

## **Winifred Titus Sentel A Great Lady of Sullivan**

Sixty years ago a grand, old lady of Sullivan died and left her home to be used as a home for aged Illinois women. In recent years the home has been known as Titus Manor at Wyman Park. An announcement two months ago stated that the Manor would be closed March 31, 2019. The decision was reportedly made by the Titus Manor Board of Managers.

A news article in the *NewsProgress* reported: "The home goes to the trustee of the Winifred Titus Sentel Will at Busey Bank for further action. Provisions of the will call for the property to be turned over to the City of Sullivan on the Manor's closing." (January 30, 2019.)

A little background ....

### **The Titus Family**

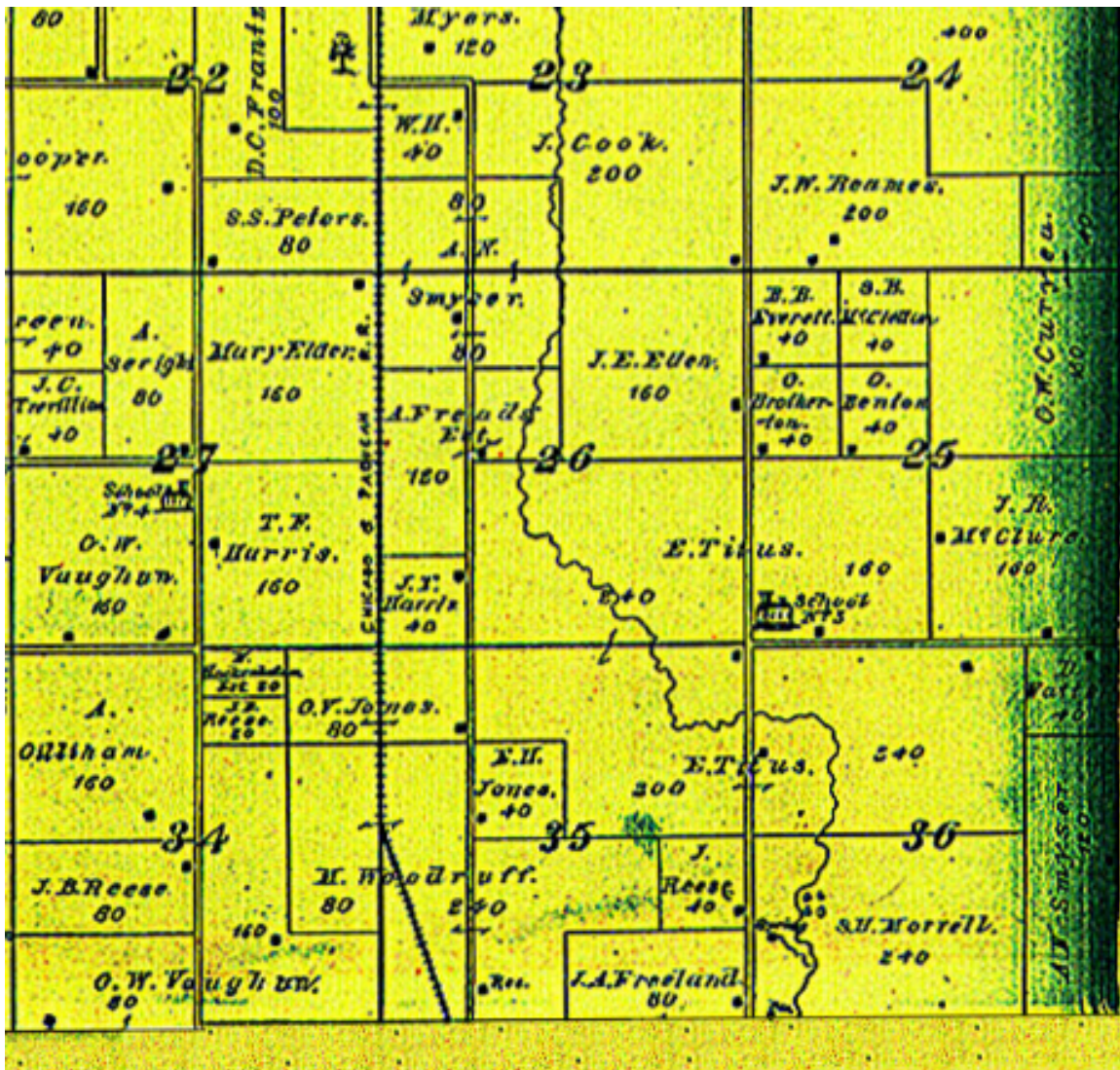
Winifred (Winnie) Titus Sentel was born March 31, 1873, the daughter of Joseph B. and Louise Titus. She died December 29, 1960.

Her Titus grandparents were **George Washington (G.W.) Titus** (1814-1864) and **Elizabeth Bennett Titus** (born 1820; died April 4, 1912). They came to Moultrie County from Indiana in 1857. In the 1860 census G.W. is stated to have been born in New York and was listed as a farmer having real estate valued at \$24,000. Unfortunately, G.W. died at the early age of 50, on September 28, 1864.

G.W. and Elizabeth had one son — **Joseph B. Titus**, a lawyer, land owner and important civic figure in Sullivan. Joseph B. (b.1838; died Sept 1919) — was known as "J.B." He was born in Indiana, graduated from Miami University at Oxford and from the Cincinnati Law College in 1860. He then practiced law in Cincinnati for two years before moving to Sullivan.

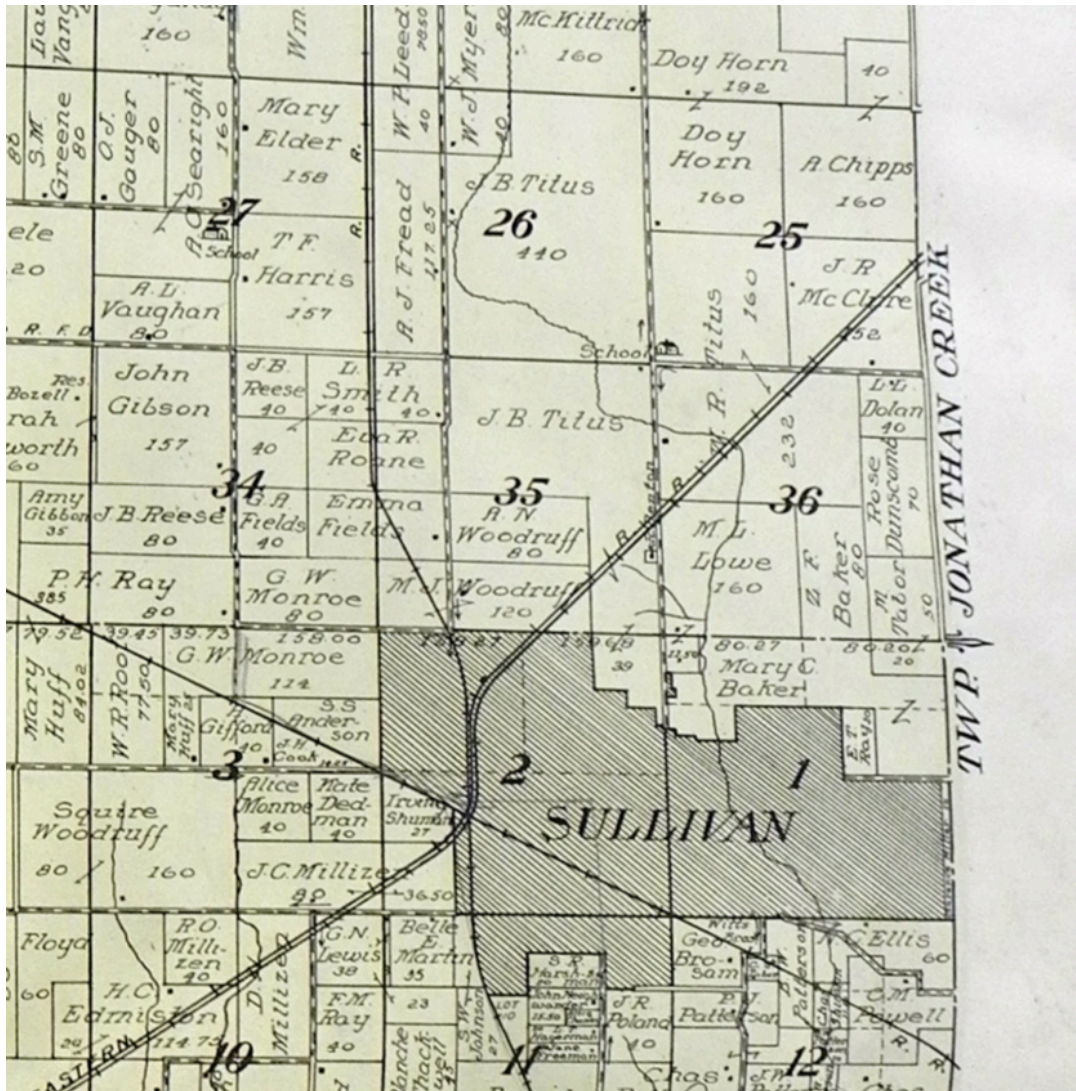
The real estate valued at \$24,000 which G.W. Titus acquired between the time he came to Moultrie County (1857) and 1860 was handed down the generations and, with periodic additions, became the basis of the Titus family wealth. G.W. died in 1864. The 1870 census shows that his widow Elizabeth owned real estate valued at \$20,000; and the son of G.W. and Elizabeth — Joseph B. — owned real estate valued at \$50,000. In 1875 Elizabeth was listed in the Moultrie County atlas as the owner of the Titus Opera House. As shown in the 1875 atlas, the "E. Titus Addition" to Sullivan consisted of about 28 city blocks of residential property north of Jackson Street and west of Hamilton. Elizabeth Titus owned that Sullivan land in the 1860s when it was pasture land. It included the property where the first "North Side" school was built in 1874 (as well as the later Powers school). She and her family enjoyed the proceeds from the sale of those residential parcels.

Much of the Titus farm land was located north of Sullivan along Eagle Creek. The 1875 Sullivan Atlas shows "E. Titus" — Elizabeth Titus, J.B.'s mother — with land in sections 25-26 (240 plus 160) and 35-36 (200 plus 340) of Sullivan township, watered by Eagle Creek, just north of Sullivan.



1875 Sullivan Atlas

Elizabeth Titus, mother of J.B., died April 5, 1912, in the home of her grandson, Will R. (the son of J.B.'s first marriage). As a result, in the 1913 Atlas, the ownership of the Titus holdings had changed. Land in Sections 25-26 and 35-36 was identified as belonging to J.B. Titus, Winifred's father, and W.R. (Will) Titus, the son of J.B.'s first marriage. It appears that roughly 440 plus 339 acres were identified with J.B., and another 160 plus 232 with W.R.



1913 Sullivan Atlas

Several hundred acres of this farm land just north of Sullivan — originally owned by G.W. Titus, then by his widow Elizabeth, and then by their son J.B. Titus — eventually passed to J.B.'s daughter Winnifred and was the subject of her will.

After G.W. died in 1864, his widow, **Elizabeth Titus**, lived in the Perryman building — a brick structure at the west end of the south side of the square. Just across the street to the west lived the family of John R. Eden, a local lawyer. John R.'s son Walt later wrote a memoir of his years in Sullivan. He remembered Elizabeth and her family:

Mrs. Elizabeth Titus, the widow of George Titus, also made her home in that building with her grandson, William R. Titus, a child of my own age. I was frequently in their home. ... She was the mother of Joseph B. Titus, who at that time was a lawyer and banker, and built a few years later the Titus Opera House.  
...

I well remember that Mrs. Titus had two fine sleek red cows, which furnished for the household plenty of good cream, on which W.R. Titus as a boy was raised. He always took it sweetened with sugar. I think that for years was his principal diet.

Mrs. Titus was the first person in Sullivan who had a piano. Hers was the first piano I ever saw. She also had a bay horse and a buggy. (*Memoirs of a Boy Mayor*, Walter Eden, 1999, at 8-9.)

Elizabeth was reportedly an excellent manager, overseeing the family farms after her husband died. The Elizabeth Titus Memorial Library is appropriately named after her.

Until recently it appeared that Elizabeth's son **Joseph B. (J.B.)** had been married twice — producing two children, one by each wife. It now appears he may have been married three times, though it is not certain that he was ever lawfully divorced from the first wife.

## 1861

J.B.'s first wife was Mary Ellen Robb, born in 1841 (1860 census). He met her during the time he practiced law in Cincinnati. They were married in Hamilton, Ohio, April 2, 1861, by a Catholic priest. Mary Ellen was then 19 or 20 years old. Their son, William R. Titus, was born December 18, 1861. (Son William R. would one day marry Mary E., and they would have a son — George L (1891-1964), who married Leona (1899-1974).)

Perhaps J.B. and Mary Ellen obtained a divorce not long after their son William was born in late 1861. In any event a few months after William was born, J.B. brought his infant son to Sullivan where J.B.'s parents were living. William's obituary many years later, in 1932, stated: "When he was nine months of age, the Titus family moved to Sullivan and his entire life was spent here." However, William's mother Mary Ellen, if she came to Sullivan, must have returned to Ohio. The 1870 census shows Mary E. "Robb," age 30, living in Hamilton, Ohio in the household of William Robb, 54, and his wife Eleanor, almost certainly her father and mother. Mary Ellen seems to have spent the rest of her life in Ohio. Ohio Death Records report the death of "Mary Ellen Robb Titus," in Cincinnati, January 9, 1912. (Emphasis supplied.)

## 1869

A few years after returning to Sullivan with his son William, J.B. married a second time. Moultrie County marriage records indicate that on December 16, 1869, Joseph B. Titus married "Josephene" Menges. The Minister who married them was N.S. Bastion. Moultrie County Illinois Marriage Index, Vol. II, p. 23. The 1870 census likewise shows Joseph B. Titus, "Banker," as living in Sullivan, in a household with one other person, "Josie," age 30, "born in Missouri," "housekeeper." They had two sons, both of whom died very young: George (1870-1871) and Charles (1871-1874).

## 1873

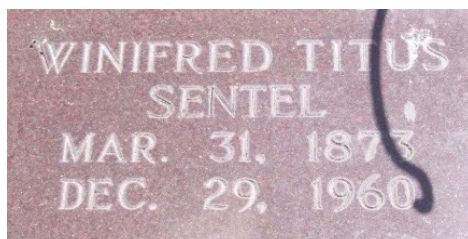
Then in 1873 J.B. reportedly married **Louise Grunert**, 15 years his junior. According to Illinois birth and death records, Louise was born in Arnswalde, Germany, January 15, 1853, the daughter of Karl and Wilhelmina Grunert. (The correct name of this third Mrs. Titus was apparently "Louisa" though she went by "Louise," which is the name used here.) The 1870 census reported that Louise was then a 17-year old teenager living in Sullivan with her mother Wilhelmina, who was working as a milliner. Louise's father Karl had died while serving in the Union Army during the Civil War. He was buried in the National Cemetery at Pine Bluff, Arkansas.

The circumstances of J.B.'s third marriage in 1873 to the 20-year old Louise are not clear. By the early 1870s, J.B. had become a well-settled citizen of Sullivan. He had moved to Sullivan in 1862 and built his law practice there. He had been elected County Clerk, a position he held from 1865 to 1869. In the 1870 census he was listed in Sullivan as a "banker" and, as pointed out above, the owner of real estate valued at \$50,000. He was elected to the Moultrie County Board of Supervisors in 1871. Also, the Opera House "was constructed by J.B. Titus in 1871 ...." (*Combined History of Shelby and Moultrie Counties*, 1881, at 182.) In 1871 his immediate family — his wife Josie and two young sons — lived there. His 10-year old son from his first marriage was also there, being raised by his mother Elizabeth.

Yet in 1873 Joseph B. and Louise reportedly married — not in Sullivan but in San Francisco. They must have traveled the 1900-plus miles from Chicago via the first transcontinental railroad, which had been completed in 1869. They would have arrived at Oakland and then crossed the bay to San Francisco by ferry. Louise was 20 years old in 1873. Decades later, Louise's obituary in the *Sullivan Progress* (November 15, 1935) stated, "In 1873 in San Francisco she was united in marriage to J.B. Titus who preceded her in death in 1919." After San Francisco they apparently stayed a short time in San Luis Obispo.

J.B. could not have lived in California very long before the reported 1873 marriage. He was elected as a county official in 1871; and it was in 1871 that he built the opera house. Also, the 1871, 1872, 1873 and 1874 city directories for San Francisco do not list any Joseph B. or J.B. Titus or Louise Grunert.

According to Winnie's gravestone at Greenhill Cemetery, in Sullivan, Winifred was born in San Francisco, on March 31, 1873.



A digital search of records in Ohio turned up no divorce record for J.B. and his first wife, Mary Ellen Robb; and a similar search in Illinois turned up no divorce record for J.B. and his second wife Josie Menges. A digital search in California turned up no marriage record for J.B. and Louise. If J.B. had not been legally divorced from either Mary Ellen or Josie, he would not have been able legally to marry Louise in California.

The Tituses reportedly returned to Sullivan from California when little Winnie was “only a baby” — so probably in 1873-74. *Decatur Review*, November 27, 1904. However, in her memoir, *The Europe I Remember* (Holborn Publishing Co., no date), Winnie wrote that after her birth in San Francisco, “while I was very young my parents moved to San Louis Obispo, where I played with children on the steps of the old mission.” (at 9.)

J.B.’s two surviving children were understandably raised in separate households. The 1870 and 1880 census reports show that young William R. was living with J.B.’s mother Elizabeth (the widow of old G.W. who, as noted above, had died in 1864). The 1880 census lists the household of Joseph B. and Louise with little Winnie, age 6, and also Louise’s mother, Wilhelmina (60).

When Winnie and her parents moved back to Sullivan sometime in 1873-74, her father assumed management responsibility for the Titus farms and also the new Titus Opera House. A biographical sketch of J.B. Titus in 1891 reported that after a career as a successful attorney, he “is now leading a retired life and looking after his real estate interests,” including “the Opera House Block, which he owns, and ... some 1200 acres of land, most of it being in Sullivan Township, and all of it being finely improved. He is one of the large property owners of the county ....” “Mr. Titus has two children — a son, William R., who is a practical farmer ... and a daughter Winnie, who is still at home with her father attending school and studying music ....” *Portrait and Biographical Record*, 1891 at 313.

Walt Eden remembered Joseph B. Titus and his farm north of Sullivan, near Eagle Pond:

Joseph B. Titus had a bank in a one-story frame building near the center of the north side of the square. He was a fine looking man, of only medium height, rather heavy set with blond hair and beard, rather sparse. At that time he always wore his shirt open at the collar. One day there was a circus in town and he saw me standing near the ticket wagon and when he bought himself a ticket, he also bought one for me and handed it to me. (*Id.*, at 16.)

Father [John R. Eden] and my uncle [Joseph E. Eden] came from Rush County, Indiana, and knew the Newbolds when they lived there. Mr. [Frank] Newbold became a tenant on the 160 acres of land belonging to my uncle near the Eagle Pond. When Uncle built the new brick hotel [the Eden House], he sold that farm to J.B. Titus, and Mr. Newbold continued as tenant for Mr. Titus many years — in fact, I think until he died.” (*Id.*, at 34-35.)



Joseph B. Titus



Louise Titus

## The Titus Opera House

The Titus Opera House, built in 1871, was located at the west end of the block on Harrison Street just north of the Court House, on the building site which some Sullivan old-timers would associate with the Dunscomb furniture store. The opera house was a three-story structure constructed at a cost of more than \$30,000. It replaced a two-story hotel building that had been built on that site in 1847, early in the City's history.

The opera house appears to have been built with J.B.'s mother Elizabeth's money, inherited from G.W. In any event, the opera house property was owned by Elizabeth. The 1875 Sullivan Atlas identifies Elizabeth as the "owner of the Titus Opera House, which will seat 800; thirteen sets scenery, head, foot and border lights."

The Titus opera house was modeled after Haley's Opera House in Chicago. The rear part of the second floor was used for performances and dressing rooms, with the stage at the rear of the second floor, and the third floor used as a gallery. The theater was used for plays, musical productions and recitals, band concerts and minstrel shows, movies, balls and parties, high school graduations, political speeches, lectures, oratorical contests, sermons, and (at least once) a wrestling match.

The three-story structure was used for non-theatrical and non-musical purposes as well. At various periods in the four-decade life of the building, its first floor was leased to clothing and furniture retailers and a grocer, and the upper floors had office space. At one time a bank occupied the prime corner office location on the first floor. The *Sullivan Progress* offices were located on the third floor during the 1870s and early 1880s. Also, in the 1880s J. B. Titus shared a law office with my great-grandfather, John R. Eden, in the opera house building. A picture taken in 1910 shows that Baker Brothers operated a clothing store on the first floor.

The Titus Opera House burned to the ground on February 20, 1910. The fire reportedly started in the dressing rooms of the Opera House and soon spread to the entire building, causing damage of over \$50,000 (in 1910 dollars!). J.B. quickly announced that he would not rebuild the opera house but would instead put in a modern office building on that site.





### Winifred Titus Sentel

Winifred (Winnie) Titus was a talented singer and pianist. She reportedly inherited her musical ability from both parents and paternal grandmother Elizabeth — the lady with the first piano in Sullivan. Her father “played the violin, as a young man, and Mother sang and played the piano.” (*Europe I Remember*, at 10.) Her interest in music was no doubt enhanced by the concerts, musical theater productions and recitals she heard as a child at her family’s Opera House.

The opera house was reportedly a “playground” for Winnie and her friends as she was growing up. Her parents and she lived in an apartment in the opera house building. (*Id.*, at 10-11.) She debuted there as little Eva in “Uncle Tom’s Cabin,” and apparently performed in the opera house on other occasions. (*Decatur Review*, July 4, 1973.)

Winnie began her musical studies at the age of 7, receiving piano lessons from her mother until she was 12. She was then taken to Chicago for periodic lessons at the Chicago Conservatory. When her piano teacher, August Hyllested, moved over to the Gottschalk Lyric school in Chicago, Winnie followed him and received a diploma from that school.

Then in the fall of 1894 when Winnie was 21 years old, she began studying voice at the Chicago Conservatory College with Vittorio Carpi, a noted Italian singer. A baritone, he had begun his singing career in Milan in 1872; after that he performed in Genoa and Florence. In 1875 made a grand tour through the United States, singing in 24 cities. Returning to Europe, he performed in operas in many Italian cities and in London. In 1890 he came to Chicago where he assumed the position as vocal director of the Chicago Conservatory.

Winnie studied with Carpi during the fall and winter of 1894, returning to Sullivan in the spring of 1895. Carpi continued to work in Chicago until 1896, at which time he, along with his wife and three daughters, returned to Milan. Winnie wished to continue to study with him; and on November 21, 1896, she and her mother sailed from New York on the Kaiser Wilhelm II. (*Europe I Remember*, at 12.)



Winnie's musical studies included two long stays in Europe and one period of work in New York City.

Upon their arrival in early December, the Carpi family met Winnie and her mother at the train station in Milan and welcomed them into their home. Louise stayed on for a couple of months, returning to Sullivan in February 1897. Meanwhile Winnie took voice lessons from Carpi, and studied French, German and Italian at a nearby language school. She later wrote that her language studies continued for two and one half years. She also found time to explore Milan, climb the Duomo, and attend concerts at the La Scala opera house. (*Id.*, at 15-16.)

Winnie continued to study with Signor Carpi for three years, and took piano lessons at the Royal Conservatory in Milan. In the summers she went on outings to nearby Pavia, Monza, and Varese, west of Como. She climbed a mountain from which she took in "a splendid panorama":

Five different lakes could be seen, the foothills of the Alps, and the towering mountains. Such profound beauty radiates spirituality and we were entranced with the supernatural loveliness .... (*Id.*, at 19.)

Before returning to America from Milan, Winnie "sang for different impresarios and was offered a contract to sing the operas *Rigoletto*, *The Barber of Seville*, and *Lucia di Lammermoor*, but my parents decided it was better for me to return home." (*Id.*, at 19.) Louise and Winnie visited Como and traveled to Venice, Rome, Florence, Pisa and Genoa before leaving for Paris in late September 1899. They sailed from Cherbourg on November 13, spending a day in New York before taking the train to Central Illinois.

Winnie did not remain home long. "My parents thought it would be very beneficial for me to spend more time in Paris for study. So I sailed ... from New York, June 14, [1900], on the *Konigen Louise*." (*Id.*, at 29.) She passed her time in Paris in singing, study and excursions into the country. She found time to visit the Exposition in Paris as well as Versailles. A friend arranged an afternoon of music, where the great cellist, Pablo Casals, performed, and then "his accompanist played for me. I sang 'Caro Nome,' from *Rigoletto*; and the 'Jewel Song,' from *Faust*.' ... During my stay in Paris I sang very successfully many times." During a visit to Milan in December 1900 to see Carpi and his family, Winnie briefly met Verdi who had brought a gift for one of Carpi's daughters; and she was there to witness the great composer's funeral when he died a month later. Winnie "sang that winter in many concerts and musicales with success." In the fall of 1901 she returned to America. (*Id.*, at 32-35.)

Winnie spent much of 1901 and 1902 in New York City: "I spent two winters in New York City, where I sang successfully and won many nice press notices." (*Id.*, at 35.) In November 1901 she "assisted" Carpi in a recital at Mendelssohn Hall (*N.Y. Times*, November 24, 1901); and in mid-January 1902 she sang her own recital there.



Mendelssohn Hall Wednesday Afternoon Jan. 14  
**SONG RECITAL**  
  
**Miss WINIFRED TITUS** *Coloratura*

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In 1902 Winifred Titus posed for this photograph used in her programs and advertising posters for her first concert in Mendelssohn hall, New York City. She had just returned from studies in Italy.

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**BORN A SINGER IN A  
 FAMILY OF SINGERS**



MISS WINIFRED TITUS

Winnie also performed back home in the Midwest:

I sang in my home town of Sullivan, at the laying of the cornerstone of the first building of the Illinois Masonic Home there, then again at the completion of the building. Both times there were great crowds in the city of Sullivan. I also sang in Springfield, Decatur, Mattoon, Chicago, Columbus, Ohio, and other Midwest cities. While at home I had an interesting class of young people in piano and voice... *Id.*, at 35-36.

After “some years spent at home” singing, studying and teaching (*id.*, at 36), Winnie and her mother decided to make a third European trip — this time to Germany, the land of their ancestors. They sailed in August 1909, arriving at Bremerhaven, where they boarded a train to Berlin. “There was great excitement, as the Kaiserin’s birthday was being celebrated and Graf Zeppelin was to fly his Luft ship over the city for the first time.” She heard the Philharmonic Orchestra play in its fine Berlin concert hall, and “attended many recitals here and heard many fine artists. Two outstanding ones were: Lili Lehman, the great singer; and the pianist Busoni.” (*Id.*, at 37-39.)

Just before Easter 1910 Winnie and her Louise visited the little town where Louise’s parents had lived. Then, back in Berlin, they visited Potsdam and the royal summer home of the Hohenzollerns. After brief sightseeing visits in Nuremberg, Munich and the Bavarian Alps, they returned to Berlin and caught a ship home from Bremerhaven. (*Id.*, at 44.)

Winnie did not explain in her memoir why she stopped performing. According to one report many years later, she “was receiving considerable attention because of the excellence of her voice when a throat ailment ended her concert career.” (*Decatur Daily Review*, December 30, 1960.) Whether it was the throat ailment that ended her concertizing, or the passage of time, or her marriage to Judge Sentel in 1918, music remained a major part of her life.

Winnie married relatively late in life, on June 22, 1918, at the age of 45. Her husband, Judge George A. Sentel, had been born in Moultrie County and raised in Decatur until the family returned to Sullivan. He became a successful lawyer, master in chancery, and after 1915 Circuit Judge. During his early years as a lawyer, George also conducted a “private loan business which brought him substantial returns.” (*Decatur Daily Review*, September 26, 1933.) He was about 45 at the time of the marriage. They had no children.

A painting of Winnie Titus Sentel by Herbert Ryman, an artist with the Disney organization, hung in the Titus-Sentel home on North Worth street until recently. Mrs. Sentel sat for the portrait in her home, but the artist also had the 1902 photograph from which to work.



**Painting of Winnifred Titus by Herbert Ryman**

### **The Titus-Sentel Home**

The stately Titus home at the corner of North Worth and Strain streets had been built by Winnie's father, J.B. Titus, in 1895, replacing an earlier and smaller four-room structure on the same site. The new house served as the home for J.B., his wife Louise, Winnie (22 in 1895), and Louise's aged mother Wilhelmina. After Winnie returned from Europe in 1910, she lived with her parents in that home, where she offered piano lessons to her students.



### **The Titus-Sentel Home**

The 1895 home consisted of “eleven commodious rooms, with baths.” A 1905 news article pointed out that it was heated by a hot water plant and lighted throughout with electricity. It was situated on about two acres which were covered by “stately elms and oaks, interspersed with some ornamental and fruit trees.” (*Decatur Review*, January 6, 1905.)



**Stained Glass Window. The Titus-Sentel Home.**

Immediately after Winnie married George Sentel in 1918, she and the Judge lived briefly on Monroe Street. Then on September 21, 1919, a few months after their marriage, Winnie's father J.B. died. His will, made in 1907, provided for the disposition of his property as follows:

He appointed his wife Louise Titus executrix. To her he bequeathed 99 1/2 acres within the corporate limits of the city of Sullivan and on which is situated the home on North Worth street. She also receives about 80 acres more, the bequest being in lieu of the widow's dower.

To his daughter, Mrs. Winnie Titus Sentel, he leaves 240 acres in the tracts known as the Eden farm, the Fread 40 and the Jones 40. To his son, William R. Titus, he leaves any and all other real estate not mentioned in the two bequests. ... Most of the real estate which is mentioned in the will had been deeded to the heirs prior to Mr. Titus' death." *Sullivan Progress*, October 24, 1919.

It is not clear why J.B. disposed of his property by deed before his death in 1919 rather than relying on the will and a probate proceeding. It is possible that J.B. — an experienced real estate lawyer — saw some risk associated with allowing the effectiveness of a property



transfer to depend on a will describing Louise as his wife and the bequest as “being in lieu of the widow’s dower.”

In any event, according to the newspaper account, J.B.’s widow Louise received the North Worth Street home. At some point Winnie and George moved in with her. See *Sullivan City Directory, 1933-1934*. After George Sentel died in 1933, Winnie remained in the home with a her mother. After Louise died in November 1935, the house went to Winnie.

During the latter 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s, Mrs. Sentel (as it now seems appropriate to call her) gave piano and voice lessons to local students and held recitals in her elegant home. During the 1950s, Janet Roney was one of her students for both piano and voice. She remembered:

Mrs. Sentel charged nothing for the lessons. ... She gave her lessons on her sun porch on the west side of the house. She spent most of her time there and in the kitchen. ... Her beautiful grand piano stood in the northeast corner of the large living room that went across the entire east side of the house. She took me in there a couple of times to show it to me. I remember the wooden floors were highly polished and it was the centerpiece of the room. She told me that if I ever got good enough, she would let me play on it.

Every May she opened the house for her Garden party and Tea. She invited all her clubs to have their meetings there so they could enjoy her beautiful gardens in bloom. ... What I did love about taking lessons from her was walking to her sun porch door along the walk on the west side of the yard from the street ... because most of her gardens were on the west side, as was one of her two fountains. ...

The other favorite part was the little sun porch where her little spinet piano was that she used for lessons. It was torn off and rebuilt with a two-story addition when they made the place into the ladies’ home. Piled on top of the window ledges and in shelves here and there were stacks of music. (Email from Janet Roney to REM, May 2019.)

Mrs. Sentel also wrote several songs, one of which, “Jenny Wren,” won a national prize. Later in life she provided scholarship awards for Millikin voice and piano students, and served as a trustee of the university beginning in 1953. She gave a fine two-manual organ to the Sullivan Presbyterian church in memory of her parents.

In addition, she continued to coach and encourage many young Sullivan musicians, including Guy Little Jr., who went on to found the Little Theater, and Sarah Williamson. My brother Philip and I were beneficiaries of such coaching in the years 1956-58.



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Mrs. **Winifred Titus** Sentel listens in the music room of her Sullivan home to a selection played by a young friend and student, Sarah Williamson, 13, of Monticello. Also giving close attention is Guy Little, Jr., of Sullivan, another student of the former concert artist. Mrs. Sentel, who has followed musical activities of Millikin university for a number of years, recently presented the school with two annual scholarships. (Herald and Review Photo)

**Winifred Sentel with Guy Little Jr. and Sarah Williamson in 1951.**



**Edén Martin at Mrs. Sentel's grand piano, circa 1957.**

## Winnie Titus Sentel's Will

I remember Mrs. Sentel as an elegant, gentle, rather frail lady. She died December 29, 1960, in the home on North Worth Street that her father had built in 1895. She had been alone since her husband Judge Sentel died in 1933, and had been in failing health for several years.

Dan Flannell, Sullivan's City Administrator, kindly provided me with a copy of the will and court order in 1961 taking jurisdiction and confirming appointment of the trustee, the National Bank of Decatur.

In her will as amended by two codicils, Winnie made gifts to the girl scouts, to her half-nephew, George Titus, to the boy scouts, and —

Sixth: her home place, including the house and land, to the Presbytery of Mattoon of the Presbyterian Church to be used for a home for elderly ladies; “and if said Presbytery shall fail or cease to use said property for said charitable uses and purposes hereinafter set forth, said property shall be sold by my Trustee, ... and the proceeds distributed in accordance with the provisions of the Tenth Paragraph ....” (Emphasis supplied.)

Eighth: “I give and devise all the rest, residue and remainder of my real estate, of whatever it may consist and wherever situate ... to THE NATIONAL BANK OF DECATUR, ILLINOIS, Trustee, to be held in trust for the charitable uses and purposes and under the conditions and provisions as hereinafter set forth ....” “(c) The annual rents, profits and income realized from my said trust estate shall be distributed as hereinafter set forth: ...” To the Mattoon Presbytery ... “such sum or sums of money as it shall deem necessary for the proper maintenance, repair and operation, the cost of necessary building improvements, and support of the home place ...”; (Emphasis supplied.)

Ninth: the Mattoon Presbytery shall “establish and use my said home place and property ... as a home for elderly women ....”

Tenth: In the event the said Mattoon Presbytery ... should not accept the aforesaid gifts according to the terms herein above set forth, or in the event the said Presbytery should cease to operate said home for the purposes herein above set forth, then it is my will and I do hereby direct that my Trustee ... convert all of my said Trust Estate into cash at either public or private sale, ... I direct that the net proceeds therefrom be paid to The City of Sullivan, Moultrie County, Illinois, to be used for civic improvements ....” (Emphasis supplied.)

In a codicil Winnie changed the church designation to: “The Trustees of the Synod of Illinois of the United Presbyterian Church in the USA.”

Winnie's gift to the Presbyterian Synod thus consisted not only of her home, but also of rents and income from the farm land north of Sullivan as the Trustee deems necessary for “the proper maintenance, repair and operation” of the Titus home.

The farm land had been in the Titus family for decades.

On February 11, 1961, the general council of the Synod accepted the home and agreed to the stipulation that the house be used as a home for aged women. (*Decatur Review*, February 12, 1961) Annual income from the 913 acres of land was then esteemed at \$15,000 and was deemed sufficient to maintain the home. The home was to be called the “Joseph and Louise Titus Memorial Home.”

One might pause and ask: what was or is the Synod? The entity which accepted the Titus gift was the “Illinois Synod of the United Presbyterian Church, USA.” It held annual meetings at Millikin University during the 1960s. (*Decatur Daily Review*, June 7, 1963.) Local churches are governed by presbyters or elders. Synods are associations of local churches. Although the Presbyterian Church of Sullivan seems now to be defunct, there is a Presbytery of Southeastern Illinois which seems to include Moultrie County. And there is a “larger” Synod of Lincoln Trails which includes the territory of central and southeastern Illinois as well as Indiana. That Synod may well be the successor to the Synod that accepted the Titus gift back in 1960.

In any event, it appears that neither the original “Illinois Synod” or some successor synod has been involved in the control and management of the Sentel home in recent decades. Management appears to have been in the hands of the Trustee and the local management board.

Somebody in Sullivan knows how much 913 acres of good Moultrie County farm land is worth today. I do not. I’ve heard prices per acre mentioned ranging as high as \$10,000 per acre or more.  $900 \times 10,000 = \$9$  million.

The author is not practicing law here (or anywhere else). But it appears that Sullivan has experienced a stroke of very good fortune. Mrs. Sentel’s will was that if the Presbyterian Synod “fail or cease to use” her home for the purposes described, the property was to be sold; and the trustee is to “convert all of my said Trust Estate into cash” with “the net proceeds therefrom to be paid to The City of Sullivan ... to be used for civic improvements ...” It appears incontrovertible that Winnie’s home has ceased to be used by the Presbyterians — or anyone else — as a home for aged women.

The will says the home is to be sold “at either public or private sale.” Sullivan thus has at least two options:

Option I: If Sullivan wants to use the home or the property on which it sits for some civic purpose, it could purchase it. The Trustee would likely insist that the property be sold to the bidder who offers the most money. Sullivan or some entity connected with Sullivan could easily be the successful bidder. Sullivan could (a) borrow \$X to outbid any other bidder, (b) then receive the same \$X as part of the “net proceeds,” and (c) use the money to repay the short-term loan.

Option II: If Sullivan does not want to use the home or property, it could cheer as other bidders seek to buy it, and then pocket the proceeds, which would then be devoted to “civic improvements” along with the presumably-larger amount to be received from the sale of the farm land.

Thanks to Mrs. Sentel’s generosity over half a century ago, many elderly ladies have enjoyed the use of her home over many decades. Hopefully, Sullivan’s leaders will find a civic use for the proceeds from the sale of the house and farm land that would have given her satisfaction.

