

ALFRED LAWTON  
410 Cherokee Road  
Florence, South Carolina

March 1 1965

Dear Cousins,

I am happy to present to you a print of a pen and ink sketch of the old "Lawton-Willingham House" at Lena. The sketch was made by artist Barry Baker Harrison of Florence, from a photograph loaned me by Louise Lawton Vincent of Varnville,

On his infamous march to the sea Sherman crossed the Savannah River into Barnwell County, South Carolina, and headed for the old Allendale home of my great grandfather, Dr. Benjamin Lawton, captain in the Confederate Army, State Senator from Barnwell County. Dr. Lawton's home, said to have been "the finest in the whole country", went up in flames because Dr. Lawton had signed the Ordinance of Secession.

From old Allendale the Yankee troops moved south 18 miles to Lawton-Willingham House, located at what is now Lena. Several attempts were made to burn the handsome home, but a sister of the owner who was the only person there managed to extinguish the flames each time. Finally the soldiers set fire to the barns and left. It is ironic that in 1930 the old place burned to the ground because of a defective flue.

My personal interest in the home at Lena is two-fold. First, it is the place where my father was reared. Orphaned at the age of five when his parents died during an epidemic, Joseph Maner Lawton was taken into the home of his mother's brother, Thomas Oregon Lawton and his wife, Mary Phoebe Willingham, where he spent his youth. Known affectionately as Black Joe, my father was a favorite in the family circle and was a leading character in "Jockey and Other Stories," a child's book written by his adopted brother, T. Oregon Lawton of Greenville, and used in many schools as a textbook. My father died in December 1964 at the age of 89.

My second interest in Lawton-Willingham House is the fact that I was born there, July 22, 1906, brought into the world by Dr. Hardwick Wyman of Estill. My mother was the former Maude Constance Tilton of Savannah, Georgia, who my father said was, when he first married her, the most beautiful woman he had ever seen.

Historically--Thomas Henry Willingham of Market Rasin, England, married Sarah Chovin, a French lady, and settled in South Carolina in 1790. Their son, Thomas, Jr., married November 13, 1823, Phoebe Sarah Lawton, daughter of Benjamin Themistocles Dion Lawton and Jane Mosse of Beaufort District, S. C.

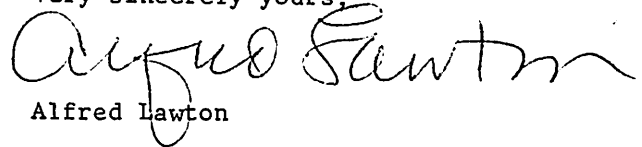
Thomas, Jr. and Phoebe Sarah bought a large tract of land in what is now Hampton County and in 1828 built "Lawton-Willingham House". They had eleven children, William Alexander, Thomas Henry III, Cornelia, Sarah, Edward G., Benjamin Lawton, Mary Phoebe, John Calhoun, Winborn J., Robert and Belle.

This is incorrect.  
Sherman went  
directly to Savannah  
from Atlanta;  
did not enter S.C.  
until Jan. 1865.

Their seventh child, Mary Phoebe Willingham, married Thomas Oregon Lawton, son of Joseph Maner Lawton and his second wife, Elizabeth Thompson. Thomas Oregon and Mary Phoebe lived at "Lawton-Willingham House" and reared nine children, Wesley, William, Phoebe, Oregon, Jr., Asbury, Herbert, Allene, Mary, Louise, and their nephew, Joseph Maner Lawton, son of Edmund Milo Lawton and Thomas Oregon's sister, Catherine Elizabeth Lawton.

These little reflections and this project have given me much pleasure, and I trust it will bring some happiness to you.

Very sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Alfred Lawton". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Alfred Lawton

Research:

"Our Family Circle" -- Annie Miller

"The Lawton Family of Robertville" -- E. L. Inabinett

South Caroliniana Library

Joseph Maner Lawton's Family Bible