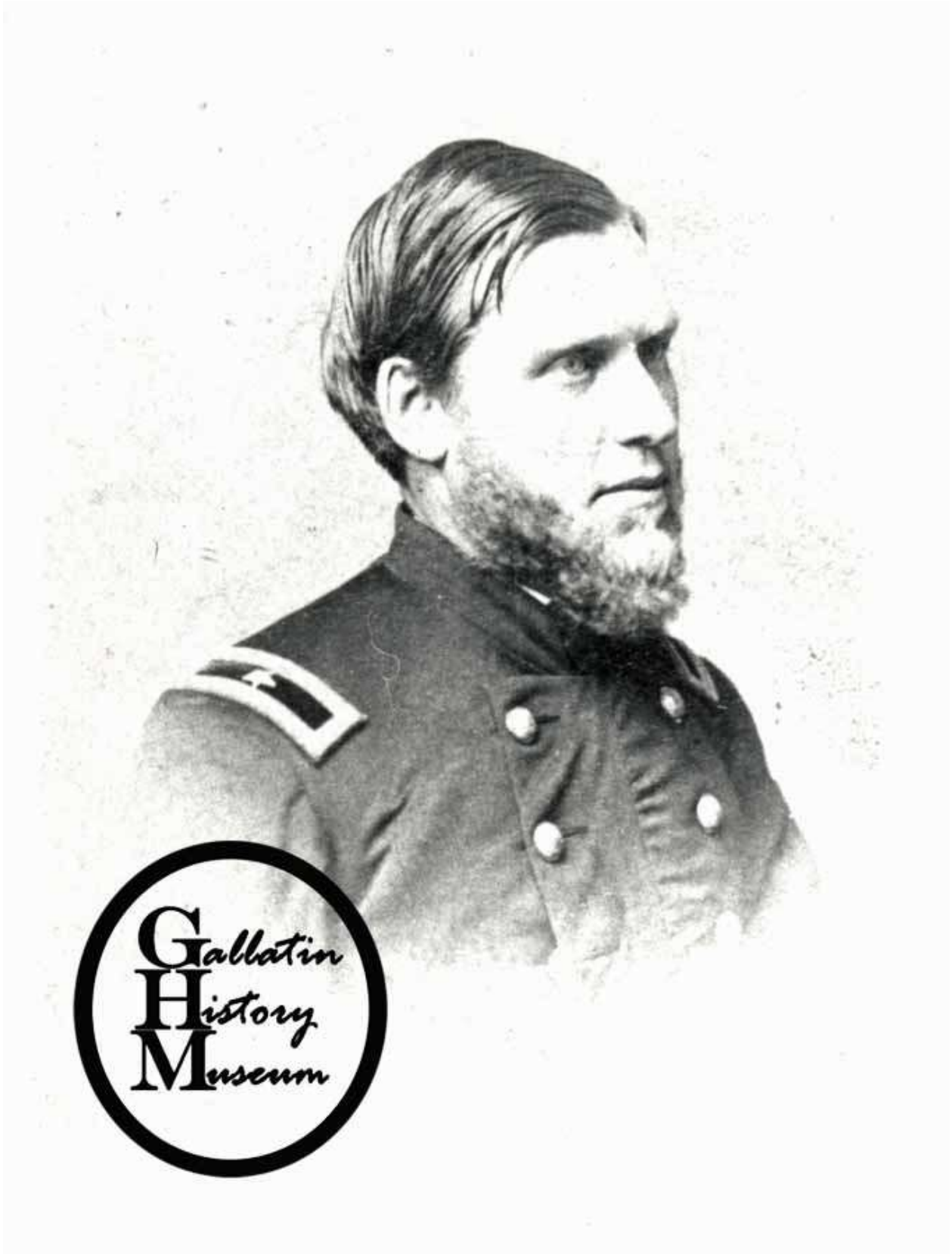


Lester Willson





General Lester Willson with his wife Emma Weeks Willson and their sons Fred Willson (polka dot shirt) and Eugene Willson. The woman on the right is unknown.

WILLSON, GENL. U.S.

Stone

House
Street ^{504 So. Broadway}

Born 1839 - N.Y. - ancestral line goes back to King Charles
& Knight of Round Table.

Attended a ~~military~~ academy
Given the rank of brevet - brigadier general in 1865 "for
gallant & meritorious service under General Sherman at
Atlanta"

Came to Montana in 1867 - mining, banking, merchandising

Member of territorial legislature 1868-69

1900 - candidate for presidential elector for Republican party

Founded the "Willson Co"

First house where ~~the~~ Range Hotel now stands - log cabin of grand
pines. Indians used to gather at windows to hear Mrs W. play

Name Willson, Lester Sebastian Serial No. Civil
Home Address Bozeman, Montana
Next of Kin Fred Willson Address Bozeman
Born 6-16-1839 At Canton, N. Y.
Date of Death 1-26-1919 Cause Arteriosclerosis
Buried 1-28-1919 19 At Sunset Hills Cemetery
City Bozeman County Gallatin
Grave No. Lot No. 66 Block D Section Old
War Record Co. "A" 6th New York
Branch of Service Infantry Rank Lieut. Col.
Enlisted July 1861 Discharged July 1865
Information Given By G.A.R. Records, Cem. Records, Clerk & F
Remarks Recorder
Care Assigned to Post No 14, American Legion
Govt. Headstone Desired Legion Marker Placed
Mail this form immediately following burial of every World War Veteran to American Legion Dept. Headquarters
GRAVE REGISTRATION FORM NO. 1

General Lester S. Willson

PIONEER'S DEATH SUNDAY MORNING

Gen. Lester S. Willson, After
Long and Useful Life, Ex-
pires in Eightieth Year.

Jan 28, 1919

VETERAN OF CIVIL WAR

Prominent in Business, Social and
Political Life of Bozeman and Gal-
latin County for More Than Half
a Century.

General Lester S. Willson, soldier,
banker, business man and pioneer of
Gallatin county, died at his home, 504
South Central avenue, Sunday morn-
ing, January 26, at 7:55 o'clock, in
the eightieth year of his age.

Besides the widow, there survive
one son, Fred F. Willson, and one grand-
son, Lester S. Willson II; a brother,
George Willson, all of Bozeman, and
one sister, Mrs. Emma Chaffee, of
Wollaston, Mass.

The general has been in failing
health for several weeks past, but at
times rallied and was able to attend
to business. The night before he pass-
ed away he was very comfortable and
there were hopes of a recovery, but
a sudden change took place at 5:30 a.
m., and at 7:55 a. m. he breathed his
last.

Prior to his death General Willson
made several requests as to the con-
duct of his funeral. He asked that
there be no flowers and that private
services should be held at the home
in the morning, followed by a public
service at the church. He asked that

(Continued on Page Five.)

GEN. LESTER S. WILLSON.



Born June 16, 1839—Died January 26, 1919

PIONEER'S DEATH SUNDAY MORNING

(Continued From Page One).

as far as possible the services of the Loyal Legion of Honor, of which organization he was a member of the New York order, be observed at the funeral.

The requests will be carried out as far as possible, and the private services will be held at the home at 11 o'clock this morning. The remains will then be taken to the Presbyterian church, where they will be viewed by friends till 2:30 p. m., when the public services will be held. A detail of the G. A. R. will be in attendance at the church. Rev. R. P. Smith will officiate at the church, and at the grave the G. A. R. will also participate in the services, when the remains are laid to rest in Bozeman cemetery. Major Charles Sheridan will command a detail of soldiers and have a firing squad.

The active pall bearers will be men who have for many years been associated with the general in a business capacity at the store. They are C. W. Jackson, R. P. Seidlitz, Ed. Rich, Fred B. Williams, George McFadden and Sherman Phillips.

Active for Fifty-Two Years.

For 52 years General Lester S. Willson had been identified with the business, politics and social life of Bozeman, Gallatin county and the state of Montana. He has seen the city grow from a few frame buildings, a frontier settlement, to one of the most prosperous and richest cities in the state. He had early realized the possibilities of the community, has been a member of the legislature, was instrumental in starting the first bank in Bozeman, having been associated with Nelson Story, Sr., in that enterprise, and throughout his long and useful life had never wavered in his faith of the great future of the state, county and city.

General Willson took the greatest pride in the upbuilding of Bozeman and Gallatin county. For more than a half century he maintained the deepest interest in The Willson company store, which he looked upon as a monument to his business endeavors, and up to the last remained the active head of the concern. A sketch of the life of the estimable citizen would not be complete without reference to his business, the manner in which he came to locate in the west and the story leading up to locating in Montana.

Heeded Advice of Schuyler Colfax.

General Willson, together with Chas. Rich and L. W. Fuller, in the early spring of 1866 attended a lecture given by Schuyler Colfax in New York City.

riage of Ambrose and Julia A. (Hill) Willson, who were the parents of seven children.

General Willson was educated in the schools of his native county and after clerking for two years in his uncle's store, the Civil war broke out and he offered his services in the defence of the union as a member of Company A, 60th New York infantry, in which he enlisted in August, 1861, under Captain William B. Goodrich. He was made a sergeant in September of the same year, a second lieutenant in October, and first lieutenant and adjutant the following month. He was offered a captaincy on the day his commission as adjutant was received, but declined the promotion.

In August, 1864, the young soldier was made a captain and in October of the same year was promoted to a lieutenant-colonelcy. In May, 1865, he was made a colonel and a brevet brigadier general, after he left the service with that rank from March 13, 1865. The last honor was conferred upon him through the recommendation of two commanders of the 20th corps, Generals Hooker and Slocum, "for gallant and meritorious service under General Sherman at Atlanta."

His early duty in the service was in guarding the Baltimore and Ohio railroad and in the Virginia campaigns under Banks and Pope in 1861-2. He was later in the hardest of the fight at Antietam and again at Chancellorsville, where he was severely wounded and compelled to retire from active service for a time. He rejoined his regiment as the army was preparing to move for the Gettysburg campaign, but his wounds broke out afresh and he was ordered to Washington for treatment. In September, 1863, he went south with the 12th corps under General Hooker and participated in the battles of Wauhatchie, Lookout Mountain, Missionary Ridge, Pea-Vine Creek and Ringgold.

Regiment Is Veteranized.

On November 24, 1863, largely through his efforts and personal influence his regiment veteranized and re-enlisted. This was said to be the second one in the service to take this step. The next spring with the third brigade, Geary's division, he took part in all the battles of Sherman's campaign from Chatanooga to Atlanta, Savannah, Goldsborough, Raleigh up to and including Johnston's surrender.

During much of this time he served as aide, assistant inspector general and assistant adjutant general of the brigade. The 60th New York and 111th Pennsylvania divide honors of having been the first regiment in Atlanta, and the first to unfurl their colors from the top of the city hall.

As assistant adjutant general, Willson was the first officer to enter Savannah at the head of his regiment and he received the surrender of

Group "Up with the Country," the three young men decided to take the advice. At a late hour in the night they planned what in reality became The Willson store. Messrs. Rich and Fuller immediately began carrying out the plans and General Willson remained in the east to settle up personal affairs.

After buying supplies, merchandise and such articles as would be in demand in a new country, they arrived at Fort Ellis on the night of September 3, 1866, and got into Bozeman the following morning. There were few houses in Bozeman at that time, and by invitation the men proceeded down the river to the M. W. Penwell ranch and "opened up a shop." Here business was conducted for two or three weeks.

While purchasing their supplies at Omaha, the young men bought a couple of loads of cornmeal, which was to be fed to their mules. They soon found that the meal was the most valuable of their commodities, and they found a ready market for it at 35 cents a pound.

Enters Bozeman to Stay.

The young men were not satisfied with their location and soon decided upon Bozeman. The first location here was in the Masonic temple, then it was moved across the street, then into a brick building, which was the first brick structure in the city. In 1903 the store was moved into the present quarters.

General Willson landed in Bozeman April 25, 1867. He was delayed in the east by settling up his affairs and getting his discharge from the army. He immediately took charge of affairs. Shortly afterwards he bought out Mr. Fuller, and he and Mr. Rich operated the business. Finally Mr. Rich's interests were purchased, and the general became sole owner. Several years later, Mr. Fielding joined the firm, and in 1893 it was incorporated under the name of The Willson company.

Civil War Record.

Brevet Brigadier General Lester S. Willson's life was largely consecrated to public service, both in war and peace. He was born at Canton, St. Lawrence county, New York, June 16, 1839, and was a descendent of a line of illustrious ancestors reaching back to the time of King Arthur and the knights of the Round Table. He was the immediate offspring of the mar-

H. A. Barnum, commander of the third brigade, he carried the lieutenant-colonelcy commission without muster from Atlanta to Goldsborough, remaining as adjutant general of the brigade.

Until the declaration of peace, he was in constant, every day service, never leaving his command only on account of wounds, and by his close attention to duty and resourcefulness in action, he stood high in the confidence of his several chiefs, Generals Sherman, Hooker, Slocum, Geary, Greene and others. He was accredited as being a most faithful and intelligent officer and of his regiment, Major General Geo. S. Greene has said "it was one of the best in the service."

Resigns From Union Army.

After the close of the war, General Willson was appointed assistant quartermaster general of the state of New York, with the rank of colonel. The office had the adjusting of many large business matters with the railroads touching the transportation of troops, supplies, etc. He resigned the office in March, 1867, to engage in business in Montana, and has been in this state ever since, mining, merchandising, banking and other pursuits occupying his attention. From 1833-86 he served as quartermaster general of the territory with the rank of brigadier general. He has always voted the republican ticket and been active in campaigns, having served as a member of the national committee and holding other important places in its organization. He was a member of the territorial legislature in 1868-9, and in 1900 was a candidate for presidential elector for his party.

General Willson was married in Albany, N. Y., March 2, 1869, to Miss Emma D. Weeks, a native of Vermont. Three children were born to them, only one of whom, Fred F. Willson, and the widow survive.

The general was a member of Bozeman Lodge No. 18, A. F. & A. M., and a charter member of William English Post, No. 10, G. A. R. He has been department commander of Montana. He also belonged to the Loyal Legion of the United States in the commandery of New York, and the Republican club of New York.

LESTER and FRED WILLSON

My grandfather, General Lester S. Willson came to Bozeman in 1867 after serving in the Civil War under General William Sherman. Towards the end of the war he was wounded and while he was in the Hospital he met my grandmother who was studying to be an opera singer and she would come to the Hospital to entertain the wounded soldiers. A short time after he left the Hospital he went to Horace Greeley and told him he was going West and Mr. Greeley said, "Lester you are a damn fool."

A short time after he came to Bozeman he and a Mr. Charles Rich started a freight service between here and Helena. I don't know how long he had that service. Then he started a general mercantile business in a log cabin on Main Street. As time went on the store grew and it eventually became a department store called the Willson Co. and it was located on the corner of Main and Black where Conrads is not.

I don't know how long it was before he went back to New York and married my grandmother, Emma Weeks. They came by covered wagon from North Dakota and brought with them the first grand piano in Bozeman. They lived in a log cabin on Main Street about where D. A. Davidsons is now.

My father told me that the Indians would peer through the windows and listen to my grandmother play and sing. She played a very active part in all the musical activities that took place here in Bozeman and she sang for many social events. The pipe organ in the Presbyterian Church was dedicated to her.

In 1872 Lord and Lady Blackmore from England arrived in Bozeman on a World sight seeing tour to visit the wonderland of geysers. They stayed with my grandparents in their log home. They had agreed before they left home that if one of them died while they were on this tour they would be buried wherever they were. While here at my grandparents house Lady Blackmore became ill and died shortly after. Lord Blackmore purchased five acres where the present cemetery is located in memory of his wife and it was his way of showing his appreciation of the kindness of the citizens of Bozeman to him and his wife. South of Bozeman is Mt. Blackmore and there is an apartment complex named after the Blackmores.

My father, Fred Fielding Willson was born Nov. 11, 1877. He had two brothers. One died at age 13 and the other shortly after birth, so my father was raised as an only child. Our family home at 504 So. Willson was built in 1886. It had 14 rooms, full basement, attic, four fireplaces which heated the house, inlaid hardwood floors and I believe it was built for around \$5,000.00. At that time they had almost a whole block with a barn, corral, shed, to house the horses, cows, chickens, etc. They also had a Chinese servant who took care of the animals, kept the fires going, etc.

My father was educated here in Bozeman and one of the first students of M.S.C. After three years here he transferred to Columbia University in N. Y. where he studied architecture. He wanted to be a Doctor but his mother wanted him to be an architect. Following his ~~his~~ graduation from Columbia as an architect major he then spent two years studying and traveling in Europe.

When he returned home he worked in the architectural firm of Link & Haire in Butte. A few years later he opened his own office in Bozeman. However, while I was very young he had an office in Butte also and I had many happy times accompanying him to Butte where we stayed at the Finlen Hotel and he always took me to the Columbia Gardens.

Before going any further I should mention that my father married Helen Fisher who was also born in Bozeman and also a graduate of M.S.C. with a degree in Home Economics. I have an older brother who is retired from Du Pont and lives in Wilmington, Del. and a younger sister who lives in West Lafayette, Ind.

After my parents were married my father's folks gave them money for a wedding present to build their own home which my father designed and it is located at 509 South Tracy, and I was born in that house.

After my grandparents died their home was rented to the Chi Omega Sorority for 2 or 3 years and then with some remodeling and redecorating we moved in when I was six years old.

My father was a wonderful man. I never heard him raise his voice or show any anger at anyone. If one of us had done something wrong and my mother was going to give us a spanking, if Dad was home, he would put on his hat, go out the door and take a walk and then when

he came back, he would sit with us and quietly discuss what we had done.

I think my father had a tremendous impact on architecture not only here but through out the state.

Starting at the east end of Main Street, he designed the Griffin Apts. which was formerly the Hamill Apts, the Ellen Theater, the Baxter Hotel. Also the stained glass window in the Robin Cocktail Lounge. Then on to the Gallatin County Courthouse and the jail. I might add here that when the jail was finished and the first night they put eight prisoners in, they all escaped. I don't remember what happened, but my father took alot of teasing about it.

Across the street from the jail is Willson school. It used to be the High School and I was in the first graduating class. He also did alot of remodeling and renovating of many other down town businesses.

He also designed the Blackmore Apts., Emmerson, Longfellow, Whittier and Hawthorn schools, Dokken-Nelson Funeral Home, The First Presbyterian Church, and the First National Bank Building.

At M.S.U. he designed the first Student Union Building, the first Library, the MSU. Heating Plant, Roberts Hall, Ryan Lab, Hamilton Hall, the old Chemistry Building and some of the dorms. He was also an associate in the design of the M.S.U. Fieldhouse and Bozeman Senior High School.

One of the earliest was the Belgrade City Hall which was built in 1912 and now it is on the National Historic Registry. He built a school and the Sacajewia Inn in Three Forks. He also did alot of work at the Orphans Home in Twin Bridges, buildings in Butte, and Anaconda. Also Livingston, Big Timber and the Eagle Stores in West Yellowstone, and many building through out Yellowstone Park. And, of course one we all love is Soldier's Chapel in Gallatin Canyon.

He also designed numerous private residences in Bozeman. The Graf house on West Cleveland being the most unique.

Written by Virginia Kippen (daughter of Fred Willson)
for Montana Ghost Towns Conference
Bozeman, Mt. Sept. 8, 1990