

Biographical & Historical Memoirs of North East Arkansas
Goodspeed's

Willis

Hon. N. J. Willis, farmer, Harrisburg, Ark. The name that heads this sketch is borne by one of the most highly respected and esteemed residents of Poinsett County. Let a man be industriously ambitious, and honorable in his ambitions, and he will rise, whether having the prestige of family or the obscurity of poverty. **Mr. Willis** was born in Caswell County, N. C., on the 31st of January, 1835, but attained his growth in Tennessee. His parents, **John T. and Elizabeth (Ward) Willis**, were also natives of North Carolina. The father was a thorough-going, industrious farmer, and an active member of the Masonic fraternity, and held the office of junior warden in that organization several years. He was a Democrat in politics, and he and wife were members of the Methodist Episcopal Church. Their family consisted of six children: George W., died in the army in 1863, was a farmer of White County, Ark.; Mary, wife of a farmer living in Cross County, Ark.; Flora A., wife of **James Maloney**, a farmer of Illinois; Nancy, wife of **Capt. J. M. LeVesque**, county clerk, and the largest farmer in Cross County, Ark.; Sarah, died in 1864, and was the wife of **Samuel Allen**. **N. J. Willis**, the fourth child in order of birth, spent his boyhood days in Tennessee, when school opportunities were very limited. During that time his vocation was farming, and at odd times he was busy over his books, of which he was very fond. At the age of twenty he began working for himself, and then spent a year in school to **Prof. Phillips**, near Somerville, Tenn. The next year, 1856, he came with **Capt. LeVesque**, to Poinsett (now Cross) County, Ark., and followed agricultural pursuits for two years. In 1857 he married **Miss Nancy Shannon**, daughter of **Archibald and Nancy (Allen) Shannon**, the former a native of Tennessee. To **Mr. and Mrs. Willis** were born five children (two of whom are living): John T. died in infancy; Thomas J. died at the age of seventeen; James M. died at the age of four years; Samuel H., a farmer and miller, now resides with his father, and Ollie A., who is now thirteen years of age, is at home.

Judge Willis lived in Poinsett County (now Cross), until 1875, and then moved to Poinsett County proper. In 1874 he was elected justice of the peace, and in 1879 was elected county judge, serving one term. In 1881 he was elected representative, and re-elected to the same position in 1883, thus showing his popularity with the public. In 1886 he engaged in ginning and milling, and the same year moved to Harrisburg, but continued to superintend his farm. He is the owner of 828 acres of land in Poinsett County, besides two lots with good houses on them, and the gin and mill at Harrisburg. In March, 1862, he enlisted in the Confederate army, **Capt. Joe Martin's** Thirteenth Arkansas Infantry (mounted), and in 1863 was promoted to the rank of lieutenant of Company C, which position he held until the war closed. He was in the battles of Greeneville, Helena, and went with Gen. Price in his raid through Missouri and Arkansas. He left the main army at Fort Smith, and operated on White River until 1864, when he joined the main army at Camden, and continued with the same until the surrender at Wittsburg, Ark., in 1865. He served his county and State in the most acceptable manner during the war, but has rendered it even more valuable service, not only as a reliable public official, but as an industrious farmer and law-abiding citizen. He is now living in comparative retirement. He is a member of the Masonic order, also the K. of H., and in his views affiliates with the Democratic party. He and **Mrs. Willis** are members of the Methodist Episcopal Church, in which he has held the office of class-leader, has also been superintendent of the Sunday-school, and he is a liberal contributor to all laudable enterprises.

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John R. Willis, postmaster of Buffalo Lick, Ark., has held the position he now occupies for the past six years, and has ably discharged the duties incumbent upon the office. He was born in Oldham County, Ky., in 1837, but received his education in Saline County, Mo., and up to the age of eighteen years was an attendant at the district schools, and was engaged in farm labor on the old homestead. After attaining the above mentioned age he entered the employ of **Majs. Russell & Wardell**, being master of a wagon train leaving Leavenworth for any

given point in the far West. After remaining in the Government employ for about seven years he, in 1862, joined the Eighteenth Mississippi Cavalry, commanded by **Col. Jenkins**, and was in the battles of Franklin, Nashville and Fort Pillow, and in other minor engagements, serving until hostilities ceased, when he was paroled at Memphis, Tenn. He was captured three times, one time being taken prisoner at Holly Springs, Miss., by the Seventh Kansas Regiment, of which **W. F. Cody**, better known as **Buffalo Bill**, was a member, the latter having been in his employ while he was a teamster in the West. **Mr. Willis** was engaged in farming in Cross County, Ark., until 1879, when he crossed to Poinsett County, Ark., and here has since made his home, his farm of 200 acres being finely improved, with good buildings, fences, etc., and 100 acres are under cultivation. He also operates a steam cotton-gin, and raises some stock. He is independent in his political views, but usually votes the Democratic ticket. He has held the office of magistrate, and for many years has been an active worker for the cause of temperance. He is a patron of education, is a member of the school board, and also belongs to the board of equalization. He is a Mason, being a member of Arcadian Lodge, at Vanndale, Cross County, and also belongs to the Agricultural Wheel. He was married, in Cross County, Ark., in 1872, to **Miss Mary Harvey**, a native of Shelby County, Tenn., and to their union six children have been born: Lillian, Lewis, Henry X., Mary, Ethel and Edna. **Mr. Willis** is the youngest of eleven children born to **Lewis and Polly (Ryle) Willis**, the former a native of Virginia, and the latter of North Carolina. They settled on a farm in Boone County, Ky., at an early day, and in 1835 moved to Oldham County, where the mother died in 1845. In 1848 **Mr. Willis** settled in Saline County, Mo., where he farmed and made his home until his death, in 1850.

Poinsett County
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