

Bettie B. Willis, National Bank President

By Karl Sanford Kabelac

Bettie Butts, a native of Alabama, was born in 1840. Her parents were John and Amanda (Turner) Butts. Her father, a native of Virginia, was a graduate of the University of Pennsylvania Medical School in 1823. He had later settled in Greene County, Alabama where he died when she was a child in the summer of 1843. Among her siblings was an older brother, Edward Scott Butts.

She married Joel H. Willis of Warren County, Mississippi (of which Vicksburg is the county seat) in January 1866. He apparently died several years later for she was appointed administratrix of his estate on July 15, 1870. There were no children.

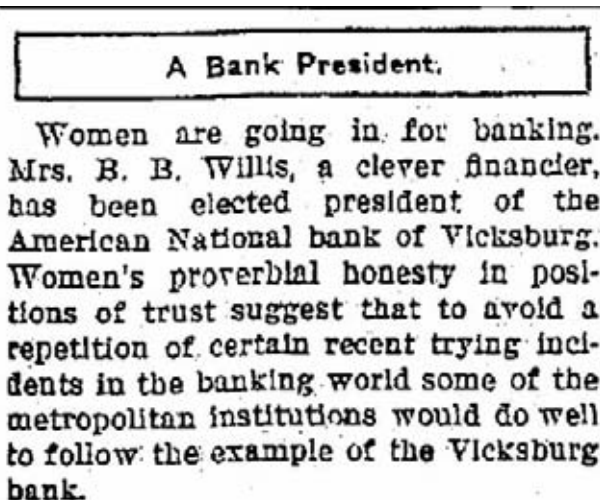
In February 1902 the Vicksburg Bank, which had been established in 1866 converted to become The American National Bank of Vicksburg (charter #6121). Her brother, Edward S. Butts, longtime president of the former bank, continued as president of the new bank until his death on May 31, 1907.

Bettie Butts Willis then succeeded her brother as president of the bank. Several years later, in November 1910 it was liquidated and absorbed by the American Bank and Trust Company of Vicksburg. She apparently continued for awhile as president of the new bank.

Mrs. Willis died at her beautiful home in Vicksburg on April 14, 1922. An obituary did not note her banking career, but stated that she was "for more than half a century one of the leading figures in Vicksburg's social and civic affairs and was possessed of the love and esteem of a wide circle of devoted relatives and warm friends." It also noted that her beautiful home was the "center of a gracious hospitality enjoyed by many friends over a long period of years."

Sources and Acknowledgements

I am grateful to Lucius Butts, Mrs. Willis' grandnephew, who provided some important genealogical information on her, and to Larry Adams, Curator of the Higgins Museum, who supplied some information on the bank. After the Civil War, Mrs. Willis claimed \$39,389 for a long list of aid (horses, mules, hogs, sheep, cows, bacon, corn, molasses, sugar, etc.) that her late husband had provided the Union cause. At first this Southern Loyalist Claim was rejected, but years later settled for \$6,040. I am grateful to Robert Ellis of the National Archives, who looked at these files and extracted the tiny bit of genealogical information within them. A photograph of The American National Bank appears in Gordon A. Cotton, *Vicksburg* (Arcadia Publishing, 1999) on page 58. Unfortunately, the reproduction charge precluded including it as an illustration for this article. Bettie B. Willis' obituary is found in the *Vicksburg Evening Post* for April 14, 1922. ❖



Above: A woman bank president was still so unusual that it made national news. An article on Mrs. B. B. Willis appeared in various newspapers including this one is from the Logansport, Indiana paper of February 15, 1908. The "recent trying incidents in the banking world" was a reference to the banking crisis of 1907.

Below: Mrs. Willis' beautiful home in Vicksburg merited a postcard view.

