

John Alexander McWilliams  
(1841-1923)  
Buried Tuscumbia Oakwood Cemetery (grid G7)

John A. McWilliams was born on March 5, 1841 in Franklin County which is now Colbert County. He was raised on the farm and received a common school education. He enlisted in Company A, 27<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry, Confederate States of America in December 1862. He participated in the Battle of Perryville and several skirmishes around Corinth.

He returned to the area after the war and became a farmer. He married Lucinda Bernida Sockwell in April of 1867. They had ten children. Mr. McWilliams entered the mercantile business near Tuscumbia in 1872. He was elected as a Colbert County Commissioner in 1877.

He was elected sheriff of Colbert County in 1880 without making a personal campaign. His friends did all the filings and all the campaigning. When elected, Mr. McWilliams moved to Tuscumbia. While sheriff, it was reported that he never carried a weapon.

Once the sheriff had a prisoner escape and flee in the direction of the railroad trestle. Sheriff McWilliams with a posse closed in on him. The escapee realized that the sheriff was closing in on him and he knew he did not carry a gun. The escapee took off running trying to outrun the sheriff. The sheriff picked up a good size rock and threw it at the escaping prisoner striking him in the head. The prisoner went down and was captured.

Sheriff McWilliams kept some of the minimum security prisoners in the upstairs of his home. The stairway was enclosed with a door at the bottom. The stairway was unlit and dark. A hole was drilled through the door which allowed the sheriff to look through the hole and make sure that no one was waiting at the bottom of the stairs.

Mrs. McWilliams allowed her son to take the food to the prisoners one evening when they decided to use him as a hostage to be freed. They were at the bottom of the stairs yelling at Mrs. McWilliams to open the door and set them free.

She did not know what to do so she ran outside and began yelling for help. A doctor was passing by and ran to help. Not being armed himself, he used his head. He took a pencil he had, stuck it through the hole in the door and told the men he was going to start shooting. The prisoners, in the dark stairway, thought the pencil was the barrel of a gun and gave up.

In 1913, he was granted permission to build a cotton gin on the north side of Spring Creek just east of the County Bridge. He would later build a grist mill near Hooks Spring on the west end of Tuscumbia.

The McWilliams' family bought the A.S. Christian home (Tuscumbia Country Club) in 1902. He lived in this home until 1917 when he sold the home to his nephews, Andy Lee and William C. McWilliams. He moved to the family home on the west end of 3<sup>rd</sup> street. He lived here till his death.