

December 4, 1984

The Willson Family of
Pendleton District, South Carolina

The first ancestor of whom we have knowledge is:

I. John Willson. He was born about 1740. Family tradition states he came from Ireland, and he may have lived in North Carolina before moving to South Carolina. At any rate, he lived in Abbeville District immediately after (and perhaps during) the Revolution.

John Willson served in the Revolution, in the militia unit of Colonel Robert Anderson, and was apparently a captain. His indents state he provided 43 days "Waggon Service" on militia account in 1781, receiving £ 172 and served as captain "before and since the reduction of Charleston," receiving £ 1257.10 shillings. His payments under the indents were converted into state currency at £ 204.4.37.

He used part of the proceeds from his Revolutionary service to pay for land. He was granted 632 acres on 23 Mile Creek on April 3, 1786 for which he paid 14 pounds 15 shillings, as follows:

"I do herby Im power Major John Bowie to pay out of my Indents for 632 acres of my own and 320 of Alexander Boyce and 300 John Wares' land, all above the line given under my hand this 21st day of April, 1786." Abbeville, S.C. John Willson apparently moved to Pendleton District

shortly after his land purchase. On December 14, 1787, he paid 7 shillings to S. Ridgeway of Greenville for 630 acres, since Wilson was "in actual possession" of the land in Pendleton, and sold 100 acres (of the 632 acres) to William Means for 30 pounds. (The payment to Ridgeway presumably reflected settlement of conflicting land claims.) John Willson is listed in the 1800 census of Pendleton District as a male over 45, with a household consisting of an additional two males under 10, one male 16-26; one female 16-26, two females over 45 and eight slaves.

John Willson was one of the commissioners for the location of the courthouse of Pendleton in 1790 and served as a magistrate at the first court session in Pendleton on April 2, 1790. His career is best summarized in Reynolds, Faunt, Biographical Directory of the Senate of South Carolina, 1776-1964 (1964) as follows, at p. 335.

Willson, John-Senator from Pendleton District. Born about 1740. Married, Planter, of Pendleton District. During Revolutionary War, served under General Pickens for most of war. Called "captain." Commissioner to locate courthouse for Pendleton District, 1789. Magistrate, Justice of Peace, Justice of Quorum. Tax collector of Pendleton, 1792. Commissioner of Pendleton 1810. Coroner 1801, 1816. South Carolina Senate Pendleton 1793-1802, 1806-1810, Presidential Elector 1803. Member of Presbyterian Church at Carmel; elder for many years. Died January 10, 1823, in Pendleton District.

John Willson died on January 10, 1823. The Pendleton Messenger reported in its issue of January 15, 1823, as follows:

Died on the 10th Inst. John Willson, Esq. aged 83 years, an old soldier of the Revolution, who served under General Pickens most of the war. For a number of years he was Senator in the State Legislature from this District, and at different times has held offices of public trust. An Elder of the Presbyterian Church at Carmel. A kind parent and neighbor.

His estate was appraised on February 7, 1823, and the sale of property effected on April 5, 1823.

John Willson Sr. left a will executed on January 24, 1816 and proved in court on March 6, 1823. (The will is found on Roll 796 of Anderson Co. Estates.) He left a sizeable estate to his "beloved wife Mary Willson" and to his children. The will refers by name to his children and at least some grandchildren. John Willson's sons Charles and John, and son-in-law William McMurry were named executors.

The estate record for John Willson shows a codicil to the will dated August 19, 1818, reading as follows:

Whereas by my last will and testament I left a negro fellow named Cato then owned by me to my son-in-law John McMurry of Caswell County in the State of North Carolina and being by said negroes conduct obliged to sell him to my son John Wilson for the sum of \$500, I do hereby certify that it is my will and desire that John McMurry receive the \$500.

See also a petition filed on April 30, 1827 on behalf of William McMurry Willson referring to the legacy left him by his grandfather.

John Willson married Mary (Polly) Pettigrew of Abbeville. She was the daughter of John Pettigrew and his

wife Sarah Matthews. They apparently had at least the following children:

(1) Charles Willson - See below.

(2) John Willson, Jr. - John Willson, Jr.

received a grant on March 6, 1809 for 330 acres on 23 Mile Creek on land bounded by the lands of John Wilson, Esq.* He served as Justice of the Quorum in 1803. He died on January 22, 1826, and estate papers were initially filed on February 13, 1826. His estate was valued at \$4,656, including eight slaves, and land totalling 764 acres. His land, by plot, was adjacent to land of William McMurry, James Willson, Jeremiah Williams and the widow Whitten. In addition to his widow Isabella, he apparently left the following children:

- a) Harvey Wilson
- b) Sarah Wilson
- c) John Wilson
- d) James A. Wilson
- e) Allen Merritt
- f) Clarissa Wilson
- g) William Mattison Wilson (probably died 1859--see Anderson County Roll 2753)

Sarah, Clarissa and William were all under fourteen and William McMurry was appointed guardian. In 1830 Isabella was made guardian of John, Harvey and Sarah.

(3) Ann. Married John McMurry of Caswell County, North Carolina.

(4) Margaret. Married Samuel S. Owen.

* The records sporadically refer to Wilson and Willson.

(5) Jane. Married William McMurry.

(6) Elizabeth. Married William Burney - Died before 1816. She had at least two children, Elizabeth and Anne Burney, who were given \$100 each in the will of their grandfather, John Willson.

II. Charles Willson. Little is known of Charles Willson. He apparently was born between 1760 and 1770 but we do not know where. He appears to have been clerk of the Court and probate judge in Pendleton District in 1794 and 1795. By will dated February 11, 1794, James Compton of Pendleton left "my plough and tackling and other working tools" to Charles Willson. John Willson was a trustee and witnesses included Mary Willson and Charles Willson. He also may have been the Charles Wilson who purchased 320 acres on Beaverdam (Anderson County Roll C-177).

Family tradition states that Charles Willson inherited a survey of 630 acres of land in Pendleton District, including the site of Fairview Methodist Church. His wife inherited an adjoining survey of the same size. He donated the land to the Church and built a church of logs at his own expense. John Willson's will did leave to Charles Willson the land on which Charles was then residing and certain other property.

The 1830 census for Anderson County shows Charles Willson owning twelve slaves and being from 60-70 years old,

with a wife of about the same age. (There is another Charles Wilson, 50-60 years old.) At any rate, Charles Willson, Sr. died in 1843, probably July 7, 1843. His sons, R.D. Willson and James J. Willson, in filing for administration on July 17, 1843, state their father "lately died intestate . . . (and) was seized of considerable personal estate." The sale of the property, including seventeen slaves, brought \$4,570, of which one-third was distributed to his widow and the remainder divided among eight children.

Charles Willson, according to family tradition, married Martha McMurray. He also appears to have married Jane Fagon (1763-June 14, 1850) as his second wife. After the death of Charles, there was a contest for administration between the sons and "Jane" Wilson. Evidence revealed that Jane Willson was old; even though John A. Smith said she had "tolerable good mind but not well informed and thinks she could not attend to her temporal business," she was named administratrix. In view of the facts that Charles' sons opposed her appointment as administratrix and that Jane Fagon Willson left her property in 1850 to her brothers and sisters and their children, and not to the children of Charles Willson, it seems reasonable to view Jane Fagon as a second wife and, in accordance with family information, accept Martha McMurry as the mother of the children of Charles Willson.

Known children of Charles Willson were:

- (1) Charles Pettigrew Willson - See below.
- (2) Mary E. - Born in 1796. Married William M. Hamby. Moved to Pickens Co., Ala. by 1840.
- (3) James T. Wilson - Born c. 1797. Married Anne Childress.
- (4) Elizabeth M. - Born c. 1798. m. Ephraim Smith. Died in Anderson Co., S.C.
- (5) Margaret ("Peggy") Wilson - Born 1800. m. 1819 to Elisha Madison Hughes. Died 1848 in Anderson District. Margaret and Elisha Madison Hughes had the following children:
 - (a) Obedience - Born May 12, 1821. Married Joseph T. Smith. Had four sons and one daughter. She died Oct. 9, 1905 and is buried at Wesley Chapel in Fayette County, Alabama.
 - (b) Harriet E. - Born 1825. Married her first cousin, John W. Hamby, c. 1844, and had one son.
 - (c) Clarinda E. - Born c. 1829. Married on Dec. 26, 1850 to George W.L. Johnson in Fayette Co., Alabama.
 - (d) James Thompson - Born May 13, 1831. Moved to Alabama 1848-1850. Married (1) Epsy Callie Clinton; (2) Mary Jane Mitchell. Served as a private, Co. B.

41 Regiment Alabama Infantry, C.S.A.
Died June 29, 1919 and is buried at
Ashcroft Corner Baptist Church, Fayette
Co., Alabama. Had eleven children.

- (e) Hulda Elizabeth - Born 1833. Married
George W. Thornton.
- (f) Louisa Adeline. Born June 15, 1836.
Married James Harvey Wilson. Died Nov.
11, 1925 and is buried at Old Wesley
Chapel Cemetary, Fayette Co., Alabama.
- (g) William M. - Born 1839 in Anderson District,
S.C. Served as a private in Co. B, 41st
Alabama Infantry, C.S.A. and died of
"typhoid pneumonia" on Jan. 25, 1863
in City General Hospital, St. Louis,
Missouri.
- (6) Sarah Ann Wilson - Born 1804.
- (7) Robert D. Wilson - Born c. 1808. Married
Cynthia McMurry on November 2, 1830. (Family
tradition and Pendleton Messenger.) Later
moved to Georgia.
- (8) William McMurry. Born February 29, 1812.
Married, on January 7, 1836 (by William McMurry)
Martha, daughter of Bagle Nalley of Pickens
District. Died September 30, 1892. Martha
was born July 18, 1813, and died July 10,

1883. Both are buried at Fairview Methodist Church in Oconee County.

(9) Martha Wilson - Died before 1843.

Charles Pettigrew Wilson - Born, presumably in Pendleton District, in early 1800's. He was apparently a farmer. He died before 1844, as guardianship petition filed in 1844 and found in Anderson County records by Martha Wilson (by mark) requests that John A. Smith be appointed guardian, on basis that her children, Nancy, Lucy M., Robert, Sarah Ann and Martha Jane are minors under twelve, and "that they are entitled to an interest in the estate of their grandfather, Charles Willson, Sr., now deceased, as the representatives of their deceased father, Charles Willson, Jr." John A. Smith was appointed guardian (and trustee in matter of Margaret Hughes) with Ephraim Smith and Robert D. Wilson bound as sureties. Received \$360 from the estate of Charles Willson, Sr. in May, 1848.

Charles P. Willson married Martha Johnson, daughter of Gannoway Johnson. Children of Charles and Martha Willson were:

- (1) John Dowling - born August 8, 1827, in South Carolina. Married in 1846 Susan Sheriff. Died in Central, South Carolina, May 1, 1900.
- (2) Mary Elizabeth - See below.

- (3) Nancy Adeline - Born July 13, 1832. Married W.M. Roberts. Died May 8, 1917 - buried Fairview Methodist Church.
- (4) Lucy Ann Wilson - Born July 26, 1832. Died May 18, 1911, unmarried. Buried Fairview Methodist Church.
- (5) Robert P. Wilson - Probably born September 1836, since received his distributive share of the estate on September 28, 1857. Robert was a Confederate soldier, dying during or at end of war. He was married and the father of Lawrence Wilson and Elvira Wilson Hawkins.
- (6) Sarah Ann - ^{TOMASTONE SAY 5-29-1838} Probably born May 1839, since she received her distributive share of the estate on May 4, 1860. Married Charles Smith.
- (7) Martha Jane - Probably born 1842, since she received her distributive share in 1863. Married Hiram Taylor.

Mary Elizabeth Willson - Born in Anderson County, South Carolina, on October 4, 1829. She married Caleb McKendree Smith on January 20, 1848, Caleb being the son of her guardian John A. Smith. She died July 5, 1918. Was known as "Aunt Lizzie." J.R. Heller, Jr. remembers her as short and somewhat dumpy and being deaf, using an old-fashioned horn. She lived with her son John L. Smith after

the death of her husband. J.R. Heller, Jr. drove the car to her funeral, from Seneca to Fairview Methodist Church in Oconee County, some ten to twelve miles outside Seneca.

J.R. Heller, III

Sources

- 1) Revolutionary Records - John Wilson. 8607 1/2 - South Carolina. Department of Archives and History.
- 2) Dickson, Journeys into the Past. Anderson County. Bicentennial Commission 1975 State Grants - South Carolina Department of Archives and History.
- 3) Estate of John Willson Jr. 1826 - Roll 779 - Anderson County.
- 4) Charles Willson - Guardian Petition 1827, Roll 908 - Anderson County.
- 5) Will and Estate of John Willson, 1828 - Rolls 776 and 796 - Anderson County.
- 6) Anderson County Land Records - A-236.
- 7) Information on the family of Margaret and Elisha Hughes was compiled from a variety of Fayette Co., Alabama, Civil War and other records by David E. Bennett, 316 S. Barnes #79, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma 73139 in August 1981.
- 8) Much of the information contained in this memorandum was originally provided by Elizabeth A. Smith (Oct. 1, 1879 - August 28, 1970) wife of Dr. John R. Heller, who in turn received it from her grandmother Mary Elizabeth Willson (October 4, 1829 - July 5, 1918). The information provided was almost uniformly corroborated by research in Anderson County and other records.