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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. Ellis Jackson.
Secretary, Pro. Tem.
Rhode Island Chapter A.I.A.

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EDMUND R. WILLSON

1856 - 1906

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Address by Alfred Stone

before the

R. I. Chapter A. I. A., December 11, 1906.

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Edmund R. Willson, the son of Rev. Edmund B. and Martha Anne (Buttrick) Willson, (grand-daughter of Maj. John Buttrick of the "Concord Fight") was born April 21, 1856, at West Roxbury, Massachusetts, and died on the night of the 9th of September, 1906, at Petersham, Massachusetts, his father's native place.

Descended from the founders of New England, he inherited the instincts and the characteristics of the early settlers, and derived his love of good reading and fine literary taste from a cultured ancestry. His grandfather, as well as his father, was a minister and was settled not far from Providence over the First Congregational Church in Brooklyn, Connecticut, in 1813. This church was at that time Trinitarian - and Mr. Willson held to the belief in the Trinity, but after "much examination to the doctrine" he "at length announced his conviction of the truth of the Unitarian doctrine of God, and was summoned by the Consecration of Windham County to answer to the charge of heresy"- on which charge he was tried and his deposition from his office was pronounced. The majority of the Society adhered to him however, and accepted his views, although some seceded from the Church, which led him to

resign his pastorate in 1817, hoping by so doing that the seceding members might return. From Brooklyn he went to Petersham in 1819; was installed the same year over the First Parish, continued its pastor for fifteen years, and died there - in the *81st* year of his age - in 1864.

His own father entered Yale in 1834, but because of sickness was obliged to leave college in '35, and completed his studies in the Cambridge Divinity School, graduating in '43. He was ordained over the First Congregational Society of Grafton, Massachusetts, in '44; became pastor of the First Society in West Roxbury in '52, occupying the pulpit where Theodore Parker had preached, and was installed minister of the North Society in Salem in 1859, occupying that pulpit until the day of his death - June 13, 1895.

It will thus be seen that Mr. Edmund R. Willson was taken to Salem, the baby of the family, when he was but three years of age, so that that portion of his life within his memory, up to the time when at fifteen he entered Harvard University, was passed in Salem, where he imbibed the flavor and was infused with the inspiration which still lingered in the old sea port, although its Oriental commerce had almost completely gone to other and larger ports, and one could only see its richly freighted ships through other eyes and know of its adventures only from the tales of those who no longer tread the deck - survivors of the host of navigators who had sailed into all or nearly all the ports in the world. Many in his father's parish were of the number - merchants, sea captains, super cargoes, mates and sailors; and the wonderful collection at the East India Museum made by them and their predecessors - with no such

purpose originally in view - supplied the material which now constitutes a unique and unparalleled ethnological and historic collection and enabled one to fill out and make real the word pictures with which, in those days, the youthful imagination was stimulated. This collection, opened open freely to all, was the constant resort of the youth in Salem.

Then, too, he was in daily contact with and had the social entree to the best of residences built in Colonial days, dating back to the very earliest settlement and continuing well into the 19th century, covering a period of just about 200 years, thirty of which were after our separation from the Mother Country.

The silent influence of the traditions referred to, of these old houses and homes, and of the atmosphere of the quaint old town can be distinctly traced in the chosen field of his activities.

As I have stated, he entered College a mere boy, at the age of fifteen. I have a photograph of him when he graduated from the High School the year he entered college, in short jacket, having the appearance of one about to enter the High School rather than college. It was to him, in some respects, a source of regret, that he entered college so young, as in after years, he felt that he was not old enough to have reaped that advantage which would have come to him had he been more mature. Perhaps he was right, but those of us who knew him best felt that it might have dulled the edge of that childlike simplicity and serenity, that buoyant and happy disposition, which was the charm of his life, and which instinctively drew everyone to him.

Of this boyhood life and the years which followed down to the 13th of July, 1903, he has himself given a slight sketch in a sort of round-robin-letter, written by all the members of his High School Class - that of 1871 - in which each sets down for the edification of all the rest an outline of his own life.

I shall take the liberty to quote verbatim nearly all of what Mr. Willson wrote about himself.

"No. VII.

Providence, R. I., July 13, 1903.

Dear Classmates:

You can all appreciate and sympathize with my feelings when unsuspectingly I opened the rather fat, non-committal envelope that came to me from Woonsocket, (something like a month ago, I am ashamed to say) and found the six instalments preceding mine of the History of the Class of '71; and called up the memories of the two big school rooms, the four class rooms, the heater-piece base ball ground, the walk over in front of the Pickering house, and Mr. Perkins, - the cold days, the hot days, the snowy days, and the girls and the boys, the teachers, the blackboards, the platforms, seats, desks, cases and everything. My only regret in getting the bundle was in not being No. 13, Horace Traill, instead of No. 7, Edward R. Willson, and I hope that 8 to 13 inclusive will hurry up and get them into Charlie Buffum's hands, and that Annie Cook will get her photograph to him in time, (though is he to print those as well?).

For myself, after graduating and having our exercises in the hall at the top of the school house on Flint Street, (I know the street, but am in Salem so little that I'll not guarantee the name) (He should have said Dean Street) and getting three volumes of Thackeray's "Miscellanies", and being mottoed "we live in deeds not words", - which I doubt if I have lived up to, as I begin to feel more the weight of the years than pride in the deeds, - I passed four years at Cambridge, graduating in '75, rooming for two years with Bert Flint (a High School Classmate), and neither distinguishing nor disgracing myself, - never either being on the rank list nor getting a condition, simply pursuing that middle course which is said to be safest. Through with college I might have perhaps gone to teaching if my college course had been more brilliant and if I had looked older and more imposing. But as the schools, colleges and seminaries did not jump for me, and having no bent, the inclination to a certain kind of drawing, which Skiddy Ropes always remembers with such a kind and exaggerated appreciation whenever we meet, suggested my going into the profession of architecture.

So far a year I was in the office of Peabody and Stearns, eminent architects in Boston; for nine months I took a special course in architecture at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology; then a year and a half with Sturgis and Brigham in Boston; some four or five months with McKim, Mead and Bigelow in New York, and then in May, 1879 - with a man who has been my dearest friend ever since - I went abroad and stayed until December 1881; studying architecture at the Ecole des Beaux Arts, and travelling in France and Italy in the pursuit of my profession.

Coming home in the beginning of the year 1882, I went into the office of Stone & Carpenter and became a member of that firm the following year, and have been so since, and been occupied in placing, on the soil of Providence and the rest of Rhode Island; some parts of the neighboring states of Massachusetts and Connecticut; Chicago and Buffalo in their Fair years, and possibly elsewhere, deeds, some of which I am glad are there and some of which I wish were not; the bother of it being that things built are there for keeps and can't be forgotten and wiped up as easily as some other things, except by fires and earthquakes, which fall impartially and imperturbably on the just and unjust. My good father gave me an excellent education for my profession, so that with ordinary go-as-you-please abilities, I have been able to keep my head above water so far, and keep my wife and children from the poor-house, which I built for the State of Rhode Island some years ago, and the St. Elisabeth's Home and the St. Mary's Orphanage, to which I have also built additions in the past with an eye to the future.

December 14th, 1882, I was married to Anne L. Frost, whom I had known in Salem, daughter of Mr. George W. Frost, of New Market, New Hampshire, and with our two children we live happily and modestly in a small house on the hill looking over the centre of Providence, with an old fashioned apple orchard as a buffer between us and our neighbors.***

Of photographs, I cannot find any available, but hope to later and will send it along. The latest I have been able to find is one which I had made in '98 when on a bicycle trip in France to serve for identification in passing the bicycle through the custom house, and while sufficient for that purpose I should not like to circulate it as giving a just impression of myself.

I am forty-seven years, two months and twenty-two days old; five feet, four and a half inches high, and weigh one hundred and ninety-two pounds, though not unpleasantly fat. Some ten or fifteen years ago, having the grip, I took the opportunity to raise a beard which I thought looked well and saved a lot of trouble, but when it grew so gray that people thought I was older than my brother, I took it off, and am simply gray as to the head, with hopes that I may not get bald; but otherwise feel (except occasionally) as if I was twenty-two or twenty-three years old, as I suppose all the rest of you do or younger.

I read with envy of Bert Flint's canoe trips but have to confine myself to safe sports like bicycling and golf and don't get as much of them as I like.

In conclusion, I want to apologise for not having filled out my sheets in the requested three days, for which I have no more valid excuses than that I did not read that side of the direction sheet till a few days ago, and also, that for a week it has been infernally hot. So will the class, with its well known friendliness, forgive me and will 8 to 18 kindly take only a day apiece and expiate my delay. Observe please, also, that I have dated this, which I think one of our classmates has forgotten to do.

Yours sincerely,
(Signed) Edmund R. Willson."

I am sure you will agree with Mr. Willis Ropes, his classmate, to whom I am indebted for the privilege of using this letter. He truly says:-

"As I read it over again the sweet simplicity of his nature so free of trickery and sharp dealings comes back so vividly to me. Neddy was always the same, 'neither a barking or biting dog!' He and I were the two youngest in the class and graduated in short jackets, with unchanged voices. He was one year my junior, and I have always understood, entered the high school by special vote of the School Committee, the age limit being twelve years.

At school, his ever ready pencil, which served him in such good stead through life, was constantly employed in depicting the droll images of his brain, on text book, and, with crayon, on blackboard. I can see him now his Physical Geography covered with paper, on which he had sketched - on the front cover - the horned head of his Satanic majesty bending over the top, the hoofs protruding below, the barbed tail curled around the side and the clawed hands reaching round the sides and holding a bulletin board, on which was inscribed 'This is the property of E. R. Willson'. The back cover showed the reverse - the hairy back, legs and arms.

I could recount numberless cases where he set the class into a gale of laughter by a few strokes of the crayon on the blackboard, and even when the teacher detected it, he had to laugh and pass it by without reprimand or only a slight reproof."

His classmate in Salem and Cambridge and roommate at Harvard, Prof. Albert S. Flint, of the University of Wisconsin, says of him:-

He was almost the last one (of our class) I should have selected to be called next, not only because he was so young in the class, but because he was always so well and happy in temperament.

I am glad I had the pleasant call on him in '98 in Providence, and I saw him a few minutes apart in 1900 at our (Harvard) class reunion."

He questions why he selected architecture; perhaps his ministerial ancestry may account for it, for I have noticed that what seemed a disproportionally large number of architects are sons of ministers. I recall the two Wares - the professor and the editor, Robert S. Peabody, Robert D. Andrews, Thomas Hastings, John A. Fox, G. T. Tilden, A. J. Bloor, Lyman Silsbee, Wallis Howe, D. C. E. Loeb, and George W. Cady.

Mr. Willson's father I had known intimately for many years from seeing him in my own home, - as he was an intimate friend of my father, and between them there were many bonds of sympathy and harmonious views in matters of theology, religion and life, - and from personal intimacy with him after he moved to Salem; and perhaps not unnaturally he wrote to me about the time of Edmund's return from abroad expressing a desire that he should come to Providence and enter my office. I welcomed and encouraged his coming and it did not take long to detect his ability and learn his worth. I was glad to know that he would like to be associated with Mr. Carpenter and myself, and very soon thereafter we entered into an agreement by which he became a partner, which partnership, like that of the marriage covenant, was not broken until death did us part.

His quickness of perception, his readiness with his pencil, his fertility in design, his infinite patience, his cheerful disposition, his almost utter inability to take offense, his readiness to abandon a design over which he had spent days of hard work in an endeavor to meet a client's whims or solve his difficulties, his entire freedom from counting the cost of his labor, sometimes spending in design more than the cost of making the article - reckoning his time at a very moderate figure - were all characteristics of the high artistic standard which ruled his life.

His desire to solve every problem in the best possible manner, so far as lay in his power, sometimes lead to delays in finishing drawings which were not always appreciated by clients who did not understand the value to them of deliberate study, of slow incubation, of consideration and reconsideration, of the necessity of uninterrupted cogitation, and the value of that unconscious cerebration which so frequently yet mysteriously follows prolonged contemplation.

No better illustration occurs to me of the value of deliberation in an artistic creation than St. Gauden's immortal masterpiece, the Shaw Monument; and yet the people who had intrusted its creation to him would, in their impatience if it had not been for a few men of cooler judgment and better appreciation, have taken the commission from him and put it into other hands; so little do some understand that notwithstanding what the book of Genesis says, science has demonstrated the world was not made in seven days.

His method of work was not exactly unique but it was unusual, except perhaps among those whose training is in accordance with Beaux Arts's methods.

He was wonderfully quick and clever with his pencil and would through the medium of paper and pencil express that which was passing through his mind while the design was in progress of development as thought would follow thought and ideas step on each others' heels, as it were, as they sought expression in the sketches which he made, with an accompaniment of whistling or humming - almost singing. These sketches were turned out in rapid succession on tracing paper with a soft coarse pencil, folding fresh paper over a sketch which he had already made, making a new sketch on the fresh portion of the paper, and repeating the operation many times until he had satisfied himself or until he had given full expression to the many phases which the problem assumed in its development. He would thus have before him many tentative solutions of the problem from which to work up his finished design.

While thoroughly versed in classical architecture and using it as the basis of much of his work, he was not a slavish adherent to the letter of its tenets. He was too exuberant, too much of a free lance, had too subtle a sense of proportion and of adapting means to ends, and of designing so as to give the best possible expression of the material of which the structure was to be built, to confine himself too rigidly to precedent. He took just such liberties with the recognized rules of architecture as a poet takes with the rules of grammar. He did not violate them but enriched them as his skill gave him the right.

It is not always easy to wholly disassociate his individual work from those working with him, but the design - meaning by that the architectural expression as distinct from pure construction and arrangement - of many buildings from the office was distinctly and unreservedly his.

Among the notable examples - the designs of which are distinctly his - are the Providence Public Library; the Scoville Library in Salisbury, Connecticut; the Petersham Public Library, and - though not so distinctly his as the others - the Whitney Memorial - Bolton Public Library.

The first - the Providence Public Library - ranks as one of the best of modern library buildings of its size and cost in the country; correct in its proportions, dignified in its aspect, of equal interest and artistic expression on all four of its sides - a building, in which I venture to say, the stack is as worthy as the front, notwithstanding the dictum of such an authority as Russel Sturgis, - that no one had ever successfully designed a stack building.

The Scoville Library is built of a very light blueish gray - almost white - native lime stone, rock face ashler of irregular sizes, no single stone of large size, and all laid with level beds and vertical joints. Its entrance is marked by a low tower with square top, the library and its stack occupy that portion of the building on the left of the entrance and in the rear, and a large public hall in the wing on the right of the tower - a most attractive building, a reminder of old England as it sits in quiet dignity on the green lawn among leafy trees, and it carries on the mantel over the fireplace a breast plate in the shape of a piece of carved stone work from the Cathedral in the town, after which the Connecticut town - Salisbury - is named.

The Petersham Library is but a portion of a memorial building, built of field stone of a more irregular and rounder character. It contains a memorial hall and library; is more picturesque in its design and irregular in its outline than that at Salisbury, and it has done much to give a distinctive character to the small town on the hill, as the Barrington Town Hall, Library and High School have given distinction to that town.

The Whitney Memorial Building contains only the Belton Public Library and an antiquarian room. It, too, is built of natural face stone unlike either of the other buildings, in that the stones have a smoother face than those in the Barrington and Petersham buildings, are in larger pieces than in either building, and are of granite formation. They are laid up irregularly but with an approximation to as nearly level beds as the stone will permit and with an effort to avoid the unrest and disturbance of the so-called distressful pitch and dive joints affected by some in laying up natural face work. The building has low walls and a red tile roof. The windows are large and set high, breaking in large dormers through the cornice into the roof on the sides and occupying a large space in two gables.

The entrance is through an open porch surmounted by a gable, the tympanum of which is plastered with the seal of the town - a pine tree on a hillside beside an old brick powder house - modelled in low relief and with artistic skill in situ by our own fellow-citizen and clever artist, Mr. Sidney R. Burleigh, who improved on the rendering of the official seal by sketching his subject from the powder house itself which still perches on the hill top everlocking the village.

These library buildings are each of them of more than usual merit, and in their adaptation to their respective sites, their environment and the peculiar requirements of each community show how successfully Mr. Willson solved each problem.

Not the least of their merit to my mind is that the four country libraries are each distinctly library buildings but are not of what may be called the Carnegie type - which, though well suited for large and important buildings, is not I submit so well adapted to small country libraries with rural surroundings demanding less formal and more picturesque treatment.

Of successful and original treatment of country estates the group of buildings at Chapinville, Connecticut, for the Scoville family; those on Warwick Neck, R. I., for Senator Aldrich, and those for Mrs. Nevins at Methuen, Massachusetts are examples which show careful study and successful solution of very unlike and complex problems.

The Warwick Neck group - comprising the "Boat House" with its central hall, its "great room" open on two sides to the water and so close to it that you feel, as you sit in it, that you are afloat on the deep; the "Tea House" with its one great room and huge fireplace, and minor rooms for the convenience of guests; the two stone "Ledges"; the group of buildings around the "Water Tower" - stable, automobile garage, laundry, pump house and office; the various farm buildings which have been so altered and brought into harmony with their surroundings that they would not be recognized as the buildings which were bought with the estate; and the great stone walls, enclosing the estate from the highways and the garden

from the lawns, with their stately gateways, make, with their beautiful setting of broad undulating lawns, thick groves and single specimens of magnificent trees, a series of pictures and picturesque effects that can hardly be surpassed.

His untimely death prevented the completion of the work which was to have had its culmination in a residence, tentative sketches for which had been prepared, on a scale commensurate with and in keeping with the work already finished.

Whatever may be done hereafter that which has been completed is a monument to his rare skill and felicitous treatment of a gentleman's estate, full of playful fancy as befits the purposes of some of the buildings and stately dignity as is proper for such a pretentious and regal estate.

The Scoville Estate on the southerly slope of the Berkshire Hills is less pretentious than that of Senator Aldrich, but like it is of large dimensions, and upon it a fine stone house has been built; an electric water power plant; an automobile garage; a boat house of modest dimensions as compared with that of Senator Aldrich; a round brick water tower with a conical tiled roof, of a decided Normandy flavor; and a country school house - all located in more or less picturesque spots or on broad lawns with rich foliage and fine shade trees; indicative of the trend of American life affording an opportunity for the architect to mould the taste and give fitting expression to the growing passion to seek relief from the bustle and stir of the great city in the quiet repose of rural surroundings. Not a repetition of that which took place in ancient Rome in its palmy days, but a modern method of gratifying a like longing.

The work at Methuen was far less in volume than that at Warwick Neck or at Chapinville but no less successful and interesting, and of a kind in which Mr. Willson especially excelled, namely:- the alteration and extension of an old farm house of the Colonial Period, making of it a spacious summer house, preserving its simplicity, making the new harmonize with the old, and at the same time adapting it to the modern ways of living by those who have leisure and wealth and demand comforts and even luxuries. This demand was met in part by building a most charmingly picturesque and effective tea house entirely in harmony with the simple character of the old farm house.

The alterations and addition to the house of Col. William Geddard is a good illustration of the successful handling of a problem by which the owner without sacrificing the simplicity of the design of the old homestead succeeded in procuring large and sumptuous rooms and greatly increased accommodations commensurate with modern methods and style of living consistent with the hallowed associations which clustered around the house which had been for so many years the family mansion.

The changes in the Moses B. Ives House for Mr. and Mrs. Henry G. Russell is another instance of successful accomplishment to adapt an old house to present-day need without iconoclastic demolition and needless and unsympathetic destruction.

Of simpler and more modest single houses for the homes of reasonably-well-to-do people there are many examples in Providence and elsewhere. I will only mention a few that we may recall some of the evidence of his handiwork. It is not my intention to

describe them nor to characterize them, either to praise or criticise them, leaving that to each of you as you may have your own views of their intent and of their worth. My partial catalogue includes houses built for Miss Esther C. Baker; Mr. Geo. M. Smith; Mr. Robert W. Taft, on Hope St.; Mr. F. M. Sackett, on George St.; Mr. Rathbone Gardner; Mr. W. W. Dunnell, on Angell St.; Frederick Grinnell (now C. D. Owen's house), on Bowen St.; Edwin Burgess, on Prospect St.; and the Metcalf Mansion - containing the Pendleton Collection - on Benefit St. This latter he designed with care and spent upon it an incalculable amount of time, study, discussion and thought, and has succeeded in producing as nearly as possible a perfect expression of the best domestic architecture of the first quarter of the nineteenth century. It may not be necessary for me to state to those who hear me that the house is not copied from any single example, but it has so often been stated that its interior finish is copied from the house occupied by Mr. Pendleton at the time of his decease and from which the furniture was taken to the house on Benefit Street that it seems worth while to correct the false impression. That house was built by Edward Dexter just at the close of the 18th century, on George Street, and was moved to its present location in 1859, I think, and is a good example of the best work of that day, but not, in all respects, as good as in some other houses of about the same date. It was, therefore, decided not to copy literally all of the interior of the Dexter house, but to reproduce the best work from many houses, making it a typical house of the period rather than a copy of any house.

It is to the generosity of Mr. Pendleton and Mr. Stephen O. Metcalf that the public and the city of Providence are indebted for this valuable collection and its fine depository and for the free opportunity to visit and examine them.

In the "Fleur de Lis", the joint production of Mr. Sidney R. Burleigh and Mr. Willson, we have a fine bit of mediaevalism both in design and execution, and it has the rare distinction that its decorations in plaster, wood and iron were designed and executed by the artist himself and with such skill of execution that in sharpness and color it is almost ^{as} perfect as on the day it was executed.

The playful conversion of an old stable, a cheap tenement and a store-house on Garnet Street into an old German Hof Brau Haus was happily done, and the brick building two doors away from the Hof Brau Haus at the corner of Weybosset Street is a skillful adaptation of plan to an irregular and very meagre lot, with well designed and interesting exterior.

The group of City Buildings on Fountain street has always seemed to me to be not only very attractive but the buildings are, while dignified and of unmistakably a public and municipal character, neither extravagant or pretentious; the Lyman Gymnasium, Pembroke Hall, and the Gymnasium for Women's College for Brown University, the latter in process of building when he died, are notable additions to the college groups.

Of business blocks, I will only mention a few emitting those in which his individual work did not dominate the design:- on Westminster street - the Lauderdale and Francis Buildings, the

Burrill Building, and the Wm. Wilkinzen; and the Providence Telephone Company Building on Union Street. The changes in what was the What Cheer Building, originally designed by the father of Clifton Hall, virtually makes the front of the Providence Washington Building one of his designs; and the Providence Institution for Savings, also designed by Mr. Hall, is in its present form Mr. Willson's design. The changes in the old Union Bank Building and in the Butler Mansion makes these fronts notable examples of preserving the flavor of the old architecture while adapting them to the requirements of the modern storekeeper. The Y. M. C. A. building in Providence; the addition to and alterations of the Old East India Museum, now the Peabody Academy, in Salem, Mass, may be added to the list which might be enlarged but I will not take your time to enumerate more.

A member of his own family says of him:-

"that he was not a very distinguished scholar - not from want of ability or industry - but because he preferred to spend his time in browsing in the library and in other literary pursuits that seemed demilitary, but which gave him a rather unusual knowledge of English Classics and a cultivated taste for literature in general.

As to his interest in politics and the daily life of the whole country, his habitual reading of the N. Y. Sun, his knowledge of the relationship of royal families, etc. your long acquaintance with him makes you more fit than I to speak."

I can add that his knowledge of families was not confined to royalty but he took a keen delight in ferreting out relationships, not in the dry-as-dust manner of genealogists who lay the entire emphasis of their valuable research on the most minute detail. He traced in a broad way the lines of descent, the intermarriage of families, the effect of heredity, the complications of relationship,

and the discovery of family ties often unknown and unsuspected by those possessing them.

If incidentally I happened to mention a family and speak of their descent or connection with others, I became the recipient of a succession of questions till he had acquired all and more than all that I knew, because of the store of knowledge which he himself possessed.

In this way he had acquired more knowledge of Rhode Island people and their family relationship than most Rhode Islanders.

He also took great interest in heraldry and was an authority on heraldic devices, their meaning and their proper use.

Mr. Willson was an omnivorous reader, was thoroughly versed in the history of architecture, had a tenacious memory of the noted buildings of the world, and could quickly cite an example and turn to the book containing an illustration of that which he had in his mind.

An intimate friend, of literary tastes and a professional writer, with whom he played golf nearly every week said of him to me that he knew more about more subjects than any man he ever met, a statement that I can fully endorse.

He began before coming to Providence to make a collection of illustrations of such buildings as interested him or served to show how others had solved problems similar to those which every architect may possibly be called upon to solve in his own practice, and for that purpose he relied very much on the large number of Architectural Journals - American and foreign - for which he subscribed, and he took most of those published.

It was his habit to run rapidly through the reading matter, saving only such as seemed to him of especial interest and importance tearing out carefully such illustrations as I have referred to, making himself so thoroughly familiar with them that he could remember that he had secured them, classifying them for his scrap-books into which he put them, and with his tenacious memory not forgetting what there was in each which he had selected for preservation and future reference.

These scrap books were of his own design and unlike any I have ever seen. The leaves to which the illustrations were attached were put in so that they could be readily removed for use at the draughting table or elsewhere, or for removal from one book to another should he wish to re-classify their contents, both of which, with the growth of material, were of frequent recurrence.

He had in this way collected one hundred and fifty-nine volumes, each holding about two hundred illustrations, and many in addition which were slipped between the leaves.

Finding that his collection had outgrown his original system he began to put the illustrations in stiff upright envelopes in drawers of the right size, properly and alphabetically arranged.

This collection was of great value to him in the study of his designs and was of service as a handy method of readily and graphically illustrating to his clients an idea which he wished to convey, or a suggestion of treatment which occurred to him. He scarcely ever used them to copy from, but they served to stimulate thought and afford inspiration, as good reading stimulates thought in the mind of a writer.

They ought to find their final abiding place in the School of Design, where they would be of invaluable service to the student of art and architecture in that institution; or in the Providence Athenaeum or the Public Library, for reference and consultation in the art library of one or the other.

You will recall that Mr. Willson, in the sketch of his own life, says:- "In May, 1879, with a man, who has been my dearest friend ever since, I went abroad and stayed till December 1881; studying architecture at the Ecole des Beaux Arts and travelling in France and Italy in the pursuit of my profession." That friend - Mr. William B. Chamberlin, of Cambridge - himself, through physical infirmity confined to his own home unable to walk, is recognized as one of the most accomplished members of the profession; one who has under most discouraging circumstances achieved a large amount of work of distinguished merit, and has rendered invaluable service as adviser, counsellor and judge on matters architectural; an authority from whom none would think of taking an appeal. Of him, Mr. Chamberlin writes:-

"Edmund R. Willson was graduated from Harvard College in 1875, one of the youngest of his class, and began at once to study architecture.

Those who knew him then will remember his extreme modesty, amounting almost to self-distrust, in the expression of his opinions. They will remember that before long they discovered that this self-effacing student's views were nearly always sound, and that he could adduce convincing facts to support them. His reading was wide and discriminating, and his mind was a storehouse of information which he knew how to use.

After a course of study at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and service in architects' offices in Boston and New York, he went to Paris in June 1879, and after six weeks of preparatory study he entered the Ecole des Beaux Arts in July of that year. Here he spent two years and a half, doing the regular work of

the school and interspersing his projects with many journeys in provincial France. By dint of constant reading he soon acquired an acquaintance, such as few possess, of the history of the architecture of France through all centuries and through all styles. Nothing escaped him; nothing failed to arouse his interest. As a student of architecture he found nothing unworthy of attention, and he approached everything in a broad catholic spirit, though as an architect he had his likes and his preferences. He considered every architectural product of the past an historical record and, as such, sacred. This attitude of mind, especially rare among young men who are prone to extreme views and strong prejudices, stamped him as a discriminating man and won for him the confidence of his fellows, who always looked to him for cool judgment. In planning their travels his friends found him always informed, better than they of what was worth doing. He was a good observer, but at first he was distrustful of his ability to make sketch-book record of what he saw, - but he rapidly developed a facile pencil, and when he had finished his European sojourn he had a collection of notes and sketches - not simply pretty pictures - which formed an invaluable basis for his life's work. These diligent years bore fruit as the fertile fancy of his subsequent work attests. Each problem of his professional life he met with scholarliness and lively imagination.

He returned from Paris in December 1861 and became the associate of Messrs. Stone & Carpenter, of Providence, just when we were awakening to the study of our own so-called Colonial architecture, and to this he brought his keen penetrative mind, seizing at once the essence of the various phrases of the style, and reproducing its spirit as a faithful interpreter, not as an unthinking copyist.

His professional life was a steady upward progress - a crescendo to the end.

But all these professional attainments, high as they are, are small compared with the monument he built for himself in the hearts of his friends.

Not only was his spirit gentle and generous, but there could be no ill-nature in his company. Strong in argument, though not eloquent, but skilled in a sort of fence peculiar to himself, his thrusts never hurt nor left a scar.

To know him was to love him, and those who knew him longest loved him most.

One of his French atelier-friends on hearing of his death, writes:- 'Ah! les bons souvenirs que j'ai de lui'. May we all leave so sweet a memory!'

Another of his fellow-students at the Beaux Arts - Mr. A. W.

Longfellow - writes:-

"I can only add a few words of affectionate remembrance of the wonderful cheerfulness and earnestness of our friend which accomplished so much.

By his joy in living and sincere purpose, mingled with a rare sense of humor, he made work more interesting and play more fun for us all though he never lost sight of others or of our purpose to make ourselves better architects. Indeed he had the New England conscience well developed but well in hand. In the institute and in Paris at the school, he added to the 'gayety of nations' with his rare humor and quaint ways but never forget that for which we were striving.

Everything he did was individual but showed a deep sense of what was serious and beautiful in design so that he gained the respect and admiration and love of all his comrades, but was as thoroughly appreciated by the Frenchman as by his compatriots. They had amusing stories about him and his little accidents, and he has ever been the joy of all our reunions since those happy days, and we have all rejoiced in the strong, beautiful work which he did, and the happy home life; the rewards of his sympathetic nature and well developed taste.

His loss to us and to the profession is irreparable, but he has left behind the impress of a strong, joyous soul, earnestly striving for the happiness of others and for the interest of his profession, which he accomplished. To such an extent has he impressed himself upon us that we shall ever feel his influence and help, and recall at every turn how he lightened the burden and set the pace.

His generous criticism of others will always be a lesson to those who have worked with him, and we shall always feel that we still go on hand and hand with him, enjoying more and accomplishing more because we have known him and loved him."

His knowledge of architectural history was acquired in much the same way as his knowledge of men - by wide reading and personal enquiry. All of us will recall the quaint manner in which he would quiz, debate and throw doubt upon the statements of another for the purpose of drawing from him his knowledge of the subject,

and often for the purpose of testing the accuracy of his own information and to correct it when he himself was misinformed or was in doubt. It was this trait, I think, that Mr. Chamberlin had in mind when he speaks of "his skill in a sort of fence peculiar to himself, though his thrusts never hurt or left a scar."

This same spirit led him to enjoy testing his skill in solving problems and was a large factor in making him willing to enter competitions. The propriety and desirability of so doing has provoked much heated and often acrimonious discussion, has led to prolonged disputes, jealousies, bitter feeling, charges of unprofessional conduct, and attempts to overthrow awards because of their being unfair and partial. The question of competition has been the subject of much concern to the A. I. A. as well as to its several chapters; attempts have been made to formulate into codes the principles which should govern their conduct, some contending that it should be declared to be unprofessional to enter any competition which was not limited and in which every competitor was not paid something - preferably enough to compensate each for the actual outlay for the office expenses, while others, by their practice at least, have shown that they were ready to enter every competition which promised the slightest chance of success.

Mr. Willson did not take sides with either extreme but he enjoyed the study of interesting and intricate problems in planning. He felt that there was much to gain in their study, that it was good for the office force to have the practice, and he seemed to enjoy the challenge to measure his strength in contests with his fellows.

This led to his entering a number of competitions resulting in a per cent of success much above many others, some of whom have won great prizes - The Y. M. C. A. Building; Lyman Gymnasium, Gymnasium for Women's College, Brown University; Providence Public Library, and Barrington Town Hall were won by competition, and in not one of these competitions, so far as I know, was there a complaint as to their conduct or a kick over the award. He never entered a competition where he had a pull and no one could accuse him of entering one which was fixed to go his way. If not successful he accepted defeat, not without disappointment but never with resentment, and he could not be induced to join with other unsuccessful aspirants in an attempt to overthrow the decision unless convinced that there was collusion and unfair treatment. In fact I do not recall a single instance where he joined in an attempt to overthrow a competition, except one in which the twelve selected architects, from whose plans the expert advised that the Committee should select one for execution joined in an unsuccessful suit to prevent the appointment of a local architect whose plan was not only not selected but was not even considered worthy of mention by the expert adviser.

A good illustration of his attitude in such matters is shown in an extract from a letter which has been sent to me by a friend who was very anxious that Mr. Willson's plan should be selected in a competition. The plan which Mr. Willson submitted was commended and given a high rank but not placed first by the expert and was voted for by several on the Committee. An unsuccessful competitor who felt sure that he had such a pull that the job would surely come to him began in person, as soon as the expert made his

report, and by the aid of the local newspaper and the help of correspondents of the Boston papers, to attempt to overthrow the decision of the expert and the Committee. This friend, who was not on the Committee, had written to Mr. Willson in regard to his plan, the travail of the competition, and of the attempts to overthrow the expert's award; to which Mr. Willson, as all of you would know he would, replied:-

"I am very much obliged to you for telling me some of the doings of the reporters and what some of the other competitors had been doing in regard to bringing their sets of plans before the public and your suggestions thereto, but in all squareness there is nothing to do but to accept the judgment of the commission's adviser.

I have no criticism to make in regard to the award and think there is nothing for the committee to do in justice to everybody but to accept the opinion of their expert, who has presumably looked into all the plans and has a better expert knowledge, and as far as the opinion of "nine out of ten" goes as to which is the best plan I have no doubt that any competitor could select a group of his friends who would pass a favorable judgment on his plan.

In our case it was certainly because we had the promise of Mr. Chandler or some equally able expert as a judge of the plans, and the payment of something for our time and labor which induced us to go into the competition, as it was this condition which seemed to guarantee the competition, as far as could be, from the influence of pull - either political or friendly - and I think that any competitor who has gone into this competition on the basis of the prospectus as first sent forth and which so far has been lived up to, has no right to make any sort of kick at the award, and I was rather sorry to see at the end of Prof. Chandler's report itself a generalization which seemed to imply that the commission might select any one of the first half dozen or so. Of course, the whole thing is in the hands of the Committee and the competitors so understood it, but the promise that the plans should be judged by a competent expert was made, and this has been done and in all honor should be lived up to by all concerned. It could only be extraordinary reasons which would warrant the commission in recommending any other plan than the one recommended by the expert. Such reasons of course there might be, but there are none apparent in this case, and I hope that you will not take it that anything which I have written (to you) in explanation of points of our scheme was with any idea of ever-riding the recommendations of Mr. Chandler's report, and I hope that you will use your influence to prevent any tampering with the decision based upon it."

He was scrupulously assiduous to observe the ethics of the profession and to elevate the standard of professional conduct in its relations to client, contractor, material men and fellow practitioners, making the Golden Rule his guide and generously lending a helping hand to any of his professional fellows.

At the time of his death he was on a visit to Petersham to overlook a schoolhouse in process of construction and had just made some very attractive sketches of a bungalow to be built on top of one of the highest hills in western Connecticut.

He left home on a Tuesday morning expecting to return on the following Friday, but the insidious disease had fastened itself upon him causing a most intense headache and extreme weakness, so that he was at once put to bed for complete rest. He sat up several times, wrote some letters, and on the afternoon of Sunday week he sat up, and made a pencil sketch, with marginal notes, finishing it at about 5 P. M. (This sketch was sent to me by his sister with a letter of promise of a speedy recovery.) In about an hour thereafter he became somewhat delirious, soon lapsed into unconsciousness, and died before midnight, bringing to a close prematurely - as it seems to us - a fruitful life, a life, though not to the manner born, which has left Providence a more beautiful city because of the monuments of his taste and skill - some of which I have recalled to your remembrance - that he left behind him which will keep his memory fresh and cause him to be gratefully remembered. His lovable nature had won for him the love of all with whom he came in contact, and I cannot more fitly close this imperfect tribute to him than by reading to you the words with which his pastor, Mr. Lord, on that beautiful afternoon in the early autumn closed the service over his

body as it lay in the room of his old home in the most typical of old Salem streets, before it was committed to its last resting place on the heights of "Harmony Grove".

The Last Eve of Summer

--o--

Summer's last sun nigh unto setting shines
Through yon columnar pines,
And on the deepening shadows of the lawn
Its golden lines are drawn.

Dreaming of long gone summer days like this,
Feeling the wind's soft kiss,
Grateful and glad that ear and sight
Have still their old delight,

I sit and watch the warm, sweet day
Lapse tenderly away,
And, wistful, with a feeling of forecast,
I ask, "Is this the last?"

Will nevermore for me the seasons run
Their round, and will the sun
Of ardent summers yet to come forget
For me to rise and set?"

For this still hour, this sense of mystery far
Beyond the evening star,
No words outworn suffice on lip or scroll,
The soul would fain with soul

Wait, while these few swift passing days fulfil
The wise-disposing will,
And, in the evening as at morning, trust
The All-merciful and Just.

The solemn joy that soul communion feels
Immortal life reveals;
And human love, its prophecy and sign
Interprets love divine.

Come then, in thoughts, if that alone may be,
O friend! and bring with thee
The calm assurance of transcendent Spheres
And the Eternal years!

(Adapted)

J. G. Whittier.

Uprooted is the mountain oak
That promised long security of shade
And brooding place for many a winged thought,
Not by Time's softly cadenced stroke
With pauses of relenting pity stayed,
But ere a roof seemed sapt, a bough decayed,
From sudden ambush by the whirlwind caught
And in his broad maturity betrayed!

I cannot think he wished so soon to die
With all his senses full of eager heat***
He that was friends with earth, and all her sweet
Took with both hands unsparingly;
Truly this life is precious to the root,
And good the feel of grass beneath the foot:-
To lie in buttercups and clover bloom,
Tenants in common with the bees,
And watch the white clouds drift through gulfs of trees ***
Then the long evening-ends
Lingered by cozy nooks,
With high companionship of books
Or slippered talk of friends,
And sweet habitual looks.

His magic was not far to seek,
He was so human! whether strong or weak
Far from his kind he neither sank nor soared,
But sate an equal guest at every board.
No beggar ever felt him condescend,
No prince presume; for still himself he bare
At manhood's simple level, and where'er
He met a stranger, there he left a friend.

James Russell Lowell

(From "Agassiz")