

Edward Cross – Henry O. Kent Letters, 2005-021 1850-1862

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Collection Overview

Title: Edward Cross – Henry O. Kent Letters

Bulk Dates: 1850-1862

Accession Numbers: 2005-021

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Provenance and Acknowledgements: Gift of M. Faith Kent, Lancaster, N.H. Ms. Kent is the granddaughter of Henry O. Kent.

Processor: David Smolen

Access Restrictions: No restrictions

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Repository: Special Collections, Tuck Library

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Biographical Note/Summary:

These letters from Edward Ephraim Cross to Henry Oakes Kent represent one side of a correspondence between best friends, one of whom left home in 1850 to explore the expanding country and the other who stayed home.

Cross was born on April 22, 1832, Kent on February 7, 1834. They became boyhood friends in their hometown of Lancaster, a farming community of just over a thousand people north of the White Mountains. Cross's father, known

locally as Col. Cross, was a prominent figure in town, although his son's later actions indicate that he was an unreliable provider for his family. Kent's father, Richard P. Kent, was a local merchant and a civic leader in Lancaster.

At the age of fifteen, Cross found work as a printer at the *Coos Democrat*, the Jacksonian weekly newspaper. Its proprietor, James Rix, was a bitter partisan who later won colorful mention in one of the Cross letters as "a strange misanthropic man (with) a relentless system of hatred towards all those who did not agree with him in politics" (Cross to Kent, April 17, 1856). The two friends shared an interest in drama and story-telling and a "taste for things 'military'" (Cross to Kent, January 15, 1853). Both were attentive students in the local schools.

In 1850, Cross set out across the country. After attempting to connect with a New York-to-Cuba filibustering venture that was scuttled, he found a job as a printer at the *Cincinnati Times*, a daily newspaper. He was an excellent writer and a voracious reader, and he began contributing historical fiction and travel pieces to the *Times*. Before long he became a reporter and editor.

Cross wrote often to Kent during this period, and it is clear from the correspondence that Kent wrote back. The whereabouts of Kent's letters, if they still exist, is unknown. Cross regularly encouraged his friend to come west and join him. He described his encounters with women, his drinking exploits, his journalism work, and his adventures. He wrote about his prodigious efforts at self-education, including everything from a course in sword-fighting to his regular trips to a local library he had joined. The letters and his newspaper writings contain many allusions and references to Shakespeare and other writers in the English canon. Cross adopted a Falstaffian attitude toward life as being full of humbug, a word he used often. After Kent enrolled at Norwich University, a military school in Vermont, Cross wrote that he envied him the opportunity. Ever the older man advising the younger, he also wrote a scathing criticism of an essay his friend had produced for class.

Cross traveled extensively. He went to Indiana and Kentucky, took a trip to the South, and visited Philadelphia. His letters are filled with his sharp views on what he saw. Cross was the *Times'* political correspondent in Washington for several winters during the mid-1850s. His letters to Kent provide many observations about his own political stance and his reactions to the shifting political winds of the period. Cross's travels had convinced him that the South was a backward region, but he loathed abolitionism. "Negroes are not citizens and never should be," he wrote. "This is a white man's government" (Cross to Kent, March 28, 1857). The *Times* was an American Party paper, and Cross became a fervent Know-Nothing. (He was fervent in all things all his life.) He covered national Know-Nothing conventions for the *Times* and stuck to the party line even after the party faltered, supporting Millard Fillmore for president in 1856. He could not, he wrote, support "the 'Republican doctrines – in fact I have not yet found out what they are'" (Cross to Kent, March 24, 1856). Kent was by then a Republican.

In 1858, Cross left the *Times* and traveled across the Rocky Mountains to the Arizona Territory in the employ of the Santa Rita Mining Co. He brought the first printing press to Arizona and started territory's first newspaper, the *Arizonian*, a weekly subsidized by the mining company. He fought a famous duel in which he and another Arizona pioneer and booster named Sylvester Mowry fired carbines at one another four times each at forty paces with no ill effect. The humorist Artemus Ward (Charles Farrar Browne) had worked with Cross at the *Coos Democrat* and was also known to Kent. Ward wrote a column lamenting Cross's death. Cross had survived the duel, Ward wrote, but had later been killed by Mexicans in a dispute over barking dogs. This "infernal lie" incensed Cross, and he wrote to Kent that when he next encountered Ward, he would "have a bit of satisfaction that he will remember to his dying day." (Cross to Kent, Sept. 14, 1859).

Cross's final prewar letter to Kent was written from San Francisco on July 3, 1861. It contains the oft-quoted sentence "I am ready for the wars." A month later Kent, who by then was assisting Gov. Nathaniel Berry in recruiting officers for volunteer infantry regiments, helped Cross secure his commission as colonel of the Fifth New Hampshire Volunteers, Infantry.

Cross wrote sporadically to Kent during the war. The most vivid war letters came after the Fifth's fights at Fair Oaks (June 1, 1862) and Antietam (Sept. 17, 1862). Cross was shot through the thigh in the first battle and slightly wounded by shell fragments in the second. He returned to his regiment and fought at Fredereickburg, where an artillery shell nearly killed him, and at Chancellorsville, where he led a brigade. In his letters to Kent, Cross was characteristically blunt – and probably right – about political considerations depriving him of a promotion to brigadier general.

Cross won fame for his bravery and leadership during the war and died a hero's death at Gettysburg. The Fifth's memorial at Gettysburg rests near the Wheatfield on the spot where Cross was shot by a Confederate marksman on July 2, 1863. He died that night and was buried in Lancaster. Kent delivered a eulogy and wrote a remembrance of his friend in the Coos newspaper, which had changed party affiliation and become the *Coos Republican*. Kent was by then the paper's proprietor and editor. "The brave soldier, the true friend, the impulsive and honorable man, was borne to his final resting place in the valley he loved so well, amid all his wanderings," Kent wrote.

Kent never followed his friend's advice to go west and see the world. He graduated from Norwich Academy in 1854. In 1858 he was admitted to the New Hampshire bar and appointed to a commission to fix the border between Maine and New Hampshire. He also began his political career in the mid-1850s as a clerk to the House of Representatives in Concord. He was elected to the Legislature in 1862 and served as chairman of the committee on military affairs.

He had volunteered for service himself at the outbreak of the war but was assigned to help organize the recruiting service. On October 22, 1862, he was appointed colonel of the Seventeenth New Hampshire Volunteers, Infantry. This regiment never made it to the field, as its recruits were siphoned off by older regiments that needed reinforcements.

Kent had a long postwar career as a lawyer, businessman, banker, and politician. He switched to the Democratic Party in 1874 and served as a state senator during the mid-1880s. He gave seconding speeches for the nominations of Grover Cleveland in 1884 and William Jennings Bryan in 1900 at the Democratic national conventions. He was the Democrats' unsuccessful nominee for New Hampshire governor in 1894 and 1896.

Kent died at the age of 75 on March 21, 1909, and is buried in the family plot in Lancaster. His granddaughter, M. Faith Kent, preserved the Cross-Kent letters and donated them to the New Hampshire Historical Society in 2005. **(Summary written by Mike Pride, Editor, Concord Monitor)**

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Box 1

- Folder 1: Correspondence, 6/1/1850 – 11/22/1854, 20 items
- Folder 2: Correspondence, 11/22/1854 – 6/15/1857, 20 items
- Folder 3: Correspondence, 7/9/1857 – 4/6/1862, 21 items
- Folder 4: Correspondence, 5/3/1862 – 10/24/1862, 12 items