

= Henry Bell Gilkeson =

Henry Bell Gilkeson ( June 6 , 1850 ? September 29 , 1921 ) was an American lawyer , politician , school administrator , and banker in West Virginia .

Gilkeson was born in Moorefield , Virginia ( now West Virginia ) , the eldest child of a dry goods merchant , and was raised in Romney . Following his graduation from Hampden ? Sydney College , Gilkeson became a schoolteacher and served as superintendent of the Hampshire County Schools district from 1877 to 1879 . Gilkeson later studied law and started a law practice in Romney . Following the death of John Collins Covell in 1887 , Gilkeson served as the principal of the West Virginia Schools for the Deaf and Blind until 1888 .

Gilkeson served in the West Virginia Legislature as a state senator representing the 12th District in the West Virginia Senate ( 1890 ? 93 ) and as a member of the West Virginia House of Delegates ( 1883 ? 85 and 1909 ? 11 ) . Gilkeson served as the mayor of Romney beginning in 1885 , and the first president of the Bank of Romney ( 1888 ? 1913 ) .

= = Early life and education = =

Henry Bell Gilkeson was born in Moorefield , Virginia ( now West Virginia ) on June 6 , 1850 . He was the eldest child of Robert B. Gilkeson and his wife , Sarah E. Gilkeson , both of Scottish ancestry . His father was a prominent dry goods merchant in Romney , where Henry and his brother , Edward , were raised .

Gilkeson graduated from Hampden ? Sydney College in Hampden Sydney , Virginia , in 1872 . While a student , he was inducted as a member of the Beta Theta Pi fraternity . Gilkeson completed a special course in engineering at Yale University . He also received further education in Germany .

= = Academic career = =

Following his graduation from Hampden ? Sydney College , Gilkeson became a schoolteacher and later served as superintendent of the Hampshire County Schools district from 1877 to 1879 . Before 1886 , Gilkeson was elected a member of the Romney Literary Society together with his brother .

= = = West Virginia Schools for the Deaf and Blind = = =

From 1876 to 1888 , Gilkeson served as a member and secretary of the fourth , fifth , and sixth Board of Regents of the West Virginia Schools for the Deaf and Blind , a position that enabled him to become familiar with the school 's efforts to educate its deaf and blind students .

In 1887 , upon the death of the schools ' principal , John Collins Covell , Gilkeson was selected by the Board of Regents to serve as principal of the institution . The Board of Regents had reservations about selecting an immediate successor to Covell and requested that Gilkeson fill the position temporarily until the board could find a permanent replacement . Gilkeson left his lucrative law practice and accepted the position under the condition that he serve as interim principal while the Board of Regents sought a more suitable candidate to build upon Covell 's initiatives and reforms . Gilkeson believed that only administrators and educators fluent in sign language should be appointed to serve in the School for the Deaf , and during his tenure as principal he found that personnel who relied on interpreters did not receive " satisfactory results " . After he had spent a few weeks as acting principal , the Board of Regents reconvened and appointed him to stay on permanently .

During his tenure , the position of principal included the roles of clerk , bookkeeper , steward , and final arbiter of matters in the classroom . While Gilkeson lacked special training for the position , his business experience allowed him to run the schools in an economically efficient manner , which pleased the schools ' Board of Regents .

In the summer of 1888 , Gilkeson was delegated by the Board to Regents to attend the Conference of Superintendents and Principals of American Schools for the Deaf in New York City and select the

most fitting candidate present at the conference or recommended someone to replace him as principal of the West Virginia Schools for the Deaf and Blind . Gilkeson tendered an offer to C. H. Hill , then an instructor at the Maryland School for the Deaf , and upon Gilkeson 's return to Romney he recommended Hill and resigned from his post as principal . Hill was subsequently appointed by the Board to fill the position . While the Board of Regents was pleased with Gilkeson 's performance as principal and wished for him to stay on in the position , but he preferred to return to his professional law and political career in the end .

Gilkeson resumed the practice of law and pursued a political career , but he continued his involvement with , and advocacy for , the West Virginia Schools for the Deaf and Blind , especially through his influence as a prominent lawyer and state legislator . Gilkeson used his position as a state legislator to condemn and hold accountable the officials responsible for the mismanagement of the West Virginia Schools for the Deaf and Blind , and often interceded on the schools ' behalf following Hill 's retirement due to political reasons . Gilkeson was displeased with the state 's political interference in the schools , and the " multiplication " of positions within the institution that were filled with personnel who had political or business ties but lacked prior knowledge or experience with deaf and blind education .

= = Law and political careers = =

Following his tenure as superintendent of Hampshire County Schools , Gilkeson undertook the study of law and started a law practice in Romney ; he subsequently became a prominent lawyer in the community . His law office was located on Main Street in Romney , two blocks from the West Virginia Schools for the Deaf and Blind . Due to his preeminence in the legal field and high standing in the community , Gilkeson served as dean of the Hampshire County Bar Association .

Gilkeson was twice elected to represent Hampshire County as a member of the West Virginia House of Delegates for the 1883 ? 85 and 1909 ? 11 legislative sessions . As the leadership of the House of Delegates was being determined at the 1884 Democratic Party State Convention in Wheeling , Gilkeson was a leading contender for a speaker candidacy , but fellow Romney native Robert White was selected as the party 's candidate instead .

On August 13 , 1890 , the Twelfth Senatorial District Democratic Convention nominated Gilkeson to fill the vacant West Virginia State Senate seat of Samuel Lightfoot Flournoy . Gilkeson was elected to fill the seat during the general election of 1890 and served the remainder of Flournoy 's senate term until 1893 . At the time of his appointment , the Twelfth Senatorial District consisted of Grant , Hampshire , Hardy , Mineral , and Pendleton counties . In 1892 , Gilkeson was appointed to the Committees on the Judiciary , Public Buildings and Humane Institutions , Federal Relations , Forfeited , Delinquent , and Unappropriated Lands , and Clerks Office . In addition to serving in the state senate , Gilkeson also held the position of mayor of Romney , West Virginia , beginning in 1885 .

= = Banking and business career = =

Gilkeson served on the board of directors as the first president of the Bank of Romney after it was granted its charter by the West Virginia Legislature on September 3 , 1888 , and was opened later on December 20 , 1888 . During Gilkeson 's tenure as president , the Bank of Romney occupied two rooms on the ground floor of the Wirgman Building , where the city 's previous bank , the Bank of the Valley of Virginia , was located prior to the American Civil War . Gilkeson served as the president of the Bank of Romney until his retirement in 1913 , when he was succeeded by John J. Cornwell , 15th Governor of West Virginia . In November 1906 , Gilkeson , R. W. Dailey , Jr . , P. J. Ruckman , and Joshua Soule Zimmerman were incorporators of the Mill Mountain Orchard Company , which operated orchards along the top of Mill Creek Mountain west of Romney .

= = Later life and death = =

Gilkeson resided in Romney for the majority of his life and was involved in most of the community's organizations as either a leader, officer, or stockholder. Gilkeson's son Henry Bell Gilkeson, Jr., died on November 16, 1901, from injuries sustained by falling against a piece of sharp iron, which penetrated his stomach. Gilkeson's wife, Mary Katherine, predeceased him in February 1910 following the effects of a surgical procedure she had undergone in Cumberland, Maryland.

In his later years, Gilkeson suffered from allergic rhinitis and experienced a "physical breakdown" following the death of his son, Robert William Gilkeson, on October 2, 1918, during the Meuse-Argonne Offensive of World War I and shortly before the Armistice with Germany. Robert William Gilkeson was a second lieutenant in Company C of the 316 Engineers, and was interred in the Meuse-Argonne American Cemetery and Memorial near Romagne-sous-Montfaucon. Robert William Gilkeson was a 1907 graduate of his father's alma mater, Hampden-Sydney College.

On account of his increasingly failing health, Gilkeson spent the summer of 1921 in Mountain Lake Park, Maryland, to recuperate. About a week before his death, Gilkeson fell down a flight of porch steps at his vacation residence, fracturing a number of bones. He died on September 29, 1921, in Mountain Lake Park, and his funeral was held on the anniversary of his son's death on October 2, 1921. Gilkeson is interred with his wife Mary Katherine and son Henry, Jr., at Indian Mound Cemetery in Romney, West Virginia.

In recounting Gilkeson's achievements to the Conference of Superintendents and Principals of American Schools for the Deaf following his death, West Virginia Schools for the Deaf and Blind instructor Charles D. Seaton said of Gilkeson:

In 1980, Gilkeson's son-in-law George Sloan Arnold bequeathed the \$1,500,000 George S. Arnold Trust to Hampden-Sydney College, his shared alma mater with his father-in-law and brother-in-law Robert William Gilkeson. At the time, it was the largest amount given by a living person and the institution's second-largest gift in its 204-year history. Arnold gave the trust in honor of the Gilkeson family.

= = Religious activities = =

Gilkeson was active in the Presbyterian Church in Hampshire County and served as a trustee for the Presbytery of Winchester along with Samuel Lightfoot Fournoy. In 1881, Gilkeson and his fellow trustees were instrumental in securing from Amos L. and Allie G. Pugh a house and a large, partially wooded land lot in Capon Bridge for use by the Presbytery as a centrally located manse in Hampshire County. Gilkeson remained a trustee of the Presbytery from 1876 until his death in 1921. He was also a commissioner of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States representing the Presbytery of Winchester, and attended the assembly's meeting in Jackson, Mississippi, May 15-25, 1902.

= = Marriage and family = =

Gilkeson was married on November 19, 1884, to Mary Katherine Paxton (1853-1910), daughter of Jordan J. and E. J. Paxton of Iron Gate, Virginia. Their wedding ceremony was officiated by Reverend George W. Finley of Romney at the residence of Mary Ann Lipscomb at 1537 I Street, N.W. in Washington, D.C. Mary Katherine had been employed as a teacher under Lipscomb at Waverly Seminary. Following the ceremony, Gilkeson and his wife embarked upon a tour of the Northern United States. Gilkeson and his wife Mary Katherine had three children together:

Laura Paxton Gilkeson Arnold (August 18, 1885-1973), married Romney lawyer George Sloan Arnold (1885-1986)

Robert William Gilkeson (July 25, 1887-October 2, 1918)

Henry Bell Gilkeson, Jr. (February 8, 1890-November 16, 1901)