"Born in Ireland in 1879, W.P.M. Kennedy was a distinguished Canadian academic and the leading Canadian constitutional law scholar for much of the twentieth century. Despite his trailblazing career, Kennedy has been a largely mysterious figure. Now, weaving together a number of key events and drawing on Kennedy’s personal letters, Martin L. Friedland presents a lively biography of the man. Searching for W.P.M. Kennedy discusses Kennedy’s contributions as a legal and interdisciplinary scholar and his work at the University of Toronto, where he founded the Faculty of Law. The book also details Kennedy’s intriguing personal life, presenting stories about Kennedy’s family and important friends, such as Prime Minister Mackenzie King.

Kennedy earned a reputation in some circles for being something of a scoundrel, and Friedland does not shy away from addressing Kennedy’s exaggerated involvement in drafting the Irish constitution, his relationships with female students, or his constant quest for recognition. Throughout the biography, Friedland interjects his own personal narratives surrounding his interactions with the Kennedy family, including how he came to acquire the private letters noted in the book. The result is a highly readable biography of an important figure in the history of Canadian intellectual life."

One aspect of Kennedy’s life that is particularly relevant to today and that is not mentioned in the above blurb is that his first wife died in the Spanish Flu epidemic of 1918-1919 and his two children came close to death. That event had a profound effect on Kennedy’s future.


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