

**[Mrs. M. B. Willis]**

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Mrs. Edgerton Arnold, P.W.

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Page No. 1 CONSULTANT: Mrs. M.B. Willis, Waco, Texas REMINISCENCES OF MRS. M.B. WILLIS

My parents, Mr. and Mrs. Moses Balwin were natives of Alabama. They grew up in the same town. Both married. My mother marrying a Mr. Davis. After a few years my mothers first husband died. She left Alabama and went to live in Mansfield, Louisiana where she met my father (whose wife had also died) and a year after the meeting they were married.

My father and mother decided to leave Louisiana and come to Texas. They, with my two half-brothers and two half-sisters (children by my fathers previous marriage) with a bout one hundred slaves went directly to Cold Springs, San Jancinto county, Texas, where my father bought a very large farm. Two years [after?] they had settled in Cold Springs, I was born, November 8, 1855. I was named Armanda, but since that was also my mothers name it was shortened to "Mannie" and Mannie I have remained all my life.

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My childhood was very happy. My niece (daughter of of my half-sister) and I were almost the same age, and I remember that my father gave each of us a girl slave who was about our own age. It was the custom to give each child a slave near their own age so they could grow up together, there were also "[mammies?]" who had the complete charge of us. My own brother who was a year or so older than I, also had a slave. We children were taught at home until we were old enough to go to school in Cold Springs. There was no school for the slaves, whatever they learned, they learned from us.

I cannot remember much about the war. My two half-brothers fought in it, but my fathers health was so bad that he could not take an active part.

I remember very distinctly one morning going into the dining room, and seeing on the dining table stacked piles of silver dollars. My father and mother were standing at the head of the table and grouped around were the heads of the famlies of slaves. 2 He was explaining to them that the war was ended and that they were free and could [leave?] if they so desired, but if they wanted to say and work on, he would give them a contract. Just two of them decided to leave, the coachmen and my mother's seamstress, whom she had favored more than any of the others.

The following spring my father died, and my mother had a trying time. The farm was so large, and / the people began coming to our farm and hiring the negroes.

The following year we began to attend school in Cold Springs. My brother would take me with him on his horse. It was through his teachings that I became a fine horsewoman. As we grew up horseback riding was our chief sport, and our next favorite past-time was the game of crochette and dancing, though my mother would not let me atten many dances as she thought too frequent attendance would make a young lady common.

Upon finishing school in Cold Springs, I was sent to Waco to attend what was then Waco University...which began quite an interesting period in my life. I was clever but not very

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studious. Our recreation in those days was picnics, and it was at one of these given on the Baptist Encampment grounds that my husband first saw me. He told the boys that some day soon he was going to know me. Then came a big event...a grand soiree was given and it was there we met. A few days later Professor Burleson announced in chapel that we were to be given a big picnic, but there was not to be any pairing off, if any one was caught disobeying that rule, they would be sent home. There were about six couples including Mr. Willis and myself who were very much in love, and we determined not to let a rule interfere with us being together. So after arriving on the picnic grounds, and at the first opportunity, we slipped off. Mr. Willis took me to the bank of the creek where he had hidden some ice cream, and we were sitting there eating it and having a lovely time, when Professor Burleson walked up and caught us. In a very stern manner he said, "Miss Baldwin, you are to return home immediate, and are not to have any dinner." When I got to the bus, which was driven by Perry Green, I found that the other girls had been caught too, and were being sent home from the picnic. In some way the boys reached home before we did, and Mrs Caldwell, who was then Molly Hayes, 3 felt so sorry for us that she fixed up a nice dinner and invited the boys to join us. So we had a nice time in spite of Professor Burleson.

In June I returned home and in a few days Mr. Willis came to my home and asked my mother for her consent to our marriage. My bother had made investigations and found that he was a splendid young man of sterling worth, son of a prominent physician in Waco, who had been in practice with his father for a little more than a year. He had been educated in Virginia and Washington where he had won the Greek Certificate and was given a beautiful letter from General Lee commending him for his outstanding work. Leaving Washington he attended Bellview Medical College in New York where he took his medical course, graduating with high honors.

In November we were married and after a short honeymoon spent in Galveston we came to Waco which was then known as Waco Village. It was very crude but the people were friendly. Our first home was a little cottage located out on South Fourth Street. It faced

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open prairie. One of the first attractive buildings that I remember around in Waco was the [?]. Another thing that gave the old settlers quite a lot of pleasure was the theater parties. We often gave them at the old Garland Theater which was one of Waco's leading theaters in those days, even though it was built over a livery stable.

The Suspension bridge was also a great event for Waco. The crossing of the river had been accom lished in a flat [boat?] since the settlement of Waco. The ferry was at the same spot where the bridge now stands, and the sight admired by thousands who crossed on that ferry was the beautiful Waco Spring. It used to fall over two shelves of rock...a miniture cataract, of two or three yards in width, glittering in the morning sun like a sheen of diamonds. There were no water companies and the spring was free to all.

We had five children, they came very rapidly. One died in infancy. My husband 4 died at the age of 37 leaving me the responsibility of rearing four babies, the youngest was two years old and the oldest ten years old. Being a firm believer in education I was determined with the help of God to have my children thoroughly educated. Each of my children have from two to three degrees to their credit. I have been quite active in the religious, civic and social life of Waco. I was one of the organizers of the Home [Association?] of Waco (Old Ladies Home). I have been quite active in club work and am an honorary member of the Literary Club. When in Waco I attend the Austin Avenue Methodist church.

I devide my time bewteen between my daughter who lives in Bryan, Texas and my son Judge J.D. Willis of Waco, Texas. Life has given me many blessings for which I am most thankful.