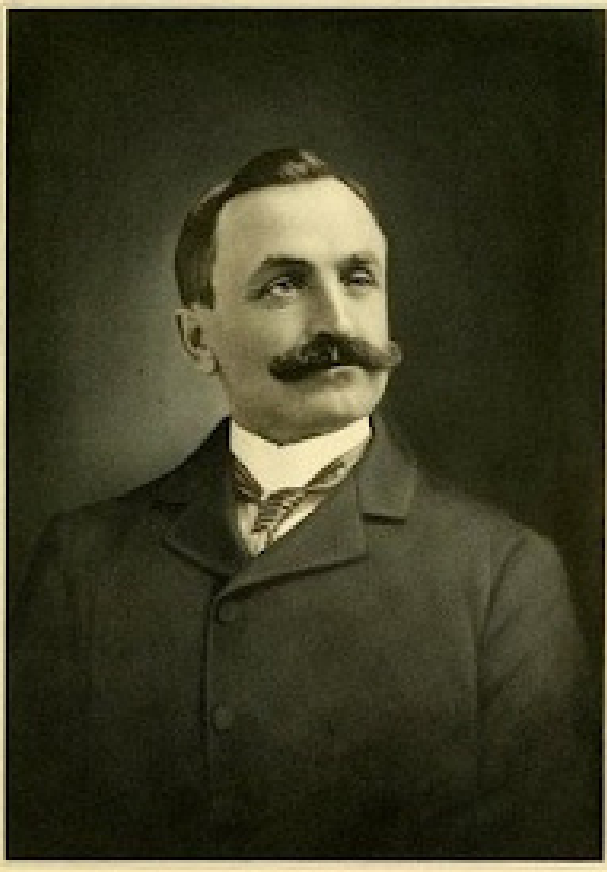


WHO WAS A. CROSBY KENNETT?



Few teachers or students are aware of the importance of this individual for whom our institution of higher learning was named. Are you?

A. Crosby Kennett was born in Madison on July 27, 1859, just prior to the outbreak of the Civil War. He was the son of William Kennett of Madison and Sarah E. Russell of Conway. He attended schools in Madison and New Hampton.

A great local trivia question would be, "What was A. Crosby Kennett's first name?" Old-timers such as Maurice Lovejoy, who Kennett took under his wing as a kid, said he hated the name and therefore went by the middle name. The answer: Alpheus. Mr. Lovejoy also relayed that whenever Stone's Drug Store came out with a new flavor of ice cream, A. Crosby would take him there to try it out. "That probably did not help his health at all as he loved ice cream," Maurice related.

The Kennett's were of Scottish origin and came to America in 1741 and settled in Kittery. They then moved to Wolfeboro and then Eaton - which part is now in Madison. Crosby was the oldest child of William and Sarah (Russell). He attended the New Hampton Literary Institute. As a young man, he drove a stage for his father between Madison and Ossipee and demonstrated "a remarkable capacity for work." He became interested in telegraphy and was put in charge of the station in South Berwick, later Salmon Falls, and ultimately West Ossipee. He also loved the woods and eventually acquired a keen interest in the lumbering business.

He bought much land in Passaconaway from the local merchant, Elijah Burbank Carlton. (Carlton was the original trustee of the Conway Public Library.) In 1888, he bought the Henry Metcalf Spool Mill in Conway (which became the largest in the world), extending into every part of the nation and Canada. Up to 50 men were employed. A million board feet of white birch was annually used in the factory. The power was produced by a 125-horsepower steam engine. Up to 2 million feet of wood was sawed in one winter. He added a planing mill and a box factory in 1897, eventually becoming the Conway Company. Boxes of all sizes and kinds were manufactured here. Up to 3 ½ million board feet of lumber were used each year. Twenty-five people were employed in this establishment and 75 more lumbered in Albany to supply the necessary raw materials. At one time he ran eleven portable sawmills. He owned as much as 70,000 acres in all of the local towns and the State of Maine. Also in 1897, Kennett helped form the first Electric Light Company, which was chartered in 1909.

Mr. Kennett was once the President of the Conway National Bank; a director of the Ossipee Valley Telephone Company; and treasurer of the Memorial Hospital. In politics, he was a staunch Republican and was elected to the State House in 1893 and the Senate in 1897. He was a member of the Governor's Council and served with the rank of Colonel. As a member, he secured the passage of a bill that prohibited the throwing of sawdust of mills into streams. He also secured passage of the State library law.

The Town Reports of the time are full of details of the involvement of Kennett in many ways. In 1915, for example, Kennett had the 202 foot covered bridge replanked with hard pine boards (for \$40.04!).

He helped to provide fuel for the schools. In 1916, he helped to maintain the state highway and repair the Cotton Mills (Conway Lake) Bridge and to break new roads. The political arena interested Kennett as well. He served as a member of the State House of Representatives from 1892-93 and again in 1895. He served also on the Republican State Committee. He distinguished himself statewide as a counselor to Gov. Nahum J. Batchelder (1903-5).

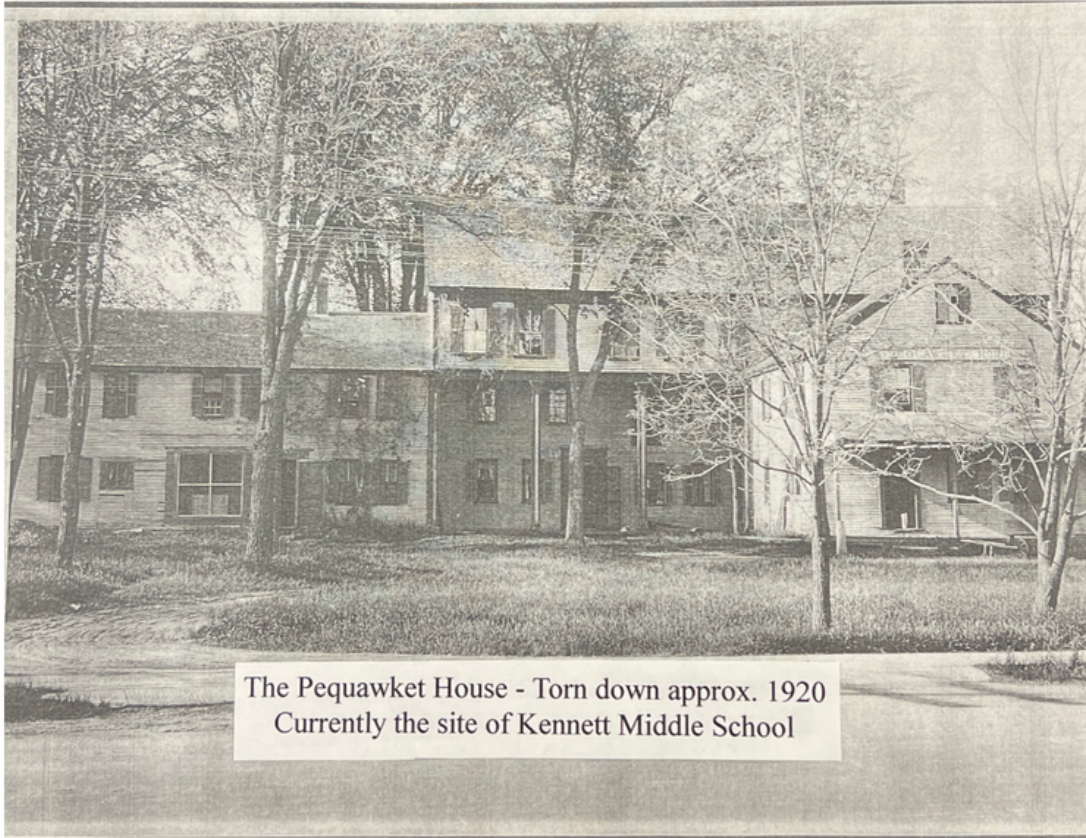
The Kennett family was also strongly involved in the affairs of the community. Mrs. (Lora) Kennett joined the Second Congregational Church in 1904 and she and her husband helped in the construction of the "Brown Church" in 1906. He was a member of the building committee. Their sons, Robert Harmon and Frank Edson would both join on April 15, 1923 and become valued members.

Kennett was an early trustee of the Conway Public Library, following in the footsteps of his mentor, Carlton. He was Chairman of the Trustees during the World War I years and served until his death.

A. Crosby Kennett was also a member of the Masons, Palestine Commandery, Knights Templar of Rochester and the Veterans Association. His religious devotion was always to the Congregationalists. He was the chief financial contributor to the edifice of our Second Congregational Church in 1906 on what was heretofore Kennett property. As most of you likely know, the Kennett barn stood where the Catholic Church was erected in 1952 which is today Robert Frost Charter School. At that time all of the land on both sides of the tracks, where the elementary and middle schools now stand, were level Kennett fields. The Kennett's served tirelessly on many committees as have succeeding generations.

In local affairs, Kennett gave of his time freely. He was a town moderator and always interested in the development of educational opportunities. As early as 1916, Kennett was a member of three of the "Special Committee of Litigation" along with John H. Garland and James Gibson. The trio looked into the feasibility of establishing a town high school. Kennett died at age 58 on December 5, 1917. His wife, Lora, herself the owner of an antique shop, offered to contribute funds toward the construction of a high school. The only stipulation was that it was to be named for A. Crosby Kennett.

On April 25, 1922, the Town of Conway accepted the gift. Opening day in 1923 saw 137 students with a staff of nine teachers. It was then one of the most complete and up-to-date educational institutes in the state and some said the finest looking structure. The spot finally selected as the site for the high school has a history of its own. According to personal notes from the late George T. Davidson, it was the scene of Thomas Abbott's Tavern and later was enlarged to the Adams Hotel, which was sold to Colonel John Hill.



It became known as the Pequawket House, where notables such as Daniel Webster, President and Mrs. Abraham Lincoln and sons, Lord Talleyrand, General John Stark, Horace Greenley and Mrs. Grover Cleveland stayed. Rates were \$6 to \$9 a week. It was a stop on the stage route from Boston. John Shorey was the final owner and it was ultimately run as a boarding house for Polish mill workers before being razed.

When Mr. Kennett died on December 5, 1917, there had never been such a gathering of locals and dignitaries attend a funeral. Known nationwide, he was beloved by friends and family as well - a great counselor, collaborator and industrialist had gone on "to higher levels."

Contributed by Brian P. Wiggin

(Much info from Hobart Pillsbury's, "New Hampshire: A History" by the Lewis Historical Publishing Company of New York. 1927.