

Old and New Westmoreland

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(VI) Edward Everett Robbins, son of Joseph and Rachel Gordon (Robbins) Robbins, was born on the home farm at Robbins Station, Westmoreland county, Pennsylvania, September 27, 1862. After attending the public schools of his native place, he went to Elders Ridge Academy, Indiana Normal School, and then to college and received his Bachelor's degree in arts from Washington and Jefferson College in 1881. Mr. Robbins stood in the first ten in his class of forty-six, received "cum laude" and delivered an oration at the graduation exercises, his subject being "The Irish Land Question." He then entered upon his studies for his profession at Greensburg, registered as a student in the office of J. F. Wentling, and after, at the Law School of Columbia University, and gained his degree therefrom as Bachelor of Law in 1884. He was admitted to the bar April 8, 1884, and entering upon practice in Greensburg, has risen to recognition as one of the foremost lawyers and legislators of the western part of the State.

Mr. Robbins has taken a leading and successful part in some of the most important cases that have been tried in late years in Western Pennsylvania. He was the chief counsel for Colonel Hawkins in the cases growing out of the Homestead riots, which were tried in the Court of Quarter Sessions of Allegheny county in 1893. Colonel Hawkins and Colonel Streeter were charged with felonious assault and battery for certain severe physical punishment which they had ordered for guilty soldiers. Mr. Robbins was leading counsel for the defendants and made the closing argument of the case. The case occupied six days in the trial, and this argument consumed a full day. It was characterized by the "Pittsburgh Leader and Gazette" as one of the most brilliant legal arguments ever heard in the Allegheny county court house. Another celebrated case was that by which Mr. Robbins won for the city of Greensburg its "Val Halle Park," devised to it by the will of Dr. Frank Cowan, but contested by the heirs. In this case Mr. Robbins was the leading counsel for Greensburg borough. The trial occupied five days, and after the verdict had been rendered sustaining the will, a majority of the jury visited his office in person and congratulated him upon the splendid argument and his presentation of the law and the facts. He was also complimented by the trial judge, His Honor, Justice McConnell. Another important litigation was that of the Pittsburgh-Westmoreland Coal Company. In this also Mr. Robbins' client, the Pittsburgh-Westmoreland Company, was awarded a verdict. This was regarded at the time, one of the leading legal fights in the United States District and Circuit Court

of Appeals, considering the questions and large amount involved, it was tried three times and finally won for his client.

From 1888 to 1894 Mr. Robbins served in the State Senate, and during this time he was conspicuous for two important measures. He introduced and advocated a bill which later became a law, to provide free text-books in the public schools, and he has been referred to as one of the "fathers of free text-books" in Pennsylvania. He also accomplished by his support, the passage of a bill increasing the taxes on corporations and personal property and removing the annual tax on real estate in Pennsylvania for the support of the State government. The passage of this legislation has always been a matter of deep satisfaction to Mr. Robbins. He also served as chairman of the judiciary committee during his last term.

In 1896, Mr. Robbins was nominated for Congress and elected by a majority of more than 10,000 in the district which was composed of Westmoreland, Indiana, Jefferson and Armstrong counties. Between the time of his election and the time he took his seat in Congress, he visited Cuba and travelled extensively, and gathered facts which he used on the floor of the House in urging the acknowledgment of Cuban independence. When war was declared, he was a member of General Wiley's staff, who commanded the Second Brigade of the National Guard of Pennsylvania. Mr. Robbins had been connected with the National Guard for twelve years, first as a private soldier in the Tenth Regiment for three years, and afterwards as lieutenant, and quartermaster of that regiment, and still later as brigade quartermaster. When the brigade was called into the service of the United States, he left his seat in Congress, and went with his command to the army. He served at Camp Thomas, Georgia, where, owing to his previous experience in troop transportation, he was detailed to oversee that intricate branch of the work. To this duty he brought not only expert knowledge, but the most zealous and painstaking industry, working at his great task night and day. Colonel Lee, chief in command, recommended his promotion from captain to major, and his transfer to Cuba for this special work connected with the shipping of supplies, and the transportation of troops. Here he served under General Miles in Porto Rica, and subsequently at Santiago, and Havana, in Cuba. At the close of the war he was honorably discharged at his own request and resumed the practice of law in Greensburg. When Governor Stone was elected, he appointed Mr. Robbins on his staff as commissary general of Pennsylvania, with the rank of colonel. He served throughout the term of Governor Stone, four years, in this capacity, and was then at his own request placed on the retired list of the officers of the National Guard of Pennsylvania with the rank of colonel. This closed a military career of seventeen years of continuous service.

From the time of his return from the Cuban War until he was nominated for Congress by the Republican party in the Butler-Westmoreland district in 1916, Mr. Robbins was engaged in the practice of the law with great diligence. He was elected to Congress on this ticket, November 7, 1916.

When Congress was called into extraordinary session, April 2, 1917, Mr. Robbins took his seat as a Republican member of the Sixty-fifth Congress from the Twenty-second District of Pennsylvania. Since Congress has assembled, he has been very active in the legislation before Congress. His first speech was in favor of the declaration of war and was delivered on the morning of April 26, 1917, and it has been favorably commented upon and widely circulated throughout his district and State and the adjoining States. Mr. Robbins is spoken of as "the war Congressman," from the fact that he strongly favored a declaration of war against Spain for the liberation of Cuba, and also against Germany for the protection of American rights. Since that time he has been an earnest supporter of the administration and of the President, urging most earnestly and unceasingly the waging of the war to successful finish and to a complete victory over Germany and her allies. During 1915 and 1916 Mr. Robbins advocated preparedness. He believed after war was declared by Ger-

many in August, 1914, that sooner or later the United States must be drawn into the world war and he urged the adoption of universal military training, the preparation of arms, and equipment, and the increase of the navy as a means of safety for the country against the threatened deluge of blood. There is no man who advocated more strenuously the supporting of the government and the President in every activity looking for the preparation of the Nation for a successful prosecution of the war. During the first session he was in his seat continuously, taking part in the debates on all questions that have come up on the floor of the House, attending the sessions of Congress more regularly than any other member from Pennsylvania, and few if any men in Congress have equaled him in this respect. The part of Pennsylvania included in the Twenty-second Congressional District produced more bituminous coal than perhaps any other in the country, this with the iron, glass and other manufacturing interests and agricultural activities, in which a population of over 400,000 people are busily employed, makes it one of the largest and most important districts in the United States. Mr. Robbins' activity in Congress for these interests, and the workmen engaged therein, has been remarkable. He advocated the increase of wages for the miners and railroad employees, and a minimum price of wheat for the farmers—all of which was accomplished. He advocated a better price for bituminous coal, more adequate car supply and better living conditions for the miners. His activities on behalf of those engaged in this great interest has resulted in greatly improved results, and caused some of his colleagues to designate him as "Bituminous Coal" Robbins in debate.

Outside of his legal and legislative work, Mr. Robbins has been concerned in the organization of many financial institutions. He was one of the organizers of the Safe Deposit and Trust Company of Greensburg, of the Wilmerding National Bank, of the Citizens' Bank of Mount Pleasant, and also of the Union Deposit Bank of Jeanette. He was also one of the organizers of the Pittsburgh-Baltimore Coal Company, for which company he purchased three thousand two hundred and fifty acres of high-grade Pittsburgh coal and four hundred and twenty-five acres of surface in Hempfield and North Huntingdon townships, Westmoreland county, Pennsylvania, opened mines, built a mining town and constructed three miles of railroad. This was afterward turned over to the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad Company and agreement securing the traffic for that company entered into. This transaction involved a financial outlay of over a million dollars. Of the Atlantic Coal Company, which owns and operates three large mines in Somerset county, Pennsylvania. Of the Youghioghenny Coal Company, which owned three hundred and fifty acres of coal which along with the Robbins Coal Company, in which his father was interested with him and which owned eight hundred and forty acres of coal, both were conveyed to the Pittsburgh Coal Company at the time of its organization. These were also large financial transactions. He is a director in the Safe Deposit and Trust Company, in the Wilmerding National Bank, and is a trustee of Washington & Jefferson College, to which institution he has contributed liberally on several occasions. He is a member of the Presbyterian church of Greensburg, and is a member of the building committee in charge of the construction of the new church building. He is a member of the Greensburg Country Club, of the Elks' Lodge, of the Pittsburgh Athletic Club, of the Army and Navy Club of Washington, D. C., of the Sons of the American Revolution, and of the Pennsylvania Society.