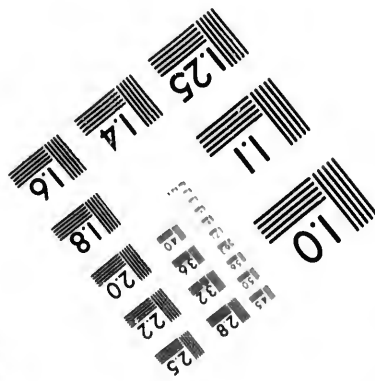
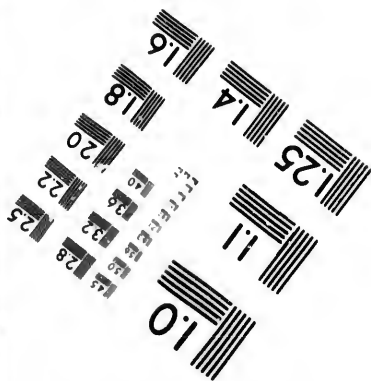
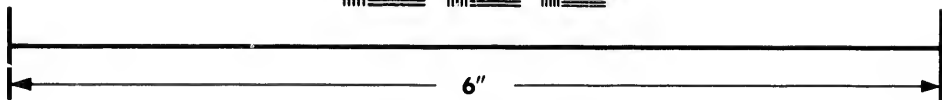
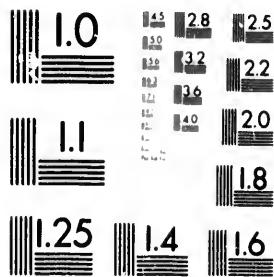


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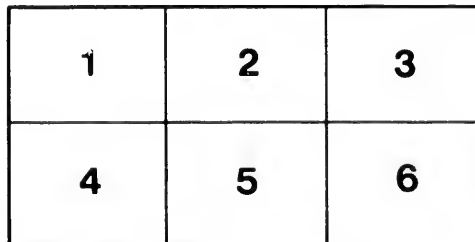
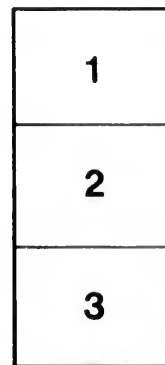
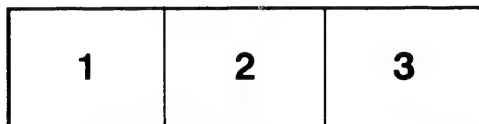
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DAVID WILLSON,
Founder of the Children of Peace.



THIRD ORGAN IN THE MEETING-HOUSE.

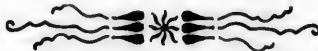


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Children of Peace



THE HISTORY OF A NOVEL SECT IN YORK CO., ESTABLISHED IN THE
EARLY PART OF THIS CENTURY. THEIR CEREMONIES, AND
HOW THEY CONDUCTED THEIR SERVICES. THE ERECTION
OF A TEMPLE. THE OLDEST BAND IN AMERICA.
THE FIRST ORGAN BUILT IN CANADA.

—X—

Various articles having appeared at sundry times, regarding the religious society called "The Children of Peace," which have only been true in part, or unwittingly calculated to mislead the public mind in forming a true conception of the founder and his adherents, the writer will endeavor to give not an elaborate but a true history of its inception, rise and progress, together with interesting matters connected therewith; also correct dates, and the explanation of some things attributed to them, not altogether clear to the public mind, which gained partial credence, and were not considered as reflecting very much credit on the society.

The writer is not entering upon a defence of their religious belief, but merely wishes to give their history as it is, leaving an intelligent public to draw its own inferences.

As regards their customs and manner of living, much has been said to their discredit, which was

utterly untrue, and it is but doing justice to their memories to explain those actions of their lives which have been wholly misunderstood and accepted as truth by a misinformed public.

David Willson, the founder of this society, was born of Irish parentage in Dutchess County, New York, June 7, 1778. His father died when the subject of this narrative was very young, so that the period of his education was limited to less than one year. While in his minority, he with his brother, the late John J. Willson, father of Mrs. C. Doan, Aurora, were engaged on a sailing vessel that sailed between New York and the West India Islands. What length of time he was engaged in this business is not now known. His brother continued to follow the business for some length of time after David Willson discontinued his part or interest in it. In the meantime he married before attaining his majority, and by the earn-

History of the Children of Peace.

est solicitations of his wife was induced to leave the West India route and emigrate to Canada, which they did in the year 1801. They suffered a severe loss on crossing Lake Ontario. The craft on which they took passage was wrecked, they escaped with their lives, but all their baggage was lost; all they possessed, on arriving at Toronto was the rim of a spinning wheel, and the clothes they had on.

On arriving in Toronto, he applied for, and obtained a Crown deed of the farm in East Gwillimbury, (which is now owned, and occupied by his grand-son, Mr. Abb Willson, one of our most prominent men). He and his wife walked up what is now Yonge Street, at that time a blazed road through an almost dense forest, carried their two little sons, John D. and Israel. Their third son was born Aug. 22. 1802, the first white child born in the Township of East Gwillimbury, and his cradle was a rough hewn sap-trough, but eventually he became one of the leading men of his time and age, but to our subject. From his earlier years, David Willson was much given to religious contemplation, and sometime after his arrival in this country, he became a member of the society of "Friends," taking quite an active part in their meetings. Entertaining, however, some peculiar views on religious points, which the Friends did not consider orthodox, he was dismissed from that body, and on his withdrawal a number, six it is said, who entertained

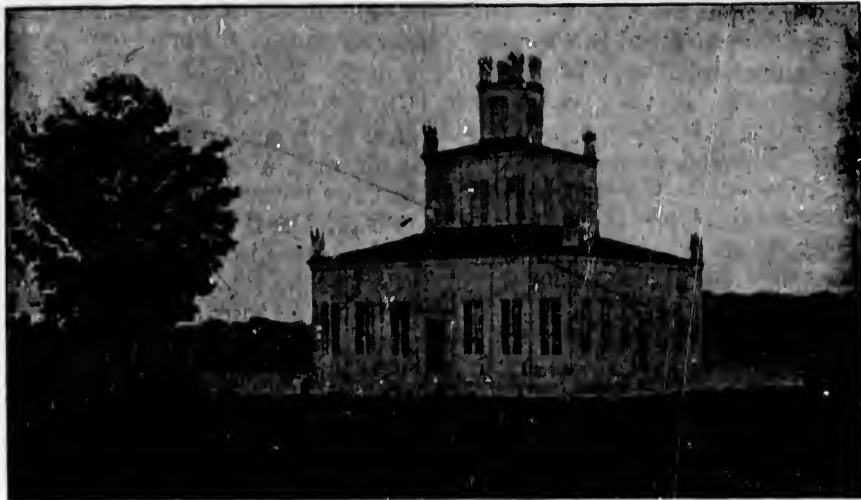
similar views, also left the society and attached themselves to Mr. Willson, who became their leader. This was the nucleus of the church afterwards founded by him, and the early combination of the little band known as "The Children of Peace," which began to hold its meetings for worship in 1814. They differed from the Quakers in several peculiarities, were fond of music and introduced both vocal and instrumental in their devotional exercises, were not obliged to conform to any particular style of dress, and no religious tests were required as a standard of faith or godliness.

Their first meetings were held in Mr. Willson's private house, and later on in a log building, which stood upon the site of the present meeting-house, until their first church was built in 1819, afterwards known as the Music Hall. It was 40 ft. square at the base, 16 ft. high, one storey, no upper room a door in the center on each of the four sides and two windows each side of the four doors, each window containing 24 panes of glass. It was painted white, the roof being supported by large columns painted a light green.

The first feast was held in 1818, as a harvest home dinner, prepared by the wives and mothers, and was partaken of in the open air, on the site where the Music Hall stood, and was afterwards instituted as the feast of the "first fruits" corresponding to "Lammas day."

In 1820 a brass band of music was organized in connection with

History of the Children of Peace.



THE SHARON TEMPLE.

the society, which is the oldest brass band in Canada, and which performed a sacred piece of music during service. A pipe organ was also added to the service during the same year, the builder being Mr. Richard Coates of Toronto, who was a band master in the British Army at the battle of Waterloo and in the Peninsular Wars. This was the first pipe organ built in Canada and had two barrels, ten tunes on each barrel.

Mr. Richard Coates was teacher of the band when organized, he taught each member to perform on his special instrument. This continued for some length of time. The late Jesse Doan, brother of the Charles Doan of Aurora, and father of Mrs. Col. Wayling of Sharon, was the first recognized leader, the time of his appointment is not known, but he continued to lead until September

1866, when through failing health he resigned, and transferred the leadership to his nephew, Mr. J. D. Graham. Jesse Doan made a specialty in the clarinet of which instrument he was thoroughly master. A number of the members of the band purchased silver instruments in New York from 1864 to 1867 inclusive, each member owning his own instrument. The two large bass horns owned by Charles Graham and George M. Doan, were particularly fine, and were purchased at a cost of \$125 and \$140 respectively. All the members of the band thoroughly understanding the different scales, would transpose the music as they played, thereby saving the trouble of rewriting the original score in a different key, if so required. It has been said by competent judges to be the most

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History of the Children of Peace.

perfect in tone, time and execution of any amateur band in Canada.

They also cultivated their talent for singing at a very early date, 1819, and had the best teachers engaged that were available at that time. The first Professor obtainable was Mr. Daniel Cory of Boston, whom they engaged for the purpose. He commenced his duties January 11, 1846, and then a systematic training in all the rudiments of singing was engaged in with black-board and all conveniences required. This continued for over two years. The surrounding country joined with the Davidites in the school exercises which were conducted in the large room above in the meeting-house. Mr. Cory held two grand concerts during his engagement here, one in Feb. 1847, the other in the summer, both given in the meeting house, which was filled with an audience that fully appreciated the entertainment.

In the winter of 1818 a school was organized, the term at that time being "Girls' House," young ladies from about 12 years of age and upwards were placed there to be taught thorough house-keeping and house work, such as spinning both wool and flax, sewing, knitting, and cooking in all its branches. The first building utilized for this purpose was a log house that stood near where the residence of the late Hugh D. Willson now stands. As the number of applicants increased it was necessary to build a house for the purpose. They built a more

commodious one where the residence of Mr. John Wasley now is, nearly opposite the Methodist Church. This was in full operation for a number of years, until each one and all married, and left for homes of their own. Up to and during this period the society had greatly increased in numbers, and educational facilities were in a very crude state. They decided to erect a still larger building, which was about 30 feet square, two stories high, and was known as the "square house" and stood on what is now Mrs. E. McArthur's garden, opposite the meeting house. This institution would now be termed a Ladies' Seminary, a large number of young ladies, not only of this, but of other denominations here received a practical education.

This educational institution was what has given rise to the report that David Willson kept a harem, and the inmates were his concubines, but a baser calumny was never uttered on an honest purpose, as many who are yet living can testify. There are six still living in the year 1898, who attended this institution.

Another matter may be explained here, and that is why the young women were dressed in white on the feast days, at that time many were in very moderate circumstances and one of Mr. Willson's mottoes being "Equality," he suggested white as the color of their dresses, it being the emblem of purity, and the material inexpensive placed it within the reach of all.

History of the Children of Peace.



THE MEETING-HOUSE.

In 1825 they began the erection of the Temple, which has long been the wonder and admiration of all who have seen it. It is a three-storey structure 75 ft. in height, surmounted by a gilded ball, on which is inscribed the word "Peace." The first or ground storey, which is the auditorium, is sixty feet square. The second or middle storey is a music gallery where the band rendered a selection of music while the congregation were entering the building. The third storey is a dome, from which there is an open space to the ground floor. In the centre on the first floor stands a small finely finished structure, built by the late John Doan, called the Altar, and which occupied 365 days in building, and like the temple is square and contains the Holy Bible. It stands on twelve gilded pillars, representing the twelve apostles

and is emblematical of the religion of Christ, on the four corners of each storey of the Temple, a spire is placed, making twelve in all, and when illuminated is symbolical of the twelve apostles going out into the world to preach the salvation of Christ to the people.

THE SYMBOLIC MEANING OF THE TEMPLE.

Mr. Willson had a symbolic meaning attached to each and every part of the Temple. We will give it in his own words as the writer heard him repeat it.

"My meaning for the three-storeys is to represent the Trinity. Being square at base meant to deal on the square with all people. The door in the centre on each of the four sides is to let the people come in from the east and the west, the north and the south on equal and the same footing. The equal number of windows on each

History of the Children of Peace.

side of every door is to let the light of the gospel be equally the same on all the people herein assembled. The four pillars at each corner of the Altar, with the words Faith, Hope, Love and Charity, inscribed on them is the four cardinal virtues, which are the foundation, or in other words the principles on which it is built. The Golden Ball on the top storey with the word "Peace" inscribed meant peace to the world."

On the evening of the first Friday in each September, the Temple was illuminated for divine worship, and presented a very beautiful appearance when lighted, there being 2,952 panes of glass in the windows and spires. The illumination of the building was intended to represent Christianity enlightening the darkened understanding of the mind.

The following day the feast of the "first fruits," was celebrated and another service in the Temple, followed by a dinner provided in the meeting-house. During the afternoon the band rendered a number of selections on the green in front of the meeting-house, or, in other words, an open air concert. The members also held a feast the first Saturday in June, at first in honor of David Willson's birthday, afterwards instituted as "the passover."

The building was intended to be used fifteen times during the year, never at any time for Sunday worship, viz.: service on the last Saturday of each month, when the members made contributions for charitable purposes. It has gener-

ally been supposed that this occupied 7 years in building, after King Solomon's Temple, but such was not the case, as it was begun in 1825, and the first service was held in it October 29, 1831, making the period of erection six years. It was painted white with green facings.

At the time and during the erection of the Temple, it was proposed to erect what is known as the Study, which was erected in 1829. This though of small dimensions is one to excite interest from an architectural point of view. This building like the meeting-house is surrounded by a colonnade of pillars, 10 in number, the measurement of the colonnade being 24 ft. long, 16 ft. 6 in. wide. The body of the building 16 ft. long, 8 ft. wide and one storey high, a door in centre on east and west sides, twelve small spirals on the roof and twelve windows, four on each side, two at each end and painted like the temple, white with green facings. This structure was finished and the opening took place in September of the same year. They had seats placed in front of the building to accommodate the large gathering of friends that availed themselves of the pleasure. The time was spent in speeches and singing, and social intercourse all in harmony with the occasion, and so the afternoon passed away.

Later on, the second pipe organ, also built by Mr. R. Coates with three barrels attached to it, ten tunes on each barrel, was put in, and the music produced by this

History of the Children of Peace.



INTERIOR OF TEMPLE.

organ was the old time ballads such as "Blue Bells of Scotland," "Henry's Cottage Maid," "Water Painted from the Sea," "Lochabar no more," thirty tunes in all. The tone of this organ was particularly sweet and very harmonious to the ear.

The ladies in connection with the society made white, plain muslin curtains to drape the organ; they formed a point at the top, and reached to the floor, slightly drawn or parted in front, and trimmed with blue ribbon, which had a most pleasing effect. The windows were draped in white corded muslin, valances cord and tassels, a

bright scarlet valance was fastened around the inside above the windows. It was neat, plain and very attractive. This was the decoration of the Study, at that time. At this time, the members still increasing in numbers, it was decided to build a more commodious church for Sunday worship, which resulted in the building of the Meeting-House, a structure 100 ft. long by 50 ft. wide surrounded by a colonnade of pillars. This building was painted a light yellow with green facings, and has a large room up stairs for Sabbath Schools, and band rehearsals. The main part of the building which was used for

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History of the Children of Peace.

service contains another, the third pipe organ, placed here in 1848, built also by Mr. Richard Coates. In this place worship was held every Sunday after the following manner:—Organ voluntary, sacred piece by the band, reading the scripture, hymn by the choir, prayer, anthem, sermon, hymn, closing voluntary by the organ.

Service was also held on Christmas morning at 5 a. m., when the house was lighted by a candle being placed in each window both above and below, followed by a free breakfast, service again at 11 a. m., followed by the Christmas offertory and dinner. The 5 a. m. service was in commemoration of the Saviour's birth, at that time in the morning.

In this building the feasts were held; prior to this in the open air in the Temple field. This church was commenced in 1834, finished and dedicated in the summer of 1842, the month and date not now known.

During the early times of this society, it was the custom for a number to go to Toronto and Markham Township to hold a Sunday service, a written sermon being left at home to be read by one of their members. Revival meetings were unknown among them, neither had they any other minister than David Willson, and his service was at all times given free. While he always maintained "The laborer was worthy of his hire," he was averse to high salaries being paid to ministers, preferring rather to give the surplus to the poor, and

so this little body grew and thrived, gaining for themselves a reputation for morality, upright dealing and honesty of purpose and belief, never asking for assistance outside their own congregation. As Mr. Willson once wrote, "Our wants are few and simple," and thus they passed their lives in helping each other and the poor around them, in their own unostentatious way of serving their Creator. They did their life's work and quietly passed away in the hope of their reward in the great hereafter.

Upon the completion of their numerous buildings the society continued to flourish until the death of David Willson, which occurred on January 19, 1866, at the age of 87 years, 7 months, and 12 days. His remains were interred beside his life partner, in the cemetery one mile south of Sharon, and not in a vault under the Study as was reported by many at the time of his death. The reading of the service devolved upon his eldest son, John David Willson, David Willson having left a number of sermons, prayers, and hymns on record.

After this the society began to fail in numbers, many moved away and others identified themselves with other churches. At this time the society has become extinct. The churches still stand as a monument to the memory of the departed.

The Music Hall, and Square House were both removed some years ago.

