



#METOO, 1896

Kim Allen Scott

Scott, Kim Allen. *#METOO, 1896. Unpublished (Posted March 2019): 1-12.*

Made available through Montana State University's [ScholarWorks](https://scholarworks.montana.edu)
scholarworks.montana.edu

#METOO, 1896

by

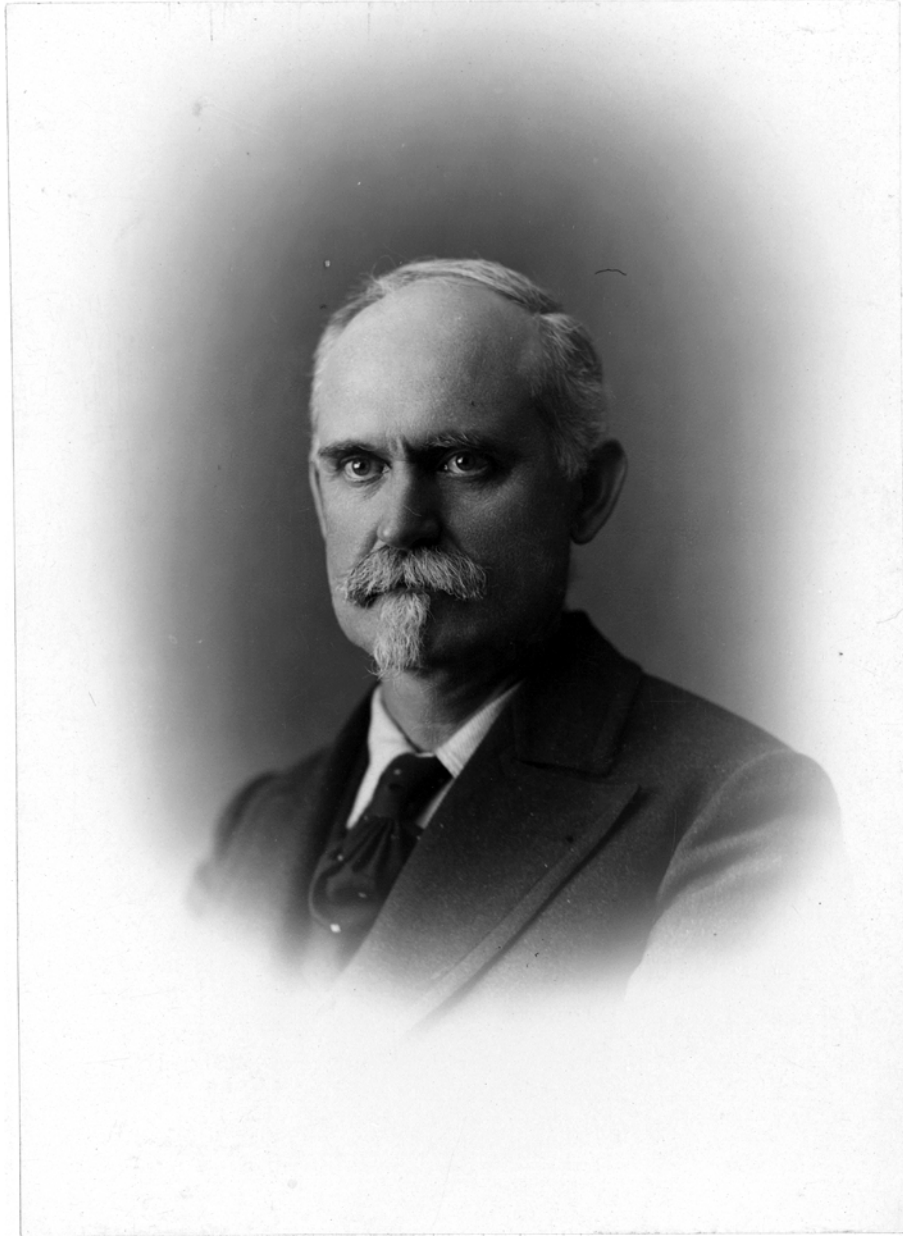
Kim Allen Scott

The contemporary scandals involving powerful men in the realms of American entertainment, business, and politics might lead some to believe that the scourge of sexual harassment is a twenty-first-century social malady. However, even a casual study of history reveals the deplorable behavior of some men in their treatment of women has always been a part of America's story, and a sharpened awareness of this longstanding problem can help reveal previously veiled instances in our national narrative. One such case involves the turbulent founding of the Montana College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts in Bozeman during the mid-1890s. Although the argument between two of Montana State University's founding fathers is well known to anyone familiar with the school's history, the dramatic story of that conflict has obscured subtle evidence of a simultaneous incident of sexual harassment. If history has a purpose for the instruction of the present, this evidence deserves the light of scrutiny it has previously avoided.

In 1893 the leading citizens of Bozeman, Montana leapt at the opportunity of gaining federal dollars for the establishment in the town of an agricultural and engineering school. A provision of the funding demanded that classes begin in the summer of that year, and a Local Executive Board formed, charged with securing a facility and a faculty for the college. The male

business and civic leaders selected for the board included serial entrepreneur Walter Cooper and local banker Peter H. G. Koch. Appointed secretary for the board, Koch became the defacto powerhouse/leader of the group and oversaw the hiring of Deer Lodge engineering professor Augustus M. Ryon as the school's first president. Summer session classes first began in a former Main Street roller skating rink owned by millionaire businessman Nelson Story, and acreage about a mile southwest became the site of the first buildings of the infant campus, all associated with the experiment station farm complex. To head this facility the board hired a recently acquired friend of Walter Cooper's, Sloan Miller Emery.

It is not entirely clear how Emery had become friends with Cooper since he apparently had only visited Montana briefly prior to 1893. Born in Columbus, Texas on September 23, 1848, Emery became an orphan at the tender age of nine months. Relatives took the boy to Pennsylvania, Mississippi, and Tennessee as he grew to adulthood. When he reached the age of twenty, Emery moved to Valparaiso, Indiana where he attended the local college and apparently took courses in bookkeeping, but it is unclear if he ever graduated. In 1870 he married Julia H. Haas, the daughter of a prominent Indiana businessman, and the following year the couple moved to Lake City, Minnesota, where Emery worked as a clerk and eventually organized the Lake City Bank with a group of local businessmen.¹ He rose quickly in wealth and prestige, serving as vice president of the bank until he resigned in 1879. Emery then formed a partnership with Joseph Merrit Underwood to operate the Jewell Nursery Company, a combination of commercial fruit tree cultivation, stock raising, and grain growing operations. The business became a huge success. Emery may have occasionally joined the more than 700 dealer agents that traveled the country selling fruit tree seedlings, possibly ranging as far west as Montana, while he continued to expand his financial empire. He claimed homestead land in South Dakota under the auspices



Sloan Miller Emery, ca. 1896

of the Timber Culture Act, a claim he later had to successfully defend when a town site established on his property in 1881.² He dabbled in politics, too, serving two separate terms in the Minnesota House of Representatives from 1883 to 1888.³

An imposing, lean man of six feet, four inches in height with a heavy beard and piercing eyes, Emery began to parley his business, agricultural, and political experience into the world of academia. During his last term in the Minnesota House of Representatives he secured an appointment to the committee overseeing the state university and university lands, which led to a seat on the University of Minnesota's Board of Regents the following year. He was assigned to a committee specifically overseeing the Minnesota Experiment Station and the Agricultural School until his resignation in the spring of 1893. He also held leadership roles in the Minnesota State Agricultural Society, the National Nurserymen's Association, and various committees overseeing the agricultural exhibitions of the Minnesota State Fair.⁴

Considering Emery's resume at the time the Bozeman Local Executive Board began searching for an experiment station director, it is not surprising they offered Emery the position. He moved his wife and nineteen-year-old son, Roe, to Bozeman and assumed his duties shortly after his April 11, 1893 appointment.⁵ Emery impressed his new employers as a "man of energy and resourcefulness with a quick and retentive mind and had good business ability," but it became evident the new director flaunted his considerable financial means and displayed an arrogant personality that made him a difficult administrator to work for.⁶ Regardless of the new director's management qualities, treasurer Peter Koch had other concerns to attend to during the school's first year of operation.

Koch began a bitter feud with President Augustus M. Ryon over the direction of the college, insisting that the school offer remedial courses for unprepared incoming students while

Ryon steadfastly disagreed. Koch eventually prevailed and forced Ryon to resign the presidency after less than a year on the job, replacing him with James R. Reid, the former president of the Presbyterian College of Montana in Deer Lodge. Although Ryon continued to teach in Bozeman, his presence at the college became a longstanding source of irritation for Koch, who bided his time before springing a trap to entirely rid the school of its former first president. The general outline of the great faculty purge of 1896 has been told in at least two published histories: professors Benjamin Maiden and Luther Foster had joined Ryon's vocal dissatisfaction with the college's direction and as a result, the State Board of Education joined Koch and the Local Executive Board in a unique method to create a clean slate. The two boards forced the entire faculty of the college to submit written resignations on February 17, 1896, and on March 6 the only ones accepted were those of Ryon, Maiden, and Foster. Koch's purge was complete.⁷

A close examination of the minutes reveals that while the popular story of the purge is essentially correct, it contains curious wrinkle as far as Emery is concerned. On the night of March 6, when Koch and his colleagues refused the resignations of all but the three men they had targeted, the resignations of President Reid and Emery were tabled until the next meeting "on account of certain matters relating to Mr. Emery having been brought to the attention of the board."⁸ Most of the minutes of the next meeting concerned the backlash of Ryon and his two colleagues protesting their firing, but at the end of that session Koch recorded "the board had expected a young man who had agreed to appear and give evidence relating to the charges against Mr. Emery, but as he failed to come, the board decided to call Mr. Emery before them and state to him the nature of the charges."⁹ Just who this young man might have been, his relationship with the woman involved, and why he was so reluctant to tell his story is a mystery, but the record of subsequent sessions leaves little doubt about the story he would have told.

On March 18, 1896, an indignant Emery appeared before the Local Executive Board and heard the charges, which Koch only partially revealed in the minutes of the meeting. Denying the charges in “the most explicit terms,” Emery demanded to confront the person who accused him of wrongdoing. Koch and President Reid then formed themselves into a committee to “wait upon the lady involved, to state that Mr. Emery denied the charges, and request her to meet the board at such hour and place that might suit her convenience.”¹⁰ It is not hard to imagine what sort of complaint involving a “young lady” and a forty-eight year old college administrator that Victorian sensibilities prevented Koch from detailing. Nor, unfortunately, is the possible calculated maneuver that the board used to defuse the situation. Regardless if motivated by a misplaced sense of fair play or a cynical plot to quiet the scandal, the board, whose all-male membership included Emery’s friend, Walter Cooper, agreed with Emery’s insistence that the woman appear in person before them and repeat the allegations. The whole ugly incident was laid bare on the late afternoon of March 19 during a dramatic meeting in the office of President Reid. After asking Emery to leave the room, Koch reported to the board that he and Reid had met the young woman who reiterated her charges and agreed to meet at 4:30 that day but then, having second thoughts, added she “did not know whether she would appear.” Koch bluntly informed her that “her failure to appear would leave her absolutely discredited in the face of Mr. Emery’s denial” and that the board would then dismiss the charges against him.

In our own time it takes a young woman of exceptional courage to face a powerful, older man who she claims has harassed her, so it is no far stretch of the imagination to understand the pressures a woman in a similar situation would face in 1896. It is also important to bear in mind that what present-day Americans would consider a mild infraction of manners would, to people at the time, seem as serious as a groping allegation. This helps

explain why, when the clock showed 5:30 pm that afternoon without the young lady's arrival, Koch proposed a resolution quickly seconded by Walter Cooper. Admitting that Emery stood accused of handing "a letter to a young lady of this city asking for a meeting after dark on Main Street," the resolution reiterated the fact that she failed to appear before the board at the time she herself had chosen. "Therefore," the resolution concluded, "we decline to consider said charges any further and to accept the denial of Mr. Emery as settling the matter as far as we are concerned."¹¹ The resolution passed unanimously, and was immediately followed by a vote to refuse the resignations of Emery and Reid. At that point the men invited Emery back into Reid's office where he was informed of his continuing employment.

On the surface this incident would seem a trivial matter of dubious authenticity for a case of sexual harassment, but subsequent events provide a pattern of circumstantial evidence that allows contemporary readers to reconsider the character of the accused director. Emery continued as the controversial head of the Experiment station for another four years. As one colleague described him, Emery "did not seem to know how to avoid stirring up antagonisms from his associates, nor how to retrain and build up their support, confidence, good will and cooperation." He had a habit of publishing intemperate remarks in his official letters, in one accusing colleague Frank Beach as a "petty thief and a liar," and in another "humorously" advocating the execution of those with whom he disagreed.¹²

The most interesting character sketch on Emery appeared in a 1946 interview with Robert A. Cooley, who joined the experiment station faculty in 1899 as an entomology professor. Cooley recalled one occasion when Emery called him into his office to "drag me over the coals." The entomologist had complained to Peter Koch that Emery had aggressively sought the presidency of the State Horticultural Society while still holding the position of Experiment

Station Director, an action Cooley considered a conflict of interest. When he arrived in Emery's office, Cooley remembered that Emery's son Roe, who had been appointed a position on the experiment farm staff, sat next to his father playing with a revolver in an obvious intimidation attempt. Cooley also recalled that once when he was out of town, his wife had to stay at the Emery residence on the experiment farm campus and "was surprised that in the morning the partly disheveled or dressed head of the house came in to her room with [fire]wood, even though it was summer and this was not necessary."¹³

In 1900, Koch and the Local Executive Board petitioned the State Board of Education to reorganize the college administrative structure and eliminate the office of Experiment Station Director, placing the farm under the supervision of the college president. Emery responded by resigning, but the director would not go quietly. At a heated public meeting in the summer of that year, Emery argued against the proposal, claiming that a botanist on his staff displayed so much incompetence that he did not even know the what wild oats were. In a telling reaction from the state board, O. F. Goddard responded, "Did you ever sow any?" Goddard then announced the board had already decided to retain the director's position, in opposition to Koch, but it came too late to save Emery's job. Samuel Fortier, an irrigation engineer, assumed the director's position later that summer.¹⁴

When Emery left the college he initially moved his wife and son to a residence in Manhattan, Montana, but they did not remain there long. Roe and Julia eventually moved to Meagher County where Roe started a cattle ranch and Julia bought a home in White Sulphur Springs, but apparently Sloan did not join them. According to his own account, Emery went to Oaxaca, Mexico at the end of 1900 on behalf of the Vista Hermosa Sugar and Mercantile Company. He returned to the states after several weeks, but then went back to Mexico where he

became the resident manager of the company's sugar cane plantation and distillery.¹⁵ It is unknown if he ever saw his son and wife again.

In 1910 while her husband still resided in Mexico, Julia Emery listed herself as a widow when responding to the federal census at White Sulphur Springs. Emery himself showed up on a list of arriving passengers in New York on the *S.S. St. Paul* from Liverpool, England on September 9 of that year, probably returning from a business trip to market the sugar and alcohol his company produced in Oaxaca. He may have remained in the Empire State or returned to his duties at the plantation, but by June 3, 1912 he was back in New York where he married an English-born teenage girl, Constance Mary Wren. In addition to the tremendous age difference (he was sixty-three at the time while Constance was nineteen) there is no record Emery ever divorced Julia back in Montana.¹⁶

Emery and his youthful bride returned to Mexico where, in 1914, they had to flee the country due to civil unrest caused by the occupation of Vera Cruz by United States Marines. President Woodrow Wilson sent the force ashore to prevent the delivery of weapons intended for Victoriano Huerta, Mexico's leader after a violent coup the previous year and the understandable resentment of the Mexican people put all resident Americans in danger. At that time of their evacuation, Emery and Constance had an infant son which made their escape all the more harrowing. When they returned to the United States they arrived with little of their money invested in the Vista Hermosa company. They established a dairy farm in Clay County, Mississippi where they had another child, a daughter, and where Sloan died in 1933 at the ripe old age of 84.¹⁷

As Montana State University celebrates its quasiquicentennial in 2018, reflecting back on 125 years of outstanding service to the state is easy to do. Recognizing some difficulties the

institution has endured along the way is much harder, especially when considering the case of Sloan Emery. In this regard, it is probably best to leave the final assessment to his first wife. By all accounts a well respected and accomplished woman, Julia Emery filled the years after her husband left her by publishing articles on domestic science and laying the foundations for the many home demonstration clubs of Montana. She dropped dead from an apparent heart attack in the White Sulphur Springs post office on December 16, 1916.¹⁸ Whether or not she ever heard from her husband again is unknown, but the record suggests it is unlikely and also that the abandonment rankled her to her dying day. In her will, registered with the probate court of Meagher County, she expressly desired to be buried back in Minnesota with her firstborn, Harvey Emery, and left all of her property to her second son, Roe with one curious exception. “Unto my husband,” she directed, “S. M. Emery, if he is alive, I give, devise, and bequeath the sum of \$1.00.”¹⁹

NOTES

¹ Frederic Bertil Linfield, “The Story about Director Emery of the Experiment Station and his Work,” manuscript report in S. M. Emery file, Accession 03001, MSU--Bozeman Faculty Biographies, ca. 1900-1990, Merrill G. Burlingame Special Collections, Montana State University Library, Bozeman. [Hereafter cited as “Emery File”]

²H.H. Hill & Co., *History of Wabasha County* (Chicago: H.H. Hill & Co., 1884), 870-871; “Emery, South Dakota.” cityofemerysd.com.

<http://www.cityofemerysd.com/history-of-emery.htm> (accessed November 7, 2017).

³*History of Wabasha County*, 1231.

⁴Linfield, "The Story about Director Emery," Emery File.

⁵Accession 87032 - Montana State University Local Executive Board Minutes, 1893-1970 ,
vol.1, 3, Merrill G. Burlingame Special Collections, Montana State University Library, Bozeman.
[Hereafter cited as "Local Executive Board Minutes"]

⁶ Frederic Bertil Linfield, "The Last Word," Emery File.

⁷Robert W Rydell, Jeffrey J. Safford , Pierce C. Mullen, *In The People's Interest* (Bozeman,
Mont.: Montana State University Foundation, 1992), 13-20; Merrill G. Burlingame, *A History:
Montana State University* (Bozeman, Mont.: Office of Information, Montana State University,
1968), 25-27; Local Executive Board Minutes, vol. 1, 74-77.

⁸Local Executive Board Minutes, vol. 1, 77.

⁹Local Executive Board Minutes, vol. 1, 78.

¹⁰Local Executive Board Minutes, vol. 1, 79.

¹¹Local Executive Board Minutes, vol. 1, 79-80.

¹²Linfield, "The Final Word," Emery File.

¹³"Statement of Dr. R. A. Cooley, September 20, 1946," Emery File.

¹⁴“Director Emery’s Argument,” *Bozeman Daily Chronicle*, June 6, 1900.

¹⁵U.S. Senate. Committee on Foreign Relations. *Investigation of Mexican Affairs; Testimony of Sloan W. Emery*, Hearing, April 9, 1920 (Y4.F76/2:M57/2/v.2) (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1920), 2203-2228. The middle initial of Emery’s name was incorrectly listed as “W” rather than “M,” but there is no indication if the mistake was intentional.

¹⁶Ancestry.com. “Thoe Family Tree.” Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2015.
<https://www.ancestrylibrary.com/family-tree/person/tree/101030505/person/250047736406>
(accessed November 1, 2017).

¹⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁸*The Mineral Independent* (Superior, Mont.), December 21, 1916.

¹⁹Ancestry.com. “Montana, Wills and Probate Records, 1866-1965; Meagher County (Montana) Clerk of District Courts”. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2015.
https://www.ancestrylibrary.com/interactive/9072/100353834_00001 (accessed November 7, 2017).