

# "UNCLE WILLIS ANDERSON"

## REFERENCES

A. Coronado's Children—J. Frank Dobie, Pub. 1929,  
Austin, Tex.

B. Leon County News—Centerville, Texas—Thursday May  
21, 1936.

C. Consultant—Uncle Willis Anderson, resident of  
Centerville, Tex, born April 15, 1844.

An interesting character at Centerville, Texas, is "Uncle Willis" Anderson, an ex-slave, born April 15, 1844, 6 miles west of Centerville on the old McDaniels plantation near what is now known as Hopewell Settlement. It is generally said that "Uncle Willis" is one of the oldest living citizens in the County, black or white. He is referred to generally for information concerning days gone by and for the history of that County, especially in the immediate vicinity of Centerville.

"Uncle Willis" is an interesting figure. He may be found sitting on the porches of the stores facing Federal Highway No. 75, nodding or conversing with small groups of white or colored people that gather around him telling of the days gone by. He also likes to watch the busses and automobiles that pass through the small town musing and commenting on the swiftness of things today. Uncle Willis still cultivates a small patch five miles out from the town.

"Uncle Willis" is a tall dark, brown-skinned man having a large head covered with mixed gray wooly hair. He has lost very few teeth considering his age. When sitting on the porches of the stores the soles of his farm-shoes [Pg 22] may be seen tied together with pieces of wire. He supports himself with a cane made from the Elm tree. At present he wears a tall white Texas Centennial hat which makes him appear more unique than ever.

"Uncle Willis" memory is vivid. He is familiar with the older figures in the history of the County. He tells tales of having travelled by oxen to West Texas for flour and being gone for six months at a time. He remembers the Keechi and the Kickapoo Indians and also claims that he can point out a tree where the Americans hung an Indian Chief. He says that he has plowed up arrows, pots and flints on the Reubens Bains place and on the McDaniel farms. He can tell of the early lawlessness in the County. His face lights up when he recalls how the Yankee soldiers came through Centerville telling the slave owners to free their slaves. He also talks very low when he mentions the name of Jeff Davis because he says, "Wha' man eavesdrops the niggers houses in slavery time and if yer' sed' that Jeff Davis was a good man, they barbecued a hog for you, but if yer' sed' that Abe Lincoln was a good man, yer' had to fight or go to the woods."

Among the most interesting tales told by "Uncle Willis" is the tale of the "Lead mine." "Uncle Willis" says that some where along Boggy Creek near a large hickory tree and a red oak tree, near Patrick's Lake, he and his master, Auss McDaniels, would dig lead out of the ground which they used to make pistol and rifle balls for the old Mississippi rifles during slavery time. Uncle Willis claims that they would dig slags of lead out of the ground some 12 and 15 inches long, and others as large as a man's fist. They would carry this ore back to the big house and melt it down to get the trash out of it, then they would pour it into molds and make rifle balls and pistol[Pg 23] balls from it. In this way they kept plenty of amunition on hand. In recent years the land has changed ownership, and the present owners live in Dallas. Learning of the tale of the "lead mine" on their property they went to Centerville in an attempt to locate it and were referred to "Uncle Willis." Uncle Willis says they offered him two hundred dollars if he could locate the mine. Being so sure that he knew its exact location, said that the \$200 was his meat. However, Uncle Willis was unable to locate the spot where they dug the lead and the mine remains a mystery.[C]

Recently a group of citizens of Leon County including W.D. Lacey, Joe McDaniel, Debbs Brown, W.H. Hill and Judge Lacey cross questioned Uncle Willis about the lead mine. Judge Lacey did the questioning while them others formed an audience. The conversation went as follows:

"Which way would you go when you went to the mine?" Judge Lacey asked.

"Out tow'hd Normangee."

"How long would it take you to get there?"

"Two or three hours."

"Was it on a creek?"

"Yessuh."

"But you cant go to it now?"

"Nosuh, I just can't recollect exactly where 'tis.[B]

J. Frank Dobie mentions many tales of lost lead mines throughout Texas in Coronado's Children, a publication of the Texas Folk-Lore Society.[Pg 24] Lead in the early days of the Republic and the State was very valuable, as it was the source of protection from the Indians and also the means of supplying food.[A][Pg 25]