

DAVID BISHOP SKILLMAN

by

George C. Laub

David Bishop Skillman, esteemed member of the Northampton County Bar and distinguished citizen of the Commonwealth, died on February 22, 1965. Thus ended a life which was rich in accomplishment and immensely valuable to the legal profession and the community.

Mr. Skillman was lifelong Pennsylvanian. He was born in Philadelphia on March 24, 1887, son of the late Rev. Willis Bishop Skillman and Annie Gayley Skillman. He was educated in the public schools of Philadelphia and at Lafayette College, from which he was graduated in June 1913, taking up permanent residence in Easton. He studied law ("read law," as this method of preparation was then called) in the offices of E. J. and J. W. Fox, Easton, and was admitted to this Bar on October 2, 1916.

Immediately after his admission, Mr. Skillman opened an office in the Easton Trust Building, nearby that of his preceptors, where he continued to practice until renovations in that building were commenced in Spring 1961. He then moved his office to the Alpha Building, and only a few months ago to his home. Throughout his career Mr. Skillman practiced alone.

In 1934 Mr. Skillman married the former Frances C. Bouchette Keller, and they became the parents of three children, Mrs. Judith B. Chapman and Willis B. Skillman, both of Media, Penna., and David B. Skillman, Jr., of Amherst, Mass.

A vignette of Mr. Skillman's personality and character should be recorded. He was a devoted husband and father. He was a religious man and not given to pretension. He enjoyed the quality of leadership. He possessed an excellent mind, one that was at once creative, intellectual, contemplative, analytical and versatile. He was an industrious and tireless worker. He was deliberative; but when he arrived at a firm opinion, of the rightness of which he was greatly confident, he held to it with fidelity and tenacity. He was patient

but persevering. He was thoughtful and cheerful, and a delightful conversationalist. He had a sharp sense of the historicity of things and events. He loved history—the history of everything—but he was not past-oriented; he was extremely aware of and responsive to the needs of his environment. He was ageless, in the sense that he could adapt himself to the age of the person with whom he was communicating—any age—and establish a rapport with that person. He was valiant and indomitable: all of us, during the last several years, have witnessed his utter refusal to allow his illness, emphysema, to reduce his usefulness to his family and his profession—indeed he worked on legal matters during the several hours preceding his death.

In the Law: Mr. Skillman's practice was general, confined to the civil, probate, and corporate fields. However, he became a specialist in workmen's compensation law, representing many insurance carriers in many Pennsylvania counties, and unquestionably was one of the top half-dozen Pennsylvania lawyers in this field. He was counsel for Lafayette College for more than thirty-five years and was expert in that unique amalgamation of various areas of substantive law which collectively is becoming known as College Law (ref. Thomas Edward Blackwell: *College Law—Washington 1961*). For many years he was counsel for Pocono Hotels, Inc. (Skytop) and a member of its board. He did a great deal of work in estate planning and administration. His clients included members of families related to the anthracite industry, such as the Markles and the Pardees. He was a member of the board of directors of the Easton Trust Company, since June 1959 the Easton National Bank and Trust Company, and of its Trust Committee. He had extensive experience in the appellate courts of the state, where he proved to be an able and successful advocate. Moreover, Mr. Skillman was deeply interested in the work of the organized bar. At the county level, he served on numerous committees, was secretary 1923-1937, vice-president 1946, president 1947 and 1948, and missed very few meetings of the association. He was also active in the Pennsylvania Bar Association: served on various committees, attended many of the annual and summer meetings—at the time of his death he was an active member of the special

committee to prepare and propose a new Judiciary Article for the State Constitution.

In Medicine: Mr. Skillman was for some years a member of the Easton Hospital board of trustees, and during the depression years of its three-man executive committee which did so much to guide its operations successfully. He was president of that board in 1935. Mr. Skillman is credited with being the creator in Pennsylvania of the Blue Cross idea, and was a leader in persuading physicians and administrators to try a prepaid hospital care plan, as a result of which he helped to found the Hospital Service Plan of the Lehigh Valley and was its president 1940-1963, and a member of its board and president emeritus at the time of his death.

In Education: Mr. Skillman's contribution to American higher education during the past fifty years, through service to his alma mater, Lafayette College, is possibly unparalleled elsewhere in the nation. He was assistant to the president of the college for thirty years, 1915-1945; secretary of the board of trustees for forty-four years, 1915-1959; life trustee for thirty-six years, from 1929, and for some few years he had been the senior trustee. He was counsel for more than thirty-five years, as has been stated. He directed two major capital funds campaigns; and was one of those six men of genius and vision who created the Marquis Foundation for the acquisition of the St. Louis Car Company, a series of transactions which resulted in Lafayette's largest gift, \$6,000,000., received in October 1958.

In Letters: Mr. Skillman was a master of the written and spoken word. He was an historian of note—his specialty was local history. He wrote numerous papers in this field, and many of them have been published by the Northampton County Historical and Geneological Society, of which he was president at one time. His *magnum opus* was a two-volume work on the history of Lafayette College during its first one hundred years, entitled "The Biography of a College—Lafayette," published in 1932. This book continues to hold great interest and to serve as a reference work for the Easton community and the Lafayette constituency. But it has achieved an even greater importance as a contribution to the history of the development

of American higher education. For example, in his authoritative work "The American College and University—a History" (New York: Knopf—1962) Prof. Frederick Rudolph of Williams College places important reliance on Mr. Skillman's study, citing it supportively in twenty-two instances. Mr. Skillman had a lifetime love of books: he had formed a splendid library at his home, and certainly his trustee career at Lafayette was most valuable to its library. In recognition of his achievements in letters, Lafayette, in 1948, conferred upon him the honorary degree Doctor of Literature.

In Family Life: Mr. and Mrs. Skillman built a sturdy family unit, one in which each member was a very special person but in which they together established strong and sound beliefs in religious and moral precepts and in an awareness of one's personal responsibility to others.

In Religion: Mr. Skillman expressed his faith through a Presbyterianism in which there was an almost imperceptible trace of the Pennsylvania Quaker. The 100th Psalm helps to define his faith: "Know that the Lord is God! It is He that made us, and we are His." It was as simple as that. It was as profound as that.

We will not be able to measure our loss in the passing of Mr. Skillman unless we appreciate that he was not a man of "many parts," as it is sometimes said; but that rather he was a man of every part. For, are not Family Integrity, Religious Faith, Medicine, Education, Law, and Letters the essential timbers that support human life?