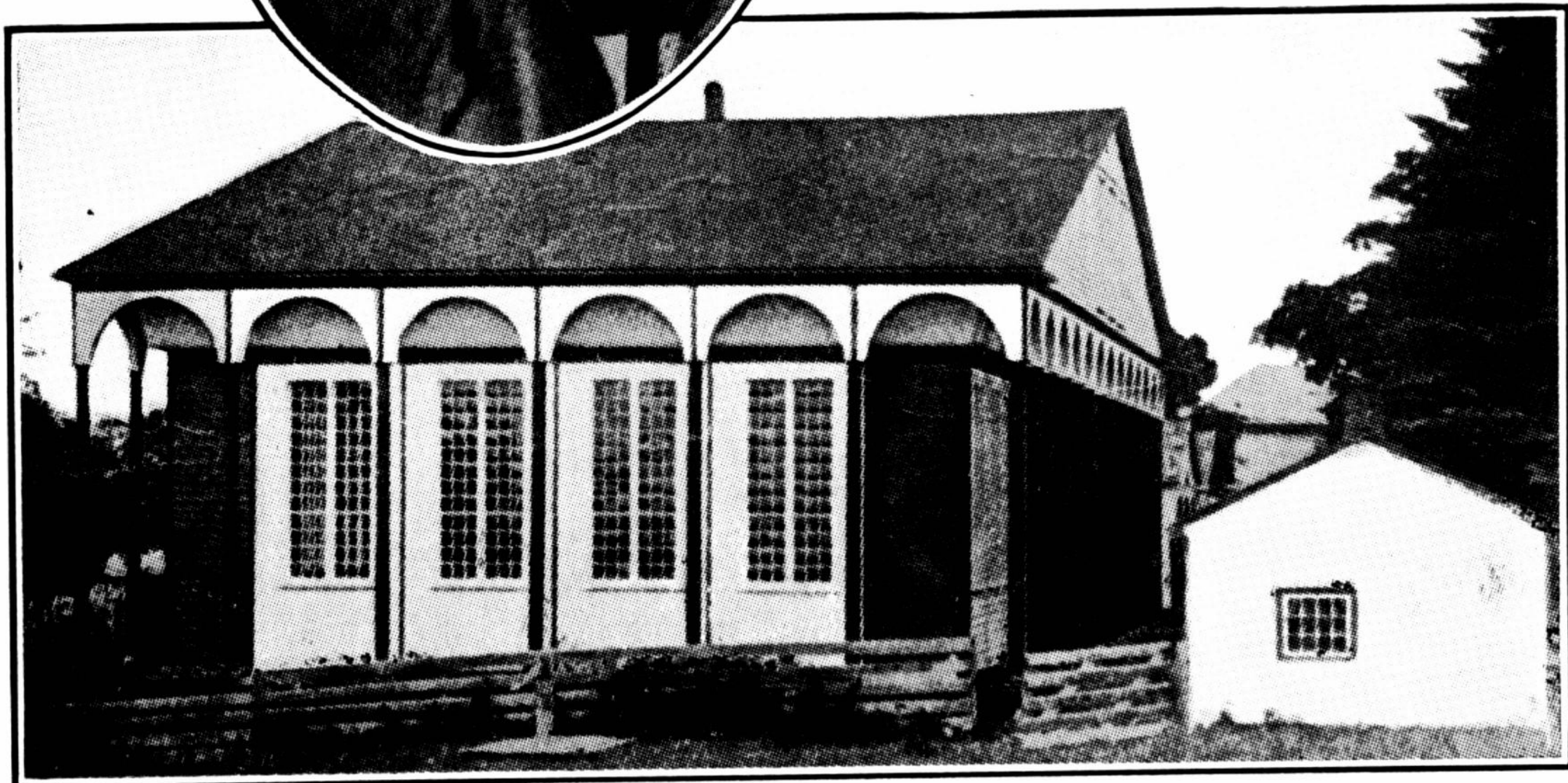


THE TEMPLE OF PEACE, SHARON,
ONTARIO, CANADA.



DAVID WILLSON,
Founder of the sect known as the
"Children of Peace."



THE MEETING HOUSE OF THE "CHILDREN OF PEACE," SHARON, YORK COUNTY,
ONTARIO,

which was torn down after the Society had ceased to exist. The small house was used in preparing the three great feasts, on the first Saturday in June, the first Saturday in September, and Christmas Day.

Block lent by A. G. Dorland from his *History of Friends in Canada*.

[facing p. 37.

The Children of Peace

Almost anyone who knows anything about Quakerism in America knows something about the Great Separation of 1828 and the later one of 1881. But few, even among Friends, know little, if anything, about the first separation within the Society in Canada, namely, that of the "Children of Peace" or "Davidites," which occurred in 1812.

Thus writes Dr. Arthur G. Dorland, of the University of Western Ontario, London, Canada, in introducing the reader of his *History of the Society of Friends in Canada*¹ to Chapter vii.

The man behind the movement was David Willson (c. 1777-1866). He was brought up as a Presbyterian and went to Canada about the year 1801. It is thought that he joined Friends soon after arrival—his name appears on the minutes of Yonge Street M.M. in 1806. "He was one of the leading Friends in Queen Street Preparative Meeting and gave the property on which the meeting house was situated." The last appearance of his name as that of a Friend in unity was early in 1811, soon after which he parted company with Friends, probably feeling that the Society was too negative in its attitude towards the affairs of the world. He wrote:²

My soul was not only separated from all flesh as to my inward feelings, but from all religious records, even the Bible, and I was constrained to live by my own knowledge of the word of God operating upon my mind.

Dr. Dorland writes :

At most, his religious ideas were a confused hodge-podge of Quaker mysticism and Jewish ceremonialism, of which the ancient Temple worship was made the central figure.

Numerous Friends, some of prominence in the Queen Street Meeting, joined the movement and were disowned by

¹ *A History of the Society of Friends (Quakers) in Canada*, published by the Macmillan Co., Toronto, Canada, in 1927.

² *A Collection of Items of the Life of David Willson from the Year 1801 to 1852, by my own Hand*, printed in 1852 at Newmarket, Ont.

the Society. In 1825 so reduced in numbers were the Friends that the meetinghouse, standing on property once belonging to Willson, was handed over to him and his followers. In this same year was begun the building at Sharon of the Temple of Peace, a lofty wooden structure, painted white on the outside, fully described in the *History*, which was opened twice a year only and then illuminated by hundreds of candles for an elaborate ceremonial worship. In their town meeting house there was a fine organ, a silver band, and large choir of white-robed females. Willson's sermons were usually on "Public Affairs and their Total Depravity." He had pronounced political and religious views and he and his two sons spent a short time in prison.

He lived in great worldly prosperity at Sharon, revered by his adherents as a sort of oracle, flattered by the attentions from successive political leaders on account of the influence which he might be supposed locally to possess, down to the year 1866, when he died in peace, aged 89 years, 7 months.³

The number of the Children of Peace never exceeded about four hundred, and the movement died down and expired in the last quarter of the century.

The Temple still stands and has been turned into a museum.

The references above are all taken from the *History*. In the *Journal of Hannah C. Backhouse*, an English Friend, on a religious visit to Canada, we read :

1833. 9th mo. 8th. A morning of trial : my heart is sore : some little refreshment in the meeting with Friends. Afterwards we went to David's Town to visit a people that had separated from Friends under David Wilson, whose principles and practices appear to be of the worst kind. Several hundreds came to the meeting.

11th. Made more visits, one on David Wilson. Thought what Paul said to Elymas and partly repeated it.

In 1912 Henry Brady Priestman, of Bradford, England, was at Sharon and called upon "a woman, the surviving member of the seceding body" (*Recollections*, by Alice Priestman, 1918).

³ Scadding, *Toronto of Old*, 1873.