

derhandedness in the conduct of life. I firmly believe that those nations which cultivate physical development by countenancing and promoting athletic sports and contests, with due regard to the exclusion of the cowardliness of brutality, will ever possess in their citizens, as compared with those of other nations differently prompted through race, or differently controlled by law or dominant public sentiment, a greater proportion than the others of those inspired by independence of character, honor, and disposition to fairness as between man and man, constituting them relatively the more stalwart lovers and defenders of the right in every form.

Obituary Notice of George de Benneville Keim.

By D. G. Brinton, M.D.

(Read before the American Philosophical Society, May 4, 1894.)

Those who have had a reasonably long and intimate knowledge of men must have observed that among the individuals prominent in the active affairs of the day there are two classes—the one, of such as are wholly absorbed in their daily pursuits, whose natures are, to use a simile of Shakespeare's, “subdued to what they work in, like the dyer's hands”—the other, who, however compulsive and harassing their avocations, retain an individual and independent freshness of personality, often strangely in contrast with the requirements of their working hours.

Distinctly to the latter class belonged our late member, George de Benneville Keim; and all who enjoyed his friendship will agree that an appreciation of his career would be imperfect which failed to present these two aspects of his character. I shall begin with that in which he was familiar to the world in general, and then I shall say a few words about him, as he was known to his friends and near associates.

Mr. Keim was a descendant in the sixth generation of Johann Keim, a member of the Society of Friends, who emigrated from the Rhenish Palatinate to the colony of Penn, and settled at Oley, Berks county, in 1704. The grandson of this Quaker emigrant was General George de Benneville Keim, an officer of note in the

war of the Revolution, from whom our late member derived his name. The de Bennevides were a French Huguenot family who joined the settlement at Oley in the early years of the eighteenth century.

His parents were George M. Keim and Julia C. Mayer. At the time of his birth, the date of which was December 10, 1831, they resided in Reading, Pa. There he received his preliminary education, and later was at school in Georgetown, District of Columbia. At an early age he matriculated at Dickinson College, Carlisle, Pa., where he graduated in 1849, when eighteen years old.

His first intention was to prepare himself as a mining engineer, and with that object in view he removed to Philadelphia and entered the laboratory of Dr. Charles M. Wetherill, where he engaged in the study of chemistry with especial reference to assaying and mineralogical analysis.

Soon, however, his predilection for a more strictly professional life asserted itself, and in the following year, 1850, he returned to Reading, and began reading law in the office of Charles Davis. Two years later he was admitted to the bar, and began practice in the same city.

At that time, the titles to many of the anthracite coal-bearing tracts in Eastern Pennsylvania were by no means clear, and costly and protracted litigation about them occupied the attention of the courts. To these intricate questions Mr. Keim early devoted himself, and rapidly acquired a remarkable familiarity with their confusing details. This special knowledge brought him into contact with many prominent owners and operators, and at the suggestion of some of these he transferred his office to Pottsville, Pa., in the year 1855.

Here he formed a friendship which lasted for many years and materially influenced his after-life. It was with Mr. Franklin B. Gowen, who about that time began the practice of his profession at the Schuylkill county bar. They were closely associated in many important cases, and Mr. Keim's intimate knowledge of most of the valuable titles in the anthracite coal basin soon obtained for him a large and remunerative practice.

When the Presidency of the Philadelphia & Reading Railroad Company became vacant through the resignation of Mr. Charles E. Smith, at the request of the Board of Directors Mr. Gowen provisionally accepted the position. His remarkable abilities, forci-

ble character and brilliant oratory commanded the admiration of all who met him, and it was not long before he was elected definitely President of this important outlet of the anthracite region. His far-reaching plans were soon formulated, and under the name of the Reading Coal and Iron Company a gigantic corporation was created, the object of which was to control, by purchase or lease, practically the whole product of the western, middle and southern anthracite coal fields.

The crucial part of this colossal undertaking—the examination of the numerous and complicated titles—was entrusted to Mr. Keim. The thoroughness with which he performed this herculean task has excited the astonishment and admiration of members of the bar ever since, for although the transfers which he passed covered about ninety thousand acres and involved many millions of dollars, not one acre has been found, the title to which he approved, but that title has, in every instance, been confirmed by the courts in spite of sometimes strenuous litigation. It is doubtful if any other real estate lawyer in the State can approach such a record, either for magnitude of transaction or uniform accuracy of opinion.

These occupations brought him constantly into relation with the affairs of the Reading Railroad and in 1871 he was appointed its General Solicitor. The calls upon his time at the central office became so frequent that, in 1874, he left Pottsville and took up his residence in Philadelphia, which city became his home for the remainder of his life.

The severe depression in business throughout the country which followed the famous crash of 1873 soon made itself felt acutely on the extensive and heavily hypothecated interests of the Reading Railroad and the Coal and Iron Company. Affairs drifted from bad to worse until, in May, 1880, both companies passed into a receivership. Mr. Keim was appointed, *pro tempore*, to that office. This threw an enormous burden of complicated and discouraging business upon him. In this position he continued until January, 1884, when a reconstruction was arranged and Mr. Keim assumed the Presidency of both companies. This phase lasted but a short time, and in June of the same year both companies again passed into the hands of receivers, of whom Mr. Keim was one, and in that condition they remained until January, 1888.

During this trying period Mr. Keim made every effort to sustain the financial integrity of the companies, to guard their disburse-

ments, and to protect the interest of those whose investments were in them. He steadily resisted the pressure brought to bear upon him to authorize foreclosure proceedings, and what was to him probably the most painful of all the sacrifices he was called upon to make, rather than violate his sense of duty to those who had entrusted him with this great responsibility, he renounced the ties of long and closest friendship.

This receivership ended at the beginning of 1888, when Mr. McLeod was elected President of the Reading Railroad and Mr. Keim of the Reading Coal and Iron Company, and a member of the Board of Managers of the Reading Railroad Company. He resigned from both these positions some time before his death, but up to that event was a Director of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad Company.

Some idea of the magnitude of the business which devolved upon him during his second receivership may be derived from the official statement, that in that period the gross earnings of the companies were about \$150,000,000.

For some years before his decease Mr. Keim had been subject to periodical attacks of arthritic disease, which had doubtless left their impress on the arterial walls and predisposed him to apoplectic seizures. He had visited Europe several times in order to avail himself of the benefits of some of the health resorts recommended for such cases. On Saturday, December 16, 1893, while engaged in some business transactions, he was suddenly seized with vertigo and allied symptoms. He was conveyed to his home and prompt aid was summoned, but in vain. The attack was rapidly progressive, and terminated fatally on the morning of Monday, December 18.

In spite of the absorbing nature of his professional duties, Mr. Keim found leisure to read extensively in general literature and to take a broad and real interest in the progress of thought and culture. The history of his native State and country possessed an early and lasting attraction for him. He was elected a member of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, December 12, 1853, and was chosen Vice-President, May 1, 1876, to which office he was continuously reëlected up to the time of his death. He was Trustee of the endowment fund, to which he was also a liberal contributor, as he was likewise to the other needs of the Society. Though a regular and interested attendant at the meetings, he was not a writer for the Society's publications.

When the Governor of Pennsylvania was requested by the Legislature to appoint a Commission who should select two distinguished Pennsylvanians as subjects of statues to be presented by the State, and placed in the Capitol in Washington, Mr. Keim was one of those entrusted with this delicate decision. The two decided upon were General Peter Muhlenberg and Robert Fulton, and this selection met with the general approval of the people of the State.

Mr. Keim was elected a member of the American Philosophical Society, April 21, 1882. He was frequently present at its meetings, and manifested an active interest in all questions touching its welfare, as well as in many of those of a scientific character brought before its sessions.

Throughout his life he was a lover of books, especially those relating to history and classical English literature. His library was large, and displayed sound judgment and good taste in the selection of its contents. In it, he often sought and always found a welcome relief from the harassing routine of his daily duties.

Professionally, his strength lay in his profound acquaintance with real-estate law and his accurate estimate of the bearings of precedents. He was not a jury lawyer, and he always felt a hesitation in addressing an audience. Although remarkably able in drawing up a lucid and convincing statement, whether in matters of business or purely technical, a certain timidity of temperament prevented him from becoming an orator. In this he was in singular contrast to his partner, Mr. Gowen.

The ennobling inspirations of domestic life were deeply appreciated by Mr. Keim. In early life he married Miss Elizabeth C. Trezevant, only daughter of Dr. Louis C. Trezevant, of South Carolina. His widow and two daughters survived him.

In the calm pleasures of the home circle he delighted to pass the hours when business calls ceased their demands. For this reason, he was less frequently an attendant at public receptions and entertainments than many of his fellow-citizens holding similarly prominent positions.

Throughout his extremely active life and his constant dealing with questions of magnitude and difficulty, Mr. Keim retained the unvarying respect and generally the warm affection of those with whom he was thrown in contact. His characteristics were entire honesty and sincerity, a simplicity of manner which led him to treat all,

no matter what their station in life, with equal courtesy, and a clear, sound judgment, which guarded him from the imposition of the fraudulent or the flattery of the interested. To use the expression of one who knew him long and well, Mr. Charlemagne Tower, Jr., "the leading traits of his private character were honor and loyalty." His charities were unostentatious, but large and constant. One of his old friends writes me that he personally knows of several whom Mr. Keim regularly assisted, and who depended on this assistance for much of the comfort of their lives.

While his acquaintances were numbered by thousands, his intimates were few. Although affable and ready of access, it was not at all easy to understand his real nature, nor to approach his inner personality. A peculiar dry humor, an odd candor of expression, foiled the importunate and disarmed the aggressive. Under the appearance of a certain levity of language and manner he baffled those who attempted to transgress the lines which he had drawn around his intimate life. The impression thus created was so different from that usually expected from a man bearing such heavy burdens of responsibility, that it always at first puzzled, if it did not even disappoint, those who knew him but slightly. Behind this outward habit of encounter, however, was a keen, penetrating judgment and a warm, sympathetic nature, fully recognized and appreciated by those who understood the thoroughness of his work and the spirit of his actions. By his death our city lost a distinguished and worthy citizen, his friends one always dear to them, and this Society an estimable and interested member.

Some New Red Horizons.

By Benjamin Smith Lyman.

(Read before the American Philosophical Society, May 18, 1894.)

It seems to be worth while to give, at least roughly and in part conjecturally, some idea of the relative geological position of the different horizons from which fossils have been reported in the so-called American New Red of the eastern part of the United States; for it will thereby be seen how completely and naturally the recently discovered, unexpectedly great, and consequently perhaps not readily accepted, thickness of the New Red in Montgomery county, Pa., harmonizes with all the hitherto



Brinton, Daniel G. 1894. "Obituary Notice of George de Benneville Keim." *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society held at Philadelphia for promoting useful knowledge* 33(145), 187–192.

View This Item Online: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/94449>

Permalink: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/partpdf/214821>

Holding Institution

Smithsonian Libraries and Archives

Sponsored by

Smithsonian

Copyright & Reuse

Copyright Status: Public domain. The BHL considers that this work is no longer under copyright protection.

This document was created from content at the **Biodiversity Heritage Library**, the world's largest open access digital library for biodiversity literature and archives. Visit BHL at <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org>.