

Will J. Kennedy



Will J. Kennedy was born in Hoosick Falls on December 6, 1872, to John and Mary Meany Kennedy. He was educated in the public schools of the village. They lived in the “brown row” on Main Street, the site of the present post office.

Kennedy went to work at an early age as a barber’s assistant and at the Walter A. Wood company. He was also a talented singer and dancer and performed his first show at age 17 in Cortland, New York. During the early 1900’s, he played with many of the top acts in vaudeville and burlesque. He was lead-comedian with the Behman Burlesque Show from 1910 to 1915.

Kennedy’s *On the Bench* characterization of a small-town constable and judge won acclaim throughout the country and was imitated by many other performers. He was one of the actors that started the so called “country rube act” which played to the stereotype that city dwellers had of rural people. Kennedy remained loyal to his hometown and returned home each year to spend summers in Hoosick Falls.

When World War I broke out, Kennedy was the first American entertainer to volunteer his services to entertain the troops. With other top actors, he toured the battlefields and encampments until the end of the war. After the war ended, he played the vaudeville circuit from New York’s Broadway to San Francisco in his own act called *Pinch Me*. He appeared on the same playbills as Fred Allen, Milton Berle, and many other major vaudevillians. In the 30s, as the tastes of people changed and movies started to become popular, Kennedy retired and returned to Hoosick Falls.

When defense activities stepped up before World War II, Kennedy went to work at the Colasta Company. He worked there until the end of the war without missing a day. His health declined but he felt well enough to go back to Colasta as personnel director.

In March 1948, Kennedy was hospitalized due to a chronic heart ailment. He was released, but two weeks later he returned to the hospital and died on April 8, 1948 at the age of 76.