Fred Wills

November 22, 1918

Hon. S. C. Ford,
Attorney General of Montana,
and President of the State Board of Pardons,
Helena, Montana.

My dear Sir:

I have just received a letter from Governor Stewart, saying that he has ordered that the sentence of Fred J. Wills, now imprisoned at Deer Lodge, Montana be commuted, upon the approval of the State Board of Pardons.

The Governor has suggested that I write you, as the President of that Board, giving my reasons for believing that it is right, and an act of humanity, to pardon Wills.

What I have to say about the boy, I of course believe to the absolute fact. His mother has been a nurse in my family for a good many months. She is a woman of courage and integrity, who has brought up five children, all of whom have made good places for themselves in the world. Fred has never, until now, been anything but an upright, industrious boy. He has been sadly handicapped from youth by his tendency to tuberculosis, and at intervals for a number of years has had hemorrhages. It was the return of these hemorrhages that took him last Spring to Montana, where he had gone one or two summers before, I believe, to work on farms. I believe that this arrest and imprisonment were an unhappy mistake.

On his way to Montana, he fell in with a drunken man, who claimed to have a large sum of money on his person, and asked Fred to look after him, which Fred did. This man gave the boy, in return for his service, $20., but he was half drunk when he did so and later caused Fred's arrest. In spite of the fact that he withdrew the charge, the boy, once in jail, the man having disappeared, was kept.

I have known of this boy so long that I thoroughly believe his explanation. There was no reason why he should have taken the money, for he had some three hundred dollars in a bank in Bridgeport, and he had never done anything of this kind before.

Digital Images, 2010. The Ida M. Tarbell Collection, 1890-1944. Allegheny College Pelletier Library.

But, whether guilty or not, his physical condition is such that I believe you will agree with Governor Stewart that nothing will be gained by keeping him longer in prison. I am hoping very much that the State Board of Pardons will see its way promptly to approve the order of the Governor, commuting his sentence.

For any help or kindness that you can have shown him, I shall be personally very grateful. Possibly I should say that his mother is sending him money and clothes to return to his home.

Very truly yours,

Member of Field Division,
Council of National Defense.

Digital Images, 2010. The Ida M. Tarbell Collection, 1890-1944, Allegheny College Pelletier Library.