

Raymond Pimlott Kaighn

by Robert J. Kaighn, Jr.

One day I received an email from a complete stranger asking if I knew anything about a gentleman named Raymond P. Kaighn. The sender had searched for “kaighn” on the Internet and found me. I had not heard of him before and was amazed to find out that Raymond played in the very first basketball game. The next question was “How am I related to this guy?” Thus began my genealogy research.

Raymond Pimlott Kaighn was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania on December 8, 1869. His father was William Lewis Kaighn (1842-1925) who was a son of Elias Kaighn, Jr. (1799-1864). A veteran of the Civil War, a good bit of information about William can be found in his military pension records. He was 5’10” tall, weighed 135 pounds (in 1892 and 1903) with brown hair and dark blue eyes. He died in Atlantic City, New Jersey on March 24th, 1925, when he was struck by a car.

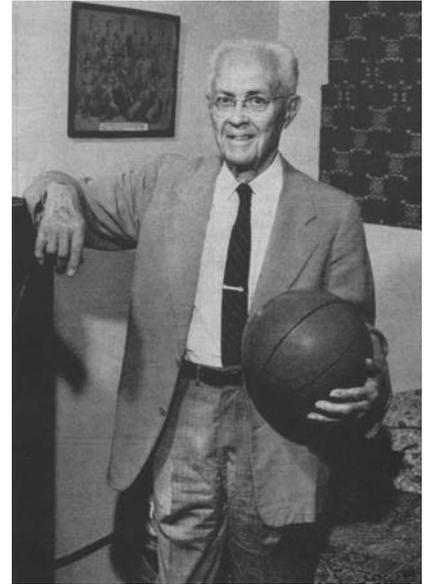


Figure 1. Raymond Kaighn from *Sports Illustrated* (11-Dec-1961)

Raymond’s mother was Elizabeth Victoria Pimlott (1843-1932). She married William L. Kaighn on January 1st, 1865 at St. John’s Protestant Episcopal Church in Camden, NJ¹. In the 1880 Federal Census the family, including the older sister Blanche Pimlott Kaighn (1865-1948), were living at 2014 Ridge Avenue in Philadelphia. A third child, Corrinne P., was born in 1871, but only lived for a few months (April 29-September 5). The 1890 Philadelphia Directory also lists both William and Raymond still living on Ridge Avenue. Raymond’s profession in that directory is listed as a clerk while William’s is listed as “sew machines.”

In December of 1891, Raymond was at the International YMCA Training School (which later became Springfield College) in Springfield, Massachusetts. It was there that James Naismith, a fellow student and football teammate, developed a game with 2 peach baskets and a soccer ball to relieve the winter doldrums of Swedish calisthenics: Basketball. Raymond was one of the 18 players to participate in the first game.

Below is an excerpt from an article from the *Greensboro Daily News* written about him in 1957 where he describes that first game.

"You see, I was a member of the Springfield football team that year (1891) with Amos Alonzo Stagg, the famous coach, and Naismith. We were tired of the one-two-three-four calisthenics and wanted a winter game, not too rough, but one which would offer some sort of competitive challenge."

"Naismith, who played center on the football team, then came up with his new invention. He installed a peach basket at each end of the gym, fastening it at the base of the balcony running track. Then he told us the rules of the new game and showed us the soccer ball we'd use. For that first game, Jim chose 18 players. I was one of them."

Kaighn said the first rules stressed the importance of passing the ball. There was no dribbling. Naismith wanted to stress teamwork with the end purpose of tossing the soccer ball into the basket.

¹ A copy of the marriage certificate can be found in William Lewis Kaighn’s military pension records at the National Archives in Washington, DC. Their marriage date is incorrectly given as 01-Jan-1855 in *Camden County New Jersey Marriages*, which would have them married in their early teens.

"It turned out that everyone wanted to shoot -- just like today. We would heave that soccer ball towards the basket from all corners of the court, regardless of the distance."

When the ball went into the peach basket, a janitor, mounted on a ladder beside the basket, would retrieve it. Each time a basket was scored, the players would return to the center circle to put the ball in play again.

Although the game was designed to eliminate roughness, Naismith made one rule which backfired.

"Whenever a ball went out of bounds," explained Kaighn, "the first player who reached it gained possession. This always produced an uproar, with all 18 men diving after the ball and scattering gymnasium equipment all over the floor. We'd usually have to take time out for gathering up equipment before we could continue the game."

"Then, when the ball went into the balcony, we'd stampede up the narrow stairway or climb up over the railing by jumping on each other's shoulders to get at the ball."

But that was not his only contribution to basketball history. Raymond went to Minnesota in January of 1893 to become a secretary of the YMCA. In 1894, he enrolled at Hamline University in St. Paul, graduating in 1898. At Hamline, Raymond was a student, the athletic director, quarterback of the football team, and the editor of the student newspaper. His first wife, Pearl Benham (1874-1943) was also a Hamline graduate.

On February 9th, 1895 the first intercollegiate basketball game was played at Hamline and Raymond is given credit as the driving force behind the game (Hamline lost to the Minnesota State School of Agriculture 9-3). This first game had 9 players on each team, however Raymond is also credited with introducing 5-on-5 basketball to the Midwest.

After leaving Hamline, Raymond continued to work for the YMCA. Table 1. shows his work history, most of which is in New York working for the YMCA.



Figure 2. Pearl Benham Kaighn

In the 1920 Census, Raymond was living at 52 Ivy Close, Forest Hills, Queens, New York. His occupation was listed as Secretary for the YMCA. He was living with his wife Pearl, and a nephew and niece, Clyde and Glen Benham.

In 1925, Raymond was named the first Secretary of the YMCA Retirement Fund. He retired from the YMCA at the age of 70 on April 1, 1940. In 1942, he moved to Greensboro, North Carolina, where he lived until moving to Chapel Hill, North Carolina, in 1952.

Table 1. Employment History for Raymond P. Kaighn²

1892-93	County secretary YMCA, Rice Co. Minnesota.
1893-98	Student at Hamline University, St. Paul Minnesota. Graduated in 1898. Work for state committee during two or three summer vacations. Served in college as physical director.
1898-99	Boys' work director, YMCA, Haverhill Massachusetts.
1899-01	General Secretary YMCA, Holyoke, Massachusetts.
1901-02	With International committee associated with Frank Ober in "Association Men"
1902-05	Instructor in Pratt Institute High School, Brooklyn, NY. At same time

² This information was found at the Basketball Hall of Fame, Springfield, Massachusetts, in a folder on the "First Team".

	did graduate work at Columbia University, securing degree MA in 1905.
1905-11	Educational director YMCA, Bedford Branch, Brooklyn, NY.
1911-16	Industrial Secretary International Committee.
1916	Secretary secretarial bureau International Committee
1917-18	Director Personnel Bureau, War Work Council
1918-25	Personnel Secretary, International Committee, YMCA.
1921	M. H. Honorary
1925-40	Secretary, Retirement Fund, YMCA
1940	Retired from YMCA Retirement Fund, April 1, 1940.

Raymond married Stella (Taylor) MacNaughten (1886-1979) on May 17, 1951.

How to Retire and Like It, written by Raymond, was first published in 1942. It was revised and republished in 1951 and posthumously in 1965. The back cover states:

Raymond P. Kaighn, former member of the North Carolina State Gerontological Commission, has written this practical, psychologically and physiological sound guide to planning in advance for retirement, and enjoying it fully when it arrives. Discusses finances, where to live, keeping physically and intellectually alert, rewarding activities and marital harmony.

Raymond applied for Social Security in December 1952. Below is pictured his application. Of note are his address in North Carolina, the names of his father and mother, and the spelling of his middle name, Pimlott.

Form SS-5
TREASURY DEPARTMENT
INTERNAL REVENUE SERVICE
 (Revised 7-48)

APPLICATION FOR SOCIAL SECURITY ACCOUNT NUMBER
 REQUIRED UNDER THE FEDERAL INSURANCE CONTRIBUTIONS ACT
 READ INSTRUCTIONS ON BACK BEFORE FILLING IN FORM

238-52-9639
 DO NOT WRITE IN THE ABOVE SPACE

FILL IN EACH ITEM. **PRINT** IN BLACK OR DARK BLUE **INK** OR USE TYPEWRITER FOR ALL ITEMS EXCEPT SIGNATURE. IF THE INFORMATION CALLED FOR IN ANY ITEM IS NOT KNOWN, WRITE "UNKNOWN."

1 **PRINT NAME YOU GAVE YOUR PRESENT EMPLOYER, OR, IF UNEMPLOYED, THE NAME YOU WILL USE WHEN EMPLOYED** FIRST NAME: **RAYMOND** MIDDLE NAME: **P. M.** LAST NAME: **KAIGHN**

2 **MAILING ADDRESS (NO. AND ST., P. O. BOX, OR RFD) (CITY) (ZONE) (STATE)** **PO-Box 324 CHAPEL HILL N.C.**

3 **PRINT FULL NAME GIVEN YOU AT BIRTH** **RAYMOND PIMLOTT KAIGHN**

4 **AGE OR LAST BIRTHDAY** **93** 5 **DATE OF BIRTH (MONTH) (DAY) (YEAR)** **12 8 1969**

6 **PLACE OF BIRTH (CITY) (COUNTY) (STATE)** **PHILADELPHIA PA.**

7 **FATHER'S FULL NAME, REGARDLESS OF WHETHER LIVING OR DEAD** **WILLIAM LEWIS KAIGHN**

8 **MOTHER'S FULL NAME BEFORE EVER MARRIED, REGARDLESS OF WHETHER LIVING OR DEAD** **ELIZABETH VICTORIA PIMLOTT**

9 **(MARK (X) WHICH)** **SEX** MALE FEMALE 10 **(MARK (X) WHICH) (IF OTHER, SPECIFY)** **COLOR OR HAIR** OR

11 **HAVE YOU EVER BEFORE APPLIED FOR OR HAD A SOCIAL SECURITY OR RAILROAD RETIREMENT NUMBER?** YES NO **(MARK (X) WHICH)** **DATE**

12 **BUSINESS NAME OF EMPLOYER. IF UNEMPLOYED, WRITE "UNEMPLOYED"** **UNEMPLOYED - (RETIRED)**

13 **EMPLOYER'S ADDRESS (NO. AND STREET) (CITY) (ZONE) (STATE)**

14 **WRITE YOUR NAME AS USUALLY WRITTEN (DO NOT PRINT)** **Raymond P. Kaighn**

15 **TODAY'S DATE** **12/31/52**

16 **RETURN COMPLETED APPLICATION TO NEAREST SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION FIELD OFFICE**

Figure 3. Raymond's Social Security Application.

In the 1950s, Raymond was interviewed several times as the last surviving member of the original team and to promote the establishment of the Basketball Hall of Fame in Springfield

Massachusetts. He would describe the events surrounding the first game and comment on how much the game has changed. Below is another excerpt from the article from the *Greensboro Daily News* in 1957.

"Today's game has too much constant tension. In football or baseball, a player gets a chance to relax. Now as soon as on team makes a basket, zoom . . . there's not a second's break.

"Too, I bet Jim Naismith never dreamed the game would develop into one for giants. I don't see why they don't classify teams according to height, like the classify boxers according to weight."

"Another thing. Jim designed the game to be played by as many as possible. I've seen 50 playing at one time in the old days."

Although everything has been done to speed up the game, Kaighn cited on important item which hasn't changed since that first day in the old YMCA Training School gym.

"The height of the basket then was 10 feet . . . and that's what it has remained," he remarked.

Raymond was inducted into the Basketball Hall of Fame in 1959 as a member of the first team. He was also at the Commemoration of the Hall on November 6, 1961; he signed the envelope pictured below for that day.

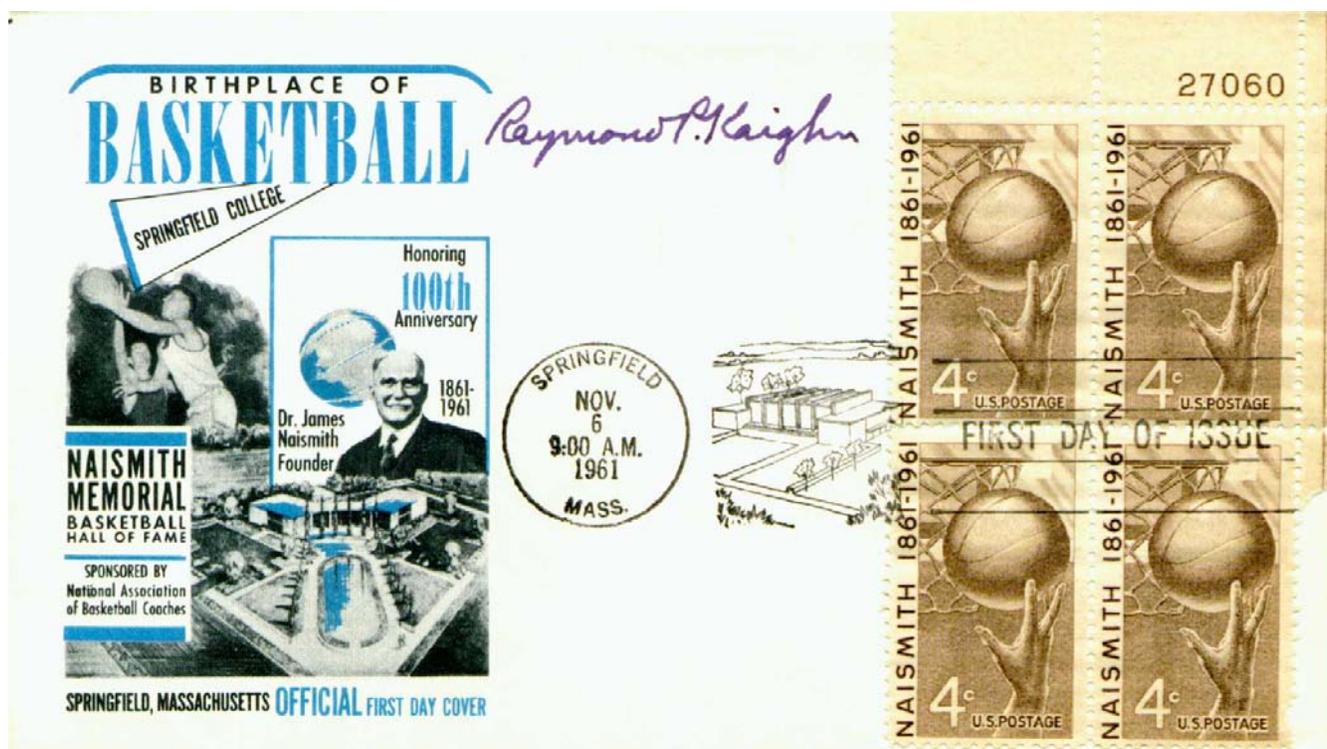


Figure 4. Envelope signed by Raymond.

Raymond Pimlott Kaighn died of a heart attack on August 17, 1962, while vacationing at the Cashier's Inn in Cashiers, North Carolina.