was mentioned in several newspaper stories. Realizing he could earn a much better living taking advantage of the public’s desire for Native American performances, Shunatona hit the vaudeville circuit. Over the next 15 years he became a radio star and built and led an all-Native American orchestra which performed at the 1929 and 1933 Presidential inaugurations. These performances were “in full regalia . . . celebrating the Native identities that the same government had spent the last fifty years seeking to destroy.”

The collection contains images showing both the early and later stages of Shunatona’s career as well as what appear to be his extended family. They include pictures of his wife and children, two large hand-colored portraits and one of him conducting a choir. There’s a portrait of a Native American woman in uniform (possibly a WAC) and a few others showing Native American military men in the WWII era. Shunatona is shown with “Arizona Cowboy” Rex Allen as well as in a few color shots of his appearance on a 1965 episode of *To Tell the Truth*. Shunatona wrote at least one book, *Skookum’s Laugh Medicine. Indian Humor from the Great Sooner State* (1957), and produced at least one recording, *Cowboy Tom’s Roundup* (1932).

A warm and interesting documentation of a man determined to preserve his culture. (Berglund, Jeff et al. *Indigenous Pop. Native American Music from Jazz to Hip Hop*. University of Arizona Press, 2016.). [\[BTC#412961\]](#)







