

In 1856, five years before the Civil War, Richard Bryan freed his slaves, educated them, deeded land, and shared profits. At war's end, Yankees wanted to use his success to promote their own agenda. He refused, and they turned on him.

The Chess Match: Book Four of Conveyance

By Jeff Babb Willis

Order the book from the publisher [Booklocker.com](https://www.booklocker.com)

<https://www.booklocker.com/p/books/13753.html?s=pdf>

**or from your favorite neighborhood
or online bookstore.**

THE CHESS MATCH

Book 4 of

Conveyance



JEFF BABB WILLIS

with C.K. Gurin

Copyright © 2025 Jeff Babb Willis

Print ISBN: 978-1-958892-10-7

Ebook ISBN: 979-8-88531-683-5

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the author.

Published by BookLocker.com, Inc., Trenton, Georgia.

NOTE: This novel is fact-based fiction, passed down through the years to the author by elderly members of the author's own family. Stories were painstakingly verified with multiple family members privy to the same information; and further verified by area genealogists.

BookLocker.com, Inc.
2025

First Edition

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
Willis, Jeff Babb and Gurin, C.K.

Conveyance: The Chess Match by Jeff Babb Willis and
C.K. Gurin

Library of Congress Control Number: 2024924968

CONTENTS

CONVEYANCE – PRELUDE: The Reconstruction Years – 1865 - 1877	7
Where we are in the story.....	13
PART I.....	17
Chapter One.....	17
Chapter Two	44
Chapter Three	66
Chapter Four.....	87
Chapter Five	110
Chapter Six	132
Chapter Seven.....	166
Chapter Eight.....	194
Chapter Nine.....	220
Chapter Ten	241
Chapter Eleven	263
Chapter Twelve	294
Chapter Thirteen.....	323
PART II	364
Chapter Fourteen	364
Chapter Fifteen	387
Chapter Sixteen	419
Chapter Seventeen.....	460
Chapter Eighteen	496
Continue The Adventure CONVEYANCE BOOK FIVE	537

Jeff Babb Willis

The Conveyance Saga.....573
About The Author: Jeff Willis575

CONVEYANCE – PRELUDE: The Reconstruction Years – 1865 - 1877

On April 9, 1865, the South surrendered, and Northern forces occupied the southern states, which were then reorganized into a part of the Union. Kentucky, New Jersey, and Delaware were states in which slavery remained legal.

On April 15th, less than a week after the Confederate surrender, Lincoln was assassinated. Vice President Andrew Johnson assumed the presidency, bringing some of his personally owned slaves to the White House with him.

President Johnson quickly reneged on Lincoln's approval of forty acres and the loan of an army mule to heads of household among the newly freed slaves in South Carolina. Johnson returned ownership of land upon which forty thousand freedmen had already settled, to wealthy plantation owners, former slaveholders, from whom the land had been captured and confiscated during the war.

It took eight more months before the 13th Amendment to the Constitution was legally ratified on December 6, 1865, and with it, slavery was legally abolished across the entire United States of America.

Close on the heels of the newly occupying Northern forces came strangers, some genuinely interested in helping recently freed slaves. Most of the ex-slaves could neither read nor write, and they struggled, as they tried to acclimate themselves to their new reality.

Others came South as well. A wave of profiteers, who cloaked themselves under the guise of helping former slaves, instead held personal financial gain and obtaining control of state and local governments, as their ultimate goal.

The profiteers came to be known as “Carpetbaggers” a disparaging reference to their vulture-like arrival during times of extreme stress and deprivation. Carpetbaggers, viewed as lowlifes who thrived on people’s misfortune, were frequently identifiable by their one-handed luggage, a compact, soft-sided bag typically constructed of cheap flowered carpet material.

Resentment ran high in the South. Citizens were being threatened, taken advantage of, and bullied by members of the occupying army, many of whom had previously been recruited from Northern jails. And nobody was doing anything about it.

Peace was a thing of the past. In this new reality, it no longer mattered if you had argued against secession. You were branded a traitor, based simply upon where you happened to live when the war began.

The Chess Match

Richard Bryan of Mt. Lebanon, Louisiana, whose story follows, was an influential citizen. Upon the passing of his well-off parents in Georgia, he and his siblings had each inherited a share of their parent's property and their forty-one servants. Opposed to selling the slaves and breaking up families to convert his share of the inheritance to cash, Bryan had traded his siblings for four thousand in gold plus the married couples and their children, who then packed up and moved with him to Louisiana. Bryan spoke of them respectfully as "the people."

Bryan, a consummate idealist, had a forward-looking outlook. Slavery had been an anachronism. Years before the war, he had offered emancipation to everyone on his plantation, hired a teacher, deeded land, shared profits, and encouraged entrepreneurs.

The Civil War devastated the South, but the war never reached his home. When Union occupiers finally arrived in Mt. Lebanon, they were astounded to find Bryan's experiment fully implemented. Former slaves could not only "read, write, and cipher," they were landowners, homes had been built, they were engaged in a trade, some were even bilingual.

Pressure was being brought to bear on the South's most influential citizens by those seeking to advance a specific political agenda. If residents who had been identified as "influencers" agreed to join the political party that aggressively sought control of the newly

conquered South, they would be offered favored treatment. Failure to acquiesce would not be viewed favorably.

Those who made what was viewed as a bargain with the devil were roundly cursed as “Scalawags” by their neighbors. Across the entire South, it could be said that scalawags were despised even more vehemently than the opportunistic carpetbaggers.

Richard Bryan, although he had chosen to emancipate and educate the people on his own many years before, and had deliberately kept quiet about it, was exactly what politicians were looking for to further their agenda. But Bryan wasn't interested in being used for propaganda. Nor was he of a mind to allow the stunningly beautiful orphaned mixed-race teenage daughter of his son's late governess and a wealthy New Orleans businessman to be taken advantage of by one of the most famous Reconstruction era scalawags of all.

After the Confederate surrender, Richard Bryan, his extended family, their hired hands, the people, and a wounded Yankee deserter his young sons had stumbled upon in the woods and brought home with them, found themselves at the mercy of a corrupt Governor, political hacks, petty tyrants, and remorseless convicts in military uniform.

Not just rustlers but occupying troops would frequently raid farms. Often, they'd steal entire harvests. If you

The Chess Match

resisted the men in uniform, they might hang you and burn your place down out of spite. There was no legal recourse against the government.

Food became scarce, hard money even more so. “Injun Grass” as it was known to those who smoked it, grew wild on their land. It was good quality, so they’d periodically harvest it and offer little poke bags of marijuana for sale to visitors who were passing through on the stagecoach. Occasionally they’d even sell some to soldiers. Every penny counted.

They tightened their belts, quietly bartered for weapons, secretly manufactured ammunition, and killed in self-defense when they were faced with no other choice.

Their joint goal was survival.

Some of them would make it.

What transpired across the South might today be equated to legal, as well as militarized police brutality by occupying forces.

The experience of all, regardless of color, who lived through this traumatic and tumultuous time in history, burned itself deeply into America’s collective psyche.

Where we are in the story...

The year is 1866. There had been a brief lull in the violence, sparking hope that things might finally return to normal. The lakeside contingent, marauding bands of ruffians, consisting primarily of Union deserters, Jayhawkers, and Comancheros, along with a few Confederate deserters and assorted outlaws, had quietly and mysteriously gone dark. Deputy Robert Love had assured the Bryans that the “problem is gone,” without further explanation. Richard Bryan took the notation instinctively.

The cold, clear winter weeks passed, and February signaled a cool, dry springtime. The Bryans welcomed Joshua Willis and John Garrett from Claiborne Parrish.

Joshua and Barbara Willis arrived as paying guests at the stagehouse. During their visit, they had a short business-related rendezvous with John Garrett and his son Pat. Young Pat Garrett would eventually go on to become Sheriff Pat Garrett, the famous Old West lawman and customs agent who has been credited with killing the outlaw, Billy the Kid.

The purpose of the rendezvous, orchestrated by Dr. Barth Egan, was to systematize a disbursal of the war’s leftover Laudanum (opium) for profit. Their plan was to convert it to “tonic” for retail sales.

Joshua Willis, a native Virginian who found his way to the city of Arizona, Louisiana, via Todd County, Kentucky, would, many years hence, become the ancestor of Dr. James Clinton Willis, co-founder of Willis-Knighton Memorial Hospital in Shreveport.

Richard Bryan's pre-civil war crony, Walt Schantz, his wife Gretchen and son Otto arrived unexpectedly on the last day before Willis and Garrett's departure. The chance meeting resulted in a friendship forged between Garrett, Schantz and Dr. Egan.

Schantz and Bryan shared similar political leanings. Both voted for Stephen Douglas in 1860. Those views were clearly on display when confronting another visitor, Freedman's Bureau agent, Marshall Harvey Twitchell. Twitchell was rudely insistent on having the Bryans board a pair of so-called "school-marms" sent by various Abolitionist organizations.

Angered by Bryan's rebuff, Twitchell's sardonic response ignited Schantz, who responded accordingly. With the decidedly unfriendly exchange, the current political divide in the North was clearly on display.

As the weather softened, fears began to lessen. Superficially, everything seemed to be returning to normal. Young Frank Bryan was "reintroduced" to pretty Augusta Upton, one-year his senior and literally bursting into womanhood. Infatuated, he is curtly reminded by his mother, after having observed what

The Chess Match

she considered an inappropriate lack of decorum, that girls mature earlier than boys, and “men have their seven seeds to sow,” prior to settling on a life partner.

The long-awaited sawmill kit has finally arrived and is now being put to good use. The tinker, Cecil Taylor proves invaluable in his instinctive understanding of how to keep the sawmill components operational. Taylor ingeniously continues his production, modification and perfection of various rounds and accompanying weapons. The arsenal’s growth continues and with it the stockpile of small firearms.

Joined by his brother Will, Frank, George, Otto Schantz and Pat Garrett share a memorable moment in Reconstruction North Louisiana, 1866.

Unfortunately, this “lull,” a brief return to pre-war times, is interrupted by the future, as it looks upon a past few now recognize.

Conveyance

Book Four – The Chess Match

PART I

Chapter One

The Ides of March slipped by almost unnoticed.

During these cool, sunny days, work began in earnest as a full twenty acres of primarily loblolly pines and red oaks were cleared. The sawmill kit, under the watchful eye of Cecil Taylor was working like clockwork.

The first week, Daddy and Amos transported a wagonload of lumber to Sparta. Within 48 hours, they sold every bit of it. The price was not as high as Daddy had hoped for, but it was visible proof that the kit would pay for itself in a short time.

The cotton fields were being carefully sowed. Amos had suggested that they allow some of the seventy acres to stand fallow for a year. But with the constant need for hard money, it was decided to try to get the maximum yield, “resting” the land the following year. The clearing would ultimately create new farmland.

“Planting day” for the corn was under debate. Because Spring had been dryer than normal, there was concern that if the rains did come suddenly, it might force the planting to be redone. There was also the concern that if they waited too late, the ears might be stunted due to the usual drought that historically came in late August.

Daddy’s cattle trading was going extremely well! Within two weeks of our return from Shreveport, he had added a bull and thirteen heifers. The fourteen head of cattle were received in exchange for ordnance! Our neighbors were anxious to better defend themselves against marauders. With the newborn calves, the herd was now up to 137 head.

The number of hogs on the property continued to swell. Nobody knew the exact count. But it appeared that no less than seventy hogs had been added from the previous fall, due to unusually large litters.

The turkey and chicken numbers continued to mount as well. Riley had gradually taken over duties from Rosa and was greatly assisted by Lilly. He had truly become the “sheriff” of the chicken houses, as Amos called him. It was believed that he and Lilly would be “tying the knot” in late spring.

Luther had been joined by Helen Mendez, a light-skinned woman with features that combined African and Spanish. She was born in Sabine Parish to free parents. We had gradually come to realize that the two

The Chess Match

had been corresponding for better than a year. At age four, Helen's mother had died, and her father had taken her to live with relatives in Houston.

Tragedy had struck, leaving her orphaned. Her impoverished aunt had placed her in a Catholic establishment there in Houston, where she stayed until she had graduated all eleven grades of school. She had then returned to Louisiana in hopes of finding misplaced family members. Instead, she had met Luther, 15 years her senior, whom she agreed to marry. She arrived on the same Eastbound stage that carried the Shantz's to Monroe. The driver agreed to delay departure long enough for the Shantz's to witness their marriage.

Nothing more had been said about the former Lakeside menace, it was as if it had never existed. Yet, without fail, Amos and Guy made certain that at least four hands were monitoring the embankments daily.

Guy continued to reside with Juliane Mayeaux in her small cottage near the college. That they would eventually marry was something assumed but left unspoken. I sensed Daddy was worried that if they did marry, both might opt for a return to South Louisiana.

One day, without warning, Daddy called Will and me into the dining room and shut both doors. It was such an unusual gesture that we concluded that we were in

trouble. As it turned out, we weren't! But his revelation justified his action.

He took his usual seat at the head of the table. "Boys, you are both growing up in fine fashion and I am especially proud of the manner in which you have addressed your academics." Daddy motioned for us to sit on either side of him. Folding his hands, he resumed. "These are perilous times, as you have witnessed. I have always believed that while we should always hope for the best, we must likewise plan for the worst.

"Through this past year, following Southern defeat, we have been at the mercy of the invading army. As you have seen, I have done everything imaginable to placate the Yankees. I see this as the right approach. We should never anger a sleeping dog when it can be better left to sleep." Daddy was taking a piece of paper and writing something on it.

"Do you think they're coming back, Daddy?" Will asked.

"Will, they have never left," Daddy admitted. "They haven't necessarily been over here poking around or stealing our livestock. But they are close by. Never forget this for one minute! My hope and prayer is that they will eventually become bored with us and return to where they came from.

The Chess Match

“As you have seen, there are a lot of lawless men drifting through our land. Many are former members of the Union Army. I honestly don’t know what happened to that contingent on the lake, but I have been assured that they will not harass us further.”

“Do you think they’re still over there? Or do you think something bad might have happened to them?” I was asking a question that nobody seemed to want to answer.

“Frank, I honestly don’t know.” Daddy sighed. “And I haven’t pressed for answers. Perhaps it is because I don’t want to know. I would advise you both to do the same. Sometimes, it is better not to know. What is important is that you know where certain caches of valuables are hidden that might be needed if I and/or your mother depart unexpectedly. You both know the dry well where we rested the trespassing ruffian?”

I couldn’t tell what he meant initially. Then it came to me. “Yes, I do.”

“We both do, Daddy.” Will broke through my momentary trance.

“Stand at the well, facing south,” Daddy instructed. “Walk due South, ten paces. Stop and commence digging. At approximately six feet, you will find a tin box. In it are instructions, in French, on where to go next.”

“And?” Will answered.

“That is all that you need to know for now.” Daddy signaled that the meeting had concluded.

“What is in the box, Daddy?” I asked.

“I just told you, son.”

“What he means, Daddy, is what kind of treasure can we expect to find, when we find it?” Will was persistent.

“There are some things that you might expect, such as gold coinage,” Daddy replied forthrightly. “But there are other items that might surprise you. I can tell you that the practice of entailing is dead.”

“What was entailing?” I asked.

“Entailment is the practice under English Common Law of limiting inheritance of land to the owner's lineal descendants. In other words, if in my will I had wanted to leave a bit of acreage to George, for example, instead of leaving it to the two of you, my lineal descendants, under entailment, I would not have been permitted to do so,” he explained. “That practice still exists in England, but not here.”

The Chess Match

“Regarding land, under Louisiana law, it will automatically go to the two of you. Your mother is bypassed. This is the Code of Napoleon.

“What I’m also advising you today is that whatever is included in the estate will be divided between the two of you equally. Thus, it is your responsibility to make certain that your mother is taken care of.”

“You have our word on it, Daddy,” I answered firmly, extending my hand.

Will joined me in saying, “We’ll do everything that we can to maintain our home.”

“I know that you both will be responsible stewards of it.” Daddy shook our hands in turn.

“I cannot express the gratitude that I hold for both of you. A man could not have finer sons. I am profoundly saddened by the fact that you have been forced to see as much of the real world as you have during this past year. But you have handled it like men. For that, I will be eternally grateful.”

Rising abruptly from the table, Daddy re-opened the doors and signaled to Merriam for coffee. “Boys, I intend to take your mother’s advice and embark on a trip soon. We have been too long isolated by war, reconstruction, and circumstances in general.”

“Where will we go?” Will’s inquiry was tinged with notable excitement.

“Perhaps we might journey to New Orleans. Perhaps up north. I am not certain at this juncture.” Daddy answered candidly. “I will study it further.”

A few days later we were greeted by a rather tall, strapping young man on a white stallion accompanied by two black stewards on smaller chestnut geldings. Stopping first at the confectionery, he greeted Miss Mayeaux and then me.

“I understand that this is the establishment of Richard Bryan,” he inquired. “Might he be on the premises?”

“Well, I am not certain of his whereabouts!” Miss Mayeaux gasped.

“What do you want to know for?” I walked up to the man. He was easily two inches taller than me. He had dark brown hair, a huge mustache and was wearing an expensive suit.

“I have heard some amazing things about Mr. Bryan.” The dapper stranger had an accent akin to Billy’s, but more precisely enunciated. I guessed that they were roughly the same age. I’d learn later that the visitor was twenty-four years old.

“You wouldn’t be from Illinois, would you?” I asked.

“As a matter of fact, I am!” the stranger acknowledged. “How did you guess? My name is Henry Clay Warmoth; of McLeansboro, Illinois.”

“Is that near Marion?” I asked.

“As a matter of fact, it is!” The stranger seemed impressed with my reference to geography. “In fact, Marion is only thirty miles or so from McLeansboro! I take it you know someone from Marion?”

“Maybe,” I answered hesitantly.

“I’ll take yo hosses, suh.” Uncle Elijah appeared. “If you wants yo men ta stay in de bahn, we has a fine room fo dem.”

“That would be splendid.” Warmoth tipped his hat. “Much Obliged.”

“I reckon you’ll need a room, Mr. Warmoth?” I asked hesitantly.

“Yes, if you have such.” Warmoth had taken his saddlebag and another small bag from the horse and proceeded to follow me into the house.

“Good afternoon.” Mama met us at the top of the stairs. Mr. Bryan is currently making his rounds, but he should return shortly. I take it you should like accommodation for the evening?”

“Indeed, I would, Mrs...” The stranger took off his hat and bowed.

“Bryan. Mary Bryan. I am his wife.” Mama graciously led Warmoth into the parlor and motioned for him to have a seat. “Frank, please take our guest’s belongings into the back, east bedroom upstairs. If you should like to bathe, Mister, we can bring a deep tub to your room.”

“That I might.” Warmoth politely removed his hat as he took a seat on the long sofa.

“I apologize.” I stuttered. “His name is Henry Clay Warmoth. He is from Illinois. His two men will be staying in the barn. Uncle Elijah has already taken care of their horses.”

“Well, we are delighted to have you, Mr. Warmoth.” Mama smiled. “Might I offer you some refreshment? We have coffee and tea. Or, if your leanings favor something a bit stronger, there is wine, brandy, and Luther’s famous recipe. All are conjured, right here, on the farm.”

“‘Luther’s famous recipe’ does sound intriguing.” I noticed Warmoth’s tall black riding boots were highly polished. “I should like the opportunity to wet my whistle, come to think of it. We had quite a ride from Shreveport this morning.”

The Chess Match

Raising her eyes and speaking to Chantilly, who had quietly entered the room behind Warmoth and out of his immediate line of sight, Mama continued, “Chanti, please bring our guest a decanter of Luther’s recipe with a glass. And please check to see if Aunt Lizzie has any more of those corn dodgers she baked this morning.” With a silent nod, Chantilly quickly disappeared.

Chantilly re-entered the room and approached Warmoth with a tray, carefully placing it on an adjacent table. He instinctively rose to his feet, his jaw slightly agape.

“Thank you, Chanti,” Mama acknowledged. Turning back to Warmoth, she resumed. “We typically have a late dinner and supper at about seven. But I should think that we might step the latter up an hour. You must be famished from your long ride!”

I noticed that Warmoth could not take his eyes off Chantilly. “I take it you live here, Miss?” he addressed Chantilly directly.

Chantilly was noticeably embarrassed by the attention. “Yessuh. I’ve lived here ever since I was born.”

“Chantilly’s mother was my son’s governess,” Mama explained. “Unfortunately, she passed in the cholera epidemic in sixty-two. Chantilly has always lived in this house. She is part of the family.”

“Indeed!” Warmoth dropped to the sofa and poured himself a generous glass of the recipe. “Well, Miss Chantilly! You are very beautiful, if I do say so myself!”

I looked at the still blushing Chantilly. She was almost as tall as Will and me, and in truth, she had blossomed from pretty into stunningly beautiful overnight.

Chantilly’s mother had been a very pretty woman herself, with a light olive complexion and long, straight, fine-textured black hair and gray-green eyes. Chantilly’s complexion was even lighter. She had a fine-featured, elegant bone structure complemented by intelligent eyes, the color of which seemed to transition from brown to hazel to green depending upon what she was wearing. Her appearance was distinctly French.

Chantilly had inherited her long, thick, fine-textured black hair from her mother and from her wealthy Robillard father, which had a very gentle natural curl to it. She had pulled the sides of her hair back away from her face, elevating and securing those sections with a pair of tortoiseshell combs, while the balance was permitted to cascade halfway down her back. It was a particularly becoming hairstyle.

She had what might best be described as a lush, hourglass figure, with generously sized, perfectly rounded breasts and a tiny waist. Both Will and I had noticed that with one glance at Chantilly, most men

who met her for the first time tended to look as if they had suddenly been pole-axed. Such was the case with our new visitor, Henry Clay Warmoth.

“Thank you suh,” Chantilly responded quietly and politely, standing rooted to the spot, not wishing to offend the guest.

“What do you do here, if I might ask?” Warmoth persisted. Finishing his first glass of the recipe, he was now reaching for a corn dodger.

“Well, I attend school,” Chantilly replied. “And I help Missy Mary in the house.”

“School?” Warmoth asked with interest, as he poured himself a second glass of the recipe. “I had heard about that! In fact, that’s what brings me to Mt. Lebanon.”

“Yeah, there are several of us who attend school together.” I interrupted. “Miss Mayeaux, whom you met in the commissary, is the teacher.”

“What do you learn in the school?” Warmoth was clearly interested.

“Mainly mathematics, science, humanities, French.” I answered proudly. “The usual.”

“Something that I quickly learned when taking residence in New Orleans.” Warmoth pointed out. “The

old society does retain French as its first language. I am attempting to learn it myself.”

“Yessuh, I am a member of the New Ahlins branch of the Robillard family.” Chantilly blurted unexpectedly.

“Are you indeed?” Warmoth’s eyes suddenly flashed with interest. “There was a death about a year ago, perhaps nine months ago,” he corrected himself. “It was one of the Robillard clan, evidently a man of significant means. They are still attempting to locate all the heirs.”

“What brings you to Louisiana, Mr. Warmoth?” I could tell that Mama didn’t care for the tone of the conversation. “Or better yet, perhaps you might want to table the answer to that question until Mr. Bryan returns. Chanti, might you help me in the kitchen?”

Warmoth politely rose as Mama and Chantilly left the parlor. Looking at me he demanded. “How old is Chantilly?”

“Seventeen.” I answered. “We thought she was going to marry a man who lives here on the plantation. But we’re not so sure now.”

“A young woman such as Chantilly, should hardly be in a rush to get married! She is ravishing!” I could tell by the look in the young man’s eyes that he was smitten!

The Chess Match

With that, I politely excused myself to attend to some light chores before supper.

That night Billy, Lem, Bucky, Guy, Corporal Slats and Miss Mayeaux joined the family and our guest for dinner. I was amazed when both Merriam and Aunt Lizzie entered the room with two heaping platters of fried fish.

“Jawge ‘n Joseph done had dey bes’ luck o de yehr wit dem fish!” Aunt Lizzie crowed. “Dey tuk out ovah hundret dis aftahnoon, so dey say!”

“So, I assume everyone is eating fish on the plantation tonight.” Warmoth laughed. “Suits me! I have always had an affinity for freshwater fish!”

Daddy looked suspiciously at our guest. “I understand that you’re from Illinois. What brings you to Louisiana?”

“Well, I might start by properly introducing myself. “I am Lieutenant Colonel Henry Clay Warmoth, of the 32nd Missouri Volunteer Infantry. I was wounded at Vicksburg and later fought with General Sherman and then General Banks. You know Sherman’s slated to be the President at that new land grant university in Baton Rouge.”

“You wuz with Banks?” Billy asked uneasily.

“Not that it meant anything.” Warmoth noted. “He wasn’t particularly effective! To have lost that Red River campaign, when he had the enemy outnumbered two to one?”

“And what then, Colonel?” Daddy’s gaze was not friendly.

“I resigned last year. Returned to legal practice. I am a lawyer by profession,” Warmoth acknowledged.

“I read about you, Colonel er... Mr. Warmoth.” Daddy’s gaze remained suspicious. “You were elected territorial delegate as a Radical Republican in an unauthorized election. I understand 19,000 black Louisianans cast votes. That was nearly as many as the white voters turned out.”

“Yes, Mr. Bryan.” Warmoth paused to wipe the crumbs off his prominent mustache. “The purpose of the vote was to let people in Louisiana know that with black suffrage, there was a chance that the Democrats might not win.”

“Do you not think that such a ploy is presumptuous, Mr. Warmoth?”

“Perhaps,” Warmoth noted airily. “But the war is over. Suffrage is pretty much a foregone conclusion. We all know that it’s only a matter of time. They might as well get used to it.”

Chantilly returned to the dining room, checking to see if anyone needed tea. Upon her entry, Warmoth again left his seat and motioned for Chantilly to take a seat. “Might you take a plate and sit with us here at the table, Miss Chantilly?”

“Yessuh, if it’s alright with Mistah Bryan and Missy Mary.” Chantilly was obviously flattered. She glanced at Daddy for permission.

“Certainly,” Daddy answered. “Will, can you grab us an additional chair?”

Within moments, Chantilly was seated close to Warmoth. Catching her eye, the young man smiled, then turned to Daddy and revealed. “Captain Henry Pease, a mutual acquaintance, has spoken highly of you, Mr. Bryan. He said that you are committed to carrying out the government policies regarding the darkies.”

“Well, I don’t know exactly what he is referring to, Mr. Warmoth.” Daddy’s voice was a mixture of surprise and disgust. “But we offer education to every person on this plantation.”

“What he is most impressed with, Mr. Bryan, is how diligent you are in making certain that your colored residents are given access to education.” Warmoth clarified.

“It has been that way for better than ten years.” Daddy laid down his knife and looked directly at Warmoth.

“Well, you should be proud that a man who oversees 126 schools sees your operation and tells us that he is more impressed with your accomplishments than anyone’s!” Warmoth was taking a large fishbone from his mouth. “I just wanted to see it for myself. This afternoon, I met their teacher. And now I’ve also met two of the students of the school, your son Frank and Chantilly.”

“I am glad that he approves of what we’re doing,” Daddy commented coldly.

“Well, of course, you realize that if we can educate the Negroes, we will have better overall schools, leading to a better-organized society.” Warmoth predicted. “And I do think that the vote, as in universal suffrage, is just around the corner!”

“That may well be a bit more optimistic than what first greets the eyes!” Daddy challenged. “I, too, believe that it’s coming. But when it does come, I would advise all proponents to embrace it! Or, at the very least, accept it! The “black codes” that are popping up in every corner of the state are not helping matters!”

“My sentiments exactly, sir.” Our guest glowed. “What I can’t determine is why more of your countrymen don’t see things as you do.”

“Mr. Warmoth,” Daddy’s eyes suddenly flashed. “I have always tried to convince my peers that “black codes” were the wrong approach. By the same token, the 10th Amendment draws distinctions with what should be handled by the state and federal governments.”

“In other words, do nothing? Allow matters to progress naturally?” The young man stroked his large mustache.

“You honestly don’t know who is doing what, and to what extreme, Mr. Warmoth.” Daddy’s demeanor suddenly became smug. “Look long enough, and you might find that other plantations are doing what we do while maintaining discretion as we have attempted to do.”

Changing the subject, Warmoth prodded. “I told Chantilly about the death of a prominent Robillard in New Orleans last year. She mentioned that she is part of the Robillard clan.”

“Chantilly was the daughter of Mr. Robillard’s deceased lover.” Daddy’s affront was so blunt that I was afraid that Chantilly’s feelings would be hurt.

“Well, it doesn’t matter.” Warmoth would not be put off. “Speaking as a lawyer I can tell you that if there is actual lineage, then Chantilly would be entitled to her share of the estate.”

“What if there’s a will?” Guy asked.

“There isn’t one,” Warmoth said. “The man died suddenly. There are four children, three grandchildren, and, it is rumored, two children who came from outside the marriage but who are indeed heirs.”

“How much is in the estate?” Mama asked.

“They are finding more bits and pieces of it every day.” Warmoth raised his eyebrows and served himself another fried bream. “About three hundred thousand in gold, perhaps another two hundred thousand in mixed securities.

“There are some prime townhouses that he owned on Canal Street. Last week, they learned that he owned 60% interest in a sugar plantation in Plaquemines Parish. He was a wealthy man.”

“What is his wife saying at present?” Mama asked.

“Nothing.” Warmoth’s smile was oily. “She met her maker four months before he met his!”

“So, you have children and grandchildren squabbling for their inheritances, I presume?” Daddy’s stare was cold and calculating.

“Mistah Bryan, does this mean that I get some of that inheritance?” Chantilly’s eyes were wide and childlike.

“I would say so.” Warmoth answered the question for Daddy.

“Mr. Warmoth, please consider.” Daddy’s eyes were fixed on Chantilly. “Your words are taken well, and we do appreciate your apparent candor. But I must say, their content is purely overwhelming.”

“I take it, you knew Mr. Robillard, Mr. Bryan?” Warmoth seemed to be gaming Daddy.

“Yes, I did,” Daddy confessed. “And he was quite a good friend. I am aggrieved to hear that he passed. But I can assure you, Mrs. Bryan and I have done our best to provide a decent Christian home for his daughter. Not to mention a superlative education!”

“Well, it sounds like Mr. Robillard made a sound decision in allowing you and your wife to be the caretakers of his daughter,” Warmoth said wryly.

“But that isn’t exactly how it was!” Mama interjected. “Chantilly, please accept our apologies for this intrusion. Neither Mr. Bryan nor I knew of your father’s demise. And I am equally dismayed that this part of your life has been so needlessly shared with people you might not have wished to know of your circumstances.”

“Mistah Warmoth.” Chantilly said softly. “I had a mother who died when I was thirteen years old. We

lived together here on this plantation. When my mother died, Missy Mary took care of me like I was her own. That's what happened. I've lived here all my life. This is my home."

"Well, great foster parents are always helpful." Warmoth seemed to brush off the last point. "At this juncture, my suggestion is for you to return to New Orleans with me. There, I will make certain that you receive what you are entitled to as one of the heirs of the Robillard estate."

"You want me to come back to New Ahlins, with you, Mistah Warmoth?" Chantilly's mouth was wide open, and her eyes were wide.

"I think that such action is both premature and unnecessary." Daddy jumped into the conversation.

"Yes, I agree." Mama seconded. "Mr. Warmoth, you must understand! Chantilly has never been away from home in her life. She is only seventeen. I should think that she would need to investigate the situation deliberately. I would only agree to it if Mr. Bryan were to accompany her."

"If that is what you wish, Mrs. Bryan!" I could tell that Warmouth was becoming slightly agitated. "But you must understand. There looks to be upwards of seven hundred thousand dollars, maybe as much as nine

hundred thousand dollars in this estate. There are at least seven, perhaps as many as nine prospective heirs.

“Because of Chantilly’s circumstances, those heirs are not going to want to immediately recognize her claim. Of that, I can assure you!

“However, if I am her lawyer, I can make certain that she gets what is rightfully hers! And that equates to an equal share of the estate.” Warmoth concluded.

“How much money is that?” Chantilly asked sheepishly.

“Nine legitimate heirs and seven hundred thousand dollars would be \$77,777 each. If there are nine heirs and there is eight hundred thousand dollars, that would be \$88,888 each. If there are nine heirs and nine hundred thousand dollars, that would \$100,000 per heir.” Warmoth calculated.

“And what might your fee be, for performing such a service?” Daddy eyed Warmoth suspiciously.

“I would do it for a simple “thank you,” Mr. Bryan,” Warmoth said firmly.

“I want to go with Mistah Warmoth!” Chantilly exclaimed. “I want to visit New Ahlins!”

“Chanti, nobody is saying that you can’t go!” Mama assured her.

“But I am free to do so, aren’t I?” I never recalled seeing the normally placid Chantilly so agitated.

“Yes, of course you are!” Mama placed her hand on Chantilly’s arm.

“Indeed, you are, Miss Robillard!” Warmoth’s reference to her father’s name was intoxicating. “I would encourage you to think long and hard about it! The decision can come down any day. However, I am due to be back in New Orleans in a fortnight.

“Upon arrival, I can act on what is called a stay of execution, pending the proof of your lineage. Mr. Bryan can obviously furnish such. Don’t think there won’t be those who will contend that you are not who you say you are! But I do believe that we can put together an airtight case against any who attempt to deny you what is, after all, your birthright!”

“So, you are, in effect, saying, Mr. Warmoth, that I would need to be present to allow Chantilly to prove that she is the daughter of Mr. Robillard?” Daddy’s interrogatory was clear.

“No. A written assertion should be sufficient.” Warmoth seemed confident with his position.

“Especially if we have one from both you and Mrs. Bryan.”

“How long are we talking about before we have a decision by the court?” Daddy wanted to know.

“Two weeks to four months,” Warmoth predicted. Turning to Chantilly he continued. “I understand that you are fluent in French. There is a large community of Creoles in New Orleans. It’s probable that you would find them most ingratiating, Chantilly.”

“There is?” Chantilly was utterly beside herself.

“God’s truth!” Warmoth retorted. “New Orleans is a big city. Why, its population was 175,000 before the Civil War. It’s much larger now!”

“You know, Mr. Warmoth,” Daddy said gravely, changing the subject, “there are people in New Orleans who aren’t taking kindly to the darkies voting. Some are saying that things could get out of hand. I wish that the federal government would move slowly with this talk of franchising former slaves.”

“It’s going to happen, Mr. Bryan,” Warmoth said airily. “It is a mathematical certainty. What is uncertain is the possibility that because they have chosen the route of obstruction, will the white population be disenfranchised?”

“Do you honestly think that it will come to that, Mr. Warmoth?”

“I would lay odds that it will!” Warmoth conceded.

“So, what would you plan to do with Chantilly; should we agree to allow her to join you when you depart, Mr. Warmoth?” Mama was determined to stay on the subject.

“I would likely take her to a fine hotel in the French Quarter where she would be served breakfast in bed every morning,” Warmoth noted. “I would make certain that a hot bath awaited her every afternoon. She would be adorned in the finest of satin and lace. And she would frequent some of the finest plays and musicals the United States has to offer!”

“I want to go, Missy Mary!” Chantilly was beside herself with excitement.

We had finished dinner. A few made their way into the parlor. Mama gasped and placed her hand on her chest. This was all happening so fast. She turned to Chantilly and said, “I have something for you. I was going to give it to you on your eighteenth birthday. But now may be a better time. Wait here, please.”

Excusing herself momentarily, Mama went up the stairs to her bedroom. She quickly returned with a long, white box. Handing the box to Chantilly, her voice

The Chess Match

broke. “In 1862 Mr. Bryan ordered this beautiful evening gown for me. It came all the way from Paris! Sadly, it didn’t fit. When we tried to return it, New Orleans had fallen to the Yankees.

“Then my father and your mother died in the epidemic. Then Vicksburg fell. Then we went the war. I honestly didn’t think about the gown until a year ago, watching you and noting how you have become a woman overnight! I want you to have this gown, Chantilly. I do believe that it will fit you perfectly. In fact, I would ask that you humor us all by trying it on!”

“Now?” Chantilly asked, as she eagerly eyed the long box.

“Yes.” Mama’s eyes reflected maternalism.

Chantilly smiled, her girlish enthusiasm getting the best of her, and she headed for her room. Soon she returned, garbed in Mama’s beautiful, but never worn white gown.

“You look positively stunning, Chantilly!” Warmoth couldn’t take his eyes off her.

“I think that you shall grace New Orleans in splendid fashion!”

About The Author: Jeff Willis

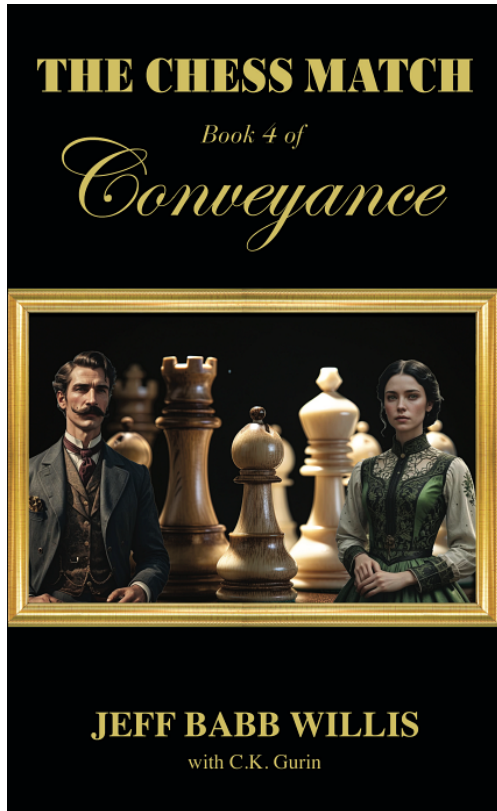


Jeff Willis was born in El Dorado, Arkansas and attended Louisiana State University. He graduated in 1979 with a double major in Journalism and History. He worked in Broadcast Television for 20 years before switching to Banking/Financial Services in 1999. Willis published topical, "E" is for English in 2010.

In 2022, he completed the multi-part, thousand-plus page historical novel "Conveyance", a riveting five-

book series following the true adventures of a Louisiana family that emancipated, educated, and deeded land to their slaves a full five years before the Civil War. The family interacted and had personal dealings with a number of historically notable people. They also found themselves forced, for the sake of personal survival, to kill or be killed, and to keep secrets. The first four books transpire during the Reconstruction era, while the fifth book, "Aftermath," provides the results, along with a truly stunning conclusion, some twenty years later. The historical saga is scheduled to be evaluated by LSU Press.

Jeff Willis has lived in eight different southern states and enjoyed some of the south's finest cities, including, but not limited to, Asheville, North Carolina, Atlanta, Fayetteville, Arkansas, Lexington, Kentucky, Miami and Nashville. He has traveled extensively in Europe, Russia, including Siberia, and Alaska, and is conversant in Spanish and Russian.



In 1856, five years before the Civil War, Richard Bryan freed his slaves, educated them, deeded land, and shared profits. At war's end, Yankees wanted to use his success to promote their own agenda. He refused, and they turned on him.

The Chess Match: Book Four of Conveyance

By Jeff Babb Willis

Order the book from the publisher [Booklocker.com](https://www.booklocker.com)

<https://www.booklocker.com/p/books/13753.html?s=pdf>

**or from your favorite neighborhood
or online bookstore.**