

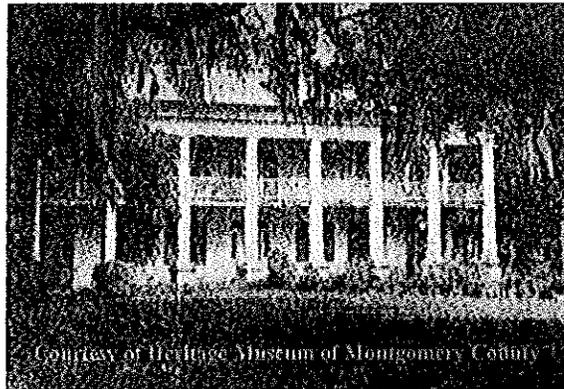
## HISTORICAL TIMELINE OF WILLIS, TEXAS

**February 20, 1852:** Having arrived and purchased land in Danville on December 13, 1849, George and Susan Spiller relocate to a tract of land on the east side of Main Street (today known as Old Danville Road) in the town of Danville, which is today known as Old Danville Road. There they raise their son William F. Spiller and daughters

**January 21, 1853:** The San Jacinto Masonic Lodge No. 106 is organized in Danville, probably with the support of Sam Houston. Danville is a growing town with Dr. Charles B. Stewart operating a drug store there, and there is a Methodist Church and perhaps a Baptist Church. (The chapter later transfers to Willis.)

**1854:** Judge Goldthwait of Alabama comes to Danville with 200 slaves and develops a cotton plantation.

**1855:** General A. J. Lewis from Virginia develops a fine cotton plantation with a grand three story home called "Elmwood" south of Danville. The home has a ballroom and brick shipped from Holland with wooden beams fastened together with wooden pegs whittled out by slaves. (The plantation is in the vicinity of today's Lewis Creek power plant off of Longstreet Road. The house was torn down in 1940 and the lumber used for a modern home.)



*Elmwood Plantation Home of A. J. Lewis*

**1856:** The farming village of Danville has a population of about 300.

**September 11, 1858:** The town of Danville hosts Sam Houston at a barbeque. By this time there are reportedly about 1000 residents, 600 of whom are slaves, with 14 businesses, two blacksmith shops, two mercantile stores, an inn, a cotton gin, a general store, a hotel, a saloon, a saddle shop, and a grocery store.

**1867:** The Thomas Chapel UM Church is founded by Afro-American freed slaves from nearby plantations a few years before Willis begins. It is the oldest church in Willis and one of the very oldest churches in Montgomery County.



*Thomas Chapel circa 1976*

**1870:** The construction of the International and Great Northern Railroad begins in Houston and proceeds north to Palestine through Montgomery County. With the arrival of the railroad, timber is marketable beyond local consumption, and many more sawmills develop. The “19<sup>th</sup> Danville subdivision” has 15 sawmills located in Danville, Esperanza and the new community known as Willis. These sawmills most certainly provide crossties to the I & G N Railroad as its tracks are being laid north of Houston through Montgomery County.

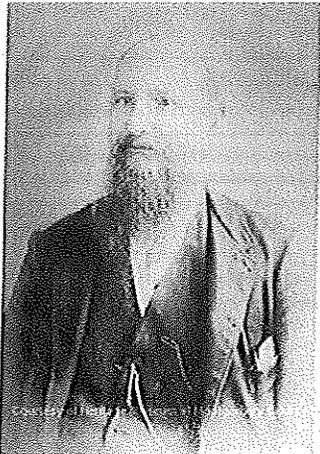


*Railroad Surveying Crew circa 1870*

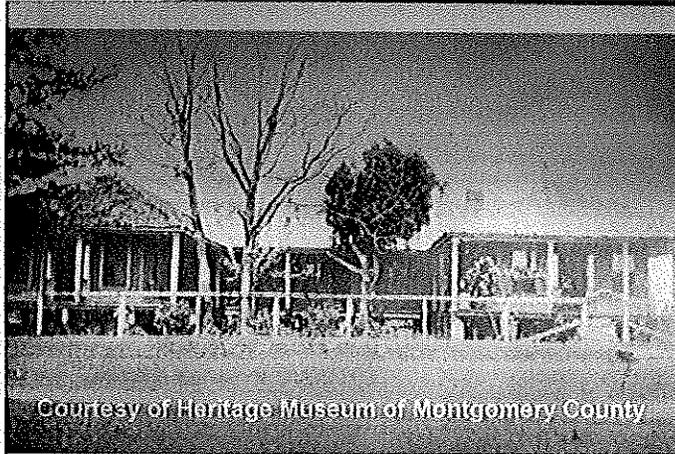
**1870:** Willis, named for pioneer merchant Peter J. Willis from Galveston and before that Montgomery, is founded on his donated land known as “Mocking Bird Hill,” and grows into a leading town in the county when the International and Great Northern Railroad (part of today’s Missouri Pacific Railroad system) is completed in 1872 as the first railroad in the county. As Danville and Old Waverly residents did not want the railroad in their communities, most of the businesses and residents from Danville and some from Old Waverly move to the new town as the

new railroad by-passes these towns. Sidney L. Inglet of Danville builds the first house in Willis, used as a boarding house for railroad men. (Years later First State Bank is located on this site.)

**1872:** Dr. William P. Powell, a Confederate veteran in Hood's Texas Brigade who was wounded several times during the Civil War, builds his home at Wood and Stewart Street in Willis where 6 of his 12 children are born. He uses the 13-room house for his office and a make-shift hospital. Sidney L. Inglet is the home builder. (It is later purchased in 1946 by Justice of the Peace R.M. Jordy where he performed 119 weddings over the years.) Dr. Powell is the first to own a motorized buggy in Montgomery County and the first to own a motor car, a Maxwell. He also invented a bandage truss for a hernia and a flexible rubber tube stethoscope.



*D. W. P. Powell*



*Dr. Powell's home circa 1910*

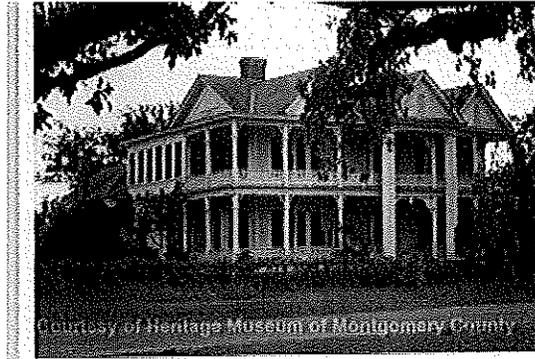
**1872:** Dr. Samuel Dunbar Wooldridge moves his medical practice from Danville to the new community of Willis.

**1872:** A white Baptist church is organized in Willis, as the I&GN rail line extends through the community and residents of Danville and the residents of Waverly begin to move to the new Willis community. (It is reported that the first Willis newspaper was *The Willis Enterprise*, operated by M. P. Daniel who later moved to Dayton and had a son, future Governor Price Daniel.)



*M. P. Daniel*

**1872:** Captain Thomas Wesley Smith, a merchant, county sheriff (at 21) and a captain in the Confederate Army, builds a magnificent home in Willis (later known as the “Old Crawford House”) and later builds an Opera House in Willis. The Smith house is built by Willis pioneer builder, Sidney L. Inglet, who at age 38, on September 11 of that year marries 20-year old Sally Caperton and they settle in Willis. (The Smith home burns down in 1964.)



*Capt. T W Smith home built in 1872*

**June 19, 1872:** Notorious Texas outlaw John Wesley Hardin and local resident Duane Murchison are involved in a gun-fight in the streets of Willis. Reportedly Murchison outdraws Hardin and seriously wounds him in the side, but Hardin escapes.

**July 11, 1872:** Church of Christ preacher Daniel Lipscomb travels to the new Willis community on the Great Northern and International Railroad, and proceeds to Montgomery, then a town of about 500 or 600 inhabitants. He notes in his book entitled *Daniel Lipscomb, a Journalist of Texas, 1872, and Guiding Light to Church of Christ Congregations*, that Texans have a habit of carrying and using pistols and not uncommonly took the law into their own hands.

**September 9, 1872:** John E. George is appointed the first postmaster of a Willis post office which is established that year.

**September 7, 1874:** As Willis is thriving and is now the geographic center of the Montgomery County, a county election is held to move the county seat from Montgomery to Willis. Willis wins by 142 votes (788 votes to 646), but presiding justice, E. A. Linton, declares that Willis does not have the two-thirds majority necessary to carry the election and therefore certifies that the county seat will remain in Montgomery. Three county justices issue a fake certificate ordering the county seat to be moved to Willis. Heated arguments follow and litigation between Montgomery and Willis ensues before the Texas Supreme Court in Galveston.

**September 14, 1874:** Some of the county records are moved to Willis.

**September 30, 1874:** Some of the county officials from Willis meet at the new location in Willis with some stolen records, since Montgomery refuses to give them up. The Montgomery

County commissioners vote to proceed with the construction of a 50 foot by 50 foot 2-story courthouse in Willis.

**November 2, 1874:** Map of the Town of Willis is filed of record with the county clerk by I & G N Railroad [Vol. 1, Page 1B of the Map Records of Montgomery County]

**December 30, 1874:** One of the first trains reportedly rolls through Willis on the new section of the International and Great Northern Railroad from Houston to Palestine, Texas.

**1875:** The San Jacinto Masonic Lodge No. 106 is moved from Danville to Willis, as more and more businesses move to the railroad town of Willis; and Danville slowly fades eventually into a ghost town.

**January 29, 1875:** The Texas Legislature passes a special Act drafted by Charles B. Stewart to designate that the district and county courts will be held in the town of Montgomery that year, and all the records are ordered to be moved back to Montgomery. (Records indicate that Dr. Stewart's address at that time was Danville, and he represented Montgomery and Harris Counties.)

**April 15, 1875:** The county records are moved back to Montgomery from Willis.

**April 20, 1875:** The *Willis Observer*, a newspaper in the town, advertises that a new Grange store is opening, which would be a great benefit to the farmers. The store is under the management of Col. Israel Worsham, operating in the building occupied by F. J. Williams.

**May 1875:** The Commissioners Court disregards the Act of the Texas Legislature and continues to hold its sessions in Willis.

**June 16, 1875:** According to the Titusville, Pennsylvania newspaper, on Wednesday night five masked men attempt unsuccessfully to rob the office of the Texas Express Company at the Willis station on the main line of the International & Great Northern Railway. Four are captured, including George Ellsworth, a civil war telegraph operator originally from St Louis.

**August 24, 1875:** The *Willis Observer* publishes its first issue in Willis.

**1877:** The Willis African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Church is organized on African Hill north of Willis.

**March 3, 1877:** The ongoing dispute about the proper town for the county seat continues. County Judge J. M. Lewis orders the county seat moved to Willis.

**March 12, 1877:** County court declares the decision of County Judge J. M. Lewis to be illegal.

**October 17, 1877:** Land is conveyed by the Texas Land Company for the Methodist Church in Willis.

**1878:** The Texas Supreme Court in Galveston finally rules in favor of Montgomery as the county seat, thereby ending Willis' claim to the county seat.

**1878:** Willis possesses the largest stave, lumber and shingle-manufacturing complex in the state of Texas. Supplementing this is agricultural implement and wagon manufacturing, two cotton gins, two sawmills, a broom factory, grist mills, brickyards, and numerous grocery and dry-goods stores.

**April 2, 1880:** Montgomery wins in a new election to determine the county seat, beating Willis 1308 votes to 1243 votes. Both communities solicited every possible vote to win the election, including Negro sawmill workers who would otherwise be discouraged from voting.

**1881:** The Willis Male and Female College is built by Sidney L. Inglet but does not open until 1885. The college consisted of three buildings: the main 3-story building with an auditorium on the second floor, the dining room and the kitchen. It took a few years before Mr. Inglet was paid, which may explain why it did not open until 1885.

**1882:** Black children in Willis are offered a free public education by white citizens Mr. Witherspoon and Mr. Acres in the Methodist Church.

**1883:** The Antioch Missionary Baptist Church of Willis is organized, near the site of the former J.S. Hunt Lumber Company. Rev. Jimmy Johnson serves as the first pastor.

**1884:** Willis boasts several steam-powered sawmill and grist mills, two cotton gins, a brickyard, a saloon and gambling house, a Grange hall, numerous grocery and dry goods stores, various schools and churches with a population of 600.



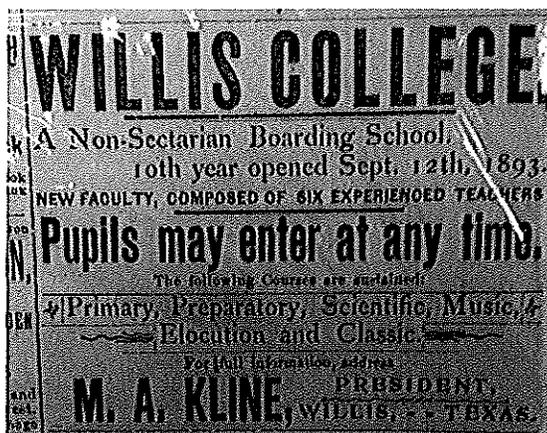
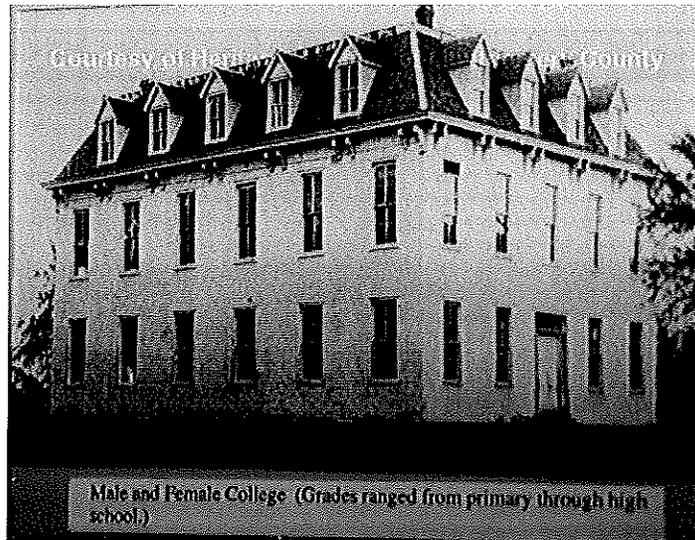
*Mules hauling sawmill logs*

**April 24, 1884:** The Sweatt's Progress Order of the Eastern Star of Willis, Texas is organized as a black Christian women's fraternal organization with Mrs. Ada Barnes as worthy matron.

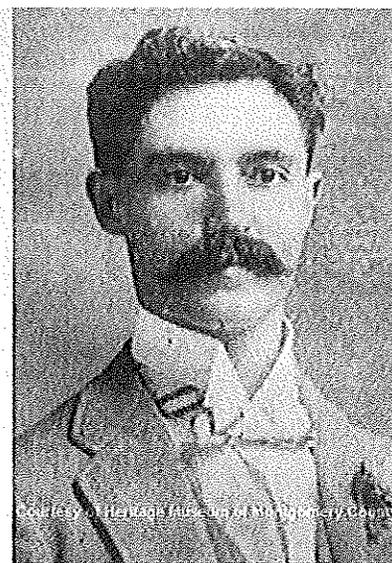
**August 1, 1885:** The private Willis Male and Female College opens with 3 buildings and at one time up to 250 students boarding on the campus and in nearby homes. The courses provided by the college were science, literature, mathematics, history, ancient languages, vocal and instrumental music, art and physical culture. Rev. S.N. Barker (the administrator), N.A. Cravens, Jr., and M.H. Barker served on the board of directors.

**March 16, 1886:** By 1886 Willis has the requisite number of inhabitants to incorporate as a town. Upon a petition of 49 residents asking for an election to incorporate the town, the County Judge calls an election to be held at the Market House of R. B. Roach. The citizens of Willis by a majority of 14 barely vote against incorporation of Willis.

**March 30, 1886:** A charter is signed for establishing the three-story Male and Female College in Willis which was opened in 1885.



*Willis College Ad in Willis Index (1894)*



*D. A. Franks, Principal in 1900*

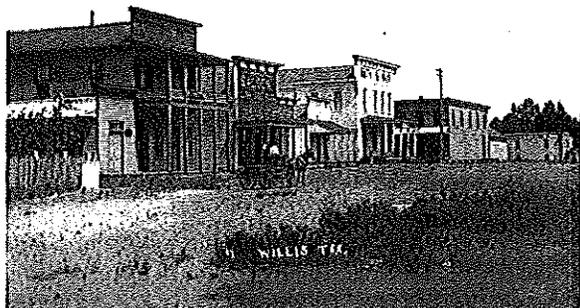
**1888:** The first Church of Christ is established in Willis.

**1889:** By now the first black school is built in Willis where the Masonic Hall stands today. It is a two-room structure with Mr. Terry serving as its first principal.

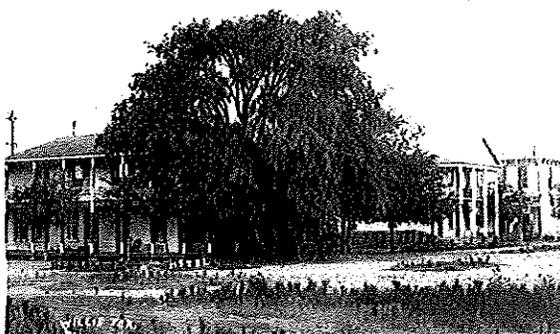
**March 15, 1889:** Through the instigation of the citizens in Willis, Captain James K. (Jim) Ayres and 200 other citizens petition the Commissioners Court in Montgomery to hold an election to move the county seat to Conroe. The old two-story courthouse in Montgomery is a 20-year old worn building, fifty foot by fifty foot, with a hall separating 2 rooms on each side down stairs and a courtroom upstairs. The jail in Montgomery is 5 years old and inadequate. At the time the unincorporated town of Conroe has one hotel, the Fisher Hotel, a small post office of which Captain Isaac Conroe is the postmaster, a small general mercantile store, two saloons, a planing mill, and a few small dwellings.

**May 6, 1889:** An election is held for the purpose of moving the county seat from Montgomery to Conroe, the results being 1161 votes for Conroe and 1099 for Montgomery. Conroe wins the election as the new county seat by the combined votes of Willis, Conroe and the sawmill community of Leonidas west of Conroe. (Willis citizens' vengeance is finally satisfied.)

**1890:** Willis has a population of 700, 3 hotels, and a second weekly newspaper, the *Willis Index*, reportedly published by a man named "Judge" N.A. Cravens.



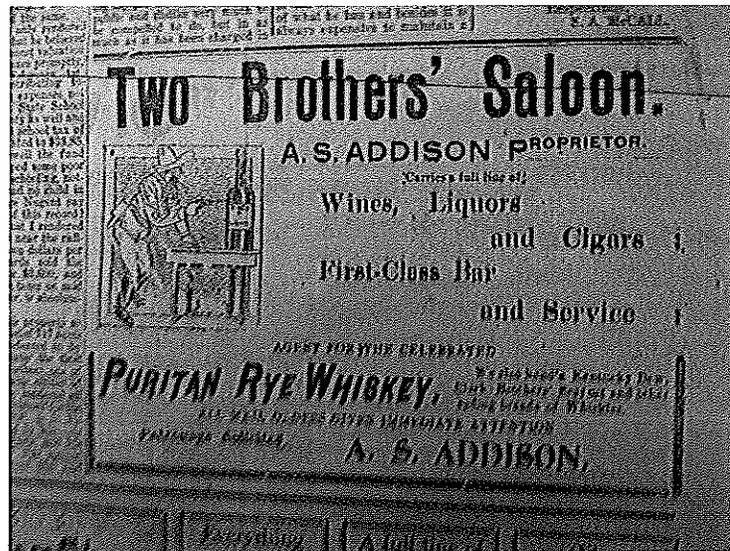
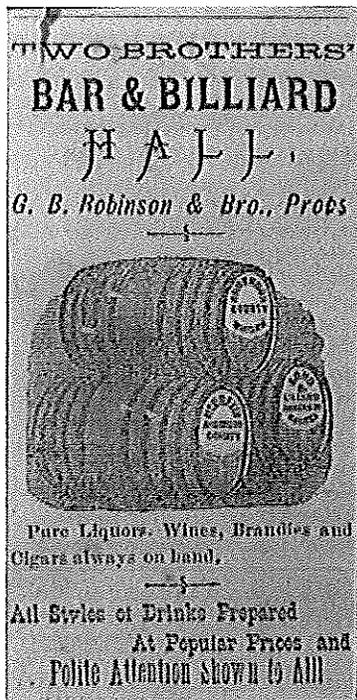
*Downtown Willis circa 1890*



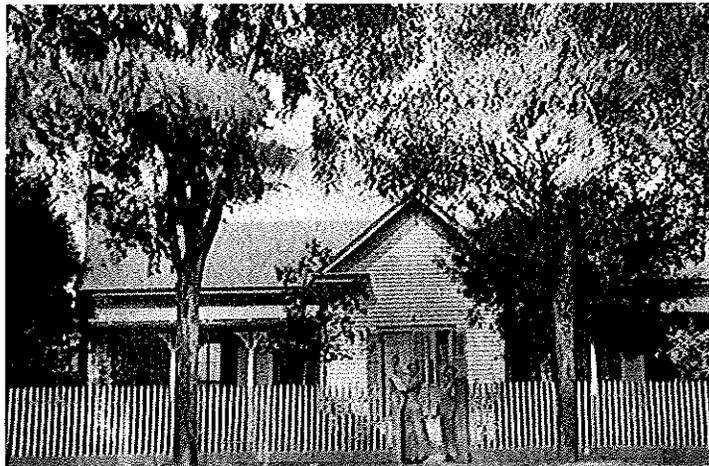
*Willis Hotel on Montgomery St circa 1900*

**May 18, 1890:** Dr. Samuel Dunbar Wooldridge, noted Danville and Willis physician, Master Mason, and captain of the Danville Mounted Riflemen, dies and is buried in the Willis Cemetery.

**1891:** G. B. Robinson, who along with his brother operates a successful "Two Brothers" saloon and mercantile business in Willis, relinquishes his ownership in the saloon to marry the love of his life. They live on Danville Street in Willis.



*Two Brothers' Saloon Ads before and after G. B. Robinson sells his saloon to get married*



*G. B. Robinson House on Danville Street circa 1900*

**1891:** John Blum begins growing cigar tobacco in Willis, followed by Owen Smith, and then the Carson-Morris Company, which eventually led to 1500 acres of Cuban “Vuelta Abago” tobacco being farmed in the Willis area and shipped to eastern markets. Willis continues to prosper and eventually becomes the second largest town in the county.

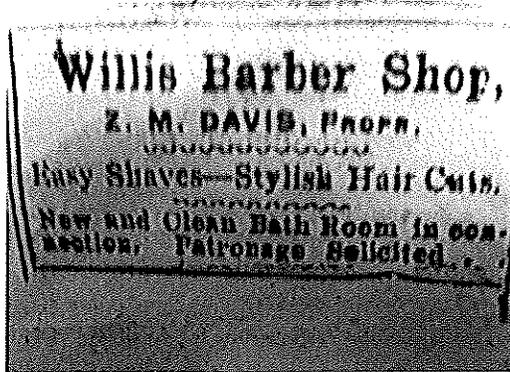
**1893:** Tobacco grown near Willis wins first prize at Colombian World’s Expo in Chicago.

**August 1893:** The Hymen brothers, who own the Coletown Lumber Company, contract their sawmill and planer for the entire output of the Coletown sawmill.

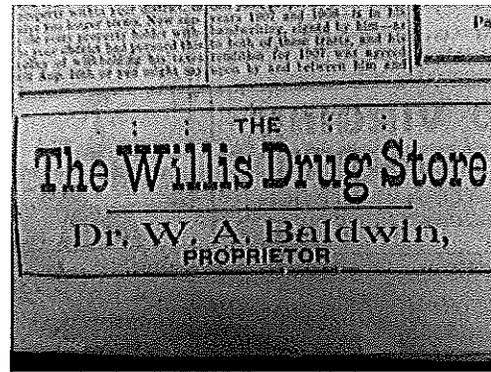
**October 20, 1893:** The first edition of the *Willis Index* reports on the newly opened Willis opera house, “an attractive public hall and Thespian temple,” located in the Caldwell Building on the “Texas Montgomery Greys” veterans’ organization.

**July 13, 1894:** The *Willis Index* newspaper, published every Friday by editor and proprietor N.A. Cravens, chronicles the Democratic county convention delegates elected from Willis (11), Union Grove (1), Tillis (4), Montgomery (9), Longstreet (1), Halton (1), New Caney (1), McRae (1), Bobbin (2), Conroe (11) and Brantley (3). There was one representative for every 25 votes cast in the presidential election.

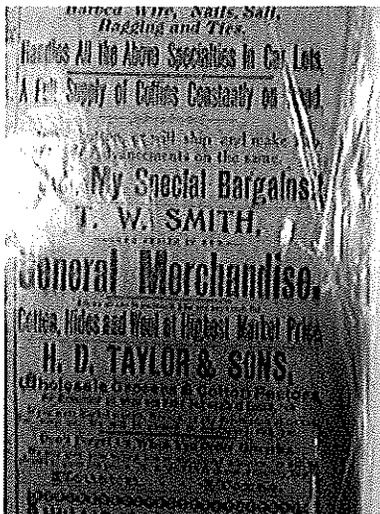
**July 13, 1894:** The *Willis Index* reflects the sentiment of most men at the turn of the century who oppose women’s suffrage with this tongue-in-cheek observation: “The opponents of the women’s rights movements contend that, at the time of her creation, woman was only a side issue.” In the same issue, the derisive observation is made: “The best tempered women in the world are Quakeresses. They don’t go about howling and gnashing their teeth (which might fall out,) but set a good example and make everybody about them comfortable if not happy.”



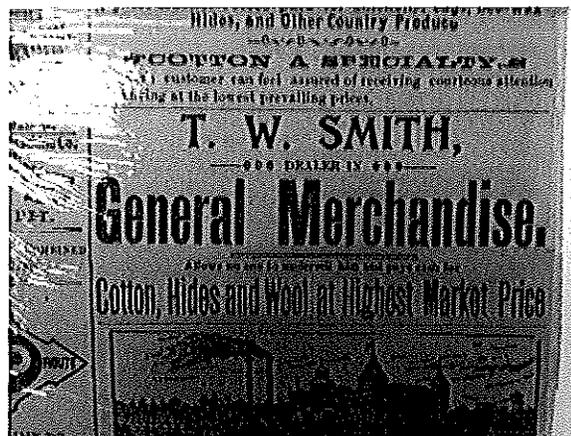
*Willis Index Ad (1894)*



*Willis Index Ad (1894)*

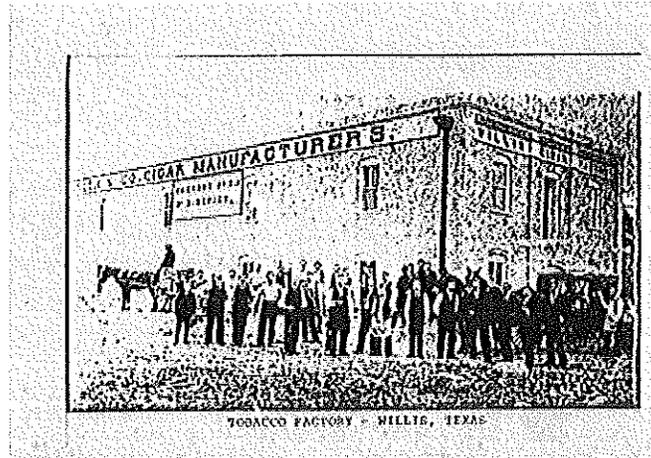


*T. W. Smith Mercantile Ad (1894)*



*T. W. Smith Mercantile Ad \*1894)*

**1895:** The tobacco industry flourishes in Willis. Willis becomes a much advertised town in the late 1890's because of the tobacco industry, encouraged by Capt. T. W. Smith and his son Owen, who own a large tobacco plantation and who build the first brick cigar factory.



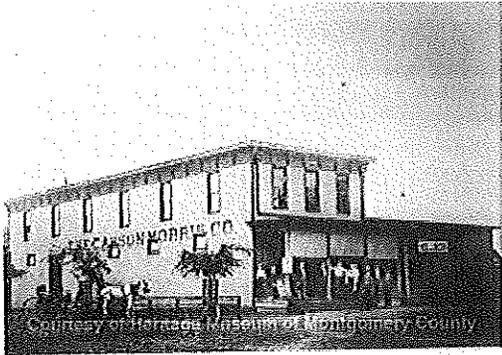
**November 1, 1895:** Willis has seven cigar factories.



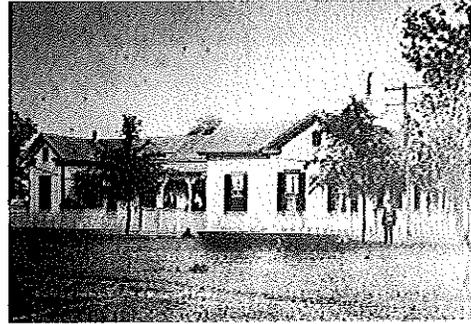
*Willis Tobacco Fields circa 1895*

**November 6, 1896:** The *Willis Index* newspaper editor N. A. Cravens celebrates the Democratic Party victories in state and local elections with the demise of the post-Civil War reconstruction Republican Party: "If any man feels better over the glorious victory won by the democratic party in Texas and Montgomery county than our editor does, please trot him out and let us take a look at him."

**May 1898:** The Carson, Morris Company, chartered in West Virginia, sells to the Carson, Morris Company of Texas (A.M. Carson, secretary; A. W. Morris, president) its sawmill in Willis for \$15,000. The firm gradually becomes a wholesaler or commission lumber merchant at Willis. Its large store is located on Danville Street where Francis Meador later operates his Humble Service Station (corner of Danville Street and FM 1097).

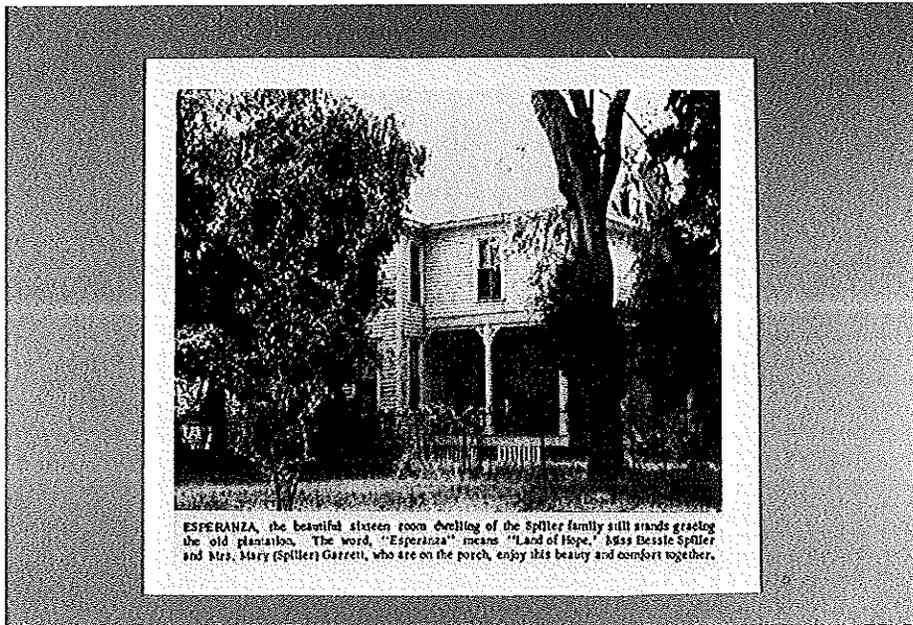


*Carson-Morris Co store circa 1900*



*A.M. Carson home on Danville c. 1915*

**1899:** The settlement of Ada is renamed named “Esperanza” (Spanish for *hope*) by William F. Spiller, who owns a tobacco farm known as “Esperanza Plantation” in the area with a partner, Col Openheimer. Spiller builds a 16-room mansion in the Virginia style on what today is Esperanza Road just off Highway U. S. 75. Esperanza has a post office, a store, a doctor’s office, a dental office, a cotton gin, a smoke house, a hen house, a barn and the Spiller’s new home with 10 fireplaces and a tin roof. The town never thrives and by 1940, the town of Esperanza has only 2 churches, 2 businesses and eight buildings.



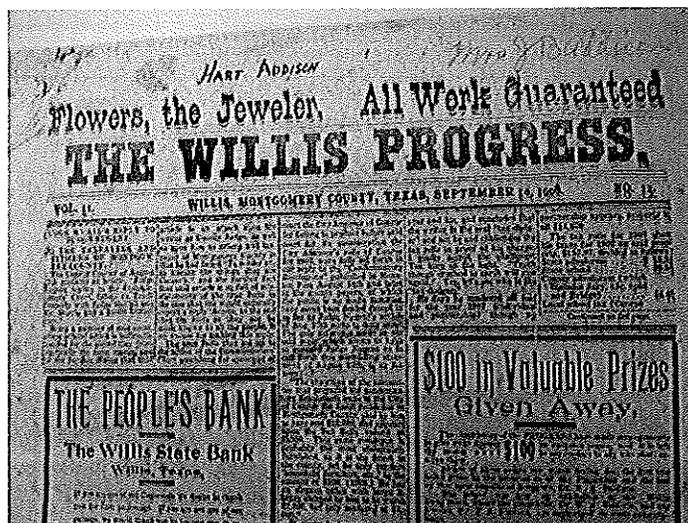
**1900:** Tobacco grown near Willis wins first prize at the World Fair in Paris, France. At the peak of its tobacco boom, Willis has 7 cigar factories in operation to supply eastern buyers, several businesses and an opera house. Willis is the center of Texas tobacco growing, with 90 per cent of Texas tobacco growing within five miles of town. (When the Cuban tobacco tariff is lifted, the tobacco business in Willis disappears. By 1901, there are only 70 acres of tobacco raised as truck farming of a variety of vegetables and fruit replaces tobacco as the main crop. The main market is nearby Houston.)

**1900:** About this time, an elephant from Mollie Bailey's Circus breaks through a rickety wooden bridge as the circus was being moved down the road from Willis to Montgomery. The whole countryside turned out to give advice on how to get the elephant out of a muddy creek.

**1900:** By the turn of the century, Hampton Mitchell, born to slaves in Georgia, has purchased 300 acres in the community that comes to be known as Mt. Zion, where he donates land to his children and land for Mt. Zion First Baptist Church, Mt. Zion Missionary Baptist, and the Mt Zion Cemetery. Cotton farming is the chief way of making a living along with vegetable gardens.

**1901:** With the decline of the Willis Male and Female College, the school administrator, Professor F. P. Crow decides to sell the building and equipment to the citizens of Willis for a public school.

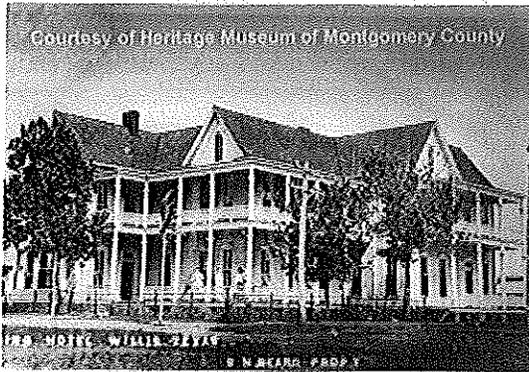
**May 1903:** The *Willis Progress* is published.



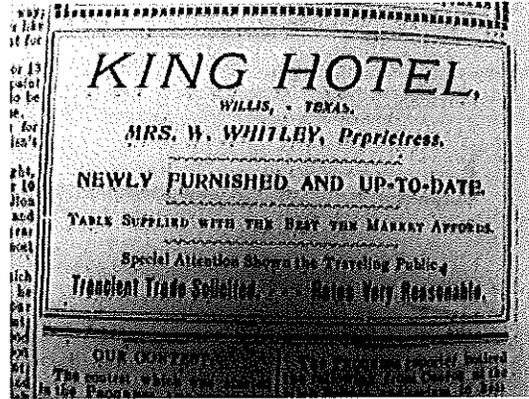
*Willis Progress (Sept 1908)*

**September 10, 1906:** Public school is opened in the old formerly-private Male and Female College in Willis. This is the beginning of the Willis ISD.

**September 10, 1908:** The *Willis Progress* (Vol. II, Issue 12), a local newspaper that operates for a few years, features ads from the Willis State Bank and the Banks, Griffin & Son, Bankers. It also features an ad from Mrs. Clara Madeley's Captol (sic) Hotel at rates of \$1.90 per day and the Willis Barber Shop owned by Z. M. Davis.



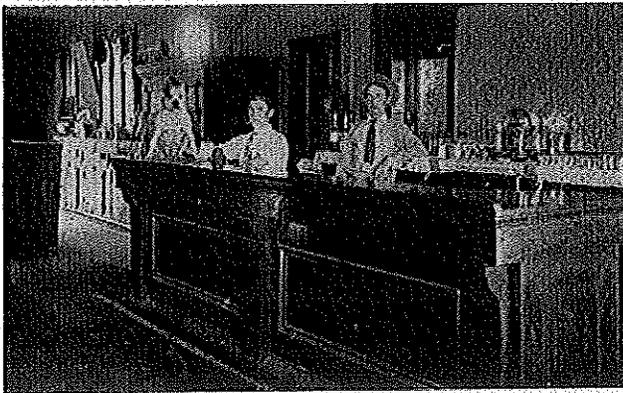
*King Hotel in Willis on Montgomery St*



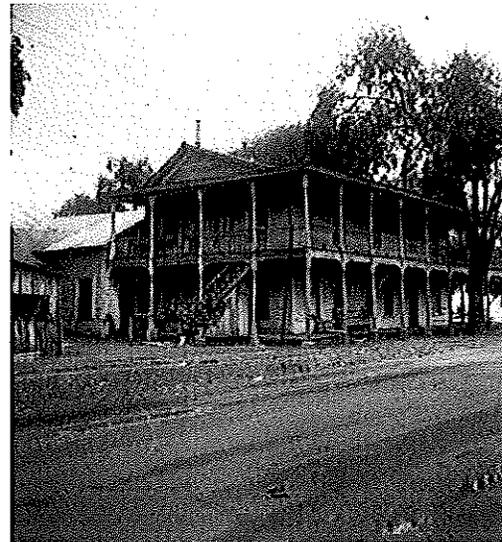
*King Hotel ad in Willis Progress (1908)*

**1910:** Gold and silver coins from the Willis bank robbery that year were never recovered until they are discovered below a tree along Highway 75 in November 1941.

**1911:** The Willis State Bank is established, reportedly built on the site of a railroad boarding house which was the first building built by Sidney L. Inglet 40 years before.



*Willis Saloon with Billy Wilson & L P Paddock (c. 1910)*

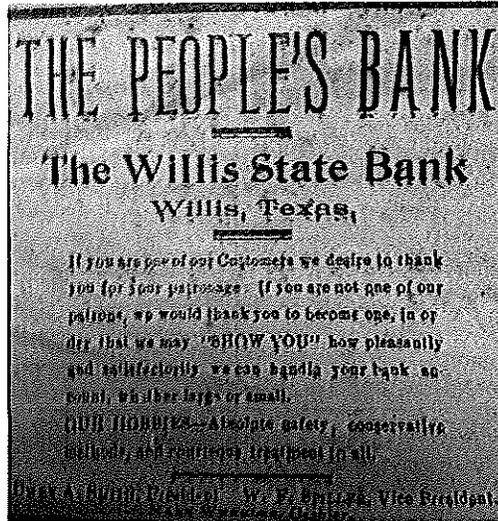


*Wooldridge Boarding House (c. 1910)*

**July 22, 1911:** Montgomery County votes for the controversial State prohibition of alcoholic beverages by a vote of 803 to 723. Willis had the largest voter turnout, followed by Montgomery and then Conroe. Other county voting boxes were at Union Grove, Pinehurst, Longstreet, Haltom, New Caney, McRea, Bobbin, Brantley, Walker, Oklahoma, Arnold, Splendora, Fostoria and Magnolia. The “drys” win state-wide.

**July 28, 1911:** Professional baseball is featured in every issue of the *Conroe Courier*, and it reports on the games between local baseball teams in Conroe, Willis and around the county.

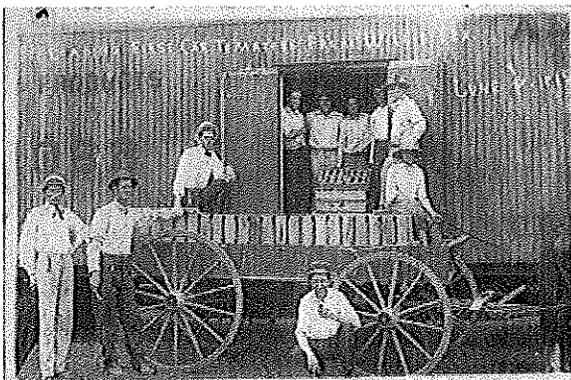
**September 15, 1911:** First State Bank of Conroe reports in the *Conroe Courier* that on September 1 it has \$19,154.9 in resources while Willis Bank reports it has \$48,752.42 in resources.



*Willis Progress Ad (Sept 1908)*

**November 1-4, 1911:** The Montgomery County Fair Association holds its 2<sup>nd</sup> annual County Fair in Willis on a 20-acre tract enclosed by a high board fence. There is a half-mile race tract, a 30' x 100' exhibition hall, a large tent for poultry, and an ample supply of stalls for horses, hogs and cattle. The newly organized Conroe Brass Band provides the entertainment. The National Shows and Carnival Co. provides a carnival with a Ferris wheel. Even a "Curtis bi-plane aeroplane" is booked for one flight and for exhibition. The 2<sup>nd</sup> day of the Fair celebrates "Montgomery Day" and "Confederate Veterans Day." The 3<sup>rd</sup> day celebrates "Conroe Day," and the 4<sup>th</sup> day celebrates "Willis Day" and "Good Roads Day."

**1915:** With tobacco farming gone after the embargo on Cuban tobacco is lifted by the United States, other agricultural products are grown on the farms near Willis which are transported to the Houston market. Cotton and vegetables are among the crops grown locally.



*Loading tomatoes on train circa 1915 at Willis depot*

**1913:** While the city of Houston has almost 111 miles of paved streets as automobiles quickly fill the city streets, Montgomery County has no paved city streets.

**1914:** Another Willis newspaper appears—the *Willis Star*; and the town has a telephone exchange in operation.

**December 20, 1916:** Judge Elkins from Huntsville (founding partner of Vinson and Elkins law firm in Houston) and Leo C. Cooper come to Willis to start a new bank with only \$49,000 in deposits. Cooper is the cashier and only 20 years old at the time.

**1918:** Montgomery County communities suffer from the worldwide flu epidemic that kills many people.

**1920:** Born a slave in 1861, Ned Eastman Barnes of Willis is considered one of the greatest inventors of his time with inventions that serve railroads to this day. He and his wife Ada Johnson Barnes live in a finely furnished home in Willis.

**1925:** H.C. Calfee, from a family long connected with sawmilling in Willis, builds a sawmill in Leonidas.



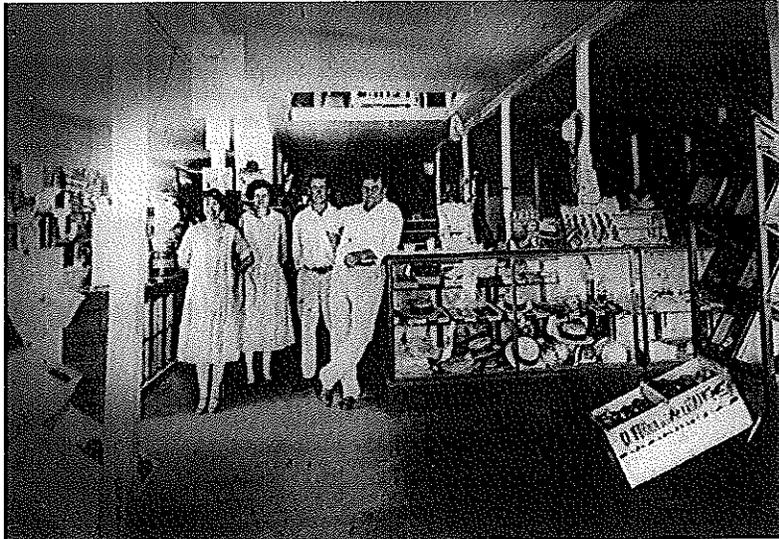
*Homer and Delphia Calfee plowing circa 1900*

**February 6, 1925:** The *Conroe Courier* reports that the City of Willis is to be served by electricity from a line from the Western Public Service central station in Conroe. A total of 61 Willis citizens reportedly have signed applications for the service.

**1926:** Willis students can ride a bus to school from the fleet of Model T. Ford school busses.

**1926:** Willis wranglers (including 14 year-old Dick Calfee) drive 400 head of cattle from Willis through downtown Houston in 24 hours, meeting one car between Spring Creek and Houston.

**May 1926:** Russ Clanton graduates salutatorian from Willis High School, and his brother Irvin graduates valedictorian. Born in Esperanza north of Willis to share-croppers, Russ Clanton becomes one of the most beloved businessmen and civic leaders in Conroe.



*Thomason Store on Danville St with Russ Clanton (1930)*

**October 29, 1929:** The Wall Street stock market crashes, leading to the Great Depression throughout Texas and the U.S. Montgomery County's economy—supported primarily by timber and agriculture—declines and comes to a virtual halt by 1931. Many unemployed men look for work in Conroe and Willis, and knock on doors asking for food.

**1932:** State Highway 75 is designated to be built between Galveston and Dallas to replace State Highway 13A which was the route to Amarillo. State Highway 75 north of Dallas turns into U.S. 75.

**1933:** Charlie Johnson, a local Willis businessman, opens his Chevrolet dealership and operates it for 26 years until 1959. (In 1955 he sold 702 new cars, more than any other Chevrolet dealer in Texas had ever sold. Today the dealership building is home to the Turner Wise Hardware Store.)

**1934:** By now State Highway 75 has extended through Willis and the town experiences a growth in population to 900 as the timber and agricultural industries begin to revive. Highway 75 is merely a shell road from Spring Creek to Houston running over creek bridges. (Old county settlers recall when a one-lane dirt road called "Highway 17" ran north from Houston through Conroe and Willis, and on to Dallas in the early 1900's.)

**1936:** Janie Westmoreland Stubblefield begins teaching in Willis ISD in 1936, retiring in 1973 after serving in many capacities over the years. (Willis ISD has honored her by naming its alternative school the Janie W. Stubblefield Alternative School.)

**1937:** Willis is incorporated. Leo C. Cooper serves as one of its first council members.



*Old Willis City Hall*

**1939:** The Willis High School building on Rogers Street is completed. It is built where the old Willis Male and Female College once stood. (Today it serves as the Cargill Education Support Center.)

**1942:** As the country goes to war, Montgomery County citizens join the war effort with scrap rubber and aluminum drives, war bond drives, blackouts and test drills, first aid training and rationing of food, gasoline and other commodities.



*Danville Street circa 1942*



*Danville Street circa 1942*

**June 1946:** Mr. C. C. "Cliff" Hardy becomes the Willis ISD Superintendent after joining the faculty of WISD in September 1942 as a vocational agriculture teacher.

**June 1954:** J. A. "Jack" Parker Lumber Company sells his complete sawmill and equipment in Willis for \$10 to Robert Brabham. (In February 1956, Brabham sells it back to the J.A. Parker Lumber Company. Brabham later reassumes ownership of the old sawmill in east Willis.)

**September 1956:** Willis's new black school is open for formal classes. It is named for its principal, A. R. Turner. The twelve-room brick building is completed at a cost of \$784,680 and replaces a seven-room wooden structure.

**November 21, 1957:** Formal opening of the bridge over the San Jacinto River on Interstate Highway 45, thereby opening up more residential and business opportunities in Willis and Montgomery County.

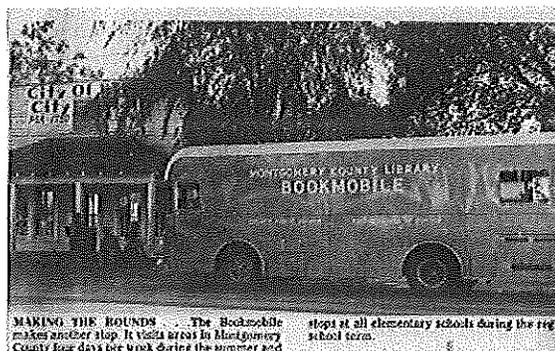
**1958:** Natural gas pipelines are extended by Moran Utilities Company to Willis.

**1960:** San Jacinto River Authority Board of Directors select the Lake Conroe reservoir site and approve land procurement. The City of Houston and the SJRA enter into contracts for the design, operation and ownership of the dam, with the City owning 2/3's ownership in the water rights. (The original site was selected by the Federal Bureau of Reclamation and was just below the confluence of Lake Creek and the San Jacinto River, several miles below the site finally selected. Reportedly politics moved the site north to its present location, even though Lake Creek always had a serious flooding problem.)

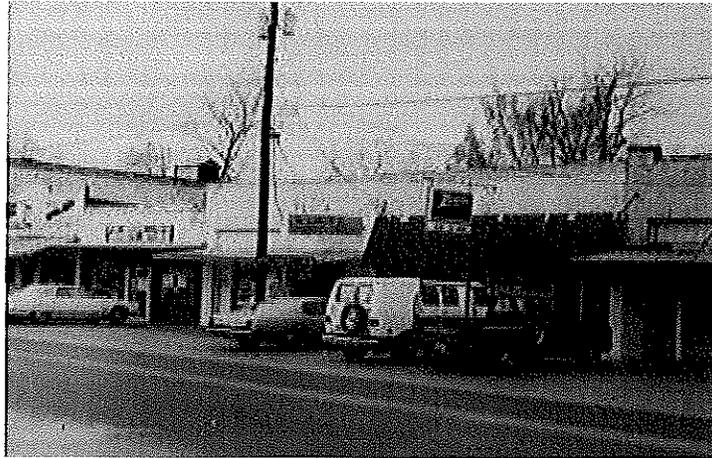
**1964:** Interstate Highway 45 is completed into Montgomery County.

**1970:** Residents of Willis celebrate the 100<sup>th</sup> birthday of the City of Willis.

**1972:** With no local library, the Montgomery County Library Bookmobile stops at Willis schools.



**October 1973:** Ten months after the Lake Conroe Dam is completed, the Lake has completely filled. Total project cost for Lake Conroe is \$30,000,000.



*Downtown Willis on Danville Street circa 1975*

**1981:** Willis ISD has 1850 students enrolled at four campuses.

**1996:** Voters in Willis ISD and Splendora ISD approve joining the North Harris Montgomery County College System.

**2000:** Willis' population is estimated at 3985.

**May 8, 2008:** The voters of the City of Willis approve a Home-Rule City Charter.

**October 2011:** Willis mayor Leonard Reed becomes the 2011-2012 president of the Texas Municipal League, the highest honor attributed to a Texas city mayor by that organization.

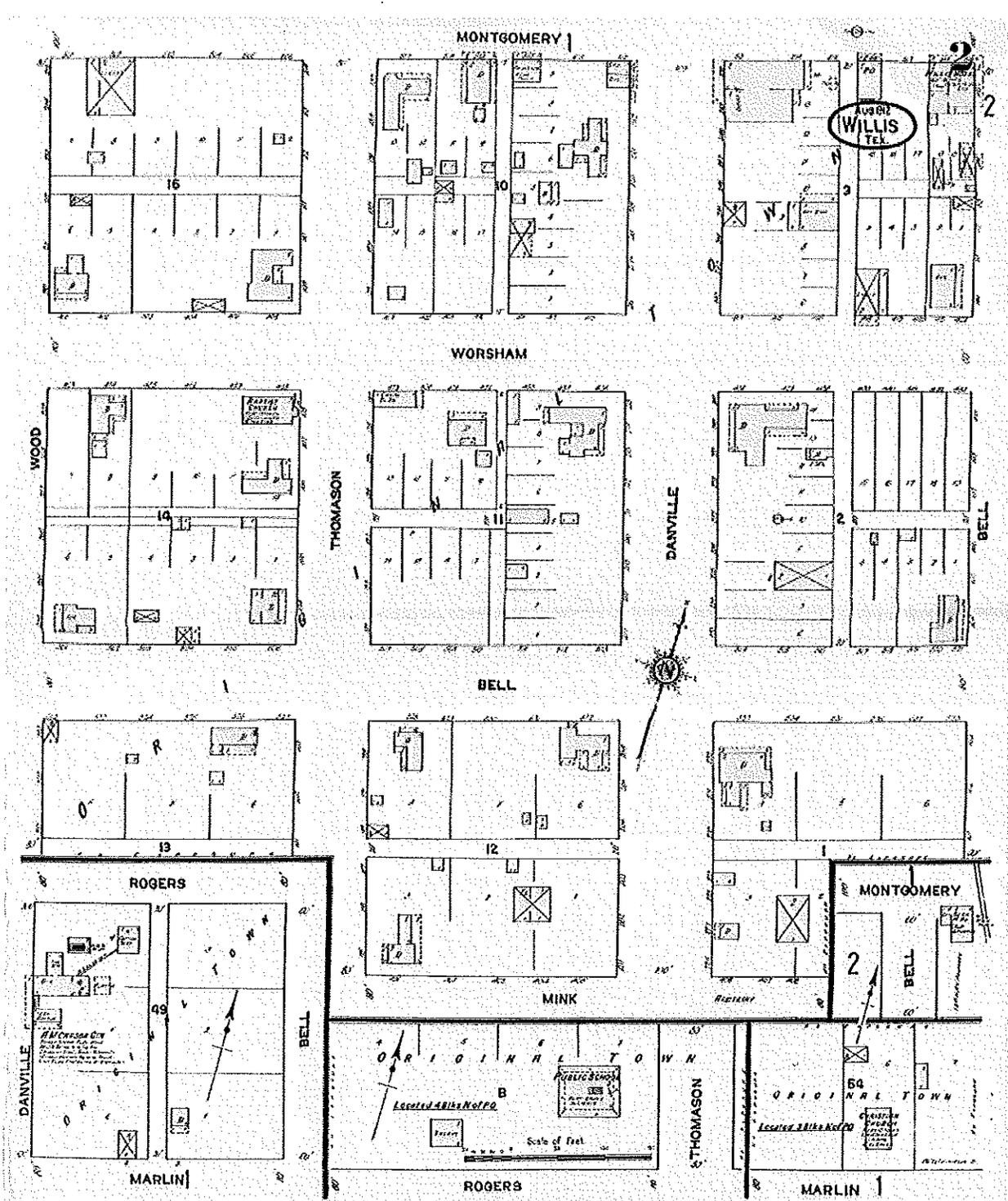
**May 2012:** The *Ten Ninety Seven*, a monthly newspaper for the Willis community publishes its premier issue. It is the only local newspaper for Willis.

**August 18, 2012:** The Thomas Chapel United Methodist Church celebrates its 145<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Organized before Willis was founded, this Afro-American congregation has continuously worshiped in the city since 1867, making it the oldest church in Willis and one of the very oldest in Montgomery County.

By: Larry L. Foerster, Chairman  
Montgomery County Historical Commission

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