

Frank Phillips

Frank Phillips, founder of Phillips Petroleum Company, was born near Scotia, Greeley County, Nebraska, on November 28, 1873. His birthplace was a primitive log cabin on the sparsely settled frontier where educational opportunities were limited to the traditional one room country school house. This, perhaps, accounted for his later life interest in the education and training of modern youth.

When Frank was one year old, his parents moved to a farm near Creston, Iowa, where he spent most of his early youth. There he learned the value of hard work. He earned his first wages digging potatoes for a neighboring farmer at ten cents a day.

Frank Phillips was always determined to do big things. He began to display ability as a businessman and financier at the early age of 14 while working as a barber in Creston. Before many months passed, he owned every barber shop in town. His interest, however, soon turned to financial matters.

It was in 1903, while working as a bond salesman, that he heard about the new oil field which had just been discovered at Bartlesville,

Indian Territory. Moving to the new oil town, Frank Phillips went into business for himself, using his savings to organize the Citizens Bank and Trust Company.

He soon found that the banking business extended into oil operations and began to acquire a few oil leases. His oil interests grew until, in 1917, he and his brother, L.E. Phillips, incorporated Phillips Petroleum Company.

For the first 21 years of the company's operation, Frank Phillips served as president. At his suggestion K.S. Adams was elected president in 1938. Frank Phillips then served as chairman of the board of directors of the company until 1949 when he asked to be relieved

of all responsibilities of active management and requested that he not be re-elected as chairman of the board.

A new title of honorary director and chairman was then created for him by special action of the board of directors.

Frank Phillips, known as "Uncle Frank" by employees and friends,



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contributed large sums to the Boy Scouts of America and other youth programs. He also organized The Frank Phillips Foundation, Inc., which owns and operates Woolaroc.

Among his numerous appointments, honorary memberships, and degrees, he was most proud of his admittance to the Oklahoma Hall of Fame in 1939, the French government decoration of Chevalier of the Legion of Honor in 1928, and the Silver Buffalo for Distinguished Service of Boyhood, the highest award presented by the Boy Scouts of America. In 1949, he was awarded the Distinguished Service Citation by the University of Oklahoma.

In the early days of his career he drilled a number of wells on Osage Indian lands. As a tribute to his fair dealings and interest in their welfare, the Osage adopted Frank Phillips into the tribe and made him a chief. He was given the Indian name, “Wah-Shah-She (Osage) Hluah-Ke-He-Kah (Eagle Chief).” Uncle Frank was the the first white man ever to attain this high honor.

Frank Phillips died on August 23, 1950. Mrs. Phillips, affectionately known as “Aunt Jane,” preceded him in death by more than two years, about eighteen months after their fiftieth wedding anniversary. Mr. Phillips will be long remembered for his great personal achievements and his unselfish interest in the welfare of people.

The following was handed out at Phillips’ funeral:

“The death of Frank Phillips is a great loss to all of us who knew him and worked with him. It means the loss of a warm, personal friend. His life exemplifies the best American traditions. By his own initiative, he founded Phillips Petroleum Company and became a great leader in American industry. He had the gift of acquiring, the wisdom of giving. In his private life, he was known for his humanitarianism and his deep understanding and warm appreciation of people. Frank Phillips’ life is an inspiration for all of us.”

K. S. Adams



The Phillips home in Bartlesville is now a museum managed by the Oklahoma Historical Society. Oklahoma Historical Society

Frank and Jane Phillips Woolaroc Museum

