

# FAMILY ALBUM

## PHOTOGRAPHS BY PIERRE TARTOUE

One of the great powers of photography lies in its ability to connect us to our past and to signal how far we have come. On rare occasion photographs give us more than distant evidence, and actually let us participate with our history. They have the distinct ability to remind us of not only who we were, but also who we continue to be. Unexpectedly, the photographs of Pierre Tartoue (1885-1976) operate in this manner.



Ernestine Black and Betty Jo Buffalohead.  
Ponca Tribe of Oklahoma, 1947.

Tartoue was born in the harbor town of Saint-Nazaire on the western shores of France, and in his lifetime made his way across most of the continental United States. From the late 1930s to early 1950s he spent most of his time in Oklahoma painting and producing photographs that witnessed tremendous renaissance in American Indian communities, including the emergence of large intertribal expositions and powwows. This rebirth would not have been possible without strong multi-generation American Indian families.

Tartoue photographed events such as the Anadarko Indian Exposition with the idea that he would somehow capture the essence of a "vanishing race." This was a popular idea among many of his contemporaries, such as Edward Curtis. Yet, the project as Tartoue envisioned was doomed from the start. What he produced was a family album of sorts. His photographs observe young mothers with their newborns, grandparents sharing their culture with the new generation, and watch many of these children grow up and take on leadership within their tribes and intertribal communities. Their vibrant energy tells a story of survival and triumph in the dark shadow of the Great Depression and World War II. These images remind future generations of not only how far we have come, but how to have strength and resilience to keep moving forward.



Chief Fred and Mary Antelope Skin Yellowhawk.  
Cheyenne-Arapaho Tribes, c. 1948.