

# RECOLLECTIONS OF A PIONEER OF 1854

Autobiography of Mannen Willis

Written in 1908

Courtesy of Janelle Jackson JloreneJ@aol.com

Mannen Willis was born Sunday morning, May 21, 1839, six miles north of Warsaw, on what was then known as the Georgetown Road, Benton County, Missouri.

In view of the shortness of life, and the certainty that I shall not be here always, I write these few lines and dedicate them to my son, Austin George Willis, that he may not at some time in his life be left alone without any certain knowledge of his progenitors, and giving something of the history of my family, and a few of the incidents in my life.

The first thing I remember, going back to memories, for I shall be obliged to depend upon memory for most of the things I shall write; is lying across my mother's lap and gazing into her face. I suppose I was not more than a few months old. I remember quite distinctly how young and girlish she appeared at that time.

I do not think she was much more than nineteen years old, and I have often heard my mother say that I was born a year after their marriage. Among the next things that I remember distinctly is learning my letters from a piece of cardboard given me by my father's sister. This was before I went to school. The next clear recollection I have is the morning I started to school. Mother and father started me to school with a cousin by the name of Wiley Jones. I was four years old, and the distance being four miles. I became tired walking. I could not keep up. Of course my cousin hurried me a good deal, and once he attempted to punish me for not keeping up. He did not try this a second time, for I threw a stick and struck him across the nose. I remember the looks of the teacher and the children, and also the teacher's name. The teacher's name was Mr. Whiting. He was a rather good-looking man. Gray headed and wore glasses. I think he was a good man, at any rate he ought to have been a good man, for he was a Methodist preacher. I think school was in session when we arrived there. I shall never forget how bashful and scared I was when I went in, and how kind the teacher was, and showed me a seat and asked me my name. I suppose my life in school was about the same as that of every little boy in his first three months of school.

I suppose a brief description of the schoolhouse would not be out of place, as it would perhaps give a general idea of the schoolhouses in the West and Middle West at that time. I think the house was about 16 X 24 feet and was built of oak logs 8 or 10 inches in diameter, and hewn down inside and outside. The spaces between the logs being filled with split chinks and daubed with clay. For windows a single lot was cut out on the north and south sides for a space of about six feet, with a rough sash with panes of glass to admit the light. The house was covered with split boards or shakes, for a roof. The floor was made of split logs, hewn smooth and fitted down so as to make it comparatively smooth. This house had a huge fireplace, taking up perhaps one third of one end of the house. The chimney was built up of sticks and clay. The seats were made of split logs, hewn smooth, with four pins, two at each end of the logs. A long slab, procured at

some sawmill somewhere, was fastened up against the side of the house directly under the windows. This served as a writing desk for the children. I do not remember that the teacher had any table, or even a chair to sit on. There was no such thing as a blackboard or map or chart. There was no bell to call us to our studies, and even steel pens, that we prize so much now, were unknown or almost unknown. When the teacher wished to call us to our studies he simply called out "Books, Books, Books!" You will perhaps wonder how we ever learned to write. We were all supplied with slates and pencils and the teacher made pens for us of goose quills.

Foolscap paper and Congress letter paper, and notepaper were just as good then and just as cheap as it is at the present time. I attended school in three different schoolhouses in as many districts up to the time I was fifteen years old.

They were all about the same distance from our house. The second school I attended was known as the Spring Grove School and was taught by a man named Mr. John Satterwhite. The books we used in the schools at that time consisted of Webster's Elementary Spelling Book and Dictionary, McGuffey's Readers, Curkham Grammar, Smiley's and Ray's Arithmetic. The teacher set the copy in penmanship. School continued from three to six months a year. School funds did not amount to much at that time, patrons paying the tuition. Attending so many different schools at different times gave me quite an extensive acquaintance among the children. The last teacher I went to while in Missouri was a young man about nineteen years of age named Mr. Kelley. This young man had the reputation of being something of a scholar. Of course, about that, I do not know; but one thing I do know, he was a perfect tyrant. I did not have any trouble with him myself, for I seldom had any trouble with teachers, and I have seen him call pupils out into the middle of the floor before the whole school and whip them most unmercifully for very little reason. One girl I remember very well was eighteen years old. She was learning to spell and was in the first part of the spelling book. She had never attended school before and it seemed hard for her to learn, and for that he punished her.

My father's farm, the place where I was born, and where I lived up to my fifteenth year, was six miles north of Warsaw, Benton County, Missouri. My Grandfather Willis, with his family lived on a small farm one mile due east of my father's farm. My father's farm consisted of 160 acres of land, composed partly of prairie and partly of timber. The house in which I was born was built of oak logs that had been hewn with a broad-ax in the woods and was 16 feet square, consisting of only one room. As I remember it, this was a rather neat house at that time. This house was situated in the timber. My father afterwards built a new house one quarter of a mile south of the old house. This new house was a two-roomed house with large brick chimneys at each end. This new house was considered a pretty good house. The spaces between the logs being filled with stone and mortar of lime. The rooms warmed by fireplaces by rolling in logs of oak and hickory wood. My father had two orchards on his farm, consisting of a great variety of apples, peaches and cherries. So you see, we were never without fruit of some kind. Besides, the woods were full of hickory nuts, walnuts and hazelnuts. Wild grapes grew in the greatest abundance all through the woods. My father raised all the crops common to that section of the country consisting of: corn, wheat, rye, cotton, potatoes and garden vegetables of every kind, particularly sweet potatoes.

My father engaged in stock raising to some extent, consisting of: horses, oxen, cattle, hogs and sheep. We also had turkeys, chickens and geese. For heavy teamwork my father used oxen. For cultivating crops he used horses. There was a great deal of outside range for stock, so that with the exception of perhaps three months in the year, stock lived on the range. Hogs lived almost entirely on nuts in the wood, called on the mash, they often got fat enough in the early winter to make bacon; however, the meat was not considered to be very good on account of being soft and oily. It was thought best to put the hogs in a pen and feed them a while on corn, so as to harden the meat. I shall never

forget the great smokehouse full of bacon that my father always had. Lard and bacon in those days often went as "legal tender". My father often paid men for working on the farm in lard and bacon. There were plenty of poor people just coming into the country who were glad of the opportunity to work for something that they could eat. Money was scarce at that time.

My mother always had something to sell in the line of eggs, butter and poultry. My mother sold butter at 6 ½ cents (a picayune) a pound, and eggs I think, at the same price. Chickens half grown, what we at the present time call fryers, were sold at from 50 cents to 75 cents a dozen. The feathers from the geese were used in making great feather beds. I think at that time southwest Missouri was a complete sportsman's paradise: prairie chickens, bobwhite quails, and wild turkeys. Wild pigeons were found in the greatest abundance, besides deer, squirrels and rabbits were very plentiful. My father was a great shot with the rifle, and often killed strings of squirrels and birds, besides turkeys and deer.

I used to have great fun trapping quails and prairie chickens. I used two or three different forms of traps. For prairie chickens I used traps built of corn stalks, built up in the form of a square house, covering the trap with stalks. For quails I made traps of split shakes or boards. To set the traps I used what is known as the figure four trigger: baiting the trap with corn or other grain. It required considerable caution and ingenuity in selecting a place for a trap, being sure never to leave feathers scattered around the trap from birds that had been captured in the trap. From three or four traps of an evening, I have often had about as many birds as I could carry home. After I was seven or eight years old, I learned to dress birds and salt them down in stone jars so I often had quite a lot for market, for which I very readily found sale at from 6 ½ cents to 12 ½ cents a dozen for quail.

Prairie chickens often sold for as much as 50 cents a dozen, and they were fine too, so fat, getting fat on the corn in the field in the fall and winter. There was a wild pigeon roost within about three miles of our house where thousands of pigeons roosted, smashing down the timber. I never went to the roost myself, but in the early fall and winter I could hear people passing our house at all hours in the night going and coming from the pigeon roost where they captured great loads of them, clubbing them with sticks and filling them into sacks. There was another little animal that I have not mentioned yet that was very numerous around the chicken roosts, that is the opossum. When speaking of the different kinds of wild fruit, I did not think to speak of the persimmon and pawpaw. The persimmon and grapes constituted a considerable part of the food of the opossum.

The opossum afforded great sport for some people, particularly the Negroes, for they were fond of them cooked up in some way with sweet potatoes.

I went hunting 'possum once with a Negro named old uncle Ned. The night was not favorable for 'possum, though we were out nearly all night we did not capture even a single one.

This brings me up to my fifteenth year. I do not think that I ought to stop here without giving a short sketch of our home life. In those days it meant something to bring up a family, particularly the size of my father's and mother's family. There were seven of us children, five girls and two boys, all to be fed and clothed. The oldest and youngest were boys.

The clothing of this family depended principally upon my mother. My mother had hand cards for carding cotton and wool, and spinning wheels and a great loom for weaving cloth to clothe the family, not to speak of the cutting and fitting and sewing incident to clothing so many, besides the knitting of stockings and mittens. My father and grandfather made our shoes, and good ones too, for with a little repairing, a pair of shoes was supposed to last one of us a year. As the girls grew up to be of some size, the older ones helped my mother about spinning and knitting. And occasionally, when too much crowded with work, she would hire a girl to help her for a little while with her work.

My father was never strong and often had to hire men to help him. He sometimes employed Negro men, hiring them from their master, for you see, we lived at that time in the days of slavery. I would like to say just here, that up to the close of my fifteenth year, I think I passed the happiest part of my life. I was comparatively free from care and anxiety.

After the discovery of gold in California, my father talked continually of crossing the plains to the Pacific Coast either to California or Oregon. His preference always seemed to be for Oregon. Congress passed what was known as the "donation law," donating to settlers in Oregon large tracts of land. To a man and his wife 640 acres of land for moving to Oregon and taking up and occupying the same, and to single men and women 380 acres. I do not remember how long this law was in force, but I know Congress repealed the law and passed another law making "donation" only half as large as the original law. My father, it seemed, could never be satisfied until he could come across the plains to claim his part of the land that Congress had so generously promised to people for settling up the country. Sometime during the winter of 1853-54, my father sold our home in Missouri and began active preparations for crossing the plains, so that on the 10<sup>th</sup> day of April 1854, we started on the long-talked of trip across the plains to Oregon.

My father had provided us with two heavy wagons drawn by ox team and a small carriage drawn by a yoke of oxen for my mother and little brother, less that a year old, to ride. One of the heavy wagons was drawn by four yoke of oxen, and the other wagon by three yoke. My father drove one of the teams and I was supposed to drive the other, and I did drive the team most of the time. My father, when he could, would hire a man to drive my team for me, for I used to get very tired walking all day urging the oxen along that always seemed to me, to be either lazy or tired.

My father had laid in supplies to last us for five or six months, consisting of flour, bacon, lard and groceries. He also had a little chest of medicines and a keg of brandy. In fact, almost everything that was thought necessary, for so long a trip. After a great deal of talking and planning and getting ready, finally on the tenth day of April 1854, we made a start. There were

quite a number of our neighbors and acquaintances present to see us start. At this time, I do not think that any one of us realized the importance of this move. This separation and leaving meant for all time to most of us. My mother, for instance, never saw any of her people again. My grandfather Willis and grandmother died in less than six months, and were buried somewhere on their farm I have heard, at the foot of a cottonwood tree. Two or three of my cousins and one of my mother's brothers came with us two days to help us get started.

We traveled the first day perhaps fifteen miles, to near Calhoun, in Henry County, and stayed with Aunt Mary Wheeler and her family. Aunt Mary had been the wife of my father's brother, Anderson Willis, but after his death had married a man by the name of Wheeler. Aunt Mary had three children, William, Betty and Johnnie Willis. I had known these children all my life, and it almost broke our hearts to part with them, and as time has proven, we shall never see them again. Aunt Mary and the children are all dead, a

long time ago. I do not know very much of them since our childhood days. Willie proved to be something of a politician, and in the time of the Rebellion was with General Price a good deal of the time.

It was late on the second day after leaving home before we started, so much to talk about, and so much trouble getting the cattle hitched up to the wagons that it appeared as if we would not get started at all, but we finally started and before a great while passed through the little town of Calhoun. I do not know of any event that occurred that day that is worth mentioning, except late in the afternoon we passed through Clinton, at that time county seat of Henry County.

Our second camp was with some people that I think my father was acquainted with. My father had to buy corn at this place to feed our stock, as it was too early in the season for grass. The grass was starting up, but was too short for the stock to get hold of it. This third morning we were again late in getting started. Our kinfolk that had kept company with us this far, took leave of us to return home. I have not mentioned the fact that we had quite a bunch of loose cattle to drive and depended on my sisters. The oldest was fourteen years old. They managed to get along with the loose stock pretty well, as they were all gentle with animals. I do not remember our next camping place, nor any other camping place except one; we stopped one night with some people that my mother was acquainted with by the name of Cathey. The next camping place I remember was after we crossed the Missouri line on Sugar Creek. We crossed the line at a little town called West Port and my father made some little purchases and then drove on about five miles and camped in a body of heavy timber. I do not remember seeing any trees other than sugar maple.

I should judge from appearances, that this was a great sugar camp for the Indians and perhaps the whites, for it will be remembered we were now in the Indian country. About this time we fell in with two other families from about West Port on their way to California, and continued to travel with them for some distance. I do not know where we separated. I do not know where we fell in with the Rains family, our neighbors that were expected to start with us from home, but I think it was about this time.

After leaving Sugar Creek there was nothing of interest that occurred that was worth notice. We were passing through Indian country, the Indians being partially civilized, many of them living in

good houses and speaking good English. My father bought corn from the Indians to feed our stock. There were no bridges across the streams, so we had to ford them all as we came to them until we came to Call River, Kansas. There was a ferry there for the wagons. We swam the cattle and horses across. I do not know how it happened, but I had fallen behind the train so when I came up, the wagons and stock had all gone over and I was left behind. I did not like the looks of the river very much, but did not intend to be left behind very long. Someone showed me the "starting in" place, and I managed to find the "coming out" place myself. I was riding a big red sorrel mare that managed to carry me over all right, swimming almost the entire distance. The river was perhaps 300 yards wide. We crossed the river at what was called Union Town and was an Indian Mission at that time. From this point on until we arrived at Old Fort Kearney, the days were very much the same. We were now out on the plains and had got a sight of the trains that were on their way to California with vast droves of cattle. One thing, we had passed through the graveyard left by the emigration of 1852. Thousands of the emigrants died of smallpox and cholera that year.

We had fallen in with other families by this time on their way to Oregon and California, and so had quite a respectable train of our own, and by throwing the several little bunches of stock together my sisters had but little trouble in driving our cattle. When we came to Fort Kearney, I do not remember whether we stayed more than one night or not. I remember however that my father took time to go to the fort and buy us some potatoes. Before we came to the fort, we expected something grand, but instead we were disappointed at finding a lot of low, squatty adobe houses, not like what we expected to see, with notices posted up that we could not camp within several miles of the fort, that is we must "keep off the grass," or in other words, not allow our cattle to eat the grass around the fort. I do not at this time, think we stayed more than one night at the fort, and hitched up early the next morning and struck off a little west of north and came to the Platte River and crossed it to the north side above Grand Island, I should think five or six miles. The river was said to be two miles wide at the point where we crossed, and I am sure it was quite that wide, and not more than 3 feet deep at the deepest place. The bottom of the river was a bed of loose sand, and it was quite hard for the teams to draw the wagons. In fact, one of our heavy wagons stuck fast in the sand about the middle of the river, and had to have a part of the load taken off and loaded onto other wagons. One thing that may seem a little strange, if a wagon stopped for any length of time, the sand would wash from under it and in a little while the wagon would become buried in the sand. So you see, there was no time for delay. Well, we got out of the river and drove out three or four miles to a little stream of water and camped again for the night. This was a very pretty and pleasant camping place, I think to the entire train, which by this time had increased to quite a crowd.

Early next morning all hands were up and ready for a start. I will mention the fact here that we had the first signs of the buffalo, and I think the last sight of them for I do not think we saw them again on the plains. At the sight of buffalo some of the boys became very much excited, and mounting their horses went in pursuit of the buffalo. They were gone some time without having captured a single buffalo. In a few minutes after the return of the boys to camp, we were on the move. From this on, for quite a long ways, I cannot distinctly remember the camping places nor many of the things that occurred during our travels.

At this time we could see great herds of antelope, but they were always at a great distance, and not having any hunter on the train, they were perfectly safe from us, so far as we were concerned. We often saw great numbers of wolves, great big fellows. The majority of them were light gray. Speaking of wolves reminds me of seeing shallow wells dug by the wolves in the soft dirt along the bottom of the streams to secure water. These wells were generally from two to four feet deep. For eight hundred miles now we were in the home of the buffalo, and though he was not at home when we passed along, there was abundant evidence that he had been there sometime, and not very long either. The skulls and bones of the buffalo were scattered indiscriminately everywhere, evidence that here was where they had roamed perhaps for a century back, no telling how long. After traveling up the valley of the Platte River for perhaps a week or ten days we came in sight of two noted landmarks, Chimney Rock and the Courthouse, a huge mountain.

Chimney Rock had the appearance of a chimney where a house had been burned down and the chimney left standing, this at a great distance. I do not suppose we were at any time nearer than fifty miles or perhaps more. We were traveling in sight of the rock for two weeks. All the days along our journey up the little valley had a kind of sameness, except for three little incidents that I may mention.

After traveling for a long while and getting out of sight of Chimney Rock and the Courthouse, we passed through what was at that time called the Pawnee Swamp. The Swamp was pretty well dried out when we passed through it, but still bad enough. The night after passing through the Pawnee Swamp we got into a dreadful rainstorm, accompanied by wind. A good many of the tents were blown down and the stock scattered, so that the men could not hold them, though they were up all night. When daylight came we found we had only two head of cattle in sight, but the men were after them and about eleven o'clock the men brought the cattle in, so we were ready in a few minutes for traveling. After the rain the sky was clear and the road was fine.

After two or three days travel, we came in sight of Laramie's Peak. The summit was covered with snow. This was the first snow peak I had ever seen. Though we were in sight of it for a day or two, I never forgot it. As we traveled up the valley the country became more hilly and broken. About this time a little incident occurred that has not escaped my memory.

Our wagons had fallen behind the train by our stopping to water the stock, so that the balance of the train was ahead of us perhaps a couple of miles. After watering the stock and we had hitched up and were ready to start, we looked ahead of us, when behold, the Indians were coming in that direction as far as we could see. There were five hundred lodges of them moving. They were friendly and did not molest us, giving us the road. I have seen a good many Indians in my life but do not remember having seen so many at one time, nor such fine looking ones. After passing the Indians, we overtook the train and camped.

From this on till we arrived at Sweetwater River at the foot of Independence Rock, I do not remember anything of note. We arrived at the crossing of Sweetwater early in the forenoon and camped until the next morning. This gave us an opportunity of climbing up on the Rock. I spent quite a good part of the day climbing around over the rock and reading the names of the thousands of persons who had left their names on the rock, put on in every conceivable way,

with paint, tar, scratched, written, printed, etc. I found a sheltered place on the west side of the rock and wrote my father's name, John Austin Willis, also the date. We had a box of lampblack that I used to make the letters. After leaving camp the next morning we did not go far until we came to a trading post. There were a number of houses and I think a stockade. I remember there was a large store building with a fine stock of goods for emigrants. We stopped a little while at the trading post and my father bought a yoke of oxen. It was found at this time that our wagons were to heaving for the teams. The oxen he bought were in good condition as they were fat, and proved to be just the thing to help us through. After leaving the post, nothing occurred that I remember worth recording, till we arrived at the South Pass.

We camped a day or two at Pacific Springs. There is a big marsh right in the South Pass. This marsh is very peculiar. It is set with a heavy sod so that a person can walk almost all over it. The sod is springy so a person walking over it would spring the ground for quite a little distance around. The water from this swamp, or spring as it is called, runs toward the Pacific coast.

We had a very good view of the Rocky Mountains from Pacific Springs. Someone pointed out to us, while we were camped there, Fremont's Peak. I am not sure that it was Fremont's Peak, for I have my doubts whether any man could scale the mountain pointed out to us. After a view of the peaks of the Rocky Mountains, I have always thought they were properly named. I suppose the mountains we could see from Pacific Springs were known as the Wind River Mountains. The next point of importance to us was the crossing of Greene River. I do not know how many days we were after leaving South Pass till we arrived there. We arrived there in the afternoon and immediately went to work to swim the cattle over, and although the stream was not wide, the cattle did not want to swim. We managed to get everything over before dark. We camped near the ferry. I think Green River where I saw it, was the coldest, clearest and withal the most rushing stream that I ever saw. It comes right down out of the Rocky Mountains out of the snow.

Our next camp after leaving Green River was at a creek called Snow Creek. We remained at Snow Creek over night and in the morn resumed our march. Nothing of importance occurred again till we arrived at Bear River Valley. We crossed a number of small streams that we had to ford. Nearly all of them were both deep and rapid. The country was more mountainous and rocky than that we had up to this time passed over. The route that we were now traveling took us to the north of Salt Lake City. I do not know how far it was to Salt Lake City from our nearest point, but suppose it was perhaps sixty miles. From one of our camps, a man went up on a high mountain and with a spyglass and was able to see the glitter in the sunlight in the windows in Salt Lake City.

Well, after several days of rough traveling we arrived all safe in the Bear River Valley, and camped on a mad little river that came rushing down out of the mountains across the valley. I do not remember how long we stayed at this place, but I think perhaps two or three days. It was thought best to give the cattle a little rest after traveling over such a rough stretch of country as we had passed though. There was one serious objection, however, to this camping place. There were swarms of mosquitoes and in the afternoon and evening they almost ran the stock crazy. At this camp I was taken sick with mountain fever, from which I did not recover for almost a week. After leaving this point, which we did in two or three days, our next point of importance was Soda Springs.

I do not know how long we were going from the mosquito camp, for I took no note of time as I was sick. I remember one thing, that we traveled through a beautiful valley all waving with the finest grass.

When we arrived at Soda Springs, we found a great many people camped and vast herds of stock. We soon learned that the people were very much alarmed. They were expecting an attack from the Indians. I do not know how the story got afloat that we would be attacked by the Indians nor did I see any indications that we were in any danger. Our camp was not very far from the springs, so I think mother and father and the children all visited the springs, except my little brother and myself. I was still quite ill, but was able to look after him, so we were left at the camp. I do not think we remained more than one night at the place. Early the next morning as the Indians did not show up, the people with their teams and cattle were on the move. We did not go very far, till we came to a trading station kept by an old Hudson Bay man by the name of Captain Grant. This man Grant is one of the historic characters of the North Pacific Coast, and was opposed to the occupancy of the United States of what was then known as Oregon. It was through the fear of coming in contact with Grant, that Marcus Whitman, in making his celebrated trip across the plains in the winter went so much out of his way, going away south of Salt Lake. Captain Grant did all he could to turn the emigration, even in our time from going to Oregon, and probably succeeded in turning a great many people on the road to California. The California and Oregon roads separated at this place. Captain Grant impressed me with the idea that he was a pretty rough specimen of humanity, living among the Indians and having a squaw for his wife. We stopped at the station for an hour or two, and then resumed our journey taking the road to Oregon, the road to Oregon bearing off in a nearly western direction.

The next point of interest that I remember was the crossing of Raft River. We had been led to expect trouble crossing this stream, but when we arrived there we found it easily forded. From the crossing of Raft River our general course was in a northwest direction, till we arrived in the Snake River country, along the banks and the bluffs of that stream. After leaving Raft River, I do not remember anything of particular importance till we arrived at a river called the Portneuf River. I have occasion to remember this point, as I had a relapse of the fever. I do not remember how we crossed the stream. The Portneuf is a tributary of the Snake River. While we camped at the Portneuf, an Indian, a chief I think, came to the camp and was around the camp all evening that we camped there. I do not know how, but some way he became interested in my case, as I was quite sick. He told us of a cure for mountain fever. It consisted of tea made from pine leaves, and a bed made of pine leaves to sleep on. He proposed sending some of his Indians to the mountains to procure pine leaves, but the people of the train fearing treachery from the chief, moved on early the next morning. This Indian had some young squaws with him that he called his daughters. Of all the Indians I have seen, I think this Indian and his daughters were the finest specimens of the race. They were Shoshones, and I think they have always been friendly to the whites.

Two or three days before we arrived at the Portneuf River, we had a sight of the Blackfoot Butte looming up in the distance away north of us, but only for a little while one day, and then we passed out of sight of them. There were three of the Buttes as I remember it. I had often heard of those landmarks and was really glad of a chance to see them. As I said, the train was in a hurry to leave the crossing of the Portneuf River, so we moved ahead. For a number of days I do not

remember much that happened, until perhaps the day before we arrived at Salmon Falls. The weather was extremely hot and the moving trains and stock stirred up great clouds of dust, from which the people and the stock suffered greatly. We arrived at a crossing of the Snake River about two miles above Salmon Falls on July 7<sup>th</sup>. We camped at the ferry and after counseling together as to the best route to take, my father's family and three other families concluded to cross to the north side of the Snake River. This we accomplished by ferrying the wagons and cattle and most of the horses. There was a route down on the south side of the Snake River, that I think was the route we should have taken, but we were told that the grass and water was better on the north side than on the south side. This we learned afterwards was not in reality true. There were a good many Indians camped near the ferry on either side of the river. They were engaged in fishing, and drying crickets. I saw great heaps of dried crickets spread on the sand. These Indians were the most degraded Indians we had met with. It was near night when the wagons and the stock were over the river. All hands were tired and worn out so we remained until the next morning. I think it was perhaps as late as ten o'clock before we started the next morning, so we made only a short drive of a few miles and camped on a beautiful little stream bordered with willows and waving meadows of the finest grass. At this camp, while wandering up the creek above the camp among the willows, I came upon the remains of a young man who had been killed by the Indians the year before and left by his friends. We remained at this place till early the next morning and were again on the move.

We did not go very far however until we came to the Malad River. This was the most difficult stream we had to ford so far on the trip. The water was both deep and rapid and extremely cold, but like all the difficulties we encountered we made it all right and moved on. From the crossing of the Malad River till we struck the Boise River, the days were about the same, all hot and dusty, so that we all suffered very much. The country through which we were passing at this time is an alkali country, and a great many of our cattle suffered from the effects of the alkali dust, and a number of them died from alkali poisoning. I do not remember how many days we were going from Salmon Falls till we struck the Boise River, but from the time we came to the Boise River till we arrived at Old Fort Boise the travel was a good deal better. Water and grass was plentiful and the country level.

The Boise basin, as it is now called, appeared to me the most promising of any valley I had seen since leaving the Bear River Valley, and has since proven itself capable of supporting a large population. We arrived at Fort Boise early in the forenoon and remained camped near the fort until the next morning. We then crossed the Snake River onto the south side and drove a little ways and camped on the banks of the Owyhe River, a southern tributary of the Snake River. Fort Boise, perhaps deserves a more extended notice. The fort proper was a very unpretentious structure built of sod, perhaps twenty feet square, and belonged at that time to the Hudson Bay Company. It will be remembered that this company were hunters and trappers, and were English, and though their time was nearly out, only one year more, to the northwest coast, they still held on in hope that something might transpire to lengthen out their time of occupancy. But Uncle Sam proved to be too much for them, and they had to move out.

Speaking of crossing the river brings to mind the manner of crossing, as at Green River and Salmon Falls we were obliged to ferry our wagons and stock over. The ferries at Green River, though perhaps not safer, were much more convenient and speedy than at either of the crossings

on the Snake River. I think there were as many as a dozen boats at Greene River. These were flat-bottomed boats, built of pine logs, perhaps twenty feet long or a little longer and ten feet wide, and propelled on ropes by the force of the current. At the crossing of the Snake River the boats were very much the same in build, but were propelled by oars.

We remained camped on the banks of the Owyhe River until the next morning and were early on the move. I do not think we had dinner this day at all, but traveled almost all day and camped on the Malheur River at a noted Hot Spring. We did not know anything about the spring till we arrived there. There is quite a little stream of water that runs off from the spring and crosses the road. The first that my father knew the water was hot, in driving his team, he actually stepped into the stream. Well, he did not wait for someone to tell him to get out of it. The water in the spring proper was hot enough to cook an egg. I think there is now a big sanitarium at this spring. At this point we fell in with a big lot of emigrants that had come down on the south side of the Snake River, who like ourselves were tired and way worn and ready for almost anything. It so happened that a man, sent out from the Willamette Valley met the emigrants, and by lying and persuasion turned them on to what was known as the new route to the Willamette Valley. This we soon learned to our sorrow was a grave mistake, for there was no road only as we made it over rocks and canyons, and hills almost impassable for seventy-five miles up the Malheur River to the last crossing. I do not think I have ever seen such an unpromising looking country. There were miles and miles of sagebrush through which we were obliged to force our way where no wagons had ever been before. It seems a wonder to me that we ever got through at all. It may be of interest to note the way by which we managed to break road. The teams took it by turns in going in the lead, for no one team could go in the lead all the time. There is one good thing to be said. There was a great abundance of grass everywhere until we reached the summit of the Cascade Mountains.

On this new route I think there were as many as forty or fifty wagons in the train, and people from almost every section of the United States, good, bad and indifferent. Some men and women that I knew a great many years were truly as good as the best, and some that were not good on the road and perhaps were never good. The time passed in traveling up the Malheur has always appeared to me as a dream.

Our last camp upon the Malheur came near ending in a fearful tragedy. The train was encamped in a sharp bend of the river in a thickly set rye-grass bottom. The camp as a defense against surprise by the Indians was certainly poorly chosen, and the Indians I think knew it, for just at midnight they made an attempt to burn up the train by firing the grass around it. Had it not been for a low sink, or slough that extended almost across the bend of the river on the outside of the camp, they would perhaps have succeeded to their entire satisfaction. There was great excitement in the camp for a little while, but the fire soon burned up to the slough and went out, and no particular harm was done, only serving to make us more cautious in the future.

Before leaving the Malheur, I will return to our first camp on that stream. At that place there is a large ryegrass bottom where the emigrants in 1852 camped and it will be remembered that in that year both smallpox and cholera were prevalent upon the plains. A good part of this ryegrass bottom was taken up as a common graveyard, where those dying with smallpox and cholera were buried in shallow graves to be scratched out, in a short time, by the coyotes. I have seen the

ground white with bones of hundreds of those poor people who died at that place. After our experience of our last night upon the Malheur we did not remain in camp very long, but were early on the move. The country over which we traveled now for a good many miles was rough and broken and in many places almost impassable. We finally came out on what is known as the Harney Lake Valley.

This appeared to us to be a vast plain where we could see only the dim outline of the mountains away to the south of us. Here the traveling was much better as the road was smooth. We kept around the north side of the valley, and finally after traveling two or three days, bore off gradually to the northwest. I think about this time we came in sight of Mt. Hood. A good part of this valley is taken up by Harney Lake, though we did not come in sight of it at any time. In about a week we left the Harney Lake Valley and entered a broken and hilly country that reached all the way up to the foot of the Cascade Mountains, which we struck at a point of perhaps forty miles south of Mt. Hood. For a few days after leaving the lake plain we traveled over an extremely rocky country, in many places so rocky that the wagons would not touch the ground so as to leave any track that could be followed, sometimes for a long way, and was also hard on the feet of the stock. Many of the cattle became lame, and we were obliged to shoe some of them or they would have given out entirely.

About forty-five miles before we struck the Cascades we came into the juniper country. The land here was loose and sandy and somewhat better traveling, but this last forty-four miles we had to travel without water for the stock which took about two days. My father with his family camped two nights on this desert. We traveled till way late in the night the second day and were obliged to stop before reaching water. A friend of my father, who had reached the water came back on the road to meet us and dropped a canteen of water in the road so that we found it though he did not come quite far enough to meet us. Directly after finding the canteen of water, we camped for the night and resumed our journey early the next morning, and after traveling a few miles we came up with the balance of the train and camped on the Deschutes River.

The night before we arrived at the Deschutes River, I do not think my father or mother or I slept. We were up all night watching the cattle to keep them from getting away from us. Perhaps I may have slept a little while, but father and mother were awake all night. My father's shoes gave out so that his feet were exposed to the thorns of the greasewood, so that he had a bad time of it until we overtook the train. He then secured a pair of shoes that lasted him to the end of the journey.

About this time our provisions gave out so we had nothing except a little mushy cornmeal, and mother made a little piece of bread from the last of that sometime in the night before we arrived at the Deschutes. I remember she gave me a piece of the bread, and though it was poor stuff, I shall never forget how good it tasted to me. There are a great many things that I cannot remember distinctly. I do not know how we got breakfast the morning after we overtook the train, nor what we did for dinner, for supper, or breakfast the next morning.

Our course was up the Deschutes River, and after traveling another day we camped in a pretty level bottom covered with beautiful grass on the bank of the river. At this place someone killed a beef and we got a piece of it, and an old friend of my father, who had come out to meet the emigrants let my father have a sack of flour, and a roll of butter, that we found in the middle of

the sack. The man who gave the flour to my father was named James S. Phillips. He was one of the best men I have ever known. I have been at his house and have met him many times since he let us have the flour.

I do not know how many days we were traveling up the Deschutes, but perhaps a week until we crossed for the last time and struck out across the Cascade Mountains. The last two or three days on the Deschutes we traveled through a forest, for the most part of what was then known as the black pine. The road, if road it could be called, was almost impassable. Our first days travel in the Cascades brought us to the summit of the mountain where we camped at the foot of Diamond Peak on the south. This is a snow peak. Our camp on the summit of the mountain was a very pleasant one. At this camp, we gathered any amount of little red huckleberries. They were very nice fruit. The bushes were not more than six or eight inches in height. Early the next morning we left our camp at Diamond Peak and soon began our descent of the Cascade Mountains. This was on the last day of August.

We had not been traveling very long till we came to what is known as Laurel Hill, and this, for a fact, was a hill. A lady of the train who was in advance: stopped when she came to the top of the hill. When asked what was the matter, answered, "Why here is a hill that stands up perpendicular, straight up and down, and hangs over a little. We can never get down. I guess this is the jumping-off place." We did get down, as it was not a very long hill. All hands were compelled to walk down. The women and children all climbed out of the wagons and took it afoot till we arrived at the bottom of the hill. Not long after we left the foot of the hill we had our first sight of the Willamette River. This is known as the Middle Fork of the Willamette and was only a small stream where we came to it.

We now struck a road that the people from the Willamette Valley had cut out for the emigration. This I must say is the poorest road to be called a road that I have ever traveled: merely a trail scarcely wide enough for the wagons to pass between the great trees. I have traveled this road or parts of it in after years, and I have seen other parts of it that I did not care to attempt to travel, and I have always been led to wonder how the poor emigrants footsore, tired and worn out ever managed to get through.

This day after leaving the summit of the mountain we made our camp at a place called "Pine Opening." This is an opening in the timber where we found pretty fair grass for the stock. At this place it was found that our supply of flour was about exhausted. We only had enough for breakfast and we were six miles from the settlement. After a little consultation between father and mother it was decided that I should go ahead and procure provisions.

So, mounted on old Fan, a big sorrel mare, I made a start traveling all day till sundown, when unexpected to me, I came to a trading post where provisions could be procured. As soon as I found that I could get what I wanted, I took my saddle off and staked old Fan on some good grass that I found nearby. I did not eat any supper that night as I did not feel well. A man that I passed on the road that day gave me some pieces of dried beef which I ate, but which did not agree with me very well. I afterwards learned that the beef was taken from an ox that had died and been barbecued by some of the emigrants, and I never doubted the story for the effect it had

on me. Early the next morning I was up and ready for my return trip to meet the wagons having procured what provisions I could carry back with me.

Before starting, the trader set me a nice breakfast of slapjacks and sugar syrup and butter and a cup of coffee, but I was not yet hungry, so did not eat very much. I was too anxious to be traveling. I will say here that the trader charged me the modest sum of seventy-five cents for what few bites I did eat. I rode on my return trip till about noon when I met the wagons coming along. It was in a little opening in the timber where I met the wagons giving a chance to turn out of the road, which they all did as they came up, and had dinner. As soon as dinner was over we were again on the move coming out a little while before night at what is known as Little Prairie.

This was a delightful camping place. At this place some one of the train found a big Holstein bull that had been left there by some emigrants of the year before. The bull was very fat so it was decided to slaughter him. Of course, we all had a piece, and as I remember it, this was the finest meat I ever ate in my life. I suppose perhaps my appetite was just right, one thing is sure, I have never forgotten it.

Early the next morning we were on the move again. For about four miles we had a very nice road with a little downhill grade, with occasional little groves of oak trees, which made a very pretty contrast to the heavy pine and fir timber we had just come through. This brought us down to the trading post where we replenished our supplies with enough to last us out into the valley. After leaving the post, we again entered the heavy timber that we continued to travel through all the way to the prairie at the head of the Willamette Valley proper.

We made two camps in the timber before reaching the open country at Butte Disappointment. This reminds me that in my residence of a little over fifty years in Oregon, I have never seen such a body of timber. Thousands of acres of trees where it would be two hundred feet to the first limb. The trees standing about equal distances apart and almost as regular, as if planted by a nurseryman. It is impossible for me to tell at this time how many times we crossed the Willamette River after we struck it at the foot of Laurel Hill, but I should say not less than twenty times without a single bridge. A great many of the fords were both deep and rapid. We finally came out on the third night after leaving Little Prairie at what is known as Butte Disappointment. At this camp I heard a good deal about potatoes. Some of the emigrants got some, but I do not think that we had any. We remained camped at this place for only one night, but were early on the move.

We had not gone far till we crossed the Middle Fork of the Willamette for the last time on our journey. Directly after crossing the river, I remember seeing an Indian graveyard. I do not know that there is anything remarkable in seeing an Indian graveyard. I had seen a great many before and I have since, only that it reminded me that the Indians in this graveyard were all good Indians and that we had nothing to fear from them. Not at all like the treacherous Diggers that fired the grass around our camp on the Malheur, and those that were trying to steal our horses on the lake plain and were ready at any time to fill us full of arrows. There is one thing that may be said to the credit of the Willamette Indians, that they were never at war with the whites.

After passing the Indian graveyard we traveled slowly along all day crossing little streams of water, passing through narrow little valleys and through pretty fir groves with beautiful green grass till about two o'clock in the afternoon when we came out in sight of a pretty white schoolhouse where the children were out playing around. Playing the same old games that I had learned to play away back east of the Rocky Mountains. I have always remembered how much I felt inclined to stop at this place, but this was no place to stop. This little white schoolhouse was used by the pioneer settlers as a church, and in after years I often visited it. There is a good deal of history that belongs to this schoolhouse that would be pleasant to write, but I shall have to forego that pleasure for the present. Five miles more of slow plodding and we crossed the Coast Fork of the Willamette River at Whittemore's Ferry and camped for the night

It may be of interest to say that when we left Butte Disappointment we did not see anything more of the train with which we had traveled so long. The train all broke up at that point, each family going its own way. A few persons that belonged to the train I met in after years. Many of them I have never met, and some of them I never had any particular desire to meet. There were some truly good people that hardships and privations could never make different, always good and sympathetic and ready to do anything that they could for a friend or even a stranger.

#### Autobiography of Mannen Willis

#### Postscript

Hood River, Oregon – February 13, 1912

I shall try to complete this history as well as it is possible for me to do so.

Signed – Emma C. Willis

The family lived in the Willamette Valley for seventeen years. The father was sick and died in 1868. They lived in a log house but soon were able to build a new one. The first winter Mannen and his father worked among the farmers for food and supplies. The following years they also made rails for fences and split shingles. Mannen could go to school only seven weeks in Oregon. He always lamented this fact and was sorry that his father left Missouri and a comfortable home for the wilds of Oregon.

His school companions in Missouri had the advantages of education and some became lawyers, doctors, senators, etc., while he with a love for learning, had to plod out his life on the farm. He, however, obtained an education by reading at night, often by firelight. He read the branches, sciences, history, etc. He once worked for a man who owned a great many books. He took as his pay a Webster's unabridged dictionary, which he had always wanted. He read constantly, even to the end of life, and thus acquired a good education.

The farm where the family lived was in the country near Cresswell, Oregon. In that vicinity Mannen's father and a little sister are buried. After the father died the care of the family fell on Mannen and well did he fulfill his trust. After his father had been buried for forty years the man

who owned the farm where he was buried made complaint and Mannen was called on the first thing for money. As he was in straightened circumstances he could not assist in the matter.

November 21, 1919

However, some of the other members of the family attended to the matter and four blocks of rock were placed, one at each corner of the plot, thus to save the buried ones from desecration by plowing.

(Written at a later)

The family settled at Cresswell on their arrival and part of the town now stands on their land. They lived in an old log house, but then built a new one. Mannen hewed the logs and his father hauled them. Mannen also split the shingles for the roof, so they had a good log house with shingle roof. The man that owned the land had a "Squatter's Right," which they bought. The land consisted of 380 acres. Then they bought 80 acres more for the timber. They kept horses, cattle, sheep and pigs. Had the best apple orchard in the vicinity. This log cabin is still standing at the present time, September, 1912, built probably in 1855. They lived there until 1870 when they moved to Umatilla County to Pilot Rock near Birch Creek. Here they lived four years, then moved to Pendleton for two years.

Moved from Cresswell to Eastern Oregon to Birch Creek. Lived on the place for two years. Moved to Pilot Rock and lived there four years. Moved to Pendleton. There he built a house and teamed. He was married here. Traded horses for farm on Gerking Flat. Had a good house, barn, hay, wood. Sold out for \$500 and moved to town.

After a long and useful and beautiful life, Father Mannen was called from his earthly labors on August 31, 1908. He had been sick for two weeks with bilious headaches to which he was subject. All that spring and summer his heart would lose one beat and he knew that his time was drawing to a close. He told some neighbors that he would not live the summer out.