

Protecting the Family Legacy

Absalom Willson was a grandson of David Willson, founder of the Children of Peace. He was the youngest son of John David Willson (1797-1887) and Maria Thorpe Willson (1819-1894), born on April 24, 1848, in the village of Sharon.

As a teen, Absalom played the drum before getting himself a tenor horn. He spoke highly about the music played within the Temple, stating that Sharon had one of the best bands and choirs north of Toronto.

Absalom Willson married Harriet Ann Stokes (1852-1935) on October 9, 1872, and the two lived together for 63 years until her death. They had three children, Emily, Georgina, and Frank.

Absalom spent time as a medical officer, whose job it was to place placards on the doors of households that had contracted communicable diseases, like measles, mumps, or chicken pox. Houses where occupants had contracted these diseases would be quarantined.

Absalom was accepted into the Sharon Lodge in 1870, and as a member received an award for his perfect attendance for eleven years straight. He held the title of Master of the Lodge three times, in the years 1889, 1890, and 1896. When the Lodge was moved to Queensville, Absalom would walk 1.5 miles from his house to the Lodge. A reporter for the Toronto Star asked Absalom why he walked to the Lodge instead of taking a horse. Absalom told him that the horses had worked all day and because of that he did not like using them at night. On February 24, 1924, the Lodge made Absalom an honorary life member.

It is easy to see why Absalom Willson's family spoke very highly of him. Jim Pearson recounts that he, "couldn't begin to recall the number of times that I heard my mother and her sisters refer in very loving terms to their grandfather." He played a large role in the community and in the future of the buildings owned by the Children of Peace.

After the death of his father, Absalom found himself as the owner of the Temple, the two meeting houses, and the land they all sat on. After the last meeting of the



**ELIZABETH
EVANS**

Children of Peace was held in the Temple in 1889, care and upkeep of the Temple grew difficult. Absalom was not far removed from David Willson and the congregation David created and must have felt that the Temple would one day be considered important again.

Absalom did what he could to maintain the buildings, including charging a 25 cent admission to visit the Temple, allowing services and garden parties to occur on site, and attempting to sell the Temple to the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in hopes they would be able to preserve the building, and selling the wood from the demolished Meeting Houses in

order to pay for the upkeep the Temple and the Sharon Burying Ground. In August 1912, Absalom Willson sold the land, which included the Temple to Michael Ramsay. His concern for the Temple did not end there, however. From 1926 through 1928, Absalom served as the third curator of the Sharon Temple Museum, after Ramsey sold the building to the York Pioneer and Historical Society.

Absalom died on March 10, 1939, in East Gwillimbury. Today he is remembered for his role in preserving the Sharon Temple and as a dedicated Mason, a devoted family man, and a valuable member of his community.

A poem written about Absalom by his mother, Maria Willson, on January 1, 1854.

*Dear Absalom my little son
Thou art a sweet and loving one
Thy Fathers great delight and joy
Thy Mothers hope and only boy
From child to manhood may thou
grow*

*To learn Gods will and love it too
May be thy chief and constant
care*

Is thy dear Mothers fervent

prayer.

Elizabeth Evans is the Museum Manager at the Sharon Temple. She takes care of the collection of artifacts, the archives and 9 heritage buildings on site. She is a graduate of the Museum Management and Curatorship program at Fleming College and started out at the Sharon Temple as an intern.



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