

SUCCESSOR TO
WILLETT & PASHLEY

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TELEPHONE
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CHICAGO July 29, 1907.

Mr. Glenn Brown,
The Octagon,
Washington, D. C.

Dear Sir:-

As requested by you, I have written a biographical sketch of James R. Willett, and send you a copy herewith.

The Society For The Promotion of Engineering Education has also written for this sketch, and I have mailed them a copy, at the same time notifying them that the sketch was prepared for the American Institute.

Yours very truly,

Alfred F. Pashley

JAMES ROWLAND WILLETT.

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James Rowland Willett, son of James F. and Anne Willett, was born in Dublin, Ireland June 23rd, 1831, but came with his parents when quite young to America, and settled in Philadelphia. He died in Chicago, Illinois, May 9th, 1907.

The first record extant of James R. Willett in business life reveals him as a stereotype moulder; however, he soon developed a liking for a different calling. He matriculated in the Polytechnic College of the State of Pennsylvania, and on the 2nd of March, 1854, was graduated a "Bachelor of Mine Engineering." It was in the practice of this profession that the outbreak of the Civil War in the spring of 1861 found him engaged in southeastern Missouri.

Although not yet having passed the probationary period necessary between the taking out of his first naturalization papers and the granting of full citizenship, he was true to the oath of allegiance he had taken. He was in every way, except birth, an American, and when every one in the turbulent community in which the beginning of hostilities found him was forced to show his colors, he unhesitatingly cast his lot with the Union.

Young Willett's ability was soon recognized by General Nathaniel Lyon who had command of the Union forces stationed in that vicinity, and he authorized Willett to recruit men for the United States' service. Before any great number could be enlisted, the advance of the Confederate forces under General Hardee compelled the adherents of the Union to flee the country. They found refuge at Pilot Knob, Missouri, where United States' troops were stationed

Not in the least disheartened with his past experience as a recruiting officer, Willett organized a company among his companions, and for several months they served as cavalry scouts under different leaders. For efficient work rendered in this capacity Willett was complimented and recommended by his commander.

In the summer of 1861 General Fremont appointed Willett Lieutenant of Engineers, assigning him to duty on the staff of Colonel William P. Carlin of the 38th Illinois Volunteer Infantry, who then commanded the district of southeastern Missouri, with headquarters at Pilot Knob. Willett was given charge of construction of various fortifications in that part of the state, and he was present at the battle of Fredricktown.

On January 29th, 1862, he was promoted to Adjutant of his regiment, and in the spring of 1862 experienced some very arduous campaigning in eastern Arkansas. From here his regiment, together with others, started on one of the most prolonged marches of the war, going first to Pittsburg Landing, Tennessee, where it was attached to the division of General Jeff. C. Davis, and made an advance on Corinth and Boonville, Mississippi. After marching and countermarching through northern Mississippi and Alabama, the division returned to Murfresboro and thence to Nashville where it joined General Buell's army which had received orders to fall back to Louisville, Kentucky. From Louisville, the 38th Regiment marched south again to Nashville with General Rosecranz, and participated in the battle of Stone River, where Lieut. Willett's horse was shot from under him.

In April, 1863, Willett was ordered to report to General Morton, Chief Engineer Department of the Cumberland, and was assigned to duty as Post Engineer at Nashville. In this capacity he had charge of the construction of all fortifications in and about Nashville, including a large magazine and engineers' supply stores.

In the spring of 1864 he received orders to report to General Rosecranz as Inspector of Fortifications District of Tennessee, which included nearly all the military railroads in possession of the Union Army. His duties at this time were most arduous. Over a hundred and fifty block-houses scattered along the several lines of railroad had to be completed, which required constant travelling.

On August 30th, 1864, he was promoted to Major in the First United States Veteran Volunteer Regiment of Engineers, was attached to the Department of the Cumberland with headquarters at Atlanta, Georgia, and made Chief Inspector of Railroads defences. At the battle of Nashville he designed and superintended the construction of a pontoon across Duck River.

Constant activity was one of the most marked characteristics of his military services. While in charge of the Railroad defences he travelled more than twenty thousand miles; and he participated in several hard battles and many skirmishes during his service.

1865,
September 26,[^] he received an honorable discharge, with the rank of Brevet Lieutenant Colonel.

Soon after being mustered out of military service, Mr. Willett was appointed to inspect and report on the condition of the Government buildings through the South that had been destroyed or damaged by the ravages of war. This work consisted of written reports and drawings of all salvage of these structures.

After this work was completed, he was appointed superintendent of the erection of a new Government building at Nashville, Tennessee, and commenced the practice of Architecture. About this time, he married Miss Fanny E. Bayless, daughter of William B. Bayless of Nashville.

Not satisfied with the opportunities Nashville afforded at that time, he decided to go to Chicago; and when the Chicago fire occurred, he made this move and opened an office in that city.

One of his first commissions in Chicago was the building for the "Chicago Times", then one of the leading papers. In 1876 he built the first large apartment building (French Flats) in Chicago. In 1878 he was appointed Architect for the Eastern Hospital for the Insane at Kankakee, Illinois, the first asylum to adopt the "Cottage System." During his practice in Chicago, he was Architect for many public and private buildings throughout the west.

In 1900 Mr. Willett retired from business, and devoted the rest of his life to his books and study.

He was a deep student and a vigorous worker, and whatever he undertook he did with a thoroughness that left nothing unfinished. He was an authority on many branches of his profession and a reader of broad range. He reviewed many professional books, contributing to ~~THE ARCHITECTURAL~~ the Architectural journals. He did considerable research work in Graphics and in Heating of Buildings, on which subjects he wrote, published and lectured.

Mr. Willett always interested himself in the young men
and boys of his office, and when^{ever} he found a willing worker, be-
came his instructor, and took him to his own home out of office
hours and trained him in studies that could not be had in office
work.

Mr. Willett believed thoroughly in the educational in-
stitutions of the country, and during his life was a member of
The Western Society of Engineers, the Society for the Promotion
of Engineering Education, and other like societies, and was always
willing to give them the benefit of his knowledge.

Mr. Willett joined the American Institute of Architects
in 1870, and was one of the organizers of the Chicago Chapter. He
was always zealous in maintaining the high standing of his pro-
fession, honorable in his dealings with his brother architects,
and never in any way compromising for the sake of a commission.

Alfred F. Pashley