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George Ingraham Willis Papers
1807-1988
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Tamar Zeffren
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Summary

- Main entry:** Willis, George Ingraham
- Title:** George Ingraham Willis papers, 1807-1988 (bulk 1930-1944, 1979-1988)
- Size:** 2.7 linear feet (6 boxes, 1 volume)
- Source:** Gift of the New York Genealogical and Biographical Society, 2008.
- Abstract:** George Ingraham Willis (1912-1988), a native New Yorker, conducted research on the history and genealogy of the Willis family. The collection is primarily composed of his research notes, correspondence and the original documents he assembled relating to the Willis, Ingraham, Davenport, Davis and allied families. The original documents include legal and personal papers of his immediate family, as well as of earlier ancestors. Of note are the personal papers of John Davenport, his maternal great-grandfather, which include extensive correspondence with his wife and business partners, 1823-1866, and documents relating to his tenure on the New York City Board of Education.
- Access:** Advance notice required. Apply at <http://www.nypl.org/mssref>
- Preferred citation:** George Ingraham Willis Papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.
- Special formats** Genealogies, Photographs, Scrapbooks

Provenance note

Donated to the New York Genealogical and Biographical Society by George Ingraham Willis' widow, Margaret Pownall Willis, 1989.

Biographical note

George Ingraham Willis (1912-1988) was a business executive with an interest in genealogy. He was born in Flushing, New York, the son of William Willis and Mary Macdonald Ingraham. The family's primary residence was in Queens and they owned a summer home in Wainscott, Long Island. George's father, who died when George was 18, worked for the family-owned business, W.P. Willis & Co, a wool and fabric importer in Manhattan, which was founded by George's grandfather, William P. Willis. George attended the Lenox School, an all-male secondary school, in Lenox, Massachusetts and then Williams College, where he was a member of the college's Musical Society. He graduated from Williams in 1935, and then attended graduate school at Exeter College, Oxford for two years.

When George returned from Oxford in 1937, he took a position at the Lenox School, where he taught until 1942. He married Margaret Ethel Pownall in 1939, and they had a son, William Pownall Willis, the following year. In 1942, George took a job in the corporate office of United Aircraft Corporation, and he and his family moved to West Hartford, Connecticut where the company's headquarters were located. His wife gave birth to a second son, Peter Willis, in 1944. After the move to Connecticut, George became involved with the Simsbury Simply Light Opera Company, one of the longest-running non-profit light opera companies in the country. He worked for United Aircraft until 1974, and upon his retirement in that year, began to pursue genealogical research full-time.

George and his wife made three trips to England between 1982 and 1986 to research the origins of his English ancestor, Henry Willis, one of the first Quakers to emigrate from England and settle in Long Island. The results of his research were published as "The English Origins of Henry Willis of Westbury, Long Island," the front-page article in the April 1987 issue of the *New York Genealogical and Bibliographical Record*. The primary focus of his investigations remained the Willis line, but he also conducted substantive research on the allied Ingraham, Davenport, and Davis families. In addition, George was also interested in the families of women who married Willis men, such as the Crowell, Ingraham, Ross and Pownall families.

Scope and content note

The George Ingraham Willis Papers contain correspondence, research notes and original documents he collected in the course of his genealogical research on the Willis, Crowell, Ingraham, Pownall and related families. The research notes include photocopies, news clippings, maps, photographs, wills, postcards and pedigree charts. The collection and the original documents contain estate appraisals, business records, photographs, deeds, wills, and vital records certificates.

The bulk of his research pertained to investigating his ancestor Henry Willis (1628-1714), a carpenter from Warminster, England, who was one of the first English Quakers to settle in Long Island. Henry Willis, who was imprisoned in Salisbury in 1660 for keeping company with other Quakers and attending meetings, emigrated to America sometime between 1670 and 1673, perhaps inspired by the Quaker founder George Fox's visits to the American colonies during those years. Henry Willis subsequently settled in Westbury, Long Island. George made three trips to England between 1982 and 1986, where he and his wife met with a local genealogist to review parish registers, and attended meetings of the Society of Genealogists in London.

Willis regularly noted the repository and dates on his notes and kept carbon copies of the majority of his correspondence. Thus, his papers demonstrate the range of resources that he utilized in his research. His correspondence with other genealogists demonstrates that he was an avid reader of regional genealogical publications, such as the New England Historic Genealogical Society's *Register* and the *Connecticut Nutmegger*, issued by the Connecticut Society of Genealogists. His class notes from a February 1982 class called "Researching Family History Class" and the advanced "Advanced Family History" class in October of the same year at the University of Connecticut. Those same notebooks also contain notes from his trips to England.

The collection also contains correspondence, clippings and a small number of photographs documenting the families of women who married into the Willis line, such as the Ingraham family, George's maternal grandparents, and his wife's family, the Pownalls.

He also actively sought out original documents in his research, and the collection holds extensive original documents, including wills, deeds, and correspondence, particularly of the Willis, Ingraham and Davenport families. Many of the documents contain Willis' extensive annotations and summaries.

Arrangement note

The George Ingraham Willis Papers are organized in the following series:

- Series I. Letters to George Willis, 1851-1852, 1921-1981
- Series II. Correspondence with genealogists, 1979-1988
- Series III. Research files, 1807-1988

Series descriptions and container list

Series I. Letters to George Willis, 1851-1852, 1921-1981

Present are letters Willis received while a student at the Lenox School in Massachusetts from his uncle Frederick, his mother Mary and his father William. Miscellaneous letters include a letter of condolence upon his father's death in 1930 from Floyd W. Mundy, a friend of his father's, a 1941 note from Arthur F. Van Dewater, the family attorney, regarding the legacies George would receive from his grandmother Clara Ingraham's estate, and a 1981 letter from his sister Jane with a response to the biographical sketch George prepared on their father: "I have read and re-read your paper on Daddy--It is so perfect. . . ." The biographical sketch to which she is presumably referring can be found in box 2, folder 9.

<u>Box</u>	<u>Fol</u>	
1	1	Willis, Frederick, 1930 (uncle)
	2	Willis, Mary, 1930-1931, 1934 (mother)
	3	Willis, William P., 1851-1852 (father)
	4	Others, 1926, 1930, 1941, 1981

Series II. Correspondence with genealogists, 1979-1988

This series contains George Willis' correspondence with other genealogists and researchers regarding the English ancestry of Henry Willis. Additional correspondence of this nature can also be found in the research files in Series III.

One of Willis' correspondents, Eileen Tennent was the resident genealogist of the Bowne House Historical Society at Bowne Street and 37th Avenue in Flushing. John Bowne (1627-1695) was an English Quaker, known for his uncompromising stance on religious liberty and as a conscientious objector during the Revolutionary War. He was a contemporary of Henry Willis, and photocopies of the Friends records in the Henry Willis folders mention that in 1674, both men were each fined 10 pounds by Governor Andros, then governor of the "Province of New York and the Jerseys," for conducting Quaker marriage ceremonies for their daughters in their homes.

<u>Box</u>	<u>Fol</u>	
1	5	Carter, Barbara, 1982-1984
	6	Gray, Sally, 1979-1988
	7	Lampard, M.L., 1984-1987
	8	Newman, Peter, 1984
	9	Tennent, Eileen, 1980-1986
	10	Others, 1979-1988

Series III. Research files, 1807-1988

This series consists of materials acquired and generated by George Willis in the course of his genealogical research. Included are his correspondence, research notes, copies of sources and documents, and family papers he collected.

As the majority of the research relates to Henry Willis and the Willis line, those folders are listed first, and are arranged alphabetically by first name. As this line includes several individuals named William Willis, birth and death dates are included in parentheses next to those names in the folder titles. All other folders are arranged alphabetically by family name. Many of the folders contain a range of materials that are not confined to a strict chronological or topical order, so the inclusive dates should be considered estimates.

<u>Box</u>	<u>Fol</u>	
		Willis family
1	11-19	Henry Willis (1628-1714), 1896, 1977-1987 Includes "The English Origins of Henry Willis of Westbury, Long Island" article published in April 1987 issue of NYG&B Record
2	1	Henry Willis (1628-1714), 1980
	2	Henry Willis NYG&B Record article, 1986-1988
	3	James Willis, 1896, 1977-1983, n.d. Early documents include an 1896 letter to Sarah Willis Cape, daughter of James Willis and an undated fragment of an operating agreement between James and his brother William
	4	Richard Willis (1716-1784), 1977-1979
	5	Richard Willis (1770-1826), 1826, 1981, n.d. (Includes his will, 1826)
	6	William Willis (1663-1736), 1980, n.d.
	7	William Willis (1816-1875), 1977, n.d. William P. Willis (1842-1933) In addition to WPW's business and personal papers, these folders contain George's correspondence with WPW, his correspondence with WPW's business associates regarding both the state of the family company (George was a board member) and requests for material on WPW for a biographical sketch.
	8	Personal letters to parents, 1851-1852
	9-10	documents and notes, 1864, 1904-1910, 1931-1939, n.d. (Includes GIW's draft biographical sketch of WPW)
		Business
	11	Baudoine & Willis, 1866-1889
	12-14	1932-1982, n.d.
	15-16	Estate, 1931-1948, n.d.
3	1-2	William Willis (1874-1930) Personal documents, correspondence, and genealogical notes, 1903-1931, 1977-1980
	3	Caroline Willis, estate, 1937-1938

Frederick Willis

Vol
1

“W.P. Willis & Co: A Century of Progress”

This scrapbook was compiled by Frederick Willis, George's uncle, who became president of W.P. Willis & Co in 1930. It contains printed illustrations of lower Manhattan removed from an unidentified source and pasted into the book, with typed captions that emphasize the different locations that W.P. Willis & Co occupied through that area.

The scrapbook also contains photocopies of various Willis ancestor wills, which have George's annotations in the margins, and an incomplete pedigree charts started by Frederick.

In the back of the scrapbook are a few photographs of Frederick as a World War I private. There are two photographs of him at camp, one at Plattsburgh, NY in 1917 and one at Camp Joseph E. Johnston in Jacksonville, FL in 1918. There is a picture of him in France in 1918 or 1919, and a shot of him as a civilian, watching the Pershing Parade in New York in September 1919.

Box Fol
3 4
 5
 6
 7
 8

Estate, 1938-1953

Margaret Willis, will, 1875 Nov 8

Bowne Street property, 1940-1947

Family gravesites, 1958-1983 (Includes slides)

General research, 1977-1983

Crowell family

Stephen Crowell and Lucy Ross were George Willis' maternal great-grandparents. Their daughter, Clara Rockwell Ingraham, married George Ingraham, George's grandfather. Stephen Crowell (1810-1889) was born in Connecticut (different accounts offer Mansfield or Hartford as a birthplace). He worked as a painter at the Brooklyn Navy Yard, served as Chairman of the Board of Supervisors of Kings County and then worked as an insurance agent in New York for the Mutual Benefit Life Insurance Company of Newark. After a catastrophic Brooklyn fire in September 1848, Crowell established the Phenix Insurance Company of Brooklyn in 1853. He served as president from that date to 1888, and was the first insurance company to pay out losses after the Great Chicago Fire of 1871 and the Boston fire of 1872. Upon retirement, he was elected chair of Phenix's board of directors.

These folders contain numerous reports, obituaries and tributes from different New York-area newspapers. The majority of the remaining documents are genealogical in nature: a handwritten Crowell genealogy, exchanges with journalists, relatives and genealogists, and a memo book containing notes from interviews conducted with Crowell.

The correspondence contains fascinating letters between Willis and employees of the Continental Corporation, the successor organization to Phenix.

9 Documents (Includes leather-bound journal with Crowell genealogy)
10 Correspondence, 1977-1983
11 Notes and copies of sources, 1977-1983

Davenport family

The Davenport papers contain correspondence of John Davenport with his wife, 1833-1838, other family and business correspondence, and letters received upon his retirement from the New York City Board of Education. Also included are transcriptions of his travel journal, 1828-1830, and excerpts from a diary of his maternal grandmother, 1860-1861.

Letters to John Davenport

12 Abbott, John W., 1843-1848
13 Davenport, John (grandfather), 1823-1826
14 Davenport, Sarah Davis, 1833-1838
15 Long, N.R., 1855-1866

<u>Box</u>	<u>Fol</u>	
3	16	Stone, Daniel, 1824-1826
4	1	White, Fred (uncle), 1824-1828
	2	Others, 1835-1845, n.d. Letters to Sarah Davis Davenport
	3	Davenport, John, 1833-1838
	4	Davis, Hetty (aunt), 1837, 1842, n.d.
	5	Others, 1824-1837
	6-13	Documents, 1835-1903, 1925
5	1-4	Documents, notes & transcriptions, 1977-1982
	5-8	Davis and King families , 1824, 1865, 1897, 1910, 1927, 1976-1983, n.d. Captain Nathaniel Davis (1782-1829), was born in Barnstable, Massachusetts and died of yellow fever and was buried in Appalachia, Florida. Several of George's letters with other genealogists mention that he was a marine officer during the War of 1812 and was wounded during an engagement with a British vessel and/or was a POW in Dartmouth, England. Unfortunately, these folders do not contain any independent confirmation of these biographical details; understandably, most of George's correspondence herein illustrates his attempts to verify these family claims. Davis married Hannah King (1781-1879) of Raynham, Massachusetts and they had six children, five daughters and one son. Their daughter Sarah Caroline Davis (1807-1881) married John Davenport (1804-1895). Sarah's sister, Hetty Davis Woodward, corresponded with her sister, and her letters appear in the Davenport folders. The files include portraits of Hannah King and Nathaniel Davis, as well as a printed genealogy entitled "The Maternal Lineage of Sarah Caroline Davenport Willis," mailed in November 1894 from N.D. White in Manhattan to Sarah Caroline Davenport, wife of William P. Willis and George Ingraham Willis' maternal grandmother. Also included is a will of John Davis, 1825.
9		Deane, Leavitt, Leonard and Randall families , 1929
10		Dikeman, Pettit and Remsen families , 1951, 1983-1985 John Dikeman was George Ingraham's maternal grandfather: his daughter Jane married Richard Ingraham.
		Ingraham family George and Clara Ingraham were George Willis' maternal grandparents. Their daughter, Mary Macdonald Ingraham, was George Willis' mother. George Ingraham was a litigation attorney in New York before going to work for the Phenix Insurance Company of Brooklyn, founded by his father-in-law, Stephen Crowell, in 1902. Ingraham eventually became vice-president of Phenix. In addition to his business activities, Ingraham was also an accomplished amateur musician and lyricist. As a wedding present for his wife, he set the words of Edward Lear's famous nonsense poem, "The Owl and the Pussycat" to music. He called the piece "A Love Song, Male Chorus," and eventually he contracted with a music publisher in New York to market his composition. Ingraham was also involved in genealogy, especially as it related to his in-laws, the Crowells. In fact, he was responsible for compiling much of the genealogical information now in the Crowell folders, and several of those documents exhibit his annotations and notes from interviews he conducted with his father-in-law.
	11-13	Documents, 1807, 1836, 1881-1890, 1936, 1943-1977-1981 Includes February 6, 1807 land deed in Amenia, NY to George Ingraham
	14	Clara Ingraham estate, 1921-1931
6	1-7	Notes and photocopies, 1979-1987
	8	Marsh family , 1897, n.d. Includes March 1897 letter about inscription on Isaac Marsh's tombstone

<u>Box</u>	<u>Fol</u>	
		Pownall family
		George Willis' wife, Margaret Pownall, was born to William Edward Pownall, O.B.E., a lieutenant colonel in the Corps of Royal Engineers, and Ethel Dight in England. The collection includes their wedding certificate dated April 20, 1918 in Praetoria, South Africa, and both of their death certificates. Present also are seven slides and three photographs of her ancestral home, Pownall Hall in Wilmslow, Cheshire, which has been occupied by the Pownall family since 1297.
		After attending a presentation by Henry Beckwith of the New England Historical & Genealogical Society in 1979, Margaret became interested in obtaining "authentic or approved representation" of the Pownall coat of arms. The correspondence folder contains the letters associated with this search, between George, Henry Beckwith and, eventually, John P.B. Brooke-Little of the College of Arms in London. Brooke-Little's 1982 report concludes that while the Pownall family was granted arms, only a specific branch of the family--not Margaret's--is permitted to bear them.
6	9	Documents, 1918, 1955, 1958, 1966, 1975 (Vital records)
	10	Correspondence, 1980-1982
	11	Notes and copies of sources, 1980-1986
	12	Ross family, 1823, 1825, n.d. Family of George Willis' maternal great-grandmother, Lucy Ross. Files include an 1823 letter from S.S. Woodhull, Secretary of the American Bible Society.
	13	Willets family, 1980-1984, n.d. The contents of these folders relate to George's research efforts to determine the relationship, if any, between the Henry Willis line in Westbury, Long Island and the Willets (or Willits) family of Hempstead and Jericho, Long Island. In a March 7, 1983 letter to Ted Bartlett, author of "Willits Family: Descendants of Richard Willits of Long Island," he writes of his assumption that perhaps Henry decided to emigrate to Long Island because of the presence of distant relatives there.
	15	General research, 1979-1980 Notebooks Notebooks I and II contains notes from two genealogy classes taught by David Stoddard at the University of Connecticut in 1977. George took "Researching Family History" in February and "Advanced Family History" in October. In addition to class notes, Notebook I also contains his customary lists of research sources, including New York-area cemeteries, and names to contact. Notebook II contains similar information, and Notebook III holds notes from the repositories George visited during his three trips to England in 1982, 1984 and 1986.
	16	Genealogy Notes I and II, 1977 (2 vols.)
	17	Genealogy Notes III, 1982-1986 (1 vol.)