

For JAU

Biography of JOHN WILLIAM HARRIS' Family

Dr. Harris' parents were David William Harris and Anna Evelyn Buckew who were married in Lavaca County on 4 June 1865. Alice and Joe were born in Lavaca County, Texas. From here they moved to Dripping Springs, near Austin, Texas, where Charles Oscar, J. Will, and little Annie were born. In the fall of 1876, they moved to Derby, Texas, when there was no railroad. David Edward was born here on the east side of the railroad to-be. Clarence and Ann~~e~~ Minnie Myrtle were born on the west side.

Clarence was six months old when the railroad passed thru Derby. The story goes that when the first train was to pass thru Derby, every one went down to watch it go by. It whistled somewhere around the corner, scaring J. Will that he started running back up the hill until he was safe under his parents' bed.

IN the fall of 1884, the Harrises moved to Ford Switch, now called Dilley. The railroad company kept a tank of water at this switch. It was customary for the mail clerk to receive letter on the train, but only down at the switch~~s~~ where the train slowed up or stopped.

Once a cowboy stood by the track between Derby and Pearsall. He waved his hat and red handkerchief at the train. It stopped and he was asked what was wrong. He said, "I just want to get this letter mailed to my girl."

"Don't you know you can't stop the train in the middle of a pasture just to mail a letter?"

This old boy said, "I did do it, didn't I?"

In 1884, D. W. Harris, with his family, moved to a spot near the A. H. McLean home. They had build a three-room and perch frame house. A kitchen and dining room with a perch was built away from the house in the corner of the yard, which was a custom in these days. W. D. Harris

had dug a well (which is still there) and built a wooden water reservoir. Everybody stopped at his house. There was an underground cistern by the house that caught rain water. His home was a free hotel, school house, church, and a general place for entertainment. He had a fruit orchard: peaches, apricots, grapes, pears, etc. There was always something in the garden to eat. He had sheep and goats, hogs, chickens, cattle, horses, guineas and turkeys. Wild animals roamed everywhere: panthers, coyotes, wild cats, javalinas with their gnashing teeth. Quail were numerous. They were caught in home-made traps, but they killed only what was needed for eating. The rest went free.

A room about 12⁶ x 20⁶ was built near by for his sister Josephine Harris Green and her daughter Celia. He stayed with them. He signed his name always W. D. Harris because of an error in the books where his land was registered, easier than making the correction, no? He lived at this place keeping a school for his children.

The teacher lived at his house and brought her piano. They always had Sunday School. By this time, the Murrays and Cavender⁵ had located in the Cibola section. Jim, Dave, and Nannie Murray, and Green Reb and Becky Cavender, the Shull boys and Celia came to the school, so a school room was built near.³

John Shull built a small frame room in which to keep the mail near the Ford Switch, not an authorized one. John would collect the mail from the people, then give it to the clerk on the train. Shortly after this, the station was called Dilley, in honor of some railroad official. John put a stove in one corner of the room, plus a barrel of crackers and a case of sardines and tobacco nearby. More additions came into existence big enough for a family. John W. Miller moved there and Dilley had a legal post office.⁴

John William Harris was helping a group of men to herd cattle up to Ft. Leavenworth, Kansas, on the train. At night the cattle were allowed to roam near the train while the men cleaned out the cars. While they were going past Parkville, Missouri, John William noticed some beautiful castles up on the hill, just like his mother described existed in Germany where she was born. He was told this was a school to make missionaries, named Park College. On his return from Ft. Leavenworth, he got off the train, entered the building nearest the station, and asked how to enter school there. You can imagine how he smelled after working a month with cattle, never taking a bath, much less washing his clothing! Holding her nose, the teacher threw his suitcase outside, telling him not to return until he was clean.

John William Harris was nineteen years old when he was admitted to Park College. He wore his brother-in-law's wedding suit. (Will Jacobs) He was spic and span when he entered, this time as a student to Park. Not having formal education to any great extent, he was placed in the fourth grade where the rest of the class would poke fun at him because he was so tall. He always enjoyed telling people how on Fridays the teacher had "Election Day." Not knowing what that was, he listened to the others. When he leaped down to the little platform where the teacher's desk was, he stood there to recite, "Hell in Texas," which shocked the young teacher (just sixteen) so very much she stopped him before he had recited 15 lines, dismissing the class for the day!

While at Park, J. Will had to earn his way. One way was by cutting ice on the Missouri River in the winter, pulling the sawed out huge chunks up hill to a cave-like hollow in the hill near a building. He finished all grammar school in about a year, then he went on to receive

an engineering degree which was about all offered men there. Women received a degree in literature.

At the dining room in Park he was seated at a table where he met his future wife, who was engaged at that time, to the future ear, eye, nose and throat specialist, Dr. John L. Meyers. On a bet, J. Will bet he'd take her away from Dr. John. And he did! But they never married until J. Will finished his degree in religion from Princeton University in New Jersey. Meanwhile Eunice White finished at Park, then went to Tennessee for her duty as a missionary until J. Will would come to marry her.

During some War, J. Will's father captured Eunice's uncle. Her uncle hated Texas and Texans because all they ate was tortillas and beans during his captivity in San Antonio. He was against his niece marrying a Texan, even though he was a Presbyterian minister! But when a Harris has his mind made up, that's it! He was on the Kickapoo Indian Reservation when he married his Eunice on May 17, 1905.

They honeymooned in Texas where Eunice was scared stiff of rattlers. She refused to sleep on the ground as everyone else did. She climbed into the wagon, sleeping face down, with her knees and arms on the floor while her rear end was sticking up, ready to ~~run~~ ^{raise} on the first ~~noise~~ ^{noise} of whatever she was afraid of. Poor gal, marrying a cowboy, and spending her honeymoon roughing it with nature! But she endured J. Will until her death in the Wintergarden Hospital, in Dilley on January 18, 1953.

Asking for a mission somewhere in Africa, J. Will and Eunice Harris were sent to Puerto Rico in 1906! Three months before their firstborn Helen Evelyn was born in San Germán, Puerto Rico, near the oldest church on the western hemisphere, Porta Coelis, built sometime between 1493 and 1550.

J. Will and Eunice with help from his brother Clarence Harris started the only successful coeducational school in Latin America in 1912. Today it is the Inter American University with 23,300 students! It has been running in the black, too! Accredited by the Mid-Atlantic College and University Accrediting Association.

When Dr. Harris retired as President of Inter American University in 1939, he came to live in Dilley again. He got big ideas about building a Pan American Clinic, buying property and having plans made for it. He ~~got~~ never ^{got} off the planning stage as he was killed in a car accident in 1956 in front of the Wintergarden Hospital.

While in Dilley Dr. Harris dissolved the Presbyterian Church, His ^{Minnie} sister kept its organ. Selling the property, he sent the money to the proper judicatory of the Presbyterian Church.

Dr. Harris was president of the Federal Land Bank in Dilley at his death.

1. Minnie Harris Lackville, Letter to her daughters, ^{Mary Ann and Frank} I copied this on 11 June 1965.
2. Ibid.
 3. Ibid.
 4. Ibid.

Research done by
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