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**Star Weekly Feature Article  
 Tells of Smith & Stone Head**

by Robert Nielsen  
 in the Toronto Star Weekly  
 (The following article which appeared in a recent issue of the Toronto Star Weekly, tells of a Canadian businessman whose companies include the local Smith and Stone organization—Ed.)



COL. W. B. PHILLIPS

There are several true statements which can be made to contrast the present eminence of Col. W. Eric Phillips with his humble beginnings in the business world. It can be said, for instance, that he has moved from a tiny office over a garage to the spacious board rooms of 20 Canadian corporations; including some of the biggest and richest in the land; or that a struggling veteran in business 30 years ago now ranks as a close and apparent equal associate of E. P. Taylor, who is generally regarded as Canada's No. 1 tycoon; or that a one-time small manufacturer of mirrors and picture frames is now profitably concerned with the output of airplanes, automobile windows, electricity, farm implements, big-league hockey, and other commodities far too numerous to mention; or, to put it as theatrically as possible, it can be said that Col. Phillips, having started with a burned out factory because the price fitted his purse, advanced to the point where he could and recently did, stake \$1,000,000 on the toss of a coin. Yes, the career of William Eric Phillips can be fitted to the classic stereotype of business success. But the man himself cannot be simply labelled or typed. He is a complex, many-sided individual, and one of the peculiar things about him is that he much prefers to hide all his lights from the public gaze. He was a soldier of some distinction. He is an engineer, a financier, an esthete, a gentleman farmer and a diligent servant of education. Yet he insists: "I'm not story material. My life is pretty dull to an outsider - though not dull to me of course." This aversion to publicity is no pose. About the only biographical material so far printed on Phillips is to be found in the clipped, impersonal summaries of such publications as Who's Who and the Directory of Directors. Self-revelations make him uncomfortable. During our interview

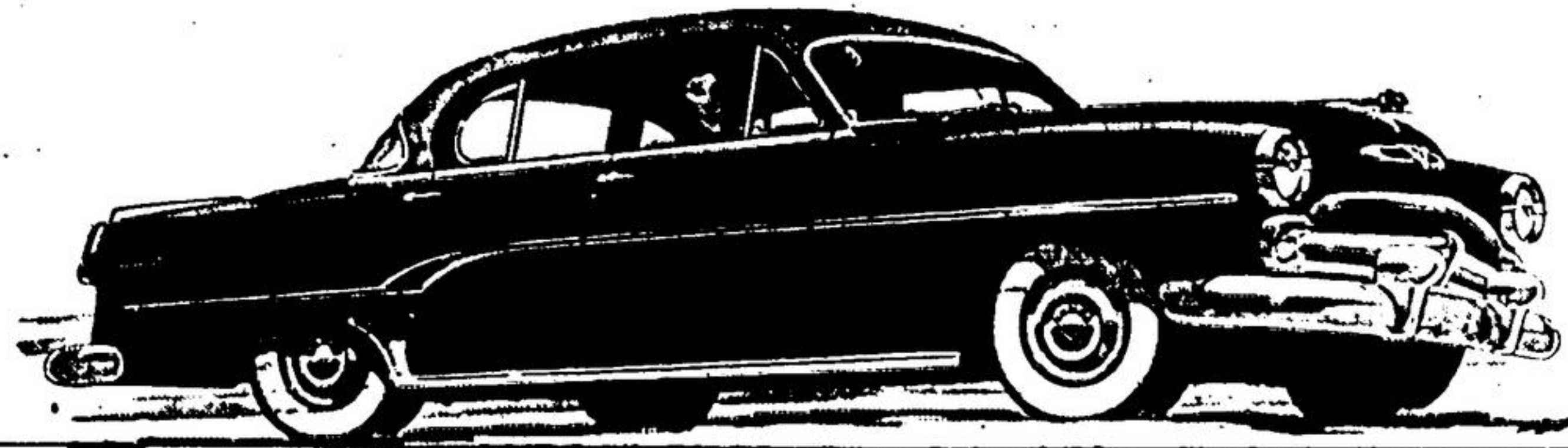
he would ponder straightforward questions, sometimes twisting himself in his chair until one well-shod foot crept over the top of the ornate, ancient and scarred oak desk. This desk and the matching Tudor chairs look out of place in an office which is otherwise smoothly and chastely modern, with pine panelling, air-conditioning and the rest. Career Built on Glass One got the impression of a quicksilver flow of thought, but all that usually came out in speech were stray drops - sardonic, cryptic or facetious - from the main stream. About his soldiering, for example. The record shows that he was one of the youngest colonels in the British army; that he won the Distinguished Service Order and the Military Cross as well as mentions in dispatches. Asked what feats had earned him the DSO and MC, he exclaimed: "God I don't know. That's one of the world's mysteries. I've often wondered myself, when I thought of the poor devils who really did something." Similarly, when invited to describe his typical work week, he grunted reflectively then said: "To do so would be a disclosure of folly. I don't believe in work, you know." Col. Phillips has never had the courage of this particular conviction. He admits that when he was a student of engineering he studied hard, and that he "worked like

hell" when he was building up the glass business that put him in the big league industrially. And his associates say he is a tireless worker still, though he leaves plenty of time for outside interests and pleasures. The 1953 Directory of Directors lists 20 companies after Phillips' name, and the same number after E. P. Taylor's. The significant thing is that in seven instances their listings coincide. The seven include such familiar concerns as Massey-Harris, the Royal Bank of Canada, Dominion Stores and Canadian Breweries. Taylor is president, Phillips chairman of the board of Argus Corp., a glassholding company which owns the controlling shares in several big businesses. Altogether, Phillips is president of four companies, chairman of two others; member of the executive committee and director of another pair, and director of twelve more. Beer built the foundation of Taylor's vaulting success, while Phillips' career was built on glass. But he did not get where he is by making the bottles for Taylor's beer. In his own, he gained, and for some years was content with, a virtual monopoly of the supply of safety glass to the Canadian automobile industry. The two men followed their separate courses until nearly ten years ago; what brought them together, chiefly, was an identity of outlook on the postwar business scene. When more cautious businessmen foresaw a slump with a shut down of industries, Taylor and Phillips saw limitless opportunities and challenges to expand. They proceeded to exploit them in a succession of ventures and coups which amazed the business community, starting with the purchase of Standard Chemical and Goderich Salt, which led to the now flourishing Dominion Tar and Chemical Co. (Javel, Sifto salt, Donnacoona board and Fiberglas are but a few of the products of these enterprises.) Their most startling move, perhaps, was the sudden acquisition of control of mighty Massey-Harris. It followed weeks of surreptitious stock-buying and conversion of 55000 preferred shares into double the number of voting shares, one minute before the closing deadline for such conversion. Gives Time to University Phillips is said to have all the essential ingredients of a top executive notably the ability to grasp a situation fast, to pick the right man, and to delegate authority. He also has the stuff needed to take big risks. The coin tossing episode was described by a colleague who admits having felt slightly anxious at the time, "because part of that \$1,000,000 was mine." Phillips had set out with others to buy a business on behalf of one of the industries controlled by Argus. Everything had been settled except the price; after hours of dickering there was still \$1,000,000 between the seller's demand and the offer of the Taylor-Phillips group. So Col. Phillips suggested flipping a coin. He won. Phillips, a graduate engineer, says all he now knows of engineering is the language, a statement which is disputed by a close acquaintance, who claims Phillips keeps up with his technically expert employees by personally experimenting in a private, superbly equipped chemical lab at "Wynyates Farms" his estate at Oriole, near Toronto. At any rate it is clear that his engineering savvy has been one of his main keys to success. That, plus a good grasp of advances in the glass industries of other countries, helped him get a head start on the manufacture of safety glass in Canada in 1929. He went on from there to dominate the market, with large plants in Oshawa and Windsor. This triumph secured, he dropped the old mirror and picture-framing business which he had launched in Oshawa in 1922 from the office over a garage and the burned out factory. His engineering background certainly fitted him for a significant contribution to Canada's effort in World War II. For six years he headed Research Enterprises Ltd., one of the most difficult and exacting of wartime industrial ventures. Starting from scratch, it turned out a vital supply of complex optical devices, including sights, directors and range finders, as well as other products never before made in Canada. This task stimulated Phillips' interest in technical education, and this moved him to accept, in 1945, another important public-service post - chairman of the board of Governors of the University of Toronto. He still holds it, and here is the strongest sort of proof that there is more to Phillips' life than the quest for material success. The board of governors directs the financial affairs of the university, and the annual budget of the university is nearly \$15,000,000. Postwar inflation has nearly doubled the operating costs, creating acute financial problems in view of the tendency of educational revenues to remain fixed. In addition to offsetting inflationary rises in costs, the period of Phillips' chairmanship has seen these accomplishments: 1—Three increases in faculty salaries totalling more than \$1,000,000 a year; 2—A \$22,000,000 building program; 3—The introduction of a faculty pension scheme which is regarded

as the best in Canada. Based on two per cent of each year's service, it would give a professor with 30 year's service a pension equal to 60 per cent of his average salary over that period. Finding the money has been the board's big problem, and evidently Phillips is the right man for that. During his tenure the provincial government has more than doubled its annual grant to the university making it \$4,500,000. In money-raising and administration, Phillips has given more time to the university than he does on the average to one of his business firms - approximately four of five days a month during the academic year. University authorities are grateful to him, not only for keeping the finances solid, but for his scrupulous policy of non-interference in academic affairs. He is a champion of academic freedom, they affirm, who believes a university must be devoted to the unfettered pursuit of truth. He once dismissed criticism of the drastic utterances of a certain professor by observing that "to think at all is to risk error." Born in Toronto, Col. Phillips was educated at Upper Canada College and the University of Toronto. At 60 years he bears his tall frame erectly, has robust health and a zest for living. His prime avocation is cattle-raising on his 700 acre Wynyates Farms. He has bred prize dairy herds and bulls there and also has 175 beef cattle. The colonial maintains a country-style barber shop on his estate, and that is where problems of running the farm are thrashed out, Sunday mornings, when Phillips and the farm staff gather for haircuts. He is rated as a fine amateur photographer in both movies and stills, which he develops and prints himself. He is a connoisseur of antique furniture, especially oak, of silver and of fine art. He is gruffly delighted over his youngest son, Timothy 25, an aspiring artist who has been taken under the pedagogical wing of the famous surrealist, Salvador Dali. Phillips visited the young fellow in Spain recently to see how he was getting along. He has two other sons, Derek, 32, a mechanical engineer, who works in his father's Duplate Canada Ltd.; Michael, 28, and two daughters, Diana and Cecil. His wife is the former Doris Delano Gibson. Phillips is a convivial, conversational sort in the society of his business friends, a quality underlined by his membership in seven clubs. He has a yacht on Georgian Bay and a second home at Nassau, where he spends a couple of months each year. He closed our interview by recalling a caption he had seen on a joke book many years ago. It was "Don't take life too seriously—you will never get out of it alive." "I've always thought that was the proper gibe," the colonel said.

**FARM NEWS**  
**HOLSTEIN CLUB HAS ANNUAL LADIES' NIGHT**  
 Over 200 were in attendance for the Halton Holstein Club's annual ladies night, held at Trafalgar on Wednesday evening. Following a delicious turkey dinner the group was entertained by the Lowville Quartette, Jack and Bryan Bennett, of Kibridge. Progressive euchre followed. President Gordon Sinclair presided over the short program at the banquet table. Among those who spoke briefly were Fred Snyder, of Waterloo, first vice president of the Holstein-Friesian Association of Canada; D. S. Dinton, of Brampton; E. A. Innes of Brantford, and Ross Segsworth of Burlington all of whom are directors of the National Holstein board. Another pleasing feature of the programme was the presentation of the E. J. Meagher Memorial Trophy, by George F. Brennan of Guelph, to Ashville Farms, Ltd., represented by Anne, George, and Joe Pelletterio.

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