

My Life: A Recollection from Thomas Jay Phillips I

Someone has said that life begins at 40. When does it end, I don't know. I do know that when you have reached 80 you begin to relive a lot of the years before you were 40. At least your memory seems to be very keen about the happenings of those long ago years and brings back to mind a lot of pleasant and some not so pleasant happenings of these years and the struggle for existence and improvements. Which you had almost forgotten when you were 50.

I was born in a small town in Northern New Jersey called Port Oram, since changed to Wharton. My father's name was Walter and he was an Englishman that came to this country from Saint Blazey in Cornwall England when he was about 20 years old. He settled in Hurdtown in the center of the iron ore district of New Jersey and became a miner. My mother's name was Mary Stidworthy. Her father was English and her mother was half American Indian and half English*. My great grandmother on my mother's side was a full-blooded American Indian. My father and mother were married young and set up housekeeping in nearby Port Oram, where I was born.

My earliest recollection was after we moved to Hibernia which was another mining town nearby and my earliest recollection was one of almost tragedy. Another boy and myself wandered into the nearby wooded section and when we started home we could not find our way out. After many hours we found ourselves in a swamp to which there seemed to be no end. I remember we stood in the water and decided to cry, which we did. At six o'clock the mine whistle blew and we knew we had been going the wrong way all the time. We turned around and tried to follow our tracks back. After about an hour we heard the seven o'clock ore train come in, so we followed the sound and came out of the woods. About a mile from home we were soon picked up and taken home. The miners who came out of the mines at six o'clock were organized and had started to hunt for us. I was in those woods for many nights after that in my dreams, but stayed within sight of our house always during the day.

*Not accurate: Mary's mother, Ruth Ann Stidworthy was born in either Warwick, NY or Sussex County NJ

We had cows, chickens and pigs and a big garden. Miners' wages were low but both my parents were ambitious and loved to work. At that time my father had never learned to read or write, and I have a very vivid recollection of being put to bed very early every night and laying awake and hearing my mother teach my father his ABCs. As my mother's education was limited to the first three or four grades, she soon reached the limit of her ability to teach and she often told us later that it was he who became the teacher.

When I was about six years old, a number of New York financiers formed a company and purchased a large track of land in the Great Smokey Mountains of western North Carolina, and began prospecting for iron ore. My dad was offered the job to go down there and carry on the investigating. He accepted and was successful in locating a large vein of high grade ore, but it was almost inaccessible. However they built a narrow gauge railroad starting at Johnson City Tennessee, running around and through the mountain for 32 miles into North Carolina's Smokey Mountains, and started to mine ore and ship it to Johnson City. He built a saw mill and cut the timber and sawed it into lumber. After drying it, he started to build houses and a town. He called it Cranberry and it is so called on all maps of North Carolina today. They built a furnace to manufacture iron, using charcoal as fuel. They cleared hundreds of acres of virgin forest and made their own charcoal. Some time later he sent for his family to join him and we lived there until his death.

A word about my father. While I am told he had been made an American citizen, he seldom voted. Why I don't know. He was truly an American, respected and loved by all who knew him. He was generous to a fault, never refusing help to anyone who appealed to him. He built two churches, one for the whites and also one for the colored people. At times when he could not make other arrangements, he was the judge and jury, settling their differences, and I never knew of a decision being questioned by either party. He was given the rank of Captain and known by all as "The Captain."*

*Captain is the term always used by Cornish miners for a mine supervisor or foreman

He was a lay minister* and conducted services for both whites and blacks. He married their sons and daughters and buried their dead. I never saw him lose his temper or tell a shady story.

He started a school for both whites and blacks and paid the teachers mostly out of his own pocket. He went to Wytheville, Virginia and persuaded a young doctor to come to Cranberry and settle there, guaranteeing him a reasonable income. This did not cost my father very much of his own money, as he promoted a plan whereby each single man had deducted from his pay each 50 cents and from each family man one dollar, which went to the Doctor and gave them complete medical treatment, except surgery, at no extra cost.** He died suddenly at 44 years of age and is buried in a little grave yard, just outside of the town he helped to build among the people he loved. His grave is marked by a stone of Tennessee granite, on which is this description: "Erected to the memory of Walter Phillips by the employees of the Cranberry Iron and Coal Co." At the time of his death there were six children, four girls and two boys***. I was 14 years old and next to the oldest). The youngest, only a baby.

*Assumption is that he was a Methodist; Walter's father, Thomas was born in Redruth Cornwall. Redruth was the site for many large-scale conversions of the Cornish to the Methodist religion by John Wesley in the middle/late 1700s.

**From research on Cornish culture in the U.S. I learned that this typified the "benevolent organizations" miners would often set up since there was no government or company assistance.

***Children's names are:

Eliza (born NJ)

Thomas Jay (born NJ)

Flossie May (formal name may be Florence May; born NJ)

Annie (formally Ruth Ann after her grandmother Ruth Ann Stidworthy; born NJ)

Harry (born Cranberry NC in 1885, although his grave in NJ reads 1882)

Naomi (born in Cranberry in September 1887, two months before Walter died).

When my mother investigated, she found herself with a few hundred dollars and a large family. And while we had never wanted for anything, she was faced by a problem that, as I look back, must have seemed insurmountable. I'll never forget the evening where she called us all together, including the old colored couple who had been with us for eight years, and explained our situation. And I can still see tears rolling down the faces of Old Mama and Uncle Henry when she told them we would have to get along without them. They assured her they would never leave us, but would get out side work and help with the expenses and still take care of the house and babies. "Greater love has no man shone." The company, (Cranberry Iron and Coal Company) at a directors meeting voted to give her an allowance each month for a year. Enough to live on and keep the family together, which was manna from heaven. During that year my mother, who was a good cook, with the help of old colored Mammy, started to serve dinners to the members of the company's staff and to excursion parties from Johnson City. I went to work in the company's store and got 50 cents a day so that at the end of the first year, thought we were ready to go on our own. The company stopped their help with the understanding that we could draw on them if we got in trouble. My mother was determined to go it alone without any help. By the end of the second year (1889) we were on the ragged edge. She had cut everything down to the minimum, with our clothes almost gone and no relief in sight, except to ask for help. This my mother refused to do. Two months later she died, just did not have the strength to carry the burden of sorrow and disappointment. After eight years of happy family life, without a thought or care for the future. In two short years our house of cards had fallen and we were six orphans. The oldest 17 and the youngest three years. Mother lies beside my father on the hill on the edge of town.

When our true financial situation became known, people in droves who claimed they had been helped in one way or another by my father, offered their help. Our pantry was filled and old Mammy and Uncle Henry almost caused a civil war when some good friends wanted to separate the children and have them live with different friends. Finally one gentleman, a good friend of my father, who lived in a nearby town had himself appointed our guardian.*

*William A. Willis was the guardian, as verified in court records obtained from NJ archives in 2004.

That was agreeable with old Mammy and Uncle Henry as long as they were able to keep us together and take care of us. Later Mr. Nimpson (sp?, could be Simpson), who I think was president of the company, came down from Philadelphia, and when he was told about our troubles he came to see us and insisted on knowing the name of some relative in New Jersey. We finally found some old correspondence of my mother's that she had, with the name of her brother (Thomas Stidworthy, eldest son of Joseph and Ruth Ann Stidworthy) and his address in Dover, New Jersey. He told us not to worry, we could get what we needed at the company store without money and old Mammy and Uncle Henry were put on the company's payroll. And it was arranged that Mr. Wm. E. Ellis, who was our self appointed guardian would see that we were properly taken care of.

There was only one train a day which came in at twelve o'clock and of course all the kids in town were always there to meet it (the schools had been closed, as when my father died there was no money to pay the teachers). Very seldom did a stranger get off, but one day there were three: Mr. Nimpson, another man and an elderly lady. The man was my uncle and the elderly lady my grandmother, whom I would not have known as I had not seen either since I was five.

Up to that time I had very little schooling and had never had a suit or any clothes except for those made for me by a sewing woman who came in once a year and sewed for us kids. She stayed about three or four weeks. The only train I had seen was the wood burning narrow gauge engine and train which ran from Cranberry to Johnson City, 32 miles away, and its maximum speed was 10 miles an hour (The famous Tweetsie Railroad). It consisted of six ore cars and a very small passenger coach with seats for 12 or 14 people. I never had talked or come in contact with anybody except the people in this little backwoods mining town, and never was anyone so self conscious as I was. If anyone came to town wearing store clothes I always gave them wide berth, and had they had spoken to me I would not have been able to answer them. I was not afraid, but shy with anyone other than my Tar Heel friends.

However it was decided that my uncle and grandmother would take the children back home with them. They took my two youngest sisters with them (Annie and Naomi), leaving the four oldest in North Carolina (Eliza, TJP, Flossie May and Harry) to wait until the courts gave us permission to sell the furniture and belongings. Then we four were to join

them in New Jersey. This took about 90 days. I believe at last everything was arranged and on the 21st of December (1889) we left Cranberry. I with my first store suit, but not overcoat or underwear, carrying a market basket of food to last all of us until we arrived in New Jersey. We got off the train in Newark about 11 a.m. on December 24, the day before Christmas and were met by my uncle (Thomas Stidworthy). There was about two feet of snow on the ground as we had to walk across town from the Penn station to the DL&W station about a mile. I was almost frozen before we arrived there. We went from Newark to Dover and there was another twenty minute walk in 15 degree temperature. I wanted to go back. I never was so homesick before or since then.

We had a pleasant Christmas. We stayed at my uncle's house until New Years. On that day my uncle called us all together and told us the plan for our future. My oldest sister (Eliza*) was to live with a dressmaker there in Dover and learn the business. I was apprenticed to a blacksmith in Stanhope, about twenty miles north of Dover, for four years. My next oldest sister (Flossie May**) went on a farm about 35 miles in another direction. My grandmother who lived on a farm took my brother. (Harry***). One uncle took one of my other sisters (Annie****) and another uncle took my youngest sister (Naomi*****). All of them had good homes and were very happy, going to school regularly.

**Eliza left the dressmaker's household sometime in early 1890s for she shows up on the 1895 NJ state census living in the household of Samuel Rouse. Ruth Ann Stidworthy was his housekeeper (And Samuel had been a boarder with Joseph and Ruth Ann back in 1880). Also living in the household was TJP's brother Harry as noted above. But a surprise is the listing of another child – Georgie Phillips. As Walter and Mary Phillips only had 2 sons, this Georgie is without a doubt the illegitimate son of Eliza Phillips, hence the reason she left the dressmaker's and went to live with her grandmother. Eliza and Georgie appear on the 1920 census and again on the 1930 census with Eliza's sister, Ruth A. (or Annie) also living with them.*

***Flossie May was sent to live with Charles and Catherine King who owned a farm in Roxbury NJ. We do not know the connection the King family had with the Stidworthy/Phillips families.*

****Harry lived with his grandmother Ruth Ann Stidworthy between 1890 and 1900. in Jefferson Township NJ.*

***** Uncle Fernando and Aunt Elizabeth (Stidworthy) Stickle took Annie. Elizabeth Stickle was Mary Phillips' sister.*

******Uncle Thomas and Aunt Mary Stidworthy took Naomi. Thomas was Mary Phillips' brother.*

My uncle (Thomas Stidworthy was a miner in Dover) went with me to Stanhope and on the way up he told me I was to live with the blacksmith and was to receive \$40.00 a year in addition to my board, out of which I would have to buy my own clothes and anything else I needed, and reminded me to be very careful with my money and make it cover my expenses and to work hard and learn the trade. I soon found out that the last part of that advice was not necessary, as there was no way to avoid doing just that. My boss was considered one of the best horse shoers of racing horses in that part of the country and I believe he was the best.

However his good qualities were limited. He was a good workman and he knew it. He was also one of the most selfish, egotistical, self centered men I have ever known. Almost everyone who could afford it, there were a large number who could, owned a racing horse. His friends were largely race horse owners and he spent a lot of his time during the racing season at the different racetracks of New Jersey and New York State. Money was no object where his own pleasure was concerned, but he gave no thought for the rights or pleasures of anyone else, including his family.

I arrived there late in the afternoon and he took me home with him about six o'clock. His wife received me very kindly and showed me to my room, an 8 x 12 room at the back of the house on the second floor. It had a bed and stand and chair and a small closet and one window. I had my belongings in a small pasteboard box, which consisted of 2 work shirts and 1 pair of trousers, an old coat, two pairs of socks, a cap and a pair of boots. My other possessions were on my back. I was called to supper and I'll never forget it. We had black coffee griddle cakes and molasses. After supper I got my orders. I was to get up at 6:00 a.m., go into the shop, get the fire going in the forgers and if and when it snowed, I was to shovel the snow away from the doors. My first job was to take the old shoes off the horses, blow the bellows and clinch the nails after the shoes had been nailed on, keep the shop clean and I was all through for the day at six p.m. I was 15 years old, 5 ft 4" and weighed 110 lbs.

For the first two weeks I don't think I spoke to anyone other than the boss and to him only "yes sir and no sir" and to his wife. I was in bed and asleep by 7:30 every night. My speech was positively North Carolina Tar Heel, and I was afraid to talk for fear

people would laugh at my accent. I found out later how wrong I was. There were two people who came to the shop who seemed to like to say something to me everytime they came in and we became friendly. Their interest was later to play quite a part in my future well being. One was Dr. Nelden (sp?) who was well to do and was the owner of 2 race horses. They called him the Salt and Pepper Duke of Stanhope, which described him well. He was kind, but positive and human, loved by all who knew him. The other was Father Brady, a Catholic priest. Father Brady came in the shop almost every day on his way to the post office and he and I became great friends. He and my boss never agreed on anything. Principally because the Father was kind and generous, seemed to always be looking for someone who needed help or sympathy, while the boss believed everyone should be able to take care of himself. There was no such word as charity in his vocabulary or makeup, so they clashed and the Father generally came out best every time, and it would end up with the boss telling him to get out and stay out, and mind his own business. The Father would go out laughing with a "goodbye Tommie...I'll see you tomorrow." And he always came back. Dr. Nelden came in about once a month to supervise the shoeing of one of his trotters. He seemed to take an interest in me, and he and I could always find something to talk about. And very often my boss would remind the doctor that I was there to work, not talk. It seemed the harder I worked, the more work he could find for me to do.

One day the doctor came in and talked to me for a while and when he was ready to leave, he asked me to come over to his office that evening, he wanted to see me. I was scared to death, wondering what he wanted. I went to his drug store that night; his office was in the rear. I was afraid to go in. I hung around outside and after some time the druggist came out and when he saw me, said "the doctor has been waiting for you for some time" and to go right in. I did and the doctor talked to me for a while and then started asking me what all I did at the shop. Finally he put me on the examining table, gave me a thorough examination and said he thought I needed a little tonic, which he had the druggist make up for me. We talked some more and I went home, not too happy, as I did not know what it all meant.

One day the next week, the doctor, Father Brady and a Mr. Lunger (sp?) who was the owner of the only department store in town, came in the shop and Mr. Lunger asked the boss if I could go up to his stable and bring down one of his horses to get shod. I was told to go. Mr. Lunger said not to hurry. When I came back about a half hour later, the air was blue and all but Father Brady in a fighting mood. And the boss was telling all and sundry that he did not give a damn whether anyone of them ever came in the shop again and he did not think he would do any work for them if they did. Told them to get out and to let him run his own business. They left. The boss told me I was causing him too much trouble and he was going to do something about it. I was too scared to ask questions. He finally shod the horse and that night the boss was in a terrible mood. After I went upstairs I heard him talking to his wife about how the three gentlemen had told him that he making me work too hard and if he did not stop it, they were going to take the proper action to stop him. And while she was afraid of her life of him, she told him they were right and she thought it was about time someone told him how heartless he was. I did not know what to do, I was afraid if I ran away he would be sure to find me. However, before I could make up my mind, it was 6 a.m. so I went and did my regular morning work and had my breakfast. When the boss came to the shop he said "good morning Tommie" for the first time since I had been there, so I felt better. Father Brady came in about 10 o'clock and stayed for about 30 minutes and for once he and the boss did not get into any arguments. By night things were going along fine and from then on he did not find so many things for me to do.

I began to get acquainted with some of the boys my age and went to church and Sunday school. My bashfulness wore off and I found they did not object to my Tar Heel dialect, but rather liked it. I got a job in a barber shop Wednesday and Thursday nights. That's when everybody came in for a shave. I'd put on lather on the man in one chair while the barber was shaving the man I had lathered in the other chair. I'd wash and comb his hair, for which I got 50 cents a night. A butcher who had two delivery horses did not like to get up Sundays, so I got the job every Sunday morning to feed and water his horses and clean out the stables for which I received 50 cents a Sunday. I had two or three other jobs I did nights. The second year I was making two to three dollars a week, more than double what I was making in the shop, so I was able to have a decent outfit to

wear on Sundays. I was invited to all the parties held by the youngsters of my age. I went to as many as I could and soon began to lose my inferiority complex, and I always had an invitation to dinner somewhere on Sundays. As I look back on it, I sometimes wonder whether this was because I had become popular or whether it was pity on their part. The principal of the high school organized a brass band of school boys my age. I was invited to join. I found all I had to do was to buy a horn and uniform, which would amount to about 40 dollars. Of course that was impossible. When I was pressed for the reason I told them. Next thing I knew I was told I had been elected a member and there would be no cost to me for either the horn or uniform. The parents of my boy friends in the band had taken care of the cost. I played solo alto for 3 years. I never could play with them on out of town engagements except on a holiday and never in town during the daytime.

During my second year, Father Brady engineered a deal that showed his friendship for me as well as the satisfaction of coming out best in a verbal bout with my boss. We would build one or two buggies a year. They were all hand made and kept us busy when there were no horses to shoe. At this time we had finished a very special buggy. Would be known today as a "sports model." I remember the boss asked \$100.00 for it and that was a lot of money in those days. However he could not sell it, no one seemed to want a sport model at that price. When Father Brady could find nothing else to kid the boss about, he would ask him why he didn't sell the buggy, telling him he was no salesman. Finally the boss decided to sell it for \$75.00. Still it did not sell. So one day Father Brady asked the boss how much he would give me if I sold it. The boss said "nothing because, first I could not sell \$100 for 75 cents and second, no one would bother with a kid 16 years old." As usual the argument started. The Father taking my part and the boss taking the stand that if he could not sell the wagon no else could. The argument ended by Father Brady proposing that if I sold the wagon for \$100.00 I was to get \$25.00 commission. After getting the boss in a fighting mood he agreed. Then ordering the priest out with orders to stay out as usual, he did not speak to me the rest of the day. I have often wondered if those arguments and all the kindness Father Brady showed me did not make it harder for me.

About two weeks after this final argument about the buggy, the boss went to the races up in Goshen, N.Y. to be gone a week. His first day away my friend came in and gave me a great sales talk and told me to try it on everyone who came in. The third day a lady with her two sons and coachman came in. They were summer residents at Lake Hopatcong, a few miles away. While I was doing the work they wanted, the boys were looking at the sports buggy. The boys wanted to the buggy and when they found it was for sale insisted their mother buy it for them. After asking the price, she said her husband was coming that afternoon and they would come down the next day and decide. The next day they came and bought it and gave me a check for \$100.00. I knew nothing about checks. As they were not going to take the buggy until the next day I accepted it, and as soon as they were out of sight I ran all the way to Father Brady's rectory to ask him if it was alright to let them have the wagon and accept the check. He assured me it was the same as cash. He knew the people well, as they attended his church in the summer resort where he said Mass every Sunday. I still wonder just how much he had to do with making the sale. It had the earmarks of one of his good deeds; however he never admitted any knowledge of it.

As the check was made out to the boss, he deposited it but said nothing about my commission. I was going to keep it until winter and buy an overcoat and underwear. I promised my friend Father Brady to do just that. He asked me several times if I was still saving the money. I evaded by saying I had not spent a cent of it. Came cold weather and thought it was about time I got my overcoat and I had to admit the boss had not given it to me yet. I will not try to describe the next few days. The only reason I stayed was because I was afraid to leave, as I was bound by law for four years. But why he kept me I don't know. It was a fight involving not only Father Brady, but those other businessmen who took a hand in the fight. Finally the boss gave me the money, saying he delayed until winter as he knew I would only spend it foolishly and I needed winter clothes and when those "damn fools tried to tell him his business" he showed them they could not force him to do anything.

The only clothing store in town was owned by David Misel, a Jew. (census records confirm a David Misel, merchant in that area, so spelling is correct) I told the clerk I wanted an overcoat. I picked out one, priced at \$8.50. About that time, Mr. Misel came out and

asked if I was Tommie Phillips. I admitted I was. So he looked at the coat I had selected and said I should have a better one than the one I had picked out, so he insisted I take one for \$12.00. I told him I could not afford it as I had to buy underclothes and shoes and I only had a limited amount of money to spend. He insisted and picked out two suits of underwear, two shirts, socks, neckwear and had the clerk fit me with a suit. All the time I was objecting because of my financial condition. He went right ahead and fitted me out with a complete outfit, even a Derby hat. The first Derby I ever owned. He told the clerk to wrap it all up, while he made out the bill. I was so scared I could hardly talk. My protests that I only had a limited amount of cash were to no avail. I just did not know what to do. After he had it all on the bill he said it came to just \$24.80. I protested that he had made a mistake. I recall he put his arm around my shoulders and said he was a Jew and a Jew never cheats himself, for me to give him \$24.80 and be happy, which I did with much misgivings.

It was late when I arrived home. I was very happy but awfully scared also. The boss and his wife were home and when I showed them my outfit, the boss said I better not wear it, as "old Jew Misel" would find out his mistake in a day or two and then there would be hell to pay. If I didn't wear it I could return what I couldn't pay for. I did not sleep that night. I did not wear any of the clothes on Sunday. On Monday night I went back to the store and told Mr. Misel all about it and would he please see if he had made a mistake and let me return what I could not pay for. He said some awfully nice things about me and some not so nice things about my boss. And that there was no mistake. I did not owe him anything and for me to be happy and the next time I needed any clothing be sure and give him my trade. Thanked me and let me out the front door. I know now that it was a pre-arranged plot involving the kindness and charity of Father Brady and his friends. Every Sunday when I dressed up, my boss would remind me that I was the only one who "ever got the best of a Jew and got away with it." However I did odd jobs for this Jew after that and received many gifts from him.

At the beginning of my third year I began to find myself. I was losing my bashfulness and was able to meet and talk with people and enjoyed doing it. I was getting along well in church and Sunday school and in the young people's meetings. There was lots of activity there and I was always included. They had parties, picnics, debating

societies and I recall my greatest pleasure was attending these debates which were held once a month. There were eight men, four on each side – two young lawyers, two school teachers, two college students who came up from Trenton and two young men who worked in town. It seemed the height of my ambition to be able to get up and talk as well as they could. The minister who was the instigator of all these activities for some reason or other noticed my interest and close attention to these debates and talked to me about it. I told him my ambition and he suggested that I take the subject of these debates and write about them in my own way, present the papers to him and he would read it and help me to improve. This I did every minute I could spare, reading up on the subject under debate and writing my ideas, submitting them to the minister for him to criticize or approve. After about a year of this, he wanted me to join the team and fill in when for any reason the regular debaters were absent. While I wanted to do just that I did not think I belonged in that kind of company. They were much older college men. I was sure I would be laughed at. However he insisted.

Later on a debate fell on Columbus Day and the subject was to be who deserved the most credit, Washington or Columbus. One of the lawyers was going to make a speech in a nearby town and could not be present for the debate and he had drawn the Columbus side in the debate. I was notified by the minister that I was going to take his place. I had a month to get ready. He also told me he was not going to read my paper or assist me in any way except to give me access to his library for any reference I might need. I nearly had heart failure. For three days I tried to think of some way to get kicked by a horse so I could get out of taking part. One night I could not sleep thinking about it. Then it came to me that this was the break I had been praying for and waiting for. It would be the height of my ambition to take part in of these debates. Now was my chance to do or die and if I threw away this chance I might never get another one. I went to sleep, awakened the next morning with a determination to do my best regardless of whether I was laughed at or not. I read all the history, made notes and wrote and rewrote. I devoted my whole time after work until twelve o'clock every night getting my speech ready. The last five evenings I spent up in the woods delivering my speech to the trees and hills where no else could hear. Until I knew it forward and backwards, timed to the exact time allowed me. I was ready.

As these debates were very popular and were well advertised, everyone in town knew beforehand who the speakers were, as well as what the subject was to be. So all my friends were pulling for me except my boss who thought I was crazy and said so.

Right here, I want to say Stanhope and Netcong had about 2 thousand inhabitants and everyone knew everyone else. I by this time knew them all almost by name and they knew me, and not one of them young or old spoke to me except in kindness and encouragement. It might have been out of pity for my rags and tatters. I'd rather think it was the milk of human kindness in their hearts for their fellow man. I'll never forget them or their kindness to me.

The night of the debate arrived. The barber insisted on trimming my hair and combing it. The last thing: my Jewish friend insisted on a new necktie. About a dozen of my young friends came to my house early to see that I got there okay. Up to that time it was the biggest event of my life. The big assembly hall was crowded and it seemed to me that everybody in town was there. My friends and I went to our seats on the right of the stage. To be honest I was scared to death. I found I was to be the last speaker on the list, which I now know was a wise move on the part of the chairman. When the speaking started as usual, I soon became so carried away with admiration for the speakers I forgot my own troubles and forgot the crowd. They were all good speakers. When it came my turn, strange as it may seem, I was not a bit scared when I reached the stage and started to speak. All I could see was the trees and the hills as when I was practicing. I did not hear a sound or see a face, just trees and hills. As I look at my speech, a copy of which I still have, I can't help but repeat the last page as I delivered it that night. I don't know now whether I copied it from some book or whether I composed it. I'd rather think it my own composition. I believe it is, so here goes:

All hail Columbus

Discoverer, dreamer, hero and apostle

The voice of gratitude and praise for all blessing which have been showered upon mankind

By his adventures is limited to no language but is uttered in every tongue

Neither marble nor brass can tidily form his statue

Continents are his monuments and unnumbered millions past, present and to come who enjoy in their liberties and their happiness, the fruits of his faith will reverently guard and preserve from century to century his name and his fame.

The judges were a minister, a high school principal, two lawyers and the editor of the Iron Era, a newspaper published in Dover, NJ. Our side was judged the winner and after the winners were announced, the judges came up and congratulated us. The editor asked me for a copy of my speech and permission to reprint it in his newspaper. After some arguing by our minister I consented. He titled his article, "The Blacksmith's Eulogy of Columbus" and spoke high praise of my speech.

During the next year I wrote a number of articles which were printed in his paper, as well as speaking to young people's societies in nearby towns. This was the high point of my life. I lost all my shyness, without I'm sure losing my humility or my respect for those who had helped me along. One speech of which I was very proud was titled, "The forks in the road," which was supposed to be the high point in every youngster's life when he has to make his decision as to which road he should take, not knowing where either one leads, only knowing how they looked at the forks. This was printed and reprinted in a number of papers, and I was very gratified. There was only one embarrassing part to all of this. My friends were not only giving me praise, but also some conflicting advice as to what I should do with my future. They all agreed I should not continue to be a blacksmith. I was only 19 years old and had spent almost 4 years learning the trade. I was not at all sure which was the right road to take. I knew I was a good blacksmith, but how good were my talents in any other direction was the question I could not decide. My apprenticeship would end on December 31. I had all kinds of offers. It seems everybody had a position open waiting for me. Came November, one day my boss for the first time condescended to ask me what I was going to do when my time was up. I told him I had not made up my mind. I'd had several offers of a job, but had not fully decided what to do. Then he asked me if I had saved any money. I said a little, he asked how much. I told him \$32.00 (a mistake on my part). He said he would go over his books and see how we stood. Some three weeks later he told me had gone over my

account and found he had over paid me. I could not believe it. But he insisted he was correct. When I asked him how much he said \$32.00 which was the amount I had told him I had saved. I was dumbfounded. After a lot of argument he told me his books were correct and mine were wrong. So I told him I would pay him and quit right then. He insisted I cool down and we talk about it tomorrow. Next day he said he had gone over his books again and there was no mistake, but he wanted to be reasonable about it and would not take back any money, but would let me work it out. After some thought, it being in the middle of winter, I consented. However when I asked him how long would it take to work it out he was surprised I would ask that question, as he expected it would take about 9 months. That was the first time I ever let my anger show with him. I told him in no uncertain terms that I would work 3 months, take it or leave it. And if that was unsatisfactory, I'd get out right then and never pay him, as I did not believe I owed him anything and I would not do a single thing until he agreed. He told me he could have me arrested and I called his bluff. He finally agreed so I stayed until the first of April. He was not home very much of the time so we got along without much trouble. However the only money I got during the three months was the five dollars I earned outside the shop. I never told my friends about the reason I stayed three months after my time was up. They were continually making plans and suggestions for my future. The more I thought about it, the more confused I became. Sometime in February, a salesman who sold the boss horseshoe nails came by and asked me to come over to his hotel room that evening as he wanted to talk to me. When I arrived he asked me if I would like to go down in South Jersey to work. He knew of a job in Annandale which he thought I would like with Hummer. Brothers who made fine carriages.* They were looking for a blacksmith to replace a man who had been with them for a number of years, who was known as a "finishing" blacksmith and was retiring because of age. Hunner Bros had the reputation at that time of building the finest carriages in New Jersey and only on order. I had my doubts whether I had experience enough to take a job as an expert carriage finisher and told him so. He assured me he believed I could make good or he would have suggested it to me. It would not be such hard work as I was now doing.

*In TJP's handwritten copy, it looked possibly like Hunner. But it is Hummer, as confirmed by Elias and Mansfield Hummer's marriage notices in the in the Hunterdon County Democrat newspaper archives for Annandale, NJ)

The Bros were the finest people to work for, the town was small but beautiful and he knew I would be happy there. He asked me to think it over and he would see them that weekend and would write me to come down and see them, after making me promise him not to connect him with the matter in any way, as he did not want to lose his business with my present boss. We parted and a week later I received a letter from him telling me the Hummer Bros would like me to come down and see them about the job. He asked me to bring some letters of recommendation with me if possible, and not to tell them my age unless they asked me. I had just passed twenty in November.

I went to see my friend Father Brady, told him my story and asked his advice in the matter. We went over my whole life as he knew it. I had gone through over four years of hard work, almost torture at times. Through it all, I had made everyone in town my friend. Each one was willing to assist me in any way they could and out of the goodness of their hearts had given me advice which was conflicting and only confused me. And while he agreed with those who thought I had talents, which if developed properly would reach beyond a blacksmith shop, it would take time and study and plenty of application. He knew I could make it because I had applied myself to become proficient in my trade under such adverse circumstances. He advised me to investigate this job. And to continue to study and make friends, and when the opportunity came, and it would come he assured me, I'd be ready to accept it. About the references: he would take care of that for me and in a week I had twelve letters from the best people in town. After reading them I was scared. I would be afraid to show some of them to anyone who wanted to hire a blacksmith. They were too good.

About that time my uncle in Dover wrote me that he was inviting all six of the kids to spend a weekend at his house and I was sure to be present. Which gave me the excuse I was looking for to get away for a day or two, as I wanted to go to Annandale to see Hummer Bros about the job and did not want to tell my boss until after I knew whether I could get it or not. So I wrote Hummer Bros that I would be there on Friday the day before my uncle's party and informed my boss that would take Friday and Saturday off. He of course strongly objected and insisted on knowing why. So I told him I was going to a reunion of my brother and sisters at my uncle's in Dover and he insisted that if

I left Saturday noon I would have Saturday night and all day Sunday which should be long enough, and I could come back Sunday night. By this time I was not afraid of him so I told him I was going to go on Friday and would be back to go to work on Monday morning. On Friday noon I took the train for Annandale and arrived there about 5:30 p.m. It was the latter part of February, cold and snowing. I inquired the way to Hummer Bros and found both brothers lived on the same street a few acres apart. I called at the home of the first one I came to, introduced myself and was most graciously received by both Mr. and Mrs. Hummer. There were no children. We talked for a few minutes and Mr. Hunner told me the final decision would be made by his brother and suggested we go to his house for the interview. Mrs. Hummer went along. I was again received with all the graciousness possible and after about 30 minutes of get acquainted talk, the women excused themselves and soon returned with a tray on which were turkey sandwiches, coffee and a lot of everything. We ate and talked, then I told them I wanted to take the 9 o'clock train back to Dover that night. At that point it was about 7 p.m. and nothing had been said about the job. They insisted I stay all night and when I said I must get back that night, the older brother said we would go in the office and talk business. They asked me a lot of questions and asked me for the names of some businessmen who I had worked for in Stanhope. I gave them the names and told them I had some letters with me but hesitated to show them because I was afraid that out of the kindness of their hearts my friends had perhaps overdone the matter. They asked to see them anyway. They both read them and without a word handed them back to me. After some more talk, the older brother said I guess we have covered everything, that they would think it over for a few days and then get in touch with me. There had been nothing said about wages and after that was what I thought an abrupt ending of the interview. I was sure the answer was no. There was no reason to bring that question up. So we joined the women and I enjoyed the next half hour. Then I bid them good night and went for my train. I was sure I would never hear from them and decided to start looking elsewhere.

I spent Sunday at my uncle's and as it was the first time in four years we kids had been together, I soon forgot my disappointment over my first interview for a job. I finally decided to wait a week before making a second try, always hoping I might hear from the Hummer Bros. Some days later I received a letter from them and a proposition as

follows: They offered me the job, and as neither one had any family, they wanted me to live with them, six months out of the year with each brother. I was to stay at least one year provided at the end of six months my work was satisfactory to them. I was to receive \$1.25 per day and my board. If at the end of six months my work was not satisfactory we would part good friends. The pay was good for those times, in fact better than I expected. After consulting with Father Brady, I accepted. I was to report May 1st. After receiving a letter from them confirming my acceptance I decided to tell my boss. He thought I was crazy and said so in no uncertain language. He was sure I would not make good in the best carriage shop in the state and Hummer Bros must be soft in the head to think I could. I would be stranded in a strange town without a job. However he said that out of the goodness of his heart, instead of getting through with him on April 1st as I intended to do, he would permit me to stay until May 1st (which was when I was to report to Hummer Bros). As I had no place to go and no money to pay my board he would kindly let me stay and work for him the extra month. As I had worked for 4 years and three months, six days a week, ten hours a day with only ½ day off during that time, I decided to take the month off and rest. I still had about \$25.00 and thought I could get by with what I could get from my extra jobs. As I refused to accept his *kind* offer at the risk of being the subject of his wrath and being told again what a brainless nincompoop I was and again I was not disappointed because this time I found out how really incompetent and brainless I was according to him.

I wrote my uncle in Dover of my decision to go to work for Hummer Bros and he insisted that I spend the month of April with him and get a good rest before going to Annandale. Which I did. So I had everything ready, all packed with what few things I owned. I quit work at 15 minutes of six, the last day of March and took the 7:30 p.m. train for Dover. And while I returned to Stanhope three times during the month of April to attend parties given me by my friends, I never saw my old boss again for 20 years. The occasion for that visit I will explain later.

I received a letter from Hummer Bros inviting me to come to Annandale anytime during April I wished and get acquainted with the people and the town before I went to work on May 1st. I accepted and arrived during the last week of the month. They had arranged a party at the church, where I was put on exhibition, and I met almost everyone

in the town, young and old. I found out that the Hummer Bros and their wives were the top brass in town, socially and financially, so I was cordially accepted. I was to live the first six months with the elder brother, Elias and his wife. I got settled in the finest room I had ever slept in, and every time I went to the dining room, the table was loaded with food. It looked to me like a special banquet after my 4 years of griddle cakes and molasses and I was sure it could not last. In this I was mistaken. Mrs. Hummer was a good cook and was so proud of her proficiency in the art. She did most of the cooking herself, or at least claimed she did. It made no difference to me who got the credit. The quality and the quantity were always tops.

I met the old gentleman who I was replacing in the shop and he assured me as he was not leaving town he would be only too glad to come in any day and as often as I wished and show me anything I did not understand about the carriage business. He insisted I was not to ask any of the others but to depend on him and he would not let me go wrong. He was one of the kindest men I ever met, and he gave me many pointers that helped me to no little end. He would slip in and look over my work and tell me if he thought I could improve it and praise me if he approved it. Before the year was out he assured me I'm as better a mechanic than he ever was which to me was the highest praise I could ever wish for, because he was in my estimation the best.

The Hummers had not given me any indication of whether they were satisfied except they had not found any fault about my work and both families treated me as if I was a member of the family. So came the end of the six months trial period and if I was satisfactory, to change my residence and move in with Mansfield, the younger brother and his wife (Kate). About a week before the end of the six month period, I brought up the subject with Elias and asked him if I was going to stay the next six months. He assured me that I was and he hoped I would become a permanent member of Hummer Bros. The only trouble was his wife Mary was insisting that I continue to live with them, while Mansfield's wife was just as insistent that I come to their house to live as per the agreement. I assured him if I was causing any trouble which might lead to hard feelings, he should tell me to find another job at the end of the next six months. He would not hear of anything like that. He was holding me to my agreement to stay at least a year if my

work was satisfactory to them and he told me it was and to forget what he had said about where I should live. He would try to fix that up during the next week.

So at the end of week I moved in with Mansfield and his wife. My life there was just as pleasant as it had been with Elias. The second year was not much different than the first. I continued to write about any subject that came up and speak at young people's meetings when ever and as often as I was invited to do so. Which was at times more than I could accept. But the third year was one of big problems for me.

First, the Hummer family decided that I was to be a minister. First they enlisted the help of the minister of our church. Then they consulted Mr. Williamson, a retired minister who was a trustee of Rutgers College and was chairman of the free scholarship committee whom I knew well. Without my knowledge or consent, they had their program all mapped out. Our minister who tutored college boys during the summer, agreed to take me in hand and give me an evening course which he was sure I could master in a year, which would permit me to pass the entrance examinations to Rutgers College. Mr. Williamson then would arrange a plan for four year course at college for me, so that I could get by financially by working at the college nights. The Hummers would lend me assistance whenever necessary. These plans I knew nothing about until after they were all worked out.

The second problem. Doctor W.E. Brocaw was chairman of the Republican Party in Hunterdon Co; John C. Haynes was a Senator. Both of these men I knew well, as they would take me along with them throughout the county to political meetings. And I would talk to the young voters. A lot of these talks were written for me by others. I was very happy to do this, as it gave me a chance to write, talk and meet all the big wheels in the Republican party, from the governor on down. I did some speaking for the reelection of John W. Gregg for Governor. I would not become a voter for 20 days after his reelection. My two friends were making me big promises as soon as I was of voting age. They had a place for me on the ticket at the next election which was a presidential election year – 1896. McKinley and Bryan were the candidates. I had met both Mr. McKinley and the democratic nominee, Mr. Bryan and attended a number of meetings during the campaign. I refused to go on the ticket for any office, as I was not sure I wanted to be that active in politics.

And a third problem had come up which I was very much concerned about. I had fallen in love with the girl next door (*Harriet Susan Miller; her father, John H. Miller worked for the rail line, CRR NJ*). In the meantime the Hummers had talked over their plan with me. So I had a three point problem and was again confused as to what to decide. If I decided to follow the Hummer plan, it would be at least five years of hard study, then at least two years to get established at even a small salary before thinking of a family. If I kept on working at my trade and going into politics, I would have to take my chances of being successful enough to get anywhere. There were several arguments for and against this plan. The one against it that seemed the most important to me was the places in which the preliminary plans for an election was worked out. This was more often than not the back room of a hotel bar room and plenty of liquor was necessary to help arrive at a decision in picking the candidates. This was I believe the main point. And so repulsive to me that it caused me to finally decide against this plan. (*I believe at this point in TJP's life he probably followed Walter's Cornish/Methodist tradition in alcohol abstinence; later on in life TJP enjoyed a 5:00 cocktail and had taken up cigar smoking in his twenties*).

And the third problem. I was in love with the girl next door. If I forgot the other two opportunities and thought of someday getting married, this presented a problem which perhaps was the most serious of all. I realized I would have to increase my earning power first and of course it would curtail some of my activities in speaking and perhaps writing, both of which I enjoyed doing so much.

Sadly, TJP's recollection ends here. Although he did chronicle the years following the "decision to marry the girl next door," the remainder of the document was inadvertently thrown out by Thomas Jay Phillips II when going through his father's (John Miller Phillips) possessions after his death in 1981.

*Elizabeth Jane Phillips
Great Great Granddaughter of Walter Phillips
Great Granddaughter of Thomas Jay Phillips I
2004*



Eargle.

Johnson City, Tenn.