

Tonto dead at 68

Jay Silverheels, the Six Nations Mohawk actor known to millions as the Lone Ranger's companion Tonto, died early Wednesday in a California hospital.

Mr. Silverheels, 68, had been a patient in the Motion Picture and Television Country House in Woodland Hills, since Jan. 25, suffering from the effects of a stroke he suffered 5½ years ago.

A family spokesman said Wednesday afternoon Mr. Silverheels died of complications from pneumonia.

Born Harold J. Smith on the Six Nations Reserve, the famous athlete and actor was given the name Silverheels by a Mohawk tribal elder.

He used it as his stage name, legally changing his name to Silverheels in 1971.

Jay Silverheels left Canada in 1933 to play professional lacrosse and semi-professional hockey in Hollywood. He was also known for his boxing expertise.

By 1939 he had turned to films at the urging of sports-minded actor Joe E. Brown, first as an extra, then as an Indian prince in *The Captain from Castille*, and as the Indian chief Geronimo in three movies: *Broken Arrow*, *Battle at Apache Pass* and *Walk the Proud Land*.

He is best known for his role as the Lone Ranger's Indian



Expositor Photo

Jay (Tonto) Silverheels led off the 1967 Canada Centennial parade in Brantford.

sidekick Tonto. He played in all 221 televised episodes as well as two Lone Ranger movies.

Mr. Silverheels made no secret of his displeasure with the portrayal of the Indian people in television shows and movies.

He once said he accepted the role of Tonto because it was a positive character.

An avid movie-goer from an early age, he once said he hated screen Indians until he realized he belonged to the same race.

Once established in Hollywood, he worked unceasingly to change the screen Indian stereotype and promote better roles and opportunities for Indian actors.

He founded the Indian Actors' Workshop, served as a member of

the Ethnic Minorities Committee of the Screen Actors' Guild, became the first Indian to have a star placed in Hollywood's Walk of Fame last year, and in 1977 was honored as Indian of the Year at the annual American Indian exhibition.

Lois Red Elk, who studied with Mr. Silverheels and acted with him in two movies, said he

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"created the atmosphere for Indians to get into the industry."

"Before that, Indian people had to play props, extras, background. There just weren't any Indian people with speaking parts."

Mr. Silverheels last visited the

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Dies in California