

Kenan, William Rand, Jr. ^[1]

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by Thomas S. Kenan III, 1988

30 Apr. 1872–28 July 1965



William Rand Kenan, Jr. Image from the North Carolina Collection Photographic Archives.



^[2]A Virtual Museum of University History. ^[3]William Rand Kenan, Jr., scientist, businessman, and philanthropist, was born in Wilmington ^[4]. His father, William Rand Kenan ^[5], was born in Kenansville and became a wholesale merchant; his mother was Mary Hargrave, of Chapel Hill, whose family gave some of the land for The ^[6]University of North Carolina ^[6] when it was founded. Young Kenan attended Horner's Military School ^[7] at Oxford before entering The University of North Carolina in 1890; he was graduated with the B.S. degree in 1894.

While in Chapel Hill, Kenan assisted in the discovery of calcium carbide ^[8], the major basis for the manufacture of acetylene; this led to the eventual formation of the Union Carbide Company. Before he was twenty-six, he traveled around the world in the employment of Union Carbide. In 1900 he moved to Lockport, N.Y., and acquired an interest in the Traders Paper Company, becoming assistant manager. In 1899 he had met Henry Morrison Flagler, who was a partner of John D. Rockefeller ^[9] in the formation of the Standard Oil Company ^[10]. At that time Flagler was the major developer of the east coast of Florida and had begun construction of his Florida East Coast Railroad ^[11] and a chain of resort hotels. Impressed with Kenan's mechanical ability, Flagler hired him as a consultant for all his Florida enterprises. Their relationship was strengthened when Flagler married Kenan's sister, Mary Lily ^[12], in 1901. Kenan built the first generator for Flagler's Miami Power and Water Company (later Florida Power and Light). At Flagler's death, Kenan became a trustee of the Flagler estate and later president of the Florida East Coast Railroad, Florida East Coast Hotel Company, Florida East Coast Car Ferry Company, Model Land Company, Miami Power and Water



William Rand Kenan, Jr. Image courtesy of Digital North Carolina Collection Photographic Archives, UNC Libraries.
and P. & O. Steamship Company.

[13]Company, West Palm Beach Water Company,

Kenan also established Randleigh Farms [14] in Lockport, N.Y., a scientific breeding and dairy farm. For his contributions to dairy science, he was awarded the Master Breeders Award.

As a philanthropist, Kenan gave generously to his church, the First Presbyterian Church of Lockport, and to the Memorial Hospital of Lockport. He also founded Camp Kenan for the Lockport YMCA [15] and endowed its operations. Among his gifts to The University of North Carolina [6], he donated the funds to build Kenan Memorial Stadium [16] in honor of his parents.

Kenan was buried in Lockport beside his wife, Alice Pomroy Kenan, whom he married in 1904; she died in 1948. They had no children. Kenan's will established the William R. Kenan, Jr., Charitable Trust [17], which has continued to make generous grants to The University of North Carolina. The first major gift from this trust was a \$5 million endowment for the William R. Kenan, Jr., Professorships. There is a portrait of him at the university in Chapel Hill.

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