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Special to The New York Times.
New York Times (1857-Current file); Nov 8, 1903; ProQuest Historical Newspapers The New York Times
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Noted Financier Expired Last Night at His Summer Home.

Pioneer in Industry Standard Oil Now Controls, and One of the Greatest Promoters of the Times.

Special to The New York Times.

PHILADELPHIA, Nov. 7.—William L. Elkins, the multi-millionaire traction magnate and financier, died at his Summer home, at Ashbourne, near here, to-night, of a complication of diseases, at the age of seventy-one years. Mr. Elkins's illness did not become alarming till about three weeks ago, but it really dated from last Spring, when he narrowly escaped a violent death.

A heavy iron girder, which was being swung to the top of a new office building at Broad and Chestnut Streets, of which he was part owner, fell to the ground, and just grazed Mr. Elkins, who was passing. The shock seriously affected his nervous system. The immediate cause of death was blood poisoning, added to which was kidney trouble, rheumatism, and rheumatic gout.

Few men have had the long and unbroken series of successful achievements which marked the career of William Lukens Elkins. He came of Puritan stock. His father was a native of this city, although the family is a Virginia one. William L. Elkins was born near Wheeling, West Va., on May 2, 1832. The first of the Elkinses to appear in Philadelphia was William L. Elkins's grandfather, William Elkins, who died in this city of the plague on July 29 1798. He was a Virginian, born in 1767.

The founder of the Elkins family in Virginia, of which William L. Elkins was a descendant from one branch, and United States Senator Stephen B. Elkins from the other, was Ralph Elkins, who in 1661 received from Gov. Moryson a patent of land and settled as a tobacco planter on an estate between the Potomac and the Rappahannock Rivers. His sons, Ralph and Richard, respectively, were the paternal progenitors of the West Virginia Senator and William L. Elkins.

HUMBLE BEGINNINGS.

There are many Philadelphians who remember the William L. Elkins of the old days—the days when he climbed up the ladder from a grocer's clerk to a business man in a small way. When he was fifteen he applied at the grocery of Brock & Kulp, then at Second Street and Girard Avenue, for work. That was fifty-five years ago. From that time his ascent of fortune's ladder was never retarded. Occasionally it was slow, but the indomitable Puritan will surmounted all obstacles. After a year as grocer's clerk, he seized a favorable opportunity and sought and obtained a position in a produce house. He studied whenever the opportunity presented, and, truthfully, he was self-taught and self-made.

Four years in the produce house made much of young Elkins. He was a hard worker, and in his position became known to the majority of Philadelphia business men. He accumulated a capital of knowledge of business, so that, at twenty-one, he had a good reputation, was shrewd, had thorough confidence in himself, and a few hundred dollars. He met Peter Saybolt, and the two formed a produce firm, which was known as Saybolt & Elkins. Four years after the firm was organized Mr. Elkins's father died.

The firm prospered and it soon became necessary to keep perishable fruit for long periods. To do this Mr. Elkins built the first large refrigerator in Philadelphia and upset all old-time methods by placing the ice above the produce. This was an innovation. In 1860 Mr. Elkins bought out his partner and was doing the largest produce business in the United States, and the store in Second Street, above Callow Hill, was one of the sights of the city.

Soon after the "coming in" of the Drake Well in the northwestern Pennsylvania oil fields, Mr. Elkins contracted the "oil fever," and in 1861 he went to the petroleum region. Convinced that the pumping of oil from the scattered subterranean reservoirs was destined to be a growing and permanent industry, he resolved to refine the crude article. With that end in view, he returned to Philadelphia and became one of the pioneers in that important branch of the oil industry. He erected his first refining works near Lancaster Avenue and Fiftieth Street, in the Twenty-fourth Ward of Philadelphia. There were but four or five stills, of the small capacity of twenty-five barrels, producing by the then slow process about 150 barrels of refined oil a week. This, one of the first petroleum refineries in Philadelphia, was designated the Monument Oil Works.

Soon afterward, in conjunction with the Monument, he operated the Park and Belmont Refineries. Under Mr. Elkins's energetic direction and the rapid introduction of improved machinery and methods of refining, the business increased wonderfully. Here the first gasoline ever manufactured from petroleum was made. More spacious sites were occupied until, at Point Breeze, the most extensive refinery in the East was established and conducted by Mr. Elkins until 1875, when he formed a partnership with the Standard Oil Company. In 1880 he disposed of his interest in the works to that corporation.

ACQUAINTANCE WITH WIDENER.

William L. Elkins and Peter A. B. Widener have been for years called the "Traction Twins," but it is not generally known that the two never met until 1873. In that year Mr. Widener was elected City Treasurer. The late William Baldwin, who had been associated with Mr. Elkins in his oil operations, and who was one of Mr. Widener's close political friends, suggested to the latter that Mr. Elkins would make an acceptable bondsman, and the Treasurer-elect said that nothing would please him better, but that he had never met Mr. Elkins. The next day Mr. Baldwin introduced the two men, and the oil magnate became one of the politician's bondsmen. The two men instantly became personal friends.

After that they conducted some of the biggest financial operations of recent years, and the names coupled are known far and wide. Their street railway deals are known to all Philadelphians, their latest being the formation of the Philadelphia Rapid Transit Company. Mr. Elkins, too, was one of the promoters of the United Gas Improvement Company.

Mr. Elkins served one term in the City Council, having been elected from the Twenty-ninth Ward. In 1873 he was a Commissioner to the Vienna Exposition, and in 1900 went in a similar capacity to the Paris Exposition. He was also a Colonel on the staff of Gov. Hartranft. He might have had other offices, but he cared more for his home and his business. He and Mr. Widener were together in all ventures, and there are few who ever were Directors in so many enterprises as Mr. Elkins. He was a Director in the following corporations:

Philadelphia Rapid Transit Company, Pennsylvania Railroad Company, United Gas Improvement Company, Metropolitan Street Railway Company of New York, Commercial Trust Company, Board of City Trusts, Land Title and Trust Company, American Surety Company of New York, International Navigation Company, Philadelphia and Erie Company, Consolidated Traction Company of New Jersey, Edison Electric Light Company, Pennsylvania Globe Gas Light Company, the Philadelphia Company of Pittsburg, Consolidated Traction Company of Pittsburg, Continental Tobacco Company, Philadelphia Electric Company, Electric Company of America, Virginia and Charleston Railway Company, American Air Power Company, Electric Storage Battery Company, National Surety Company of New York, New England Gas and Coke Company, and Asphalt Company of America. He was also a heavy stockholder in the Standard Oil Company, the American Tobacco Company, and the recently formed International Mercantile Marine Company.

Mrs. William L. Elkins was Miss Maria Louise Broomall, daughter of James Broomall of Chester County. She was married to Mr. Elkins in 1858. Two sons and two daughters were born to the couple. Three of them are alive. William L. Elkins, Jr., died of apoplexy in March, 1902. Of the two daughters, the eldest, Ida Amelia, is married to Sidney F. Tyler, who recently resigned as President of the Fourth Street National Bank. The younger daughter, Eleanor, is the wife of George D. Widener, a son of P. A. B. Widener. George W. Elkins married Miss Stella E. McIntire, and William L. Elkins, Jr., was married to Miss Kate Felton of California.

Mr. Elkins was deeply interested in art, and he accepted an appointment as a member of the Art Commission, which supervised the decoration of the National Building at the Paris Exposition, despite his many business interests. To develop interest in art and to encourage American artists he instituted in March, 1895, a prize of $5,000 for the most meritorious painting exhibited by an American artist at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts. Mr. Elkins was a member of the Historical, Genealogical, and Colonial Societies of Pennsylvania, the Union League Art and Country Clubs of Philadelphia, the Maryland Club of Baltimore, the Chicago Club of Chicago, and the Manhattan and New York Yacht Clubs of New York.

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