

# The Canadian Engineer

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## The Canadian Engineer.

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### THOMAS LEOPOLD WILLSON.

THOMAS LEOPOLD WILLSON, whose name is now known throughout the scientific and mechanical world in connection with calcium carbide, and acetylene gas, and whose portrait is given to the public for the first time through THE CANADIAN ENGINEER, was born at Princeton, near Woodstock, Ont., on the 14th March, 1860, and is therefore in his thirty-sixth year. He is above medium height, rather slight frame, and like most men who have attained to real distinction in the world, is of modest and unassuming demeanor—as may be gathered from the fact that he has personally shrunk from publicity, and invariably declined the request of leading American and foreign journals to allow his portrait and biography to be published, and only now consents on personal grounds, and because the writer was born and lived near his old family seat in the county of Wentworth. So little is known of Mr. Willson personally, by the scientific press, that his nativity has been ascribed to half-a-dozen places, ranging geographically from North Carolina to Ontario.

Mr. Willson's grandfather, the Hon. John Willson, was one of the ablest men who sat in the early legislature of the old Province of Upper Canada. He represented the West Riding of York (now Halton) from 1809 to 1820, and the county of Wentworth from 1820 to 1831, being made speaker of the House of Assembly in 1825. He was a fine type of the pioneer settlers of Upper Canada, and his public life was marked by high integrity and broad views. It may not be known, except to those who have made the early history of the province a study, that he had the principal hand in laying out the

lines on which the present unrivalled educational system of Ontario was framed. This system was afterwards elaborated by Dr. Ryerson, but the foundations were laid by the Hon. John Willson—a work sufficient of itself to give him a name in history.



*Thomas L. Willson*

The subject of our present sketch is the only son of his grandfather's youngest son, the late Thomas Whitehead Willson, who died in 1874, the Hon. John Willson having died at Wimona (then called Ontario) in 1861. Like his grandfather, Mr. Willson is largely a self-made man. His father moved to New York in 1805, and at an early age he began the battle of life on his own account. At the age of 13 he returned with his parents to Canada, and his father having died in the following year, he was sent to school in Hamilton, where he remained till 1882. His education in that city was chiefly at the Collegiate Institute, under Geo. Dickson and Prof. Spencer. While at school here he showed a special aptitude for chemistry and physical science, and it was following this natural bent of mind which led him afterwards to the discovery that has already made his name famous. When electricity began its development as a practical science, its wonders formed a field of irresistible attraction for Mr. Willson, who at the age of 20 had obtained such a mastery of electrical work that he constructed an arc light apparatus, and in association with Senator Sanford and John Hood, of Hamilton, gave the citizens there the first exhibition of the electric arc light—perhaps the first