

EVENING BULLETIN.

THURSDAY, JULY 3, 1856.

The Willing Mansion.

One of the few survivors of the original first class buildings of Philadelphia is soon to be demolished, and a successor more in accordance with the progress of the city and the demands of the age will be erected upon its site. The Pennsylvania Railroad Company have purchased the "Willing Mansion," at the Southwest corner of Third street and Willing's alley, and this relic of the substantial architecture of the Philadelphia of more than a century ago, will soon be torn down to make way for a handsome building for the use of the company as an office. The old structure, although so far behind the age, is still a fine specimen of a commodious and substantial dwelling. Its wide front, and the spacious hall that runs through the middle of the building, are in striking contrast with too many of the fashionable residences of the present day.

The Willing Mansion was begun in 1745, and was finished the following year. It was built by Mr. John Palmer, who was well known in his day as a bricklayer. It was he who built St. Peter's Church and many others of the best structures that were put up in Philadelphia about the middle of the last century. Mr. Palmer, the builder, was the father of the late Mr. John B. Palmer, who was for many years the Secretary and Treasurer of the Mutual Assurance Company. The old Mansion was occupied for many years by the Willing family, but for a considerable period, more recently, it has been used for a boarding house. The building itself has been extensively modernized, but its solidity has undergone still greater changes. Half a century ago there were but four or five buildings upon the west side of Third street, between Willing's alley and Spruce street. Bingham's splendid mansion and grounds occupied a large portion of the southern portion of this space, while the gardens intervened between the Chew Mansion and the Willing Mansion at the corner of the alley. The Willing property extended westward to Fourth street. At the mansion of Chief Justice Chew, just referred to, Washington had his head quarters at one time.

We are informed by Mr. John F. Watson, the naturalist, that the Willing Mansion was built after the form and model of the homestead building of the family at Bristol, England. The door posts and pediments which still occupy their original position in the front of the building are of Bath stone; they were imported from England all ready for putting up. Mr. Watson informs us that when the mansion was built it was a kind of country retirement, being beyond Dock creek, and consequently at that period out of town! To reach the house you went up hill along Walnut street, from the creek, to Third street, and thence on by a narrow, deep-cut road up a greater hill to the mansion. This neighborhood was called "the Hill," in old times, but the high ground gave it this distinction has long since been mostly levelled down, while the line of the creek has been filled up. Among the ancient landmarks of the neighborhood is the old buttonwood tree that still stands in front of the Willing Mansion. The writer of this article remembers when a boy, thirty years ago, gathering "button-balls" from beneath the wide-spread branches of this tree, and he remembers, too, marvelling much how the hitching post at the door had grown into the spreading base of the tree, and how it was held there as firmly as though it was part and parcel of the living timber. The base of the old tree had a habit of absorbing and growing around any object that came in its way, and at some day the bricks grown up into the heart of the trunk may do damage to the saws or axes of those who attempt to convert it into plank or fire-wood. This venerable tree, and the one that stood to the north of it, were planted in 1749, by John Palmer and John Palmer. The tree to the south became much decayed, and was cut down several years since, but the other tree still stands erect, although it has been shown

old trunk will soon have to share the fate of its fellow, and the mansion they both shaded so long and so faithfully.

The Willing family has for a century and a quarter stood in the front rank of Philadelphia society. We find the name among the early merchants of the city, and it is conspicuous in the ancient records of the city government. In 1747 the name of Mr. Charles Willing first appears as an Alderman in the records of the City Council. A year later he was elected Mayor of the city, and on his retirement from that office, after a term of one year, we find him presenting to the treasury the one hundred pounds salary just voted him. This he returned to the treasury in lieu of the entertainment usually given to the corporation by the retiring Mayors. In 1754 Mr. Charles Willing was again elected Mayor, and in 1763 Mr. Thomas Willing held the same office.

Mr. Thomas Willing, who died in 1821, aged 89 years, was probably better known in Philadelphia than any other person of his name. This gentleman, from 1754 to 1807 successively held the offices of Secretary to the Congress of Delegates at Albany, Mayor of the City of Philadelphia, her representative in the General Assembly, President of the Provincial Congress, delegate to the Congress of the Confederation, President of the first chartered Bank in America, and President of the first Bank of the United States. In addition to all these public duties, Mr. Thomas Willing was an active merchant for a period of sixty years.

We cannot, perhaps, better close this article (that was originally designed to be simply a sketch concerning a well-known building) than by making some pertinent extracts from Dr. Griswold's Republican Court. The author says:

Eminent among the English families, in Philadelphia, were the Willings, who, for strong social connections and great weight of both public and private character, enjoyed an enviable distinction. The name, though found in Germany, has become nearly extinct in England, where it originated, and in our own country has hardly been known out of Philadelphia. The family has, however, in later days given a member to the peerage of Great Britain,* and the wife, first of a count, and afterwards a marquis of France;† while, without any title, a third has illustrated the beauty of American women in the metropolis of Europe.

The first of this family of whom I have heard, although I believe it is traced much further, was Joseph Willing, of Gloucestershire, who married

about two centuries since Ava Lowre, of that county, the heiress of a good estate, which had descended to her through several generations of Saxon ancestors, and whose arms he seems to have assumed, on their marriage, in place of his own. Their son Thomas married Anne Harrison, a grand daughter in the paternal line of Thomas Harrison, and in the maternal of Simon Mayne. The first was a Major General in Cromwell's army and a member of the long Parliament; the latter was also a prominent actor in Cromwell's time; and both were members of the court which condemned Charles the First to death. Whether he considered this part of his ancestral history a good title to consideration in a country settled by puritans, in the "dissidence of dissent," or whether he was attracted by the rising commercial glory of this country, I am not sufficiently informed to say; but having visited America in 1720, and spent five years here, Mr. Thomas Willing brought his son Charles over in 1728 and established him in commerce in Philadelphia, himself returning home. Charles, the first who remained in the country, may therefore be considered the founder of the American family. Few men in private station have anywhere enjoyed greater influence or attained to a more dignified respectability. His house, still standing at the southwest corner of Third street and Willing's alley, though now deprived of its noble grounds, running back to Fourth street, and far onward down to Spruce street, and shaded with oaks that might be regarded as of the primeval forests, is still remarked for its spacious comfort and its old-fashioned repose.

He died in November, 1754. His wife was Ann grand-daughter of Edward Shippen, a person of commanding influence in the early history of Pennsylvania. His son was Mr. Thomas Willing.

TO BUILDERS AND OTHERS.
Extensive Sale at the S. W. corner Delaware Third street and Willing's Alley.
BUILDING MATERIALS, LARGE SYCAMORE TREES, &c. &c.
On Saturday morning, 30th inst. at 10 o'clock, at the southwest corner of Delaware Third street and Willing's alley, between Walnut and Spruce streets, a large quantity of Building Materials, consisting of marble and other mantels, doors, window frames, sash, shutters, superior oak flooring, staircases, lead pipe &c. &c.
SYCAMORE TREES—Also, a large sycamore tree.
* The premises may be examined any day previous to sale.

Aug. 30-1856.

The New Building for the Pennsylvania Railroad Co.—The plans for the erection of an office for the Pennsylvania Railroad Company, at Third street and Willing's alley, submitted by S. D. Button, architect, have been adopted, and the work of putting up the building will be pushed with all possible vigor. The building will have an ornamented brown stone front, and will be 42 by 190 feet. Every part of it is to be made thoroughly fire proof, and no expense will be spared to make this one of the finest buildings in the city. It is to be four stories high.

Aug. 25, 1856

A Merchant of Philadelphia



in the year 1745

THE REED BIRD SEASON is now nearly over. The marshes below the Navy Yard have been so full of cockney sportsmen that they were dangerous to, and were continually shooting, each other. Accidents happened daily there. A few of them were noticed in the newspapers, but many were unreported. The reed bird is a delicate *bonne bouche*, the excellence of which it is reserved for the inhabitants of this happy republic to know. From the fusillades made upon them every fall, it would be thought that the species would be soon extinct; but "never say die" is their motto, and they visit us every year, in undiminished numbers. Long may they do so. By-the-by, does it never strike our gunners that the day will come when their shooting grounds will be lost to them? Improvement will fill up the marshes in the Delaware in three or four years. What will our sportsmen, who are accommodated so near home, do then? Will they follow the reed birds, or give over their taste for game? These are things worthy of being thought of.

Oct. 10, 1856.

* The present Lord Ashburton, great-grandson of Thos. Willing, of Philadelphia.
† La Marquise de Blaisel.