

MAHANOEY CITY CHRONICLES

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PHILLIPS A MULTI-TALENTED PIONEER

Eulogy an indication of his stature in town

COLLIERY OWNER, mine foreman, merchant, inventor, poet, song writer, church leader, religion teacher.

All these things were embodied in David E. Phillips, a man of many talents and interests, who spent five decades of his life in Mahanoy City and was one of the town's most prominent citizens.

Mr. Phillips was 58 ears old at the time of his death on May 21, 1912, and the eulogy which appeared on the front page of the local Daily American was an indication of his stature in the community:

"DAVID E. PHILLIPS, coal operator, inventor, song composer and citizen of intrinsic worth, one of Schuylkill County's noblest sons, passed away at the family residence, 708 E. Centre St., at 6:30 o'clock this morning.

"Death came as a Gilead to a troubled heart for during the past several months he suffered agonies untold in combating a complication of ills.

"In health he was of firm determination and once his mind was fixed on certain aims or ends, after careful thought, there was no power which could thwart his efforts or energies. With this grim ruggedness of purpose, he met death.

"There was much in this life for him. The years of his youth and young manhood were given entirely to industry and frugality and the reward of a well earned rest when he might come into the happy fruition of unceasing and indefatigable efforts was now commencing to loom up before him.

"He longed to be restored to health for to him there was much in this great wide world which he considered beautiful and he was a profound lover of nature. To this end he visited eminent specialists and the tenderest nursing was given him but to no avail.

"Those who were with him during the closing scenes of his illness will never forget with what marvelous forbearance he endured the trying ordeal and passed on and out of this life.

"There is much which might be said eulogistic of David E. Phillips but the general regret and sorrow which prevailed in the entire community today far more beautifully, though mutely, attest to the lofty esteem in which he was held than weak empty vessels called words.

"Success was his standard. To the young men of his acquaintance, to the students in his Sunday school class at Bethel Congregational Church, to his acquaintances, his theme was ever "the successful man", and in fact Mr. Phillips was a concrete, living example of what he espoused and of which he was an exponent. From breaker boy to coal operator in a comparatively brief career was the excellent record of our departed friend.

"It was a pleasure to converse with a man the mental stature of David E. Phillips. Congenial was his nature while he always spoke forth intelligence. One was the better for having listened to his speaking. Back of everything he said there was a fiery earnestness, a faculty which could not fail to leave upon one an indelible impression. Then, too, he had his sunny side and was blessed with a disposition which always commanded for him the most profound admiration and respect.

"In his home circle, in the Bethel Congregational Church, in business circles, among friends, in fact, by the entire community, the presence of David E. Phillips will be sadly missed, but the memory of his life and works, his good stewardship upon earth cherished."

DAVID PHILLIPS was born in 1854 in the village of Delaware, today known as Duncott, just north of Minersville. His father, Richard Phillips, was a coal operator whose trade took him from Duncott to Centralia and finally Mahanoy City.

David attended the local grammar schools and went on to receive a classical education at New Berlin College, Union County, a training which he would put to good use in the promotion of cultural activities in Mahanoy City and beyond.

Returning to Mahanoy City, he became a clerk in the old cooperative building at the northwest corner of Main and Centre streets. Later he also became a partner in a stock company. However, he was attracted to the coal industry and learned all the operations of a colliery by working at jobs from breaker boy to outside foreman, the latter position being held at the Morea Colliery.

The dream of having his own colliery was realized in the early 1900s when he joined his brother, John W., in the purchase of a colliery at Middleport which they operated as the Phillips Coal Company. Eventually he also came to be part owner of the Vulcan, Morea and New Boston collieries.

He put his inventive mind to work to improve the mechanics of coal production in various ways. One of his key inventions was a new type punch plate which greatly facilitated the breaker screening process, an improvement which came into wide use in the industry.

In the true spirit of his ancestry, Mr. Phillips was one of the region's foremost patrons of eisteddfods (Welsh competitive festivals of the arts) which were major cultural events of the era,

continuing into the 1920s. As a result of this activity he became one of the best known Welshmen in Northeastern Pennsylvania. His bardic ability earned him numerous trophies in literary competitions. In addition to written poems and translations, he was a musical composer.

At Bethel Congregational Church he served as a deacon, and for many years taught a Bible class for young ladies. Members of his Bible class carried flowers in the funeral cortege which proceeded by special train from Mahanoy City to Tamaqua, where they placed the flowers on his grave.

His obituary stated that in addition to his widow, son and daughter. His widow later moved to Middleport where her husband had a number of homes. The son, David, moved to the New England area, and the daughter, Mae, located in the vicinity of York where she was married to a doctor. This information was provided by Mrs. Dorothy Dresch Hines of Saint Clair, who was close to the Phillips family and visited them often while Dave was still alive. She still has a diamond chip locket given to her by Dave, whom she referred to as "grandpop." She supplied the photo of him for this chronicle.

Dave Phillips was called to his eternal reward at a time when the town he helped to build was at its peak and looking forward to its 50th anniversary which would be commemorated the following year (1913) with an old home week celebration.

How great was the contribution of Dave Phillips to the growth of Mahanoy City? Consider that two years before his death, the 1910 census showed tow town bursting at the seams with an all-time peak population of 15,936. There can be no doubt that many of those 15,936 owed their daily breat to the hundreds of jos they found at the collieries which Dave Phillips devoted his life to building.



David E. Phillips
Pioneer with many talents
