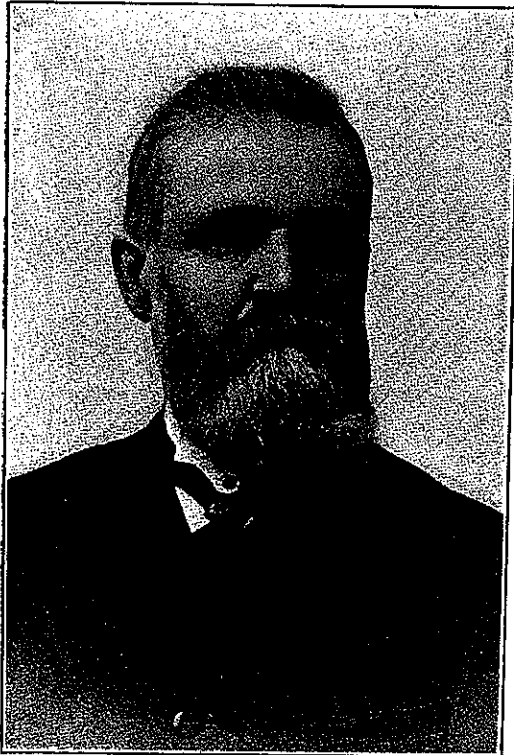


ALFRED WILLSON.

By R. H. Coleman.



Alfred Willson, son of R. T. Willson, was of a family of thirteen children, seven sons and six daughters, all of whom predeceased him. He was the youngest but one of the sons.

He was born at Willowvale, East Gwillimbury Township, York County, Ontario, on 28th July, 1833, and received his early education at the country school. In May, 1853, after a term at the Newmarket Grammar School, he secured a position on the Engineering staff of the Grand Trunk Railway, then in course of construction from Toronto to Montreal, and was posted to the staff engaged on the location survey between Kingston and Brockville under Mr. George Keefer, a brother of Mr. Samuel

Keefer, the Resident Engineer of the Railway, and in seven months rose from axeman to "Field Engineer" in charge of the party.

With reference to Mr. Willson's first employment, I quote from a letter from Mr. Willson to his father, dated Kingston, 26th May, 1853; apparently the first letter he wrote after his arrival there to take up his new work: "I got my breakfast and at once commenced search for the 'British American Hotel,' where I found not Mr. S. Keefer nor Mr. Rubidge, but Mr. George Keefer, who has charge of this party. To him I presented the note from Mr. Robinson" (this is probably Hon. W. B. Robinson, a life-long friend both of Mr. Willson and of his father). "He said that his brother (Mr. S. K.) was at present in Montreal and that this party was quite filled up, but with Mr. Robinson's recommendation, he would give me employment as axeman for two or three days, when he would be able to advance me to the chain or staff." In a letter from Mr. Willson to his father, dated at Kingston Mills, Dec. 12th, 1835, he writes: "To-day I ran in a curve 900 ft. in length, which closed beautifully, for being my first curve, it came in to $\frac{1}{2}$ an inch, a rare thing for old engineers

to do." This item gives an insight into Mr. Willson's character for exactness in everything he undertook, and this, coupled with his sterling integrity, his great personal magnetism and strong sense of humor, gave him a reputation which won for him a host of friends, with whom he was an ever-welcome guest.

Subsequently he was appointed to the Engineering staff of the Brockville and Ottawa Railway and remained in that service until the road was completed in or about 1860, when he returned to Newmarket to take a partnership with S. W. Hallen, a surveyor with a considerable practice in the locality.

In the summer or autumn of 1865 his old friend, Hon. W. B. Robinson, Commissioner of The Canada Company, through whose influence he secured his first appointment on the staff of the Grand Trunk Railway, engaged him for some weeks on special inspection work for The Canada Company, resulting on 1st January, 1866, in his appointment to the permanent staff of the Company, in whose service he remained until his death, having in the meantime risen from Inspector to Junior Commissioner, and finally to Senior Commissioner of The Canada Company.

The fact that the very great percentage of the good agricultural lands owned by The Canada Company and undisposed of in 1866, was wet and unfit for cultivation until drained, led Mr. Willson to investigate the whole subject of drainage of these lands, and particularly the drainage of a block of some 20,000 acres in the Aux Sables flats in Huron, Lambton and Middlesex Counties, which he first reported on in 1870. This scheme, which was finally completed under his supervision in 1875 at a cost of about \$100,000 was the first of the large drainage works in those Counties, and subsequently he carried out the drainage, sale and settlement of the greater part of the Canada Company's wet lands in the Province of Ontario.

In the Spring of 1856 he married Mary L. Lewis of Addison, Leeds County, who died in 1915.

There were two children in Mr. Willson's family, a son, who died in infancy, and a daughter, Maude (who married John Imrie), now living in Toronto.

Mr. Willson died in Toronto on May 26th, 1909, and his body was interred in the family plot in St. James' Cemetery.

Four of his brothers remained in Ontario and two removed to the United States. One was principal of the public school at Alexandria at the time of his death. All of his six sisters married farmers, two of whom removed to the United States.

David Willson, the noted founder of the "Children of Peace," who built the Temple at Sharon, northeast of Newmarket, was half brother to Mr. A. Willson's grandfather.