

[note: George Kimber was a Charter Member of the APCG in 1935 and its first Vice President. Quite out of the blue in June, 2004, a woman in Quebec, Louise Chamard, asked if I could provide information on Mr. Kimber, his name and address being on the address label of a November 14, 1944 issue of *Life Magazine* she had bought for a collector friend. From this query came the following biographical information, kindly provided by his daughter, Clarissa Kimber, Professor Emeritus of Geography at Texas A&M University. The photo, also provided by Ms. Kimber, is from about 1935. –Bob Richardson]

George Card Kimber 1898-1960, a brief note

George Kimber was born July 4, 1898 in Brooklyn, New York. His father was Dr. Arthur Clifford Kimber, Jr, Vicar of St. Augustine Mission Chapel in Trinity Parish, New York City. Both his father's parents had come to America from England in the early 19th Century. George's mother was Clarissa Evans, music teacher and daughter of two old up state New York farming families. George was the youngest of three boys; a younger sister died in infancy. Throughout his life he was influenced by religion, the temperance movement and music.

As a very young boy, he had a year (1903-4) in England at the Froeble Academy in Canterbury, Kent during the time his older brothers were at boarding school and his mother took lessons in music and pedagogy. Upon the family's return to New York, his mother took him to be interviewed by the Prescentor at the Episcopal Cathedral of St John the Divine. He was found to have a nice voice, untrained, but he could hit high C! The family moved from Brooklyn to Manhattan in 1908 to be closer to the Cathedral school and their father's church.



When George's father died in 1909, his mother decided to take her sons to California where her family was then living. They sailed via Cuba for New Orleans where they would take the train on to California. All the boys delighted to being on a steamship again. George was always interested in things mechanical and his father had toured the steamships' engine rooms with the boys on the crossings to Europe. Upon reaching Los Angeles, they proceeded to his aunt's ranch in Hanford, Kings County which was the Evaness' family headquarters at that time.

Mrs. Kimber was anxious to raise her sons in an academic setting and went to Berkeley, the location of the University of California. She became a music teacher using her skill and developing interest in pedagogy. After a year in Berkeley, she found the city too large and an uncongenial social environment. She decided to move to Palo Alto across the bay where the Stanford University faculty might have a stronger influence on the social climate of the much smaller town. Able to sell some property in New York City from her husband's estate, she bought a small farm nearby. All were expected to take

on odd jobs to earn money. George's older brother decided to start a chicken business to do his part.

Instead of just giving music lessons Mrs. Kimber decided to start a music school. She called it the Palo Alto School of Music. Members of the San Francisco Symphony could offer private lessons through the School, as could other freelance teachers of musical instruments. The oldest brother John was very musical. He played the violin, piano and several other instruments. The middle brother, Clifford took up the cello, bassoon, and oboe. George took up the violin, viola and cornet. Soon they were playing trios among themselves and quartets with other students of the school. They went through a lot of the musical literature in those days. By the time George reached highschool, his mother was reading to him most of his textbook lessons. He had a congenital rupture of the right eye, which made it weak, and for a time he could not see at all.

The family began to have so much to do in town that they could not keep up the farm. They moved into Palo Alto. George, in time, followed his brothers to Stanford University. There he majored in botany after deciding that he was not good enough to make significant contributions in mathematics, meanwhile playing violin in the Palo Alto Symphony. His Aunt Annie Kimber arranged for a tutor to read for him. His reader, Mr. Zvenigrad was a refugee, a Russian and an avowed Menshevik. He claimed to have known both Bolshevik-- Trotsky and Lenin, personally. After reading the lessons, he would stay and carry on long conversations and discussions concerning the history of developments in Eastern Europe and current issues in political thought. For several summers the brothers went to Camp Curry in Yosemite to act as bus boys and household help for the Currys. At that time George was to begin his love affair with mountains.

George Kimber graduated Phi Beta Kappa. After graduation he did a walking trip through southern England with Amos Willder, the poet and New Testament scholar, and brother of the more famous Thornton Wilder. He received a fellowship to study botany in Belgium from the Commission for the Relief of Belgium; he was eligible partly because his brother Clifford had been killed when his plane exploded over Romagne, Belgium in the Great War. (See here, *The Story of the First Flag* by Clara E. Kimber.) He spent a year in Brussels, Belgium working with Professor A. Rutot, Member of the Royal Academy of Belgium. While at the University he entered into the scientific and philosophical discussions encouraged by Rutot. He always thought he was able to participate in the political and social discussions of his fellow students, thanks to his long talks with Mr. Zvenigrad. He met and became close friends with Fernand Chodat, son of Robert Chodat, professor of botany and Director of both the Botanical Laboratory and the Alpine Laboratory of the University of Geneva, Switzerland. His friendship with Fernand Chodat led to an invitation to visit Geneva over the Christmas holidays, where he met Fernand's three sisters, the twins--Isabelle and Emma, named for Jane Austin heroines and an older sister Lucy who was a doctor. During the next summer he visited the Alpine Laboratory at Bourg St. Pierre. From there he and the other students took long hikes in the Alps, where he was able to make comparisons with the vegetation of the Sierra Nevada of California.

The winter of 1920-21 Kimber returned to California. An invitation to join the high school faculty in Hughson High School as the agriculture teacher gave him a chance to start looking for a farm of his own. His brother John had bought land for his chicken farm in the southern part of the San Francisco Bay area, better for livestock but not so good for general farming. Two years later George found his place and bought some acreage on Mariposa Creek in Merced County; and he began farming irrigated alfalfa. He returned the next year to Geneva where he married Isabelle Chodat, who had become a fine artist and graduate of L'Ecole des Beaux Arts de Geneve. They returned to the farm, which was named Ampney Fields after the village in Gloucestershire, England, the place of origin of his Kimber ancestors, to begin a family and life on a farm.

Kimber kept in touch with his academic friends. His father-in-law, Robert Chodat came to visit while on a lecture tour in California. Dr. Dr. J. B. Lillard, an anthropologist, was working in the Cosumnes River Valley and George Kimber did some mapping for him. Discovering that Kimber intended to move to a teaching position, Lillard offered him a position at the very new Saramento Junior College. Because there already was a botanist on the faculty, Dr. H. F. Copeland, he was offered a position as an instructor in Geography and History. Dr. Herbert Jenkins was the geologist on the faculty and became great friends of George's family. The two instructors frequently took students on excursions together. Jenkins' brother was the State Geologist, who sometimes came along. Meanwhile, his family was growing. The eldest, Clarissa had been born in Merced, but Elizabeth, Clifford, and John were born in Sacramento.

Kimber thought that one could learn on his own, but that formal education gave a discipline to the process. So, as his interest in geography developed further, he took courses at Stanford University and at the University of California. He made the acquaintance of Carl Sauer, who encouraged him to get Masters in Geography, which he got in 1933. In the summers of 1934 and 1935 Kimber went all over the state and southern Oregon to gather material for a projected textbook on the geography of California. At first his wife Isabelle went with him and sketched illustrations of landscapes for his text. At other times, his mother accompanied him along with daughter Clarissa. He received his degree from Stanford, but kept in contact with Berkeley and Carl Sauer, who became a real friend and mentor. He became acquainted with several geography students who went on to become university professors including Homer Aschmann, Bob Richardson, and George Carter. It was during this time that some like-minded people joined to form the Association of Pacific Geographers. George Kimber was the founding vice president of the organization.

In the early days of the depression George became interested in national politics; one of his closest friend was a California State Senator, John Swan. I remember many discussions over the dinner table about the passage of this bill, or that bill being hung up in committee, etc. He became interested in the plight of the elderly and recognized the lack pensions available to many of them. He was acquainted with persons in the Townsend Movement. He finally was persuaded to run on the Republican ticket for Congress. When he lost to the entrenched democratic incumbent, Frank Buck, he felt

that he had made enough impact that he was willing to run for a second time. The Young Republicans and the Townsendites backed him, but he lost a second time. He did not run again. However, he always kept in touch with the party. He was an associate of Earl Warren, who later became Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. Kimber shared many of his values, and was interested in national politics to the end of his life.

After Pearl Harbor, when the Japanese-Americans in California were considered enemy aliens and were forced to leave the West Coast and settle in defined areas in the mid-West for the duration, he became much involved in their welfare and with the legal processes associated with their removal and eventual return. Many remained life-long friends. During this time, his wife was concerned with the plight of Jewish refugees to the United States and promoted fund raising for the Free French after the fall of France.

His political activities were not limited to Congress and larger issues. He helped form the Faculty Senate at the Sacramento Junior College and took a leadership role in that organization. He represented the faculty with the administration. He later was appointed Dean of Letters and Sciences at the College which relieved him of some teaching duties, but he always kept his geography courses. I recall that one semester the texts for Introductory Cultural Geography were by Vidal de la Blach, Jean Bruhnes, and Ellsworth Huntington. The students were to examine the world geography text of the introductory class and to recast in the manner of one of the three authors. In the seminar-like environment there was always much lively discussion.

Kimber was a strong proponent of liberal arts education. He felt that an educated public was the responsibility of the state. He saw non- university, tertiary education as involving not only the trades but, more particularly, for him geography was fundamental to a general education. He lobbied for geography in small colleges as a foundation major for those who wished to go into politics and public education, and he considered it the ideal preparation for elementary teachers, especially those concentrating in the social studies. Kimber worked at many educational curriculum gatherings arguing for the benefits of geography in stimulating an informed electorate. Toward the end of the 1930s, his friends on State Education Committee introduced Kimber into educational policy controversies. He became a consultant for several school districts, aiding them on tertiary education matters. For Kimber, political action at numerous levels was a logical consequence of informed leadership.

He finally decided to get his PhD. in education at the University of California, Berkeley. This was during the Second World War. For much of a decade, he commuted by train Tuesdays and Thursdays for evening seminars and course work, writing his dissertation on "The Development of Criteria for the Establishment of Junior Colleges in California." Meanwhile Isabelle Kimber had become increasingly frail. She died in 1946 after a long illness. In 1949 he married a cousin, Josephine Gordon, who was a teacher and later a social worker in Sacramento.

George and Josephine Kimber made plans to move back to the ranch in Merced County, and after their child Naomi was born in 1955, Kimber retired to become a full

time farmer and consultant to various school districts in northern California. He began to implement his dream of being a farmer in the Jeffersonian sense.

George Kimber died in 1960, leaving his wife and his five children behind. Elizabeth had gone to England with a Fulbright Scholarship. She met and married fellow historian, John S. Nurser who later became a minister in the Church of England. Clarissa had decided to leave elementary school teaching and return to graduate school in geography at Madison, Wisc. John had married Joan Ford, a nurse and his childhood sweetheart, served his military service, and was living in Niles working for his uncle on the chicken ranch. Clifford had served his military service, finished at Stanford University, learned he was not a farmer and become a stockbroker. Josephine remained on the ranch with Naomi where she was raised as her father had wished in a rural, farming environment.

George Kimber had wide and eclectic tastes. He read both French and German. An omnivorous reader he left a fine family library based on his father's collections but greatly augmented by him. He was always interested in current events, and subscribed to a large magazine collection. I remember *Time*, *Foreign Affairs*, *Architectural Digest*, *Life Magazine*, and *Imago Mundi* among others. In addition to the library he left an extensive classical record collection.

George Kimber had a lively curiosity and was always interested in learning. In the early years of the Second World War, he was involved with the training of pilots at the local air bases. His interest in and knowledge of astronomy led to his teaching celestial navigation to the pilots at the local air base. I remember correcting a set of tests for him one evening after I had learned enough calculus. He had a drive for leadership. "Be good, strive and for the best," He felt compelled to give of it. He was proud of his father's missionary work in the Bowery of New York City especially its community orientation and practical edge. He was equally proud of his brother's sacrifice during World War I. For many years he flew the American flag in front of the house.

George Card Kimber was a scholar, scientist and teacher with a strong pastoral sense. Always the gentleman in an anachronistic and romantic way, he was interested in finding out how a particular thing worked, what were the geographic processes responsible for a landscape, what were the social events that lead up to the current political or cultural situation? He learned from everyone and was generous with his own information. Many of his students became personal friends who would stop and pass the time of day and argue some current topic.