

The following sketch was researched, compiled and contributed by a great-granddaughter, Mrs. Wanda Roberts Hamilton, 1405 6th St., Vero Beach, Fla.

John Franklin Willis was born on May 26, 1839 in Blakely, Early Co., Georgia, the eldest child of Joab and Adeline (Weathers) Willis. There being no public schools prior to 1873, he received his education at Blakely Academy. He served as assistant to the teacher at the Academy in 1859-1860.

After the outbreak of the Civil War, he enlisted in the Early County Home Guards on July 8, 1861, this unit later becoming Company G, 13th Georgia Regiment. Subsequently, he was elected an officer in Company A, 51st Georgia Regiment. This company was made up of four officers and 137 men from the Early Volunteers. He fought with the Army of Northern Virginia and served the Confederacy until the end of the war when he returned home to Blakely.

On Dec. 23, 1866, John married Frances Matilda Jane Vann, a former student of Blakely Academy. She was born on Sept. 4, 1845 in Blakely, a daughter of James and Matilda (Collier) Vann. Both the Vann and Collier families were long time residents of Early County and were planters, an occupation also chosen by John Willis.

John Willis was elected Sheriff of Early County in 1871, serving for two years and then resigning. Family tradition states that he chose giving up his job rather than locking up a farmer's corn crib for non-payment of a debt.

In the latter part of 1875, John moved his family to the Kissimmee River Valley area of Florida. They were residing in Orange County when, on Jan. 8, 1876, Frances Willis granted power of attorney to her father-in-law back in Early County for disposing of her property interests in Georgia. In the fall of 1876, John Willis homesteaded 160 acres in a small settlement located in what was then part of Brevard County, but in 1887 became part of Osceola County, Fla. Later known as Lokosee, the settlement was located near Blue Cypress Creek off present Highway 441 about two miles from Yeehaw Junction. According to final proof of homesteading filed on June 6, 1890, he constructed a log home and corn crib, planted an orange grove and farmed eight acres. A school was also conducted there where Mrs. Willis taught their children.

John was the first postmaster at Algers, being appointed on Nov. 17, 1898 when the post office was established there. The postal service was discontinued on April 30, 1907, and future mail went to Olney. The service resumed on Dec. 6, 1911 and the name was changed to Lokosee on Nov. 5, 1914. John Willis was postmaster at his death in 1904 and his son, Robert, was appointed first postmaster of Lokosee in 1914. Until recent years, a highway sign marked the site of Lokosee. Now, the old settlement no longer exists on maps and the sign has been removed.

John and Frances Willis raised a family of six daughters and one son at their old homestead. Their firstborn, a son, died before their move to Florida. Their children were:

1. John Francis Willis, born 1868 at Blakely, Ga.; died 1872 at Blakely.
2. Osteen Willis, born 1870 at Blakely, Ga; married 1st, on Aug. 24, 1889 Allen Padgett, son of Tippen & Louisa (Alvarez) Padgett; married 2nd, Walter Bebee.
3. California Matilda Willis, born Apr. 26, 1871 at Blakely, Ga.; died July 6, 1946; married on June 20, 1890, David Washington Cayson, son of John and Hannah Myantha (Gillett) Cayson.