

GULLEDGE, GEORGE WASHINGTON (DR.) INTERVIEW. 12724³⁷¹

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Investigator,
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Interview with Dr. George Washington Gullledge
Briartown, Oklahoma

I was born September 27, 1860, in Henry County, Tennessee. My father was William Gullledge, of Irish descent, and my mother was Sarah Lax Gullledge, of German descent, both natives of North Carolina.

Due to the conditions brought on by the Civil War I was deprived of the opportunity of an education in the early part of my life. The limited education I obtained was in the short term common rural schools of West Tennessee, finishing in what was called McGuffeys fifth reader, later attending normal school at Murray, Kentucky, when I was twenty-two years of age. In 1883, I went to Marion County, Arkansas, where I obtained a position teaching in a rural school. I taught this school one term, during which time I studied medicine, being assisted in this study by two of my brothers-in-law who were practicing physicians in the district. Leaving there in the Fall of 1884 I went

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to Nashville, Tennessee, where I attended the Vanderbilt University from which I graduated in medicine in 1885. In December, 1885, I went to Washington County, Arkansas, where I worked as an understudy in the practice of medicine under my brother-in-law, Dr. Robert Hiddley, at Silcom Springs, Arkansas, until June, 1886, when I decided to embark on a career for myself and started for the Indian Territory. I rode horseback from Washington County, Arkansas, via Tahlequah, over the old stage road through Ft. Gibson to Muskogee, crossing the Arkansas River on a ferry at the mouth of Grand River. Leaving Muskogee I started south with Briartown as my intended destination. When I had ridden a distance over the open country which I thought should be near my destination, I saw a cabin near the trail so I decided I would inquire as to the distance to Briartown. I rode up to the house and saw a man lying on a pallet by the door of the cabin. I asked him if he could tell me how far it was to Briartown and he raised up and looked at me in amazement and said

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"Mister you are right in the middle of Briartown." To my surprise I then learned that Briartown was a community instead of a village as I had visualized it. This man, Lacy Crane, was my first acquaintance at Briartown. The Briartown post office at that time was in the home of Isaac Mooney who was postmaster. Mooney's place was situated about three quarters of a mile northeast of the present site of Briartown. I was fortunate on my arrival in the community in finding lodging and board in the home of Jim McClure, about two and one half miles east of the present site of Briartown.

The country at that time was very sparsely settled and I was the only practicing physician in the territory between Texana, Muskogee and Webbers Falls. The few roads through the country were nothing more than trails and many of my calls were of several miles over which there not even a trail. After I had practiced medicine here two years, I returned to Arkansas and was married to Martha Williams, the daughter of Fred and Rebecca Williams. Immediately after our marriage we started

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back to the Indian Territory in a two-horse wagon. We were thirteen days making the trip of two hundred miles which we enjoyed as our honeymoon. On my return to Briartown we boarded in the home of a Cherokee Indian by the name of Bill Phillips a short time, then moved to the home of Jeff Surratt where we boarded for three years. I continued my practice here until 1894, then returned to the Vanderbilt University where I studied one year, returning then to the Indian Territory and stopping at Whitefield, across the river from Briartown. I stayed one year in this community, then moved to the little town of Starvilla which was situated about three miles east of where Porum now stands. I lived there and took care of my medical practice until 1901, then moved to the present site of Briartown and continued my practice until 1919, when I discontinued medical practice and moved to the Rio Grande Valley where I engaged in farming until 1931. I came back to Oklahoma in that year, returning a year later to Briartown where I re-

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sumed my medical practice and where I have remained until the present time.

TOM STARR

Tom Starr was one of my closest friends and I have made many professional calls to the home of "Uncle Tom" as he was familiarly known. Dr. Lindsey, who was for many years a practicing physician at Texanna, was Uncle Tom's family doctor for years.

~~During the time I was located at Whitefield I remember~~

I made many calls at his home. There has been many exaggerated stories of the early life of Tom Starr. My reason for branding as false any story that gives any impression that Tom Starr was an outlaw at heart or had any criminal or cruel characteristics is because I knew him so well; furthermore, I never knew Tom Starr to make a false statement and he told me of his early life and much of his trouble, and I am confident that what he related was the truth.

James Starr, the father of Tom, with his family,

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moved from the old Cherokee Nation east of the Mississippi River to the Indian Territory in 1833 when Tom was a small boy. James Starr was a member of the Ridge party, and after Elias Boudinot and the Ridges were murdered, many other members of the party were threatened, including James Starr. Until that time James Starr and his family had lived lives of good law-abiding citizens in the Goingsnake district near the town of Westville, where they settled when they came to the Cherokee Nation. Soon after the murder of Boudinot and the Ridges, the opposing party carried out these treats and brutally murdered James Starr and a brother of Tom. Tom's mother witnessed this brutal act and calmly told the murderers of her husband and son, "when Tom hears of this he will settle with you." I think he did a very fair job of making his mother's statement good. Tom Starr was never guilty of any act that was not executed with a clear conscience in avenging the death of his father and brother.

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Tom Starr was a very clever character, also had a great sense of humor. He seemed to have a great influence over the superstitious element of the Indians.

On one occasion one of Uncle Tom's fat hogs that he was intending to kill for meat suddenly disappeared. He waited three or four days, in his characteristic way of silently figuring things out, and yet the hog did not show up. Finally Uncle Tom strolled over to the cabin of an Indian, who lived a short distance from him, and when he came in view of the Indian's cabin where he was sure he could be seen, he stopped and stood erect in the trail, looking towards the sky, taking long draws at his pipe and blowing the smoke up into the air. The wind being in the direction of the cabin, the smoke naturally drifted towards the cabin. He repeated this performance several times before he finally reached the cabin door. The Indian had been watching him in amazement and wondering just what he was doing. When Uncle Tom reached the door the Indian asked him in and Tom entered the cabin in a slow and mysterious manner, took

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a seat near the cellar door in the floor of the cabin. He continued to take an occasional draw at his pipe. Finally he broke the silence by saying "the medicine I make through my smoke say to me my hog is in cellar." The Indian, in a state of superstitious fear confessed to killing the hog and begged to be permitted to pay for it. Uncle Tom at that time was fencing some land and he let the Indian make one thousand fence rails at \$1.00 per hundred and everything was forgiven, but Tom never lost anymore hogs.

One of the many peculiar traits in Tom Starr that I admired was that he would never speak slander of any woman, nor would he engage in conversation with anyone who was doing so. If he was talking to his closest friend and the friend happened to make any ill remark of a woman, Tom would immediately walk away from him. I remember one day when a bunch had been standing around in idle conversation, and someone had made a remark about some woman, Tom said to me "No man should speak evil of any woman, our mothers were women."