

Potters Landing, Md.

April 19, 1878

Dear Brother:

As I am now the only male survivor of our family living in the Middle States to bear our Father's name, and being now in my 65th year, weak and frail, I will send you a short sketch of the Willis family as I had it from our Father (Short A. Willis) over fifty years ago, but more particularly from old Uncle Sam and Aunt Illika, slaves of our grand-father (John Willis), as they were some thirty years older than our Father (Short A. Willis) and raised with our gand-father (John Willis) who died four years before you were born. Our father never disputed their version.

Uncle Sam said his old master's father (John Willis' father) came from Wales. Our Grand-father (John Willis) also told him so. Our father, Short A. Willis, was born in Sussex Co., Delaware, in 1722. Our Grand-father, John Willis, was a son of a widow Sally Willis, who made her living by spinning wool and flax, and as our Father said, our Grand-father, John Willis, was born in 1742 in the great gum island swamps of Sussex Co., Del., where in his boyhood, he did a big turkey-catching business until he was bound out by the trustees of the poor to a man maned Maluney, a blacksmith, until he was twenty-one, but Maluney held him a year over his time as he proved by his two older brothers, Joshua Willis, and Joseph Willis. Our Father said his elder Uncle, Joshua Willis, settled in South Carolina and Joseph Willis settled in North Carolina. Our Grand-father (John Willis) married Nanna Short, as sister of Adam Short who married a widow Bell, mother of John Bell. Uncle Adam Short had one son by her, James. Our Grand-mother's sister was the mother of the famous Tom Buck Harrison of great notoriety, and another sister was the mother of Dow or Dodd that killed Cannon.

Uncle Adam Short was a soldier in the Revolution under Captain Colwell of the company called "The White Oak Boys of Kent". Our Grand-father (John Willis) served under Captain Collins whose Company was called "The Blue Hen's Chickens". He was wounded at the battle of Brandywine and Germantown. I saw the scars of his wounds when he was laid out. He died at our Father's (Short A. Willis) homestead, and I saw his services for seven years in the Army burnt up in Continental money and I now have the old wallet that held it.

Our Grand-father, John Willis, had three sons, all learned to be blacksmiths, and three daughters. His eldest son, John Willis, Jr., married and settled in Virginia. Polly, his eldest daughter, married John Spicer; Nancy married John Martin, an Englishman; Eliza married Joseph Ricketts (or Ricards); Short A., our Father, married a widow, Mrs. Mary Griffin, and Arthur H. married Nancy Wright.

Our Father, with his two brothers, Arthur H. and John Willis, Jr., was at the bombardment of Lewistown in 1812 (now Lewes, Del.). Our Mother's father, Major Peter Rich, was an officer in the Revolution. He married the widow of a parson Macracken, a sister of old Colonel Whitely, father of Doctor Whitely.

Our Grand-father Rich on our Mother's side had three daughters and three sons. Sally married Matthew Travers; Nancy married Arthur Travers, and Mary, the youngest, married our Father, Short A. Willis, in 1812. The three sons, James, Peter and John, all served in the War of 1812. John was killed in an engagement.

Our Father, Short A. Willis, moved to the Willis Homestead in 1822 and had eight children, Arthur John, Peter James, William Henry, Richard Short, Sarah Ann, Mary Elizabeth, Mary Ellen, and Thomas Alexander.

Peter James, William Henry, and Richard Short went to Texas in 1836, and Thomas Alexander died in 1850.

Our Uncle, Arthur H. Willis, had four children, Gorlus, Nathan, Eliza Anne, and Martha Jane. Our Aunt Polly Spicer had six children, Lewis, Theopilus, Elizabeth, Nancy, Tincy, and Marianna. Elizabeth married Watson Jefferson; Nancy married Miles Tindall; Tincy married Adam Short Vincent, and Marianna married John H. Harris. Aunt Nancy Martin had six children. Sarah married Captain Raymond; John, Jane and Hugh married and settled at Seaford, Del. Eliza married John Dryden, and Mary Anne married Cyrus Townsend of Laurel, Del. Captain Raymond had one daughter who married a Doctor Roberts, and she won a good name for her many virtues and has gained a great notoriety in Philadelphia for the interest taken by her in the Sabbath schools.

(This letter was written by Arthur John Willis to Richard S. Willis. The original is lost)

Short Adam Willis (born April 13, 1783, Died November 6. 1860) married Mary (Polly) Rich Griffin (born June 24, 1788, died September 15, 1861). They had eight children:

1. Arthur John Willis Born September 27, 1813 Died March 1889 Age 76
2. Peter James Willis Born March 26, 1815 Died November 28, 1873 Age 58
3. Sarah Ann Willis Born January 12, 1817 Died September 24, 1828 Age 11
4. William Henry Willis Born July 2, 1819 Died July 2, 1843 Age 24
5. Richard Short Willis Born October 17, 1821 Died July 27, 1892 Age 71
6. Thomas Alexander Willis Born November 5, 1822 Died 1850 Age 28
7. Mary Elizabeth Willis Born May 17, 1824 Died October 6, 1824 Age 4 months
8. Mary Ellen Willis Born June 11, 1826 Died 1879 Age 53

Arthur John Willis was a Senator in the Congress of the State of Maryland during and after the Civil War.

Peter James Willis, William Henry Willis and Richard Short Willis, the second, fourth and fifth children (sons) came to Texas in 1838---Peter had made an initial exploratory journey in 1836. They first settled on Buffalo Bayou near Houston, but later moved to Grimes County and purchased a farm called "Ringold Farms" between Navasota and Washington -On-The-Brazos.

In 1843 William Henry Willis died in the Yellow Fever Epidemic. Peter James and Richard S. moved to Montgomery, where both married and built their homes.

Thomas Alexander Willis was lost at sea.

Mary Ellen Willis , the youngest child and only daughter to live to adulthood, was badly spoilt and quite determined. During the time their roof was being renovated she fell in love with the Scot carpenter who worked on the job named Jones. Failing to convince her parents of her determination to marry him, she crept out of her bedroom window and escaped on a ladder he had placed against the side of the roof and they eloped. Her brothers were broken hearted.

Peter J. Willis

R. S. Willis

Peter J. Willis & Brother

Willis Building

Office in New York

36 Thomas Street

Office in Boston

18 Pearl St.

Galveston , Oct 17 1884

Dear Brother

As this is my 63 Birthday I am after writing to all my absent children Kate at Bardstown, Ky Dcik at Swarthmore Delaware County Md. 11 miles from Phila & Olive Beatrice at Ogoutys 6 miles from Phila. the two latter I put to school at the above places last month - while in Phila I saw Luther Martin & his two sons - cosin Eliza & Martha Jane Nanie & Edward Williams & his new wife also Richard Louis - so I thought of you next - & write as above. My wife & daughter Laura (the latter in bad health) arrived from New York on the 15th in usual health So I only have with me Laura Lee - besides Short who is married again & is living to him self - well so much for the history & location of my family - at this writing - this leaves me in usual good health - as to business never have I see it so dull & depressed & I see no hope for any material imprut until after another crop is made - we have had two short cotton crops in our state & it has pretty well blattened business out here. we have discharged $\frac{1}{2}$ of our store help & will have to reduce the saleries of the Bai - so as to bridge over - until a crop is made I mean next season - should it be another short crop the permanent depressed business must continue - but it is hardly probable that we will have 3 short crops in succession hand running - I should be pleased to here from you occasionally

Your Brother

R.S. Willis