Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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For Immediate Release: July 12, 1966
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Robert L. Bennett, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, will be honored as “Indian of the Year" during special ceremonies July 16 at the annual Indian Exposition at Anadarko, Okla.

The first Indian to head the Bureau in 97 years, Bennett is a member of the Oneida Tribe of Wisconsin. He was a career employee of the Bureau, with 29 years of service, before being appointed Commissioner by President Johnson on March 18, 1966.

The Indian Exposition is sponsored by 15 tribes in Western Oklahoma--the Apache, Comanche, Kiowa, Arapaho, Cheyenne, Delaware, Caddo-Wichita, Pawnee, Shawnee, Potawatomi, Sac &Fox, Kaw, Tonkawa, Otoe &Missouri, and Osage.

For the past 15 years the celebration has been climaxed by the presentation of the “Indian of the Year" scroll. The first award in 1951 went to Jim Thorpe, the All-America athlete. Last year's recipient was Mrs. LaDonna Harris, wife of U. S. Senator Fred R. Harris, (D. Okla.).

Bennett, 53, is a 1931 graduate of Haskell Institute, Lawrence, Kans., and holds a law degree from Southwestern University, Washington, D. C. He joined the Bureau in 1933 as a junior clerk in Utah.

A Marine Corps veteran of World War II, Bennett has Seen Bureau service in Western Indian agencies, in Alaska and in Washington, D. C. In 1962 he won the Indian Achievement Award of the Indian Council Fire, a national organization with headquarters in Chicago.