

[Obituary - Alfred W. Crosby](#)

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Frances Karttunen has sent the following:

Alfred W. Crosby died peacefully at Nantucket Cottage Hospital among friends and family on March 14, 2018, after residing for two and a half years at Our Island Home. He was 87 and had lived with Parkinson's Disease for two decades.

Born in Boston in 1931, he graduated from Harvard College in 1952 and served in the U. S. Army 1952—1955. He then earned an M.A.T. from the Harvard School of Education and a Ph.D. in history from Boston University in 1961. His first book, *America, Russia, Hemp, and Napoleon*, is about relations between Russia and the U.S.A. from the American Revolution through the War of 1812. He taught at Albion College, the Ohio State University, Washington State University, and the University of Texas at Austin, retiring in 1999 as Professor Emeritus of Geography, History, and American Studies. He was the recipient of many awards including three Fulbright Fellowships and a Guggenheim Fellowship. He was elected to the American Philosophical Society, the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and the Academy of Finland and was a fellow of the John Carter Brown Library.

He was involved in the Civil Rights movement, taught Black Studies and the history of American jazz, helped to build a medical center for the United Farm Workers' Union, and took a leadership role in anti-war demonstrations.

His interest in demography and the role of infectious disease in human history led him to write *The Columbian Exchange: Biological and Cultural Consequences of 1492*; *America's Forgotten Pandemic* (originally *Epidemic and Peace* 1918); and *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900-1900*. His fascination with intellectual and technological history produced *The Measure of Reality: Quantification and Western Society, 1250-1600*; *Throwing Fire: Projectile Technology Through History*; and *Children of the Sun: A History of Humanity's Unappeasable Appetite for Energy*. His books have been published in Chinese, Greek, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Polish, Portuguese, Spanish, Slovene, Swedish, and Turkish translations. His work as a historian, he said, turned him from facing the past to facing the future. He lived by the maxim: What can I do today to make tomorrow better?

He was predeceased by his sister Ruth and by Anna Bienemann Crosby and Barbara Stevens Crosby. He is survived by Frances Karttunen, his wife of thirty-five years; his son Kevin and Kevin's wife

Pamela Mieth; his daughter Carolyn and his grandchildren Allegra and Xander Crosby-Laramie; and by his stepdaughters Jaana Karttunen and Suvi Aika and their families.

There will be a memorial service and celebration of life in May. Donations in his memory can be made to the Friends of Our Island Home, Box 39, Nantucket, MA 02554; Palliative and Supportive Care of Nantucket; or Doctors Without Borders.

For more on Crosby see the interview in *The Americas*, 72:2 (April 2015), pp. 309-17 [doi:10.1017/tam.2015.5](https://doi.org/10.1017/tam.2015.5)