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INTERVIEW WITH D. O. GILLISS  
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A PIONEER

I was born in Randolph County Illinois, 1872. My father, Antonine Gilliss, was of French and Scotch Irish descent. My mother, Martha, was of French Canadian descent. My father was considered wealthy. When I was about eight years old, he sold his eighty acres of coal land. He put us all in a covered wagon, and started west to make a fortune. My brothers, J. B. Gilliss (later a judge at Broken Arrow), and Lewis lived at Choska (near Coweta.

So in 1880 we came to Indian Territory. My father leased one hundred and sixty acres near old Broken Arrow (between the present Broken Arrow and the Arkansas River). My father leased this land from Chauncey Owens, at that time the most important white man in these parts, (there were very few white settlers). Owens had a very large ranch near Coweta and a fine home, called "The Big House." He had married a Creek citizen, Aunt Jane Wolf.

When word got out that the railroad (Atlantic and Pacific-later Frisco) was to be extended from Vinita to

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"Tulsey Town"(for the cattlemen's benefit), my father loaded us up again and we came to "Tulsey Town" to live in 1882. We were the first white people to put up a home here, though it was only a tent, floored and boxed up. There were only three houses here when we came and I will tell you exactly where they were. Noah Partridge, a fullblood Creek, with his wife and step son, lived in a little log house about where the Holy Family Church is today on Eighth and Boulder. He didn't cultivate any ground, just depended on hunting and fishing. Noah's brother, Kipsee Partridge, lived where Owens school is now. He had about an acre of corn fenced in. Later the land in this area came into the hands of Chauncey Owens, and was called Owens Park. West of Noah Partridge lived a Mexican named Hosey, who had married a Creek Indian and had four or five children. They lived in a log house and cultivated six or eight acres, which was fenced in.

As I said we were the first white people to put up a home in "Tulsey Town". It was a large tent-house put up at about where Archer and Elwood are today just a little north toward Cameron Street. Our family at that

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time consisted of my father and mother and five children: Lewis, Hattie, myself and Annie and Alice Shoemaker, step children. The next white people to put up a tent-home were an old bachelor and his mother, who lived near us. With surveyors at work, people seemed to flock here and the tent-town grew. Chancey Owens moved from Coweta and started a tent-boarding house (floored and boxed up). Later he built a hotel for railroad employees. This was where the Gibson Hotel is at Main Street and the viaduct.

With the tent-houses and box houses springing up, came our first stores. Jeff Archer put up the first store, a little board shack about twelve by eighteen feet, at what would be Main and the Frisco tracks today. He sold cider and groceries. The next store was put up by Josiah Perryman, brother of Legus and George. Josiah had married a white woman, old man Jones' daughter. He had his farm where Lynn Lane is today, about eight or nine miles east on Highway No. 66. This little store was first at about where Third Street and Olympia are today. This was the first post office in town, Perryman moved it from the George Perryman home about three and one-half miles south where it has been established on the Star Route in 1879.

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Later Perryman moved his store to the southwest corner of Main at First. Then H. C. Hall, who had one of the first stores at Red Fork (Partridge had the other) put up a general merchandise store at the northwest corner of Main and First. Later this came into the possession of J. M. Hall.

I remember Dr. Newlin was the first doctor. He put up a little drug store midway between First and Second on the east side of the street. Dr. Patton was the next doctor to come. With the coming of the railroad, Tulsa had a population of about one hundred and fifty.

Still just a wide place in the road with little one story frame stores. The best memory picture I have of Main Street was its use as a dumping ground for watermelon rinds in season.

As to recreation, we had two main sources of amusement; horse racing and the Indian ball games. Of course the white people fell for the horse racing. I remember soon after we moved here among the first newcomers to Tulsa was Bill Sennett, his wife and three boys. He put up his tent-home near ours. He had two good racing horses, two mule teams and covered wagons, quite a set-up for those days. The first horse races were

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held at what would be Elgin and the Frisco tracks today. There were two horses running a distance of four hundred yards and they had a judge with a flag. Sennett's boy rode his father's horses. The plan was to match your horse against any comer, and of course bet it heavy. The onlookers made private bets and enjoyed the fun.

This sport became so popular that Sennett moved out on what is Peoria today, about a mile east of Main Street, built his home there and established a regular race track. This track ran from what would be the corner of Pine and Peoria today, one half mile north. He certainly had some good races in those days. Some of those horses were really 'gone with the wind'. Race horses were brought in from Missouri and other states. Dr. Bland, who lived at Red Fork had a good string. The races were held every week in the afternoon, sometimes on Sunday.

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Yes, I used to go out to the buskin' ground at the Council tree near Eighteenth and Cheyenne. You see that was an old Creek buskin' ground for their dances and ball games. It was not as old as the Creek stomping ground that was over in what is Sand Springs today. You know

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where the base ball park is over there. Well this Stomp ground was just west. It was called the Big Bird(only in Creek) Stomping ground.

As you know the Creek tribe was divided into "towns" with a chief for each town. These chiefs led their followers in these games and dances. They met at this Council Tree Busk Ground two or three times a year as I remember, I used to go out often and join them. The ground would all be cleared off, sheds made from poles covered with brush, sort of an arbor for protection, would be put around the outer edge. A council fire, just a campfire, would be built in the center. The most important dance they held was the "green corn" dance, when the first roasting ears were ripe. They gathered for three or four days of celebration, camping near, usually just sleeping around on the open ground.

They started early the first day drinking their medicine which was to clean body, mind and soul, and leave them at peace with all their fellowmen. This cleansing medicine was made from pounded herbs and willow bark. That is as much as I know about it. It was dark brown in color, They had it in tubs, then the Indians passed around each drinking a gourd full. They tried to

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get me to drink some of it. I tasted it. That was too much for me. This medicine served as an emetic. Then they bathed themselves in the river, rested until toward evening when it was time for the big event, the ball game.

This was the cruelest, most exciting sport you can picture. By eliminations in games between towns, the final contestants fought it out at these dances. The players, hardy bucks, painted and wearing only breech-clouts, gathered on their clan side, at a distance, until it was time to start. Then at the signal the most blood-curdling yell you ever heard, "he, he-he, he" (I am a man), (I am a man'), burst forth. Then the game and fighting started. They fought so viciously it would make your blood run cold. White men could not fight like that, it was pure savagery. I felt as if I had been in an Indian war. I'll give you a description as I remember the game.

#### AN INDIAN BALL GAME

The goal posts on the ground were poles about eight feet high set seven feet apart. Another pair of poles were set at the opposite end of the field. A score of so many points were allowed when the ball was thrown through the space between the poles and guard was set at



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each goal to keep the ball from passing through. The clubs were two feet long made of hickory, larger at the grasp and tapered off at the end so thin that it was folded over and fastened with deer thongs or catgut to form a sort of cup in which to catch the ball. They looked something like a wooden spoon. Players used two clubs, since the ball was never touched by the hands. Games might be played indefinitely, although in big games a set number of points were agreed on beforehand. The games lasted two and one-half hours or longer. The players were painted with gay colors in grotesque designs over their bodies. The breech clout, the only article of clothing was surmounted by a belt hung with coon tails, the yellow rings on the black fur contrasting the colors on the body.

So fortified, each side of six or eight players lined up with his chief or umpire and marched in military fashion as soldiers do, to face the opponents at the center of the field. At a given signal from the chiefs the clubs were dropped and players stepped back. The the chiefs spoke. If they urged moderation they might have saved breath, for it was an opportunity to settle once for all a grudge. Should anyone be killed, it was a closed chapter, being only an incident or "accident" of the ball game.

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The speeches finished, the chief or chosen umpire tossed the ball, then followed the mighty scramble. If the ball fell to the ground the players bunched in a huddle, a seething mass of humanity to recover it. Their tails bobbing in the wind, snarls and yells emanating from the tangle, they resembled nothing so much as a pack of hungry animals fighting to death for flesh. Clubs clashed against each other or smashed on heads. Blood flowed and bodies were mauled this way and that.

~~If a player was injured or killed, the play never~~  
stopped but the umpire dragged the victim out of bounds and left him under a tree till the game was finished. When a score was made the air resounded with gobbles, the age old challenge of the Indian, until one half-expected to see men turned before his very eyes into a flock of turkeys. The onlookers not only liked the fight, but often bet heavily on the game, wagering their horses and cows.

The next day began the feasting, great barbecued beeves and the new green corn. At sundown started the Stomp dance, sometimes lasted all night. Then another day of feasting and another night of dancing. They would

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meet again for feasting and dancing when another important ball game was to be settled.

#### ABANDONED CEMETERIES

Yes, I know of three abandoned cemeteries close to the center of Tulsa. There is one that you know at Second and Frisco (special report). Then there was one at what is now Twelfth and Boulder, where the Stanley-McCune Funeral Home is. I helped Simpson Miller, a cattleman, bury his child there. My sister, Maggie Gilliss, who died in 1888, when she was only twenty years old, was buried there. Later her body was moved to Oaklawn Cemetery. Oaklawn was the first cemetery laid out by the government. I helped survey it. There was "quite a scope" of graves at Twelfth and Boulder, not more than a fourth of them were moved.

There was an old Creek Indian Cemetery at what is now Thirteenth Place and Elgin Avenue. You know that small cliff at the end of Elgin at Thirteenth Place, where the railroad cuts just below, well it was right on top of that low cliff. I used to go up there with the other boys and look at those graves, they were so different. Around each grave was a sort of a crib of rocks about two feet high packed closely together, then over the top of these rocks

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was placed a large flat rock. It was an old cemetery. I do not remember any burials there after we came here.

Note

This was of personal interest to the writer for I had laughingly said to Mr. Gilliss, "Be careful where you locate graveyards for I built a number of houses in close-in districts". Imagine my surprise when Mr. Gilliss told me of this cemetery with the cribbed graves, for right there on that one hundred and fifty feet eighteen years ago I had built three houses; as I remember they had no basements, for which I may be duly glad. E. S. J.

THE GHOST ON MINGO

About forty years ago, I was living on Mingo, where the creek runs into Bird Creek.

One summer evening, as I came up from the creek after feeding my stock, I first saw "It". The sun had gone down and it was near dark. I passed a tumbled down log house where I kept my hay piled and just happened to glance through the door; what appeared to be a man with a lantern was sitting near the fireplace. I went on to the house, thinking he had just taken shelter for a little while, but in the night I got to worrying for fear the hay would be set afire. Next morning, I took pains to go

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by and see about it. Finding everything all right, I dismissed it from my mind.

That evening, between sundown and dark, I saw the fellow again walking across the pasture lot. With arms akimbo, he was carrying his lantern in both hands and holding it close to his body. As he came nearer, I saw he had no head. I watched him disappear into the gloom of the timber bordering the creek. I couldn't believe my eyes, so said nothing about it to anyone.

A night or two afterwards, my brother, Charles, who lived a little farther down the creek was feeding his hogs when the apparition appeared again. Now he would fight the devil himself and give him the first lick but he froze to the spot as the figure moved toward him in a sort of bobbing fashion, still with the lantern. He seemed to be of the earth, yet he walked right through the hogs, crossed the creek as far as the spring and disappeared.

The following Sunday, an old German woman, a devout Catholic, elected to stay at home while her family spent the day with friends. In the evening she went out to milk the cows. It was her custom to let one cow in at

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a time. She milked the first one and had gone to the gate to let down the bars for the second. The old lady was very near sighted and was just drawing the plank back when she spied the man with the lantern standing at the gate. She dropped the pail of milk and leaving the gate open ran to the house. When the others came home, they found her in a highly nervous state, telling her beads; and the cows were in the corn.

Several nights later, he came to the door of the cabin. The mother and two daughters saw him quite plainly. This went on for several years.

The story went that the fellow had buried some money somewhere and had been killed with an ax when he wouldn't tell where it was.

A fellow with a witching rod came through and he and my brother experimented with it and came to a place near the spring where the phantom always disappeared and where the rod appeared to dip. It was late, just about the usual time for the lantern-man to appear. The man said it would never do for them to start digging then and said they would meet next morning. But next morning, my brother found a deep hole dug and the next he heard of the fellow he was in Texas.

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The lantern fellow, being earthbound as he was,  
I guess was released after his money was taken. Any way  
he was never seen again.