

DEADWOOD WALL OF FAME

2014

Willis Carlton Spindler

Born: April 1, 1869

In Edgerton, Ohio

Died: October 15, 1947

in Deadwood. (Buried at Mount Moriah Cemetery.)

Willis Carlton Spindler never ran for public office or sat at the head of a large organization. He was a hard worker, a good father, a good citizen and friend to all who knew him. Willis was the kind of man who helped make Deadwood what it is today.

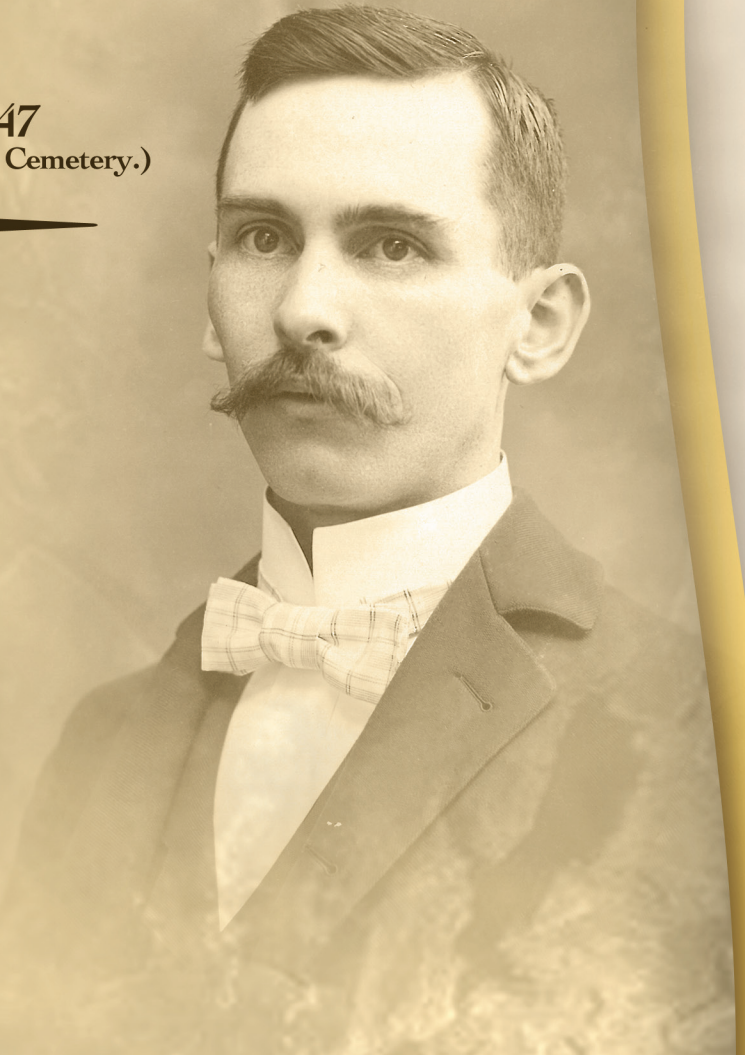
Willis came to the Black Hills in the summer of 1900 in search of fresh air. Back in Ohio he had worked as a railroad telegraph operator for nine years, but smoke from the steam engines and the confined spaces inside the train station caused health problems. His doctor told him to find a higher and drier climate.

His wife's oldest brother, Eli P. Farnham had already moved to the Black Hills to pursue mining and ranching. Willis and Nellie followed him out west, and they opened a restaurant on Deadwood's Main Street. After selling the business to Chalk Wagner, they bought some dairy stock and operated a dairy in Central City, delivering milk house-to-house. During a smallpox outbreak, Willis was forced to separate from his family for several weeks where he lived in his barn.

In the summer of 1902, Willis and Nellie bought four mining claims from George Kellar two and one half miles northeast of Deadwood, an area also known as Oak Flats of Lawrence County and the Old Toll Gate on the Centennial Road. They later bought more mining claims there, and when the Homestead Act passed in 1906, Willis converted the claims into a 37-acre homestead. The deed, patented on December 9, 1909, was signed by President William Taft.

Over the years, timber was cut and much of the land was cleared for farming, vegetable gardening and hay meadows. (This picturesque valley later became part of the land for the proposed Dunbar golf course.) The family's first shelter on the homestead was a two-room log cabin. On May 2, 1905, a heavy spring snow collapsed the roof, narrowly missing Nellie and their newborn daughter, Mae.

In 1906, the Spindler family built a large two-story house. Their income from the 30-head dairy farm, supplemented by the sale of vegetables and chickens, allowed Willis to slowly add improvements to the land. A team of bay-colored horses used for farming also delivered milk and cream every morning to Deadwood restaurants and milk depots. In the summer, the Spindler family sold asparagus, rhubarb and other vegetables to local grocery stores. Willis was well known for his Spindler Asparagus, sold exclusively at Goldberg's Grocery.



DEADWOOD
SOUTH
DAKOTA

A National Historic
Landmark