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Western Union Telegraph Expedition - Clippings, 1865 - 1867

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[[newspaper clipping]]

[[handwritten]]Chicago Tribune

Nov 15 1866[[/handwritten]]

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[[bold headline]]THE LATE MAJOR KENNICOTT. [[/bold]]

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[[bold]]Meeting of the Academy of Sciences-The Deceased Naturalist-Tributes to his Worth-Remarks by G.C. Walker, Esq., Professor Andrews, Lieutenant Governor Bross, Dr. Stimson and Hon. J.Y. Scammon.

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Major Robert Kennicott, the founder of the Chicago Academy of Sciences, and at the time of his death a Trustee and Director of the Museum, was so well known in this city, and his loss is so much regretted, that the tributes paid to his memory at the meeting of the Academy on Tuesday evening will be read with interest. We give the remarks in full:

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE ACADEMY.

The president of the Academy, George C. Walker, Esq., said:

It becomes my sad duty to announce to the Academy the death of the Director of the Museum, Robert Kennicott.

He died at Nelato on the Yukon River, in Russian America, last May.

The only account we have yet received was from Mr. Charles Pease, a member of the scientific corps under Major Kennicott, to his friends in Cleveland.

As you are all aware Major Kennicott went to the northern country in the employ of the Russo-American Telegraph Company, and to pursue the scientific explorations and to make scientific collections for the benefit of this Academy and the Smithsonian Institution of Washington. He took with him as co-laborers in his great work several young men of considerable scientific attainments. He died in the midst of his labors and before he had the opportunity to perform any considerable portion of the work he had undertaken to accomplish.

It is with a full heart that I attempt to say a few kind words in memory of one whose face was so familiar to us all, and yet upon which we shall not look again until we, too, shall be added to the number of those who have "crossed the dark river" and have realized the hidden things of the unknown future. I shall only speak of him as a friend, and as I knew him in his private life, and of his connection with this Academy.

Of his scientific attainments, you that are well versed in science can more truly speak, but as a faithful friend none knew his honest heart better than I, or realized more fully the entire devotion of his whole life to the cause of science, and to the welfare of our Academy.

None but those who have loved faithfully, and lost, can ever know the bitter sadness of those few lines flashed over the wires across the continent: "Major Kennicott died suddenly at Nelato last May." Long months of suspense and anxious waiting had passed, and no word from "Bob."

As week followed week, and the time we ought to have letters came and passed, his friends seemed to feel an inward sense that some sad news was coming, and yet would not, could not, even to themselves, admit that they thought anything serious had happened to him. The "longing" to hear from him, none but his dearest friends will appreciate.

Often he had said, "No news is good news," and we had tried to think so, and to make ourselves believe that our fears were groundless.

In July the half-yearly express came from the Arctic regions bringing letters from friends he had made on the previous northern trip, but no news from him. They knew he was coming from the other side of the mountains and had waited for him until the last moment before writing, but he had not reached the fort. Then we said: In the fall we shall hear



and all will be explained, for the vessels will then return from their summer trip to St. Michaels. And so our hearts were kept from sinking from week to week by our hope and faith that all would yet be well with him. Then came the saddest of all news, that he was dead. It was so unexpected and apparently so sudden, that at first it dulled our feeling, and we could not realize that he would not return to us in the winter. But he has gone, and as time passes we shall feel the full extent of our great loss.

It does seem very hard that he should have died so far from home, and without the kind care and attentions that loving friends would have given him. There is a peculiar sadness about it that words fail utterly to express. He died alone. No one near to hear his last words. No one by whom to send a fond, loving message to friends whom he knew would be so lonely after he was gone, or to his sisters and brothers whom he loved so dearly and for whom he would have sacrificed everything.

He went out in the morning-only a little way from the Fort-sat down on the river bank and died. Can anything be sadder?

You all know the interest he took in the Academy, and of his labors to promote its welfare. All his energy and perseverance was devoted to the building up in our midst of a museum that should be one of the largest in the country. He thought that here in Chicago, the city destined to be the largest and most active in the Northwest, should be located the finest museum west of the Alleghany. All his plans were for the attainment of that grand result. The future had no charm for him save in the prospect that his labors and the labors of all his co-workers should finally be crowned with the most brilliant success.

His eye would kindle with joy when he would speak of all he hoped to accomplish for science in the city he always called his own. In all his work for years and years, on the Western Prairies of the East, all through the desolation of country, everywhere, he had been laying the foundation, broad, deep and secure, for a grand scientific society and museum near the place of his boyhood years and near the beautiful home of his dear old father. Often has he told me of the longing of his heart and of the glorious hopes that had cheered him during his arduous labors and his long and continued travels over the land.

His life was a perfect devotion to science and to the accomplishment of the great end which to him seemed so desirable and so worthy the labor of a whole life. It was not the thought of a day, or that excitement that comes and goes with the hour, soul-absorbing ambition which nerved him to consistently increasing effort and controlled all his actions to the very last.

For weeks before he sailed from New York he travelled night and day, working hard all the time doing most of his writing on the cars, going to all the museums in Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore and Washington, seeing all the scientific men he could reach and not leaving a thing undone that could advance the interests of the Academy. His earnest desire was to leave the affairs of the society in the best shape possible for continued advancement. He crowded the work of months into weeks and almost into days. Once he wrote me, "Oh, George, would that I were five men I have so much to do, and so little time to do it in, but *I'm going to do it all the same*," and he did. One or two brief extracts from his letters will show his absorbing interest in all that pertained to the Academy and his anxiety for its success.

Once after speaking of all his plans for the future advancement of the Academy, and of the bright prospects before us, he says: "With the grand things I now have to live for, I shall die hard if I do go under while away. Nevertheless I must take all due precautions against such a contingency by getting pledges from the company to respect my rights should I lose my life in their service and by securing to the Academy the fullest benefit of all my claims on this and other collections."

In another he says: "I was very much pleased with the honor conferred

upon me by making me Trustee and Director. When I telegraphed my acceptance of the Directorship I fully determined that I should never try for a higher rank than that is in the world, and whatever I do shall be with reference to working directly or indirectly for the Academy." In another he says: "I've only commenced my work for the Academy, and I must do more each additional year."

When he left New York the future looked very bright to him. He had made all necessary arrangement for the Academy during his absence, and he thought he had before him a grand work to do—one that should add vastly to scientific knowledge, and also do very much toward building up the museum here. The vast collections he hoped to make and to induce others to make, after he should return we should receive material that would place us on a par with the older institutions of the land. It was a mine rich and unfathomable, from which we could draw for many years to come. It was another step in advance toward the grand final result he was working for. I cannot state to you all the annoyances to which he was afterward subjected. If he failed to accomplish all that he had hoped to do, it was through no fault or electronic shortcoming of his own. Circumstances over which he had no control detained him in California for months, so that when he finally reached the field of his labor it was too late to do anything that season, and thus a year was lost.

What has occurred since then we do not yet know, but from the tenor of Mr. Pease's letter we know that he was still further troubled by things which he could not change. Annoyed, disappointed and heart-broken, he has gone, a martyr to science. Whatever may be the final result of science, a truer, nobler man was never sacrificed for any public undertaking. Whether it shall receive the greatest benefit he desired and believed it would; whether museums shall be filled with the product of the labors of the various agents into whom he has infused the first sparks of scientific ardor, still the great fact remains, he gave his life to the cause he so much loved.

Brought up under the rule and precept of the gentlemen of the old school, having a home made so beautiful by the taste and labor of that genial, warm-hearted, whole-souled, good old Dr. Kennicott, with the love of science inborn and heart-absorbing, is it strange that, although young in years, he had impressed upon all who knew him, that honestly of purpose, that love for the truth in science, in nature, in everything, and that genial, warm-hearted friendship that made his presence always welcome.

Science has lost a most devoted worshipper; this Academy its greatest supporter—I could honestly say its founder, for to him more than to any other man, is due the honor and credit of establishing this Museum of Natural Science. I do not mean to take from a single one of you the praise that you deserve for the labor that you have given to the Academy, both in its earlier and later years. When I say a kind word for his memory, and a word of praise for all he accomplished and would have done had he lived, I do not detract at all from your justly merited need of praise.

As for myself, I feel that I have lost a friend whose like I shall not know again. I respected him as few men respect each other. For years I was most intimately connected with him, knew all his plans, all the longings of his honest heart, knew all the annoyances and vexations with which he had to contend, and I say with a full soul, "few better men have ever lived."

REMARKS OF DR. E. ANDREWS.

Dr. Andrews thought that few appreciated the amount of labor which the deceased had rendered to the cause of science, and the enthusiasm which he infused into these about him. The remark that he was the founder of the Academy was strictly correct, and no man had done so much to add to its collections and to place it on a permanent footing.

Everything which had been said in eulogy of his memory was strictly true, and much more might be said. Dr. Andrew's remarks were more extended than here gives, and paid a high tribute to the worth of the deceased.

REMARKS OF LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR BROSS.

At the conclusion of the remarks of Dr. Andrews, Lieutenant Governor Bross paid the following tribute to the character of the deceased:

As I was probably the last member of this Academy and the last of his early friends who saw Mr. Kennicott, it is proper that I should pay a passing tribute to his memory. On arriving in San Francisco in the first week of July, 1965, I was greatly pleased to meet Mr. Kennicott. As usual, he was full of enthusiasm in regard to scientific subjects, and inquired eagerly as to the condition of this Academy, and about his friends in this city. He took me down to the wharf and introduced me to Captain Scammon, the commander of one of the vessels of the Telegraphic Squadron, a brother of Hon. J. Young Scammon, of this city, and, together, they gave me much valuable information as to the appointments of the different vessels and the means to be used to secure success. Mr. Kennicott pointed out upon the map the localities he had explored during his previous tour in the Northwest, and the routes by which following up the Youcan River he expected to reach the headwaters of Frazor River, and then the Columbia; or as the valleys of the Youcan and a branch of Mackenzie's River seem to rise in the same valley, he would follow the course of the latter through the Rocky Mountains eastward, and thence make his way by Pembina to Chicago. I found him there the same earnest enthusiastic lover of science I had ever known him to be from boyhood. Indeed he seemed to me to be the very embodiment of scientific enthusiasm, reminding me more of my ideal of Dr. Kane than any other man I ever knew.

Leaving San Francisco, the Colfax party travelled north through Oregon and Washington Territory, and at Victoria on the south end of Vancouver's Island I again met Mr. Kennicott, as the Telegraphic expedition had called there on its way to Behring's Straits. He was delighted that the long suspense was at length broken, and that he was now bound for the field of his labors in the Far North. He spoke with great enthusiasm of what he hoped to accomplish for science and the collections he would be able to make for this Academy. I had known him from boyhood, and watched the expansion and the growth of his mind, and especially the effect of his first tour to the North, and though he had grown in years he seemed not to have lost any of the enthusiasm and singleness of devotion to the absorbing themes of science. His short but eventful and useful life is a most valuable lesson to our young men. It shows that a thorough devotion to any pursuit will be sure to command success now as it ever has been in the past. Robert Kennicott, whom many of us have known from boyhood, has made for himself an honorable name among scientific men of the nation—a name of which, as citizens of Chicago and members of this Academy, we may all be proud. His bright example and persevering efforts should stimulate the young men of our city and State to a life of usefulness, stern labor and earnest devo-

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tion to some noble pursuit, that, like Robert Kennicott, they may have an honorable name when their work is done.

The Secretary pro tem then read the following paper, written by Dr. William Stimson, Secretary of the Academy, who was not able to be present.

REMARKS OF DR. STIMSON

We have met here in our old rooms to-night for the first time since the fire which so nearly compassed the destruction of the entire scientific property of our Association, only to hear the sad news of an

incomparably greater disaster-the death of the Director of our Museum. He died at his post in the performance of an arduous and dangerous duty, in a far distant land; a region wilder, less known and less explored than any other upon our continent. He died a martyr to his devotion to science, and to the interests of this Academy.

The short time which has elapsed since the confirmation of the news of his death, has not sufficed me for the preparation of a biographical history. To tell the story of his eventful life as it should be told, which I hope to have the privilege of doing at some future time, will require study and research. Major Kennicott's labors for science have been performed in so many different fields in the East and the Far North, as well as in the West, that none of us can claim to have been familiar with his life in all of its phases and circumstances, however intimately we may have known it in any one of them.

I shall confine myself now to a brief sketch of his character and of his methods of studying and an advancing his favorite science of zoology, as far as they fell under my observation during the frequent periods of his residence at Washington. At the Smithsonian Institution we were co-workers in the Zoological Department, under the leadership of our beloved and respected friend, Professor Spencer F. Baird, Assistant Secretary of that institution. Mr. Kennicott first came to Washington in the spring of 1857-8, for the purpose of assisting Professor Baird in the arrangement of the reptiles of the Smithsonian Museum, while at the same time he was engaged in the preparation of a Report on the Natural History of Mammals of the Northwest, which was published in the agricultural volumes of the Patent Office Report for 1857, and was much admired for its clearness of style, its accuracy of detail, and its wealth of new facts regarding the habits and economy of the smaller mammals in particular-a subject which had been generally neglected by previous writers.

Mr. K's report has proved of great value to agriculturists, in pointing out the means of avoiding the depredations of the rodents. But as a contribution to zoological science it has a still higher value, and it at once established the reputation of its author as a field naturalist of great power and accuracy of observations. In this indeed he was excelled by no one in the country; and it was fortunate for science that he finally devoted himself chiefly to a department for which he was so well adapted by character and training. Though repeatedly urged to take up descriptive zoology and nomenclature, and thereby secure to himself the credit of his discoveries in an enduring form, he steadfastly refused, conceiving that he could do no more for science in the field than in the closet. And this was not from [[?]] want of ability for closet work, as his published papers show. His descriptions of new reptiles in the proceedings of the Philadelphia Academy of Natural Sciences, are complete and well written, and evince a power of discrimination between closely allied species which could only have been the result of patient study and comparison. But Mr. Kennicott's unselfish disposition never permitted him to seek advantage or reputation for himself, either in his private or his scientific life. His generous devotion led him rather to heap up new materials for investigation by other naturalists, and, in doing this, to expend his time and vigor in penetrating regions which few besides himself would have had the courage and endurance to explore. How well he succeeded I need not tell you. The writings of Baird, Cassin, Bryant, Cope, Gill, LeConte, Meek, Conce, and many other naturalists, abound in notices of his contributions to the fauna of North America, and particularly to its far northern and less accessible regions.

Mr. Kennicott also has contributed to the advancement of science in many ways other than by his own personal exertions. For one so young, he possessed administrative abilities in a remarkable degree. He was quick at planning, and very successful in securing assistance in the working out of details. He had a wonderful power of exciting the interest

of others in his pursuits, and of communicating to them a portion of his own enthusiasm. While on his three-years journey through the Arctic and subarctic regions of North America, he thus secured to science the services of very many of the officers of the Hudson's Bay Company, who have, in addition to the assistance rendered to him, continued their collecting operations since, as is shown in the large annual invoices of specimens sent by them to the Smithsonian Institution, even to this day.

Few indeed could be thrown in contact with our departed friend without becoming interested in his tireless energy, his enthusiasm, and his single-hearted pursuit of scientific objects. The history of his connection with the re-organization of this Academy in 1864 is known to you all. To his exertions, in connection with the Smithsonian Institution, and to the liberal pecuniary assistance of our citizens, of which a considerable share is due to the interest excited on his account, the Academy is mainly indebted for the extensive scientific museum it now possesses. Nor must we forget that the museum is soon to be enriched by the results of that expedition which has cost him his life and is an irreplaceable loss.

In this connection I may be allowed to relate an anecdote illustrative of the purity and unselfishness of his love for science. When the Russo-American Telegraph expedition was about to be organized, the Company lost no time in securing the services of Mr. Kennicott, whose practical knowledge of the country to be traversed by the line on the American side, was exceeded by that of no man in the country. He was offered pecuniary compensation, large indeed, but not more than such services from such a man well worth. To the surprise of those who did not know him well, Mr. Kennicott chose to relinquish his claim to the greater portion of this compensation, on condition of being allowed, instead, to take with him a corps of young naturalists, and to devote a portion of his time to the pursuit of his favorite science. Here, with the path of fortune opening to him, he refuses to make use of his opportunities for his own personal advantage, and generously devotes them to a nobler object.

Of Mr. Kennicott in his private relations I need say but little. Others can tell you, much better than I, how much he was beloved and trusted in his own immediate family, and how exemplary has been his conduct as a son and a brother. He was a staunch friend and a pleasant companion, his conversation being ever fresh and new, and his spirits seldom or never depressed. In the course of the later years of his life he became acquainted with nearly all the naturalists of distinction in our country, and made friends of all of them. None spoke of him but with praise of his actions and admiration of his energy. It was, however, in the field that his qualities shone most conspicuously. Those of us who have been with him in the woods, by the river side, or on the broad prairies, and listened to his talk of birds, fishes, insects or plants, and participated in his eager search for specimens in all departments of life, will not soon forget the delights of our intercourse with him at such times. With him for a companion, the dullest could not fail to become inspired with a love for Nature and her glorious works. He would discover points of interest in place which another would pass endlessly by and find varieties dear to the eye of the naturalist in the most unpromising localities. His long practice enabled him to do this; yet his interest never flagged; his mind was never satiated with discovery, and his delight at learning a new fact was as great to the last as when he first walked to the fields with net and gun.

Well may we lament the loss we have sustained in the untimely decease of our fellow member. The hopes we have entertained of a brilliant future, for him, as a friend of whose virtues and attainments we were all proud, and now laid low by the hand of death. We can no longer look forward to his return from expeditions, great and small, laden with acquisitions to our museums, and with additions to our knowledge of

distant lands. But let his example inspire us to do the work which he would have done, had he been spared to us. Let the enterprise which he had so large a share in originating still advance toward perfection; and our museum will soon become worthy of the city in which we live, and a fit monument to his memory.

REMARKS OF HON. J. Y. SCAMMON

Mr. Scammon said:

Mr. President-In arising to second the motion of Dr. Andrews for a committee to prepare a suitable biographical notice of Major Robert Kennicott, the originator and director of this institution-while in no sense desiring to be understood as dissenting from the sorrow expressed in the paper read by our respected president, the efficient aid and the courage of that friend to science whose sudden death we all so feelingly lament-I wish to call attention to the members of the Academy to the consideration of the fact that our friend died upon the field of battle, with his harness on, in the midst of a fight. There are heroic fields in every department of life. The soldier who surrenders his life at the cannon's mouth fighting courageously in defence of his country, is said to have died upon the field of glory, and he received the just plaudite of his fellow-citizens. There are scientific fields no less glorious, and Kennicott, boldly and courageously exploring the inhospitable regions of the Arctic Pole, exhibits a boldness, courage, and perseverance, not less worthy of public approbations.

It is a great glory to a man to die in the harness of that profession or occupation which is suited to his taste or genius. The field of glory or each one of us is the field of use. Society is human. God created man in his own image and likeness, and society resembles man. No two men are alike, and there is no one man that cannot do some one thing better than any other man. Each one of us has his place in the grand mass of human society, and we can only become really distinguished in the appropriate place which use and duty assign us.

Director Kennicott's-I choose to call him by his title in this institution rather than by his military designation-peculiar place was as an investigator in the field. As such he was surpassed by no man living. As such he was honored and appreciated by the first scientific men in the country, including Professors Baird and Agassiz; and it his glory and renown, that foregoing all other considerations, he heroically and courageously devoted himself to the investigation of natural history and science in the field, and surrendered his natural life while in the front of the great army of scientific explorers.

Were I to choose my own epitaph, it should read, He died with the harness on, in the conscientious and courageous discharge of the duties of his profession.

I never intended to retire from business to rust out, so long as God gives me strength for active employment, and I honor Kennicott, not only for his zeal and devotion, but as a scientific soldier who died upon the field of battle.

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[[bold title]]SINGULAR SUICIDE.[[/bold title]]

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[[bold]]A Woman Run Over and Killed by a Railroad Engine-Persistent Search for Death.[[/bold]]

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A very singular case of suicide occurred on Tuesday evening on the track of the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy Railroad. An unknown woman, concerning whose name and history no information can be gleaned, was seen about six o'clock in the evening, prowling about the Illinois Central round-house in a manner which excited the suspicions of the employee of the road. She returned evasive answers to every question addressed to her, and she seemed very reluctant to leave the vicinity of the track. An hour later, while a passenger train was coming

into the city, the mysterious lady posted herself so near to the track that the engine brushed the skirt of her dress, and the engineer in passing, put his hand to her head and pushed her away. Still she refused to depart. There appeared to be a fascination for her in the passing trains, and one of the men employed in that vicinity hazarded the remark that she acted like a woman who desired to destroy herself. At another time the same evening she was seen kneeling in the very center of the track, right where the train would pass, a proceeding which argued either insanity, drunkenness, or a fixed determination to be run over. She was not drunk, however, and her replied to the workmen indicated no unsoundness of mind.

A little after ten o'clock she succeeded in carrying out her strange resolve. A train of passenger and reight cars, belonging to the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy Railroad Company, left the Central depot at 9:55, and reached a narrow alley between Michigan and Wabash avenue, near Sixteenth street, about ten minutes after ten o'clock. Just as the train turned the curve the engineer's attention was attracted by a woman who started suddenly from the fence, and planted herself in the path of the engine. He immediately reversed the engine and called loudly to the infatuated creature to get out of the way. She refused to stir, and seemed not to hear or heed the warning. The train was running at the rate of only four miles an hour, and was very promptly stopped. But it was too late. The engine and one freight car had already passed over her body, mangling it in a frightful manner. The head was bettered out of shape, and her limbs were almost severed from the body. The remains were taken in charge by officer O'Sullivan, who had them conveyed to the dead house to await identification. No blame whatever attaches to the railroad company, as the accident was evidently the result of a settled determination on the part of the woman to put an end to her existence in that peculiar way.

Coroner Wagner held an inquest on the body yesterday afternoon, at the city cemetery, when the following testimony was taken before the jury:

Hiram C. Washborne being sworn, testified in substance as follows: I am engineer on locomotive No. 31. in the employ of the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy Railroad. The train left the Central depot at 9:55 on Tuesday

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The mission of the Smithsonian is the increase and diffusion of knowledge - shaping the future by preserving our heritage, discovering new knowledge, and sharing our resources with the world. Founded in 1846, the Smithsonian is the world's largest museum and research complex, consisting of 19 museums and galleries, the National Zoological Park, and nine research facilities. Become an active part of our mission through the Transcription Center. Together, we are discovering secrets hidden deep inside our collections that illuminate our history and our world.

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