

Jason Huber

ENGL 618

7 December 2015

Introduction to E. Berkley Bowie's Letter of January 3, 1919

E. Berkley Bowie, first name Edris, was born in Maryland on May 8th 1882. He was an avid gun enthusiast, especially in regards to Confederate arms. Bowie posted an ad in the *Confederate Veteran* of March 1920 which reads "E. Berkley Bowie, 811 North Eutaw Street Baltimore Md. Wishes to hear from anyone who has information, newspapers, or documents in regard to the manufacture of firearms in the Confederacy. Families of Confederate States ordnance officers are especially solicited" (119). He also solicited information from the *Columbus Enquirer-Sun* in November of 1919, in which he stated "I am engaged in the collection of data on the manufacture of firearms in the Confederate States with a view of preserving from oblivion this phase of Confederate history, and trust to be able to record what Columbus accomplished in this important field" (4). This letter, written in 1919, is a similar solicitation for information about Confederate arms.

Horace Sowers Kephart was born on September 8th, 1862, in East Salem Pennsylvania. According to George Ellison in an introduction to Kephart's *Our Southern Highlanders*, "When Lee's Confederate troops invaded Pennsylvania in 1863, Isaiah

Kephart [Horace Kephart's Father] joined the Union forces and served with considerable distinction throughout the remainder of the conflict as a chaplain of the Twenty-first Pennsylvania Cavalry" (xi). Isaiah served with the Union forces until 1867 when he decided to move to Iowa. Horace Kephart entered Western College in Iowa at the age of thirteen in 1875. In 1876, he enrolled at Lebanon Valley College. Kephart studied at the College of Liberal Arts at Boston University from 1879-80 where he graduated and went on to work at Cornell University, in upstate New York in their library. Here he also enrolled in graduate studies with courses in history and political science.

Kephart had worked in libraries for a few decades and also had a reasonable writing career by 1904 where his writing took one of two forms: "scholarly contributions on the on the technicalities of librarianship and pieces for magazines and newspapers – primarily the sporting journals of the day – on American frontier life, firearms, hunting, fishing, and camping. Only the latter category was still of vital interest to him" (Ellison, xxvi). He moved to North Carolina in August of 1904 where he would spend the rest of his life studying and writing, mainly for sporting and outdoor periodicals, about those topics that were of interest to him.

During the time in which this letter was written, Kephart had been writing for *All Outdoors* magazine for a year. In this letter, Bowie is asking about firearms made in the South from 1861-1865. He's especially interested in firearms used during the civil

war. Throughout the letter he poses a number of questions to Kephart about these firearms. The firearms referenced are breech loading carbines, Colt revolvers, and Henry rifles.

After writing this letter, Bowie continued to research the subject extensively. In the introduction to *Firearms of the Confederacy*, Claude E. Fuller and Richard D. Steuart state that “We probably never have had a more ardent and conscientious and persistent collector of Confederate arms and Confederate data than the late E. Berkley Bowie of Baltimore, Maryland, and as much of the material he collected has been made available to, and used freely by the compilers, this volume is in a sense a memorial to his life’s labor of love” (V-VI).

The letter itself is written on four pages of beige paper. It’s handwritten in pen. Bowie writes this letter in cursive, and a few words are scratched out. Two words are written in with arrows pointing to where they should go in the letter. I chose not to reflect these edits in my transcription of the letter because they were done by Bowie during the writing of the letter and thus reflect his original meaning. Beyond that, the words are scratched out in such a way that I can’t tell what they were initially.

Bowie’s writing is legible except for in a few spots where I used context clues and handwriting analysis to come up with an educated guess for the word. Those words will be addressed in the endnotes. I chose to use endnotes as opposed to footnotes

because I didn't want to detract from the readability of the letter. I chose not to change any grammar because I wanted the content of the letter to stay as close to the original as possible. I didn't need to correct any spelling, but I added punctuation where necessary and also added indents for the paragraphs, as Bowie didn't use any. There's numbers at the top of the second and third page (2 and 3 respectively). I chose not to add these as they would interrupt the readability of the letter. I also decided not to split the letter up into four pages for the same reason. My ultimate goal with this letter is to maintain the original content of Bowie's message while making it easier to read. This is the reasoning behind my editorial practices.

Baltimore 1, 3, 19

Mr. Horace Kephart of All OutDoors¹ Magazine

Dear Sir,

I have been reading your articles² in "All Outdoors" with great interest and pleasure and feel from the extent of your knowledge you will be able to tell me about my specialty buy³: the firearms made in the South 1861-5.

I have a small collection of some 250 odd pieces with 40 of Confederate origin. Are you conversant with breech loading c+b carbine stamped "C.S."⁴ in which the breech block actuated by an under lever, rises vertically above the axis of the bore, and the charge is loaded into the block⁵? Can you tell me who minted it and where it was turned out? This, the brass frame Colt's revolvers⁶, and the so called Confederate Perry C.L. carbine⁷, are constant sources of speculation, and I must say worry, as to their origin, which I trust you may be able to dispel for me.

The meaning of the letters stamped on the brass frame Colts⁸ is another mystery to me: I have nine⁹ of them running from "A" to "T" some of them doubled. Would like to hear about Confederate made firearms you have or are familiar with and also if you know anyone who is interested in this line?

Wish you would write this subject up and publish it.

There is lots of the unusual not to say romance in it, and I am sure every collector and many others would be interested. If you don't object, I am sure I have seen in the Official Records that Henry rifles with target sights (14 shooters) were used by the 14th Missouri Regt. M.P.H.¹⁰ (Birge's Sharpshooters¹¹) in the Battle of Shiloh 1862¹².

Trusting to hear from you in the near future I am.

Very Truly

E Berkley Bowie

811 N Eutaw St.

Baltimore

Maryland

Notes

1. A hunting, outdoor life, and sports periodical established in 1913 (Worldcat).
2. Kephart was working on a multi part series called "The Story of the Gun" in *All Outdoors* magazine (Horace Kephart: Timeline).
3. This word is illegible. Based on the context, it's probably "buy."
4. The "C.S." stamp was commonly used by Confederate armories. It stands for "Confederate States" (Fuller and Steuart).
5. This is in reference to a Confederate "percussion, breech-loading, caliber .54 carbine" (Fuller and Steuart 195). They go on to state that:

An article appearing in Army Ordinance, September, 1938, entitled "Historic Military Firearms," said: "Mr. Bowie had an interesting theory about these carbines, but one which he never was able to support by documentary evidence. He believed this carbine was the "Read rifle" mentioned frequently in Confederate ordnance reports... Unfortunately for Mr. Bowie, however, there is a mention of "Read's cavalry rifles" in the early part of the war. (qtd. in Fuller and Steuart 195-6)

I was unable to find more information about this rifle beyond the fact that Bowie continued to theorize about it after writing to Kephart. I was also unable to locate the issue of *Army Ordinance* referenced here.

6. This is in reference to the Colt Army (or Dragoon) 44 caliber revolver, or the lighter Colt Navy 36 caliber model 1851 (called so for its patent year) revolver. The Army model was favored by Union soldiers while the Navy model was favored by Confederate soldiers, so it's likely that Bowie is talking about the 36 caliber Navy model (Fuller and Steuart).

7. This is in reference to "an exceptionally well made arm of .52 caliber" Confederate carbine (Fuller and Steuart 196). According to *Confederate Arms* this rifle is generally referred to by cataloguers as the "Confederate Perry," but Fuller and Steuart, after arguing their case, state that "Taking all in all for what it is worth it would appear that neither PERRY nor MAYNARD is the proper designation of this arm but that it should be referred to as THE TALLASEE BREECH – LOADING CARBINE" (198).

8. I was unable to find enough suitable information to answer this question. The letters could likely be inspector's stamps. Another possible solution points to the fact that the South had their access to Colt revolvers restricted as they were mostly produced in Northern states originally. As a result of this, Southern agents took up

contracts with a number of different manufacturers who may have had varying manufacturer's stamps. These aren't, however, definitive answers (Fuller and Steuart).

9. This looks like "nine," but could also be "five."

10. Can't find context for what these letters might be. It looks like "M.P.H."

11. The 14th Missouri Regt., later designated the 66th Illinois, Was composed of volunteers from seven Midwestern states. The Union infantry unit served for 3½ years as sharpshooting skirmishers and saw action from Missouri to North Carolina. They would come to be known as the "Western Sharpshooters." The regiment was originally known as "Birge's Western Sharpshooters," after their original commander, John W. Birge. Colonal August Mersey of the 9th Illinois took command of the brigade on October 10, 1862. It was from that point on that the regiment was mostly referred to as the "Western Sharpshooters" (Tilley).

12. During the Battle of Shiloh, the 14th Missouri Regt., who had been designated as the 66th Illinois, would have been using Dimick long rifles. It appears that Bowie was incorrect in stating that the Henry rifles were used in the Battle of Shiloh (1862). It wasn't until November of 1863 that the men armed themselves with Henry lever-action, breech-loading, repeating rifles (16 shooters). The Henry rifle was patented by Benjamin Tyler Henry in 1860 and was a prototype for the Winchester breech-loading rifle which were 14 shooters (Brown).

Appendix

Baltimore 1, 3, 19

Mr Horace Nephart
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(2)

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very truly

E Berkeley Bowie

811 N Eutan St

Baltimore

Maryland

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Works Cited

"All Outdoors." *Worldcat*. Web. 06 Dec. 2015.

I went to *Worldcat* to find information on the initial publication date of *All Outdoors* magazine.

Bowie, E. Berkley. Letter. *Columbus Daily Enquirer*. 02 Nov. 1919: 4. Archive of Americana. Web. 06 Dec. 2015.

I decided to search for Bowie in newspaper databases. This was the most fruitful.

Brown, Blake. *Arming and Disarming: A History of Gun Control in Canada*. University of Toronto Press, 2012. 13–45. Print.

This source told me about the patenting of the Henry repeating rifle and the fact that it was a prototype for the Winchester model.

Confederated Southern Memorial Association, Sons of Confederate Veterans, United Confederate Veterans, and United Daughters of the Confederacy. *Confederate Veterans*. Vol. 28. Nashville, Tenn: S.A. Cunningham, 1920. Print.

This was a newspaper out of Tennessee from 1893-1932.

Ellison, George. Introduction. *Our Southern Highlanders*. By Horace Kephart. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1987. ix-xlvii. Print.

The introduction to *Our Southern Highlanders* has a great deal of biographical information about Horace Kephart.

Fuller, Claud E., and Richard D. Steuart. *Firearms of the Confederacy*. 1944. Lawrence, Mass: Quaterman Publications, 1977. Print.

This text had a great deal of information about Confederate firearms from 1861-1865.

"Horace Kephart: Timeline." *Horace Kephart Revealing an enigma*. Hunter Library Special Collections, 2005. Web. 06 Dec. 2015.

I used this to figure out when Horace Kephart began writing for *All Outdoors* magazine.

Michigan. Selective Service Agency. "Draft Registration Card, Edris Berkley Bowie."

U.S. World War I Draft Registration Cards 1917-1918. Washtenaw, MI: National Archives and Records Administration, 2005. Microfilm. Record Group M1509. *Ancestry.com*. Web. 6 Dec. 2015.

I used *Ancestry* to figure out Bowie's full name and date of birth.

Tilly, Kevin I. "The Sure-Shot 14Th Missouri (Later The 66Th Illinois) Infantry Was Better Known As The Western Sharpshooter." *America's Civil War* 13.5 (2000): 56. *Military & Government Collection*. Web. 23 Nov. 2015.

This source was invaluable for the information it gave me about the history of the 14th Missouri regiment from their organization to their dispersal.