

William Louis Winans (1823-1897)

Nationality: American

Date of Birth: 3 April 1823

Place of Birth: Vernon, Sussex County, New Jersey, USA

Date of Death: 22 June 1897

Place of Death: London, Great London, Middlesex, England

William Louis Winans was the second child of Ross Winans, an important railroad pioneer, and Julia de Kay, daughter of Thomas de Kay, a wealthy landowner, and his wife Hannah Blain. In about 1851 he married Maria Anne de La Rue who was born in England in 1825 and died 18 December 1904 in London, England. They had two sons both born in St. Petersburg, Russia and both died in England: Walter Winans (1852-1920) and Louis William Winans (1857-1927).

William Louis Winans worked for the firm Harrison, Winans and Eastwick in St. Petersburg, Russia with his older brother Thomas de Kay Winans. Their father Ross Winans had been a close friend of Major George Washington Whistler whom the Czar Nicholas I (1825-1855) invited in 1843 to be the consulting engineer on the proposed railway linking St. Petersburg and Moscow. Whistler in turn asked Ross Winans, a leading railroad pioneer and inventor, to take charge of the mechanical department in Russia. Winans, however, declined the invitation in order to continue his railroad shops in Baltimore and instead sent his two sons William and Thomas. The Winans brothers' contract was to equip the new Russian railway with locomotives and stock cars and in so doing they established workshops in Alexandrovsky, near St. Petersburg. When the railway was completed in 1850, Thomas Winans returned to Baltimore with his Russian wife while William Louis Winans stayed on until 1862 to finish existing contracts. William is credited with the design and construction of the permanent bridge across the Neva River made of stone and cast iron. Previous bridges had all been of the pontoon type and were removed when the river froze in the winter. In 1868, the Russian government took over the family's railroad contract in return for a large bonus. Both Thomas and William became multi-millionaire as a result.

William never returned to the United States as he could not bring himself to risk the sea voyage. He almost died of seasickness on the original trip from Baltimore and the thought of a return trip to the United States appalled him. After the Neva River bridge called Nicholasofsky was completed, his health had been so weakened by the Russian climate that he was ordered to southern England to restore his health. He later settled in London and there he remained until his death. He had a house in Kensington Park Gardens and rented at £8,000 a year 200,000 acres between Beaulieu and Kintail, Scotland. His wife also remained in England, her native country, lingering for years as an invalid. William died a millionaire having amassed \$20 million dollars.

See Thomas De Kay Winans biography regarding the brother joint venture in building the "cigar" boats in an effort to improve trans-Atlantic travel that William Louis dreaded so much.

Bibliography: UK census 1881 from <http://www.familysearch.org> (accessed 2004). Various Baltimore Sun newspaper articles and other materials held by the Maryland Historical Trust and Enoch Pratt Free Library.

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