

Who was Clyde Potts??

Mr. Clyde Potts, for whom the Clyde Potts Reservoir is named, was a prominent person in our area, serving as Mayor of Morristown for over twenty years and the project engineer for the reservoir project. He also led or was key for many other projects that we still know today.

Clyde Potts was born in Libertyville, Jefferson County, Iowa, in 1876 (for reference, that's about ten years after the Civil War), the son of Mr. and Mrs. James Potts. His mother died when he was 4, his father when he was 8, so he was raised by an older sister, Margaret, who died in 1921.

He was graduated from high school in Des Moines, Iowa, and then from Cornell University in 1901. Mr. Potts was a prominent Civil Engineer specializing in sanitary work who was involved in or led many sewerage projects (plants and systems) for Morristown, Jersey City, other NJ communities, other states, and even foreign projects including Athens Greece, Havana Cuba, and Peru.. He performed consulting engineering and had an office in New York City. He wrote and presented papers on the engineering profession's role in society and on water supply strategies. Mr. Potts had many affiliations and memberships with major engineering and professional organizations and honor societies, was a member of the Sons of the American Revolution, and 33rd degree Mason.

Mr. Potts moved to Morristown in 1921, having become familiar with the town after performing engineering for a sewer project there. Clyde Potts served a remarkable total of 24-years as the Mayor of Morristown across many terms in the 1922 – 1948 period, in some cases being endorsed by both the Republican and Democratic parties and running unopposed. During his watch, the infrastructure for Morristown, including roads, schools, and parks, were improved. His interest in history led to the idea of a National Historical Park, becoming Jockey Hollow and Washington's Headquarters (Morristown National Historic Park, which was approved under President Hoover and dedicated under President F. D. Roosevelt). While serving with the NJ State Health Department, Mr. Potts helped establish the State-funded Bureau of Child Hygiene, which successfully reduced infant death rates in New Jersey and became a model for others to follow. His interest in aviation and his peripatetic nature led to the creation of Morristown Airport.

Mr. Potts was married twice. His first wife, Jane Miller Potts, died. In 1941, he remarried to a widow, Mary Ryan Field. Clyde and Mary lived at 4 Farragut Place in Morristown. One of his daughters, Elizabeth Potts Koleda, wrote a book exhaustively documenting major parts of the family genealogy entitled, "Gaskill Genealogy" (one of the major family names was Gaskill).

His presentations were relatively deep and philosophical, such as long-range planning for water supplies and the role of engineers in society, but some newspaper reports indicated that he could also be quite blunt. For example, there was an article on a political flap when he reportedly used a municipal vehicle after he and his wife got stuck with their own vehicle on a stormy night. He responded (very brusquely) that it was a false accusation and not worth wasting time about it, and he moved on.

Although he served as the project engineer on the design and construction of the reservoir, it was not until later that it was named for him. The reservoir provided essential water for Morristown, and still does. Clyde Potts' many efforts are still serving our area to this day.

Clyde Potts died in his home in 1950 at the age of 73. A Daily Record editorial said, "A friendly, even-tempered man, he was an indefatigable worker in the fields that most interested him - - history and good government. ...If ever a man deserves an immediate place in the heavenly ranks it should be Clyde Potts, for the service he rendered mankind while on earth."

- Information from the Morristown public library's Local History section, including various newspaper articles, books, and technical papers.
- Thanks to Mr. Matthew K. Stechauner, Town Clerk for Morristown, for the photograph.

