

January 6, 1955

Internal Memorandum

Papers of Fred I. Kent

On the invitation of Miss Dorothy Warden, I went to Scarsdale to see the papers of Mr. Fred I. Kent, 70 Morris Lane, Scarsdale, New York. These papers were left in a basement room of his house which he himself always kept locked. The room was appropriately dusty and cold, although some cleaning had been done, and an electric stove was provided. The papers were heaped on bookcases, on two desks, and in various boxes. Very little sorting of any kind was visible, although in some instances the magazines and reports were isolated and piled in order.

Miss Warden and I spent the entire day going over the papers or part of them. We began with those which covered one desk and proceeded to another desk. As Miss Warden's task was the disposal of these papers, and mine was the finding out whether any of them were important enough to be saved, we decided that it would not serve either purpose to make a preliminary sorting. Afterwards, we decided that we might have saved time by isolating correspondence, reports, newspaper clippings, and so on, but in the state of confusion in which we found things, that was a secondary consideration.

This was truly the detritus of an extraordinarily active and varied life. Mr. Kent belonged to a great number of institutions and seems to have kept all their reports. One of the most interesting items was a tin Japanese box, perhaps 2-1/2 feet wide, covered and provided with a lock such as used to be used to store valuable papers. This was apparently filled with material which Mr. Kent had sent to his father, Mr. Henry Kent. It contained magazines in which Mr. Kent's articles were published, envelopes full of letters from important people which he had apparently sent to his father as a testimony to the importance of the work which he was doing, and other memorabilia of the kind which a devoted son may send a parent. The box had apparently come from Chicago at the time of Mr. Kent Sr.'s death, and the supposition was that it had not been opened since that time. The letters contained in it were of early dates, and some of them looked to have considerable importance.

In accordance with Miss Warden's need to throw away, we discarded a good deal of material which, on first sight, seemed to have no value excepting as testifying to the many activities of Mr. Kent. We made it a rule to save the following things.

- 1) All correspondence, to be looked over a second time.
- 2) All material concerned with the Federal Reserve System (there was a report dated December 12, 1918 of which two carbon copies existed).
- 3) All financial matters, that is, reports which had to do with finance.

We discarded a great deal of material from New York University which had to do with reports on various chemical experiments. These seemed to have some to Mr. Kent in his role as President of the Council of New York University. They bore no sign of having been read.

There was a bookcase full of books on various phases of financial and monetary operations. There also seemed to be complete sets of economic journals of one kind or another. Thus far, the mass of correspondence which we found consisted largely of notes of thanks from prominent persons to Mr. Kent for having sent them a copy of some speech or other. He was obviously a very popular speaker and a very busy public relations man. Among this material, however, occasional letters turned up which were of far greater apparent importance. This correspondence will have to be gone over a second time.

There were also boxes of stamps cut from envelopes, and there must, at some time, have been an order to Mr. Kent's secretary to clip stamps from incoming letters. His correspondence was great and covered most of the world. The boxes might be a find for a stamp collector.

There were innumerable banquet lists, badges worn at meetings, copies of resolutions, and all the enormous amount of paper work which comes to a man of that character and which most people throw away. One suspects that Mr. Kent was either a man of enormous ego or had an underlying sense of insecurity which had to be

continually propped up by the saving of every scrap which seemed to prove how great a man he was. In physical stature, he was a small man, and these characteristics frequently accompany the small Napoleons of finance and business as well as politics and public affairs.

It is worth recording that Mr. Kent's house, situated on several acres of land in one of the wealthy sections of Scarsdale, is said to have been designed by himself. This is probably an exaggeration. It was obviously the work of a good architect, and while there is no doubt that Mr. Kent would have had ideas on the subject of its arrangement, nevertheless, it was not one of the self-made houses which are sometimes so uncomfortable. It is a big and very comfortable house. The front entrance leads into an ample foyer with a handsome stair going to the second floor. On one side is a dining room, on the other side a great drawing room. In front of the foyer, so that one looks through the house from the front door out windows to the garden, is the office or study or library which Mr. Kent used for his own. It is not a library in the sense of an extensive collection of books, but rather the working study of a man who spends all day someplace else.

The furnishings were of comfortable and expensive middle-class type, very solid and substantial. The floors were covered with Oriental rugs, and the furniture was solid mahogany of the late 19th or early 20th century. As furniture, it was undistinguished in that it had no pretension to antiquity or to beauty of design. A handsome bow-front chest in the front hall was an exception to this general rule. The whole thing bore the look of the average American's idea of a comfortable house, wealthy, expensive, but above all comfortable. If Mr. Kent was a man of pretensions, those pretensions were probably matters of his own personal ambition rather than in the field of art. The exception to this is the fact that he himself was a musician and the founder of a musical club in Chicago from where he came. His sister, Miss Kent, who is still alive at the age of 80 was a music

teacher in Chicago and still plays the piano.

Mr. Kent's acquaintance must have been enormous, and one gleans from his secretary and his sister the sense of a warm-hearted, very busy, very energetic and supremely outgoing person. His sister, Miss Jessie, said she was not brought up to spend money where the spending of it could be avoided, and she would not telephone from her room in a hotel when she could go down and make a call for less money from the booth on the main floor. She was, however, quite willing to buy dresses when they seemed to be bargains. This was a small, but probably significant, commentary on the family habits.

Mildred Adams:ib