

# Willis centennial brings memories to Mrs Scott

By JAY DORMAN

Post Reporter

Willie Inglett Scott, 88, a lifelong resident of Willis, is looking forward to her town's centennial celebration Thursday through Saturday.

"It'll probably be the last chance I have to see a lot of old friends I have known through the years," she said. Mrs Scott, who was born and reared on a farm four miles west of Willis, can recall a great deal of the town's 100-year history.

Her father, Sidney Inglett, was a building contractor in Willis. He built many of the town's historic buildings. Most are gone now, but one remaining, the First Methodist Church, was built by Inglett in 1870.

It was in front of that church in 1900 that 18-year-old Willie Inglett was married to J. E. (Nick) Scott, while the couple sat in the seat of a horse-drawn carriage.

Among the buildings built by Inglett was the old Willis Male and Female College in 1881. It was a three-story frame building that was torn down after World War II.

Mrs Scott and her husband, who died in 1969, for years operated a grocery store on the bottom floor of what is presently Willis' oldest building. Built in 1870, it is a two-story, white slab-board building across the street from the present post office. At different times it served as a saloon, bank, telephone office, and real estate office.

In 1911 the building was the site of a gun battle between the banker and two outlaws

who made good a bank robbery and fled on a Great Northern railroad train.

Inglett also built the house in which Mrs Scott now lives with her maid Katy Duckett, 50. It is located on a tree-shaded lane, two blocks from downtown Willis. A wide front veranda is decorated with Mrs Scott's plants and an ornately carved front door with an oval glass.

Inside the building's 11-foot ceilings and low hanging chandeliers bring to mind post-Civil War construction. The walls are decorated with examples of Mrs Scott's needlepoint and embroidery work.

Very little of Willis has remained the same since it was first laid out in 1870. The town went through a period in which growing tobacco and producing cigars was the primary industry.

"I remember daddy building tobacco barns in 1890. But when they quit growing tobacco they started growing cabbage," recalled Mrs Scott.

A later timber boom was followed by an oil boom, and then in 1963 Interstate Highway 45 was opened, rerouting the heavy Dallas-Houston traffic off U.S. 75 running through the heart of Willis.

For a period the economy lagged, but the timber industry continued. Two major mills are still in operation there.

Today Lake Conroe is developing a few miles west of Willis, and the economy is on the upswing. It now has two shopping centers and a sprinkling of light industry in addition to the lumber mills.

Downtown parking places along the three-block business district are generally filled these days, even during the week.

Plush subdivisions are springing up between Willis and the lake. Others are appearing in the 8-mile stretch between Willis and Conroe to the south.

Conroe is rapidly becoming a bedroom community for sprawling Houston, and Willis is catching some of its overflow.

Willis voters passed a city sales tax last week, and the school district has reported a 10 percent increase in enrollment since last year.

Newspapers have appeared and disappeared in the town's history, but today The Spectator, a 28-page tabloid, seems to be thriving. It was begun a little over a year ago by Stan Crawford and former town councilman Wayburn Castleschouldt.

The paper has grown from 12 pages, and subscription sales are averaging 25 a week, according to Castleschouldt. It is gratifying to know that Willis is responding so well to its own publication, he said.

One of the special events Mrs Scott will be able to attend during the centennial celebration is a luncheon at Wayne's Restaurant in honor of the area's older residents. It was planned as an opportunity for all the long-time residents to visit during the centennial.

Other activities include a talent show, carnival, children's pet parade, a pancake breakfast, and an antique show.



*Willis' oldest building, constructed in 1870*



*Home of Mrs Scott, built by her father in 1880*



*Mrs Scott and maid, Katy Duckett*