

Obituary Notice of Robert Frazer. By Persifor Frazer, Jr.

(Read before the American Philosophical Society, February 7, 1879.)

ROBERT FRAZER was born December 29, 1818, at his father's house in Newtown Township, Delaware County. His father, Robert Frazer, was a lawyer of excellent standing and distinguished for his knowledge of land law, who had served several times as a member of the House of Representatives of this State.

The elder Robert, son of General Persifor* and Mary Worrall Frazer, was three times married, as follows :

On May 3, 1798, he married Sarah Ball, who died without issue, June 21, 1800.

On October 15, 1803, he married Elizabeth Fries, daughter of John and Anne Fries, by whom he had six children, three of whom died under the age of one year, and the others were, Anne Fries, Persifor, and John Fries, of whom only the second survives.

On February 11, 1818, he married Alice, widow of Eli Yarnall and daughter of Joseph and Sarah Pennell, by whom he had but one child, the subject of this brief notice.

The boy was named originally Joseph Pennell, but on the death of his father, January 20, 1821, his name was changed to Robert.

From that date he continued to live on his mother's farm, near West Chester, till her death in 1825 or 1826, when he spent some time in Philadelphia and attended Dr. S. Crawford's school.

In 1834-38 he went to school in Pittsfield, Mass., and finally completed his education at Norwich University, a military academy in Vermont, under the direction of Capt. Partridge.

He graduated after having completed courses in Civil Engineering and in the Arts and Sciences.

In 1838 he joined the corps of Engineers which was then engaged in laying out the Reading Railroad, and was in charge of the second division above Reading, remaining there until the completion of the road.

In the autumn of 1846 he went to Europe and remained about a year, and upon his return commenced the study of law in Reading, in the office of Judge Jones.

On being admitted to the bar, he removed to Philadelphia to practice, and not long after this held the office of Prosecuting Attorney for Delaware County for some time.

In 1846 he was married to Miss Jane Biddle Wood (daughter of Samuel and Fanny Collins Wood, and grandniece of Marks John Biddle) who was born February 14, 1820. The marriage was celebrated by the Rev. Edmund Leaf, Rector of Christ's Church, in Pottstown, Montgomery County.

On July 22, 1849, Robert Frazer was born as the first issue of this marriage.

* General of State Militia after the Revolution. Lt.-Col. in the American army during the Revolution.

A daughter, Fanny (now Mrs. Herbert Welsh), was born on October 4, 1852.

Almost at the same time in this year (1852) Robert Frazer was elected Secretary and Treasurer of the Camden & Atlantic Railroad, in the construction of which road he had been previously engaged as consulting engineer.

In November, 1863, he was elected President of the Company, which office he retained till the fall of 1873.

It will ever remain as a monument of his devotion, zeal and efficiency in the management of this road that its stock advanced during his tenure of the chief office from an almost unsaleable commodity to a position of prominent favor for such a road.

Upon his retirement from the Camden & Atlantic Railroad he was called to the presidency of the Wilmington & Reading (afterwards known as the Wilmington and Northern) Railroad, and while holding this position he died suddenly of a stroke of apoplexy, on May 4, 1878, at 15 minutes past 6, P. M.

On the 4th of May, 1878, he was apparently in the best health and in buoyant spirits and attended to all his duties with ease. He was expected at the house of his daughter, Mrs. Welsh, to tea, when a short time before the hour a messenger arrived announcing that he had a severe headache and would not be able to come. Very shortly after this he died.

He was a man who was characterized by many salient traits, among which none was so striking, by reason of its rarity, as his gentleness and sweetness of disposition. No one ever observed him in his relations to other men without envying him the kindly tone, the liberal view and the winning manner with which he either opposed or endorsed the sentiments of others. His normal condition of features was the border of a smile, and his heart was full of sunshine, which his cheery words sprinkled like drops of water on those about him. One is tempted to dwell on a character like this, for the memory of it causes always an agreeable sensation: yet it may be thought that the ties of consanguinity render the writer a too partial witness. But it is not so. All who knew Robert Frazer, knew him as a patient, forbearing, kind and cheerful friend, a model of content, and a well-spring of pleasure to those by whom he was surrounded.

His tastes were those of a cultured man, and his mind had that quality of interest and curiosity which kept him actively seeking information and *au courant* with the affairs of the day. Every new turn of the kaleidoscope of the times which developed some new and beautiful idea, some discovery, or some invention, delighted him whether it was or was not in the direction of his professional work.

He was one of those earnest soldiers of ideas who, whether they serve religion, their country, or science, show alike their sense of the solemn meaning of the march of events. He believed in the *duty* of man to *labor* for and with that evolution of new forms of truth which is but the measure of onward progress, even though the progress be in any case inevitable;

and he believed also unwaveringly in the majesty and goodness, the fitness and worthiness of that which the future was to bring forth.

Many find this state of mind inseparable from a mood of seriousness, if not of asceticism ; Robert Frazer did not. No one realized more fully the serious side of life, but he had also learned (if it was not taught him by instinct) the phariseeism of gloom as an emblem of respect for truth. If ever man served his God with the grateful incense of smiles and joyfulness it was the subject of this sketch.

This interest in the affairs of the world around him led him naturally to cultivate various branches of science, as an amateur, and he preserved the keenest interest in them to his last hour, though his engrossing occupations forbade him to tread the path of original investigation.

Microscopy and Entomology always had great attractions for him, and for several years previous to 1867 he was President of the Entomological Society of this city.

He was elected a member of the Academy of Natural Sciences in 1866, and when his duties allowed was frequently seen within its halls on its nights of meeting.

In 1873, he was elected a member of this Society.

Of his inner life as a member of a family ; of his charm within that circle, shut out from the gaze of the world, I may not speak. But were it permitted to pursue this theme a far juster picture of the man could be presented than in these few poor lines in tribute to his memory. Yet those who knew him in the world can easily imagine how bitter was the loss of this friend, who ever dispensed consolation and cheer, to those whom he most dearly loved, and to whom his whole life was a pattern of self-sacrifice, of manly and healthy virtue, and of the warmest human sympathy.

Stated Meeting, April 18, 1879.

Present, 19 members.

Vice-President, Mr. FRALEY, in the chair.

A letter declining the appointment to prepare an obituary notice of Dr. Wood, was received from Dr. Stillé, whose communication was on motion referred to the Committee on the eulogy.

A letter accepting the appointment to prepare an obituary notice of Dr. Beadle, was received from Dr. Agnew, dated April 17.

A letter requesting permission to use the Logan-Penn



Frazer, Persifor. 1879. "Obituary Notice of Robert Frazer." *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society held at Philadelphia for promoting useful knowledge* 18(103), 233–235.

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