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Chapter file

PROVIDENCE, R. I. October 3, 1906. 190

Mr. Glenn Brown, Sec.,
American Institute of Architects,
Washington, D.C.

Dear Sir:-

I am in receipt of your letter of Oct. 2nd, and in reply would say that I think the American Architect has published something regarding the life of Mr. George W. Cady, and I am informed by Mr. Stone that the same paper made notice of Mr. Wilson's death, together with a short history of his professional work.

I think it very probable that at one of the immediate meetings of the Chapter, the works of Mr. Cady and Mr. Wilson will be presented; the meeting to be a memorial meeting. If so, at that time the secretary will forward you the action of the Chapter together with any data he may have that may be useful to you.

Yours very truly,

F. E. Jackson.

Secretary, Pro. Tem.

Rhode Island Chapter A.I.A.

GEORGE WATERMAN CADY, F. A. I. A.

AN ADDRESS BEFORE THE R. I. CHAPTER

A. I. A.

DECEMBER 11, 1906,

BY NORMAN M. ISHAM, A. A. I. A.

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We are here to devote an evening to the memory of two of our professional brethren who, this last summer, left the works forever.

And, although they whom we commemorate were quite different, as men will differ, in all but their devotion to their profession, it is a happy circumstance which joins them thus in the minds of their fellow architects.

For these two men represented, as none others in the Chapter did or could, the two opposite poles of the profession, the past and the future, the old traditional building of Rhode Island, based on construction and lonely technical study by candle light, and the new American architecture, based on the finest academic training, on foreign travel, and on the largest observation.

For Mr. Cady was the last of our self-trained architects. In doing honor to him, as we do on this evening, we do honor to a long line of men whom he, as the last, as one fallen on late times, still represented, - to William Carpenter, John Smith, the Mason, Eliezer Whipple, housewright, Caleb Ormsbee,

John H. Greene, and James C. Busklin.

It was a long and honorable career which closed on the ninth of August, 1906, when George Waterman Cady died at his home in Longmeadow. Born in Providence, August 27, 1825, he was the son of the Rev. Jonathan Cady and his wife, Eliza Pettey. His father was a prominent man in the town of that day, - pastor of the old Fountain Street Methodist Church, and of several other churches of that denomination.

Mr. Cady's education was begun in a private school in Providence- whose I cannot say- and was completed at the Lowell Seminary, in Massachusetts.

We find him, after the close of his school days, as a clerk in a wholesale ship chandlery. This sort of work was not to his taste, however. He had a mind and he meant to use it. He was naturally more of a maker or a doer of things than a trader. He turned to medicine and began studying, as the custom then was, with an established physician, a Dr. Waterman. This career was closed, however, by the tempest of the Dorr War which caused Mr. Cady's patron and instructor to flee to another state.

Left thus, without any occupation, Mr. Cady seems not to have sought any further instruction in medicine, though he never lost his interest in it. He at once apprenticed himself to Alexander Williams, a builder of Providence, who appears in the Directory of 1841, with a shop at 104 Broad Street.

Plain carpenter work, however, he did not follow very long. When first "out of his time" with Williams- he bought the last six months from his master- he was called upon to build an hotel at Scio, New York, but when this was done he went to work for the Sweet brothers, stair-builders. Stair-building, under the impetus of the fashionable circular flights, had come to require more knowledge of drawing and of descriptive geometry than any other branch of the building craft. It led Mr. Cady, then, in the direction in which he naturally would go, and that the training was not lost, the designing and building, in 1860, of the Joseph Fletcher house, now the Lying-in Hospital, give evidence.

Mr. Cady, however, was not yet ready to give up the actual construction of buildings. He was still in the path of John Greene and of Bucklin in his earlier years. He purchased the shop and machinery of C. Young, on the corner of Charles and Smith streets, about 1861, and when, a year or so later, this was burned, he built a shop on the present State House ground, on Gaspee Street.

In 1869, he handed this shop over to his brother and son and launched out upon the future work of his life, the practice of architecture, not as a craft but as a profession.

Mr. Cady began his new work with an office in a building next to the Universalist Church, on Westminster Street, where the Boston Store now stands. Here he designed and carried out the Burgess Building, just opposite, now 230 Westmin-

ster Street, a granite front characteristic of those days. Into this he moved his atelier and here he remained till, in 1882, he found quarters in the Barstow Building, on Weybosset Street, next to the building he had erected for Wm. H. Hall.

After the Barnaby fire, Mr. Cady was called in for the rebuilding, as the architect of the original structures. At this time he also built the Gaspee Building, in the place of the brown stone store so long associated with Henry T. Root. Into this Gaspee Building he moved his office, and here it remained till his death.

In his long life, and amid all his professional work, Mr. Cady found time for many other useful activities. He was much interested in military affairs, saw something of politics, and did excellent service as a fireman in the old days of the volunteers. But on that side of his life, however interesting and important, we have scarce time to dwell. It is as an architect that we do now honor him, and in his profession the amount of his achievement was great. The roll of his buildings is a long one. Beside those I have already named, he built the Fletcher Building, the Aldrich House, the High Street Bank, the building lately vacated by Bosworth and Aspinwall, the Infantry Armory, the State Armory at Woonsocket, the old Low's Opera House, the old station of The Three Ones, on Exchange Place, several churches in near-by towns, the Asbury Methodist Church, on North Main Street, his own church, and

many school houses and dwellings. He was, when he died at almost 81, at work upon a building on Eddy Street.

Mr. Cady's career as an architect was marked and conditioned by the time in which he lived. He found himself in a day of transition. Beginning late in life- for he was forty-four when he finally launched upon the professional stream- with no preliminary office training, to say nothing of the academic equipment now possible, with a technical education solely that which he gained by practical work, and by his own hard study, with lithographs and engravings- often inaccurate to a degree we can hardly imagine- instead of photographs, he responded well to the demands made upon him. He came too late for the Colonial art tradition, nor did the Greek revival affect him. He was too early for the "great awakening" which began in the eighties. He had to take architecture as he found it, and that he did so well with the nondescript style or negation of style which was given into his hands to work with, speaks very much for his ability.

But an architect has other sides than the artistic. He is more or less of a craftsman. He must be, even in these days of the young Beaux Arts men and the specialists, of the architectural engineer and the great contractor. In this field Mr. Cady's carpenter training stood him in good stead. For those days it was the best training, because the carpenters of that time dominated the whole building domain in Providence as surely as the maestri di legname did in Florence.

It is otherwise now, but there is no one here who cannot remember something of that day.

The carpenter ancestry of Mr. Cady, which extended back for several generations, was also of no small help to him. It gave him a natural aptitude which could use what his own experience had placed at his command. It made him resourceful. It gave him the invaluable power of meeting promptly and effectively any occasion that might arise. No problem or emergency found him unprepared.

Again the architect has to be a professional adviser and no mean ability will serve his turn. And in this domain also Mr. Cady was not found wanting. No time has changed this requirement of the profession. None can, except to add to the burden thereof. It was essential to the man who built the Pyramids, it was to the mediaeval magister operum, it is today. In many ways it is the severest test that we can apply. Mr. Cady stood it.

Of this Chapter Mr. Cady had been a member since January 5, 1876. In it he took a deep interest, serving on its committees and attending almost every meeting for years after his infirmity kept him from hearing what was going on. The Chapter may well speak of him as a staunch supporter and a pleasant comrade; it may well honor him as one who for forty years, in this community, had practised with skill, fidelity and honor the exacting art which is so dear to us.