

Lorraine asked GROK-3 for information about an agent with the surname SMITH. Here is the answer on 23 Nov 2025.

It sounds like you're describing a classic case of corruption in the U.S. Indian Bureau during the mid-19th century, when agents were frequently accused of embezzling annuities, selling off government-issued goods meant for tribes, and pocketing the profits. While I couldn't find an exact match for an Indian agent surnamed Smith in Kansas who fits this description (despite extensive searches across historical records, agency lists, and corruption scandals), the story aligns almost perfectly with Perry Fuller, who served as the U.S. Indian agent for the Sac and Fox Agency in eastern Kansas from 1859 onward. Fuller was a notorious figure in Kansas history for exactly the kind of graft you mentioned: diverting and selling supplies intended for Native Americans, providing substandard goods, and profiting massively from the scheme. He was investigated multiple times and ultimately "caught" through federal probes, though he evaded full accountability until his death. I'll outline the key details below, based on historical accounts.

Background on Fuller and His Role

- **Appointment and Context:** Perry Fuller (1817–1871) was a Kansas settler, freighter, and politician who became the Sac and Fox Indian agent in 1859, shortly after Kansas Territory became a state. The Sac and Fox (also known as Sauk and Fox) were a confederated tribe displaced from their original lands in the Great Lakes region and resettled in Kansas in the 1830s–1840s. As agent, Fuller was responsible for distributing federal annuities (cash and goods like food, blankets, tools, and clothing) promised under treaties, managing tribal lands, and mediating relations. This was during a turbulent era of "Bleeding Kansas" violence, the Civil War, and rampant spoils-system corruption in the Indian Bureau, where agents often treated their posts as personal profit centers.
- **Location:** The Sac and Fox Reservation was in present-day Franklin and Osage Counties, Kansas (near modern Ottawa and Quenemo), about 50 miles southwest of Kansas City.

The Corruption: Stealing and Selling Supplies

Fuller's schemes were multifaceted, but the core involved exploiting the supply chain for tribal annuities and refugee aid:

- **Substandard and Diverted Goods:** During the Civil War (1861–1865), thousands of pro-Union Native refugees from tribes like the Cherokee, Creek, and Seminole fled to Kansas reservations, including Sac and Fox lands. Fuller and his business partner, Benjamin P. McDonald, secured lucrative government contracts to supply these refugees (and U.S. troops) with food, clothing, and other essentials. Instead, they delivered rotten or inferior items—e.g., moldy flour, spoiled meat, and threadbare blankets—while pocketing the difference between the inflated contract prices and actual costs. Complaints from tribal leaders and other agents described Indians going hungry or sick from the bad provisions.

- **Selling Stolen Supplies:** Fuller systematically skimmed annuities by withholding portions of the goods and reselling them on the open market or through his own trading post near the reservation. One year alone, he sold \$40,000 worth of "consignment goods" (intended for tribes) from his store. He also profited from outright theft, such as driving stolen cattle from Indian Territory (Oklahoma) to Kansas markets and selling them back to their original owners at a markup.
- **Whiskey Trade as a Side Hustle:** To further exploit the tribes, Fuller ran a illegal liquor operation, selling whiskey (sometimes laced with poisons like strychnine, leading to reported deaths) to Natives during annuity distributions. He hired armed thugs to intimidate rival agents and ensure compliance. This not only generated direct cash but also made tribes more vulnerable to land cessions, as alcohol-fueled desperation led to bad deals.
- **Land Fraud Tie-In:** Fuller orchestrated the 1860s sale of over 263,000 acres of Sac and Fox land to speculators and railroads (e.g., Kansas Pacific Railway) at rock-bottom prices, convincing some tribal members it was necessary while ignoring protests from chiefs who called it a "fraud" that would desecrate graves and enrich whites. He personally acquired choice parcels and flipped them for profit.

These actions left the Sac and Fox and other tribes in dire poverty, exacerbating starvation and disease on the reservation. Fuller's corruption was part of a broader "Indian Ring" pattern, where agents colluded with traders and politicians to siphon federal funds.

How He Was "Caught" and the Aftermath

- **Investigations:** Fuller's misdeeds drew scrutiny from reformers like journalist Col. William A. Phillips, who documented the thefts, shoddy supplies, and threats in detailed reports to the Indian Bureau and Congress starting in the 1860s. Tribal complaints and rival agents (e.g., Francis Tymany, whom Fuller terrorized) provided eyewitness accounts. A key probe in 1865–1866 under the Doolittle Committee (a Senate inquiry into Indian affairs) highlighted Kansas agency corruption, including Fuller's role in refugee supply scams.
- **Consequences:** Despite the evidence, Fuller was never fully prosecuted during his Kansas tenure—war chaos and political connections (he was a Free-State ally of Gov. Samuel Crawford) shielded him. He resigned in 1865 amid scandals but pivoted to other graft: As U.S. Collector of Customs in New Orleans (1868–1871), he ran a massive duty-free smuggling ring, diverting \$3 million in freight (equivalent to ~\$60 million today). A Treasury Department audit in 1871 exposed this, leading to his removal by President Grant and federal charges. Fuller died in October 1871 before trial, possibly by suicide or illness, leaving his estate tangled in lawsuits.
- **Legacy:** Fuller's story exemplifies the systemic rot in the Indian Bureau, which prompted Grant's 1869 "Peace Policy" to replace political appointees with religious overseers (though that too failed). The Sac and Fox were eventually removed to Indian Territory in the 1860s–1870s, losing most of their Kansas lands to white settlers and railroads.

If this isn't the Smith you're thinking of (perhaps from a family story or book?), it could be a conflation with another corrupt agent like C.C. Hutchinson (Sac and Fox sub-agent, fired for fraud in the 1860s) or the more famous "Indian Ring" scandals involving figures like William Belknap. Feel free to share

any additional details—like a first name, specific tribe (e.g., Kaw, Osage, Potawatomi), or year—and I can dig deeper! For more reading, check historical sources like *Tribal Dispossession and the Ottawa Indian Reservation* by William E. Unrau or Kansas Historical Society archives.