



ALICE BIRD LETTER TO MINNIE BIRD

April 1, 1909

Hunter Library MSS 80-33



Transcribed and Edited by

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Introduction to the Series

This transcription and its attendant annotations, explanatory material, and bibliography were prepared by students in ENGL 618: Research Methods in English, the required gateway class for the MA in English at Western Carolina University. The learning outcomes for this class include the following:

1. Conduct appropriate, effective, and ethical scholarship.
 - a. Effectively find and use advanced research tools (handbooks, databases, guides, bibliographies, etc.) appropriate to a subject.
 - Students will be able to use a wide variety of such tools and evaluate those tools.
 - b. Find appropriate advanced research (print and electronic scholarship) and apply that research to specific disciplinary questions or issues.
 - Students will be able to find a variety of scholarship, evaluate both the appropriateness and rigor of that scholarship, and incorporate that scholarship correctly and effectively.
 - c. Develop accurate bibliographies and reference citations.
 - Students will be able to annotate, abstract, and cite materials following standard MLA format.
2. Understand the process by which the texts we use are made available.
 - Students will be able to conduct basic editorial work and evaluate the editorial work of others.

All work is presented as submitted by the students. While these students take great care with their transcriptions and annotations, errors are always possible. As these students learn throughout this class, good scholarship requires checking of sources and corroboration by authoritative sources.

It is hoped that the transcription and annotation of WCU Special Collections materials will be useful to the institution, students, scholars, and other patrons and users of WCU's Special Collections materials.

INTRODUCTION

This edition is created from the manuscript of Alice Bird's letter to her Sister-in-Law, Minnie Bird, on April 1, 1909. Within this letter, Alice corresponds with Minnie, answering a previous letter and relaying events of the past several weeks, including typical day-to-day news of her husband, Terrell (Minnie's younger brother). Alice also details a shopping trip to buy a new dress, describes an evening out with Terrell, and asks of more news from "home." This is a very personal letter, and it is apparent that Alice and Minnie have a close relationship, even though Alice and Terrell moved from Cullowhee, NC to Los Angeles, CA shortly after their marriage in January of 1909. Alice was born August 22, 1890, and her maiden name was Alice McGuire. Her husband, Terrell Bird (listed in varying documents as JT Bird, James T Bird, and J Terrell Bird) was born May 25, 1885 in Cullowhee, NC, and along with Minnie, is the child of Charlie A. and Sarah E. Bird.

The letter's recipient, Minnie M. Bird, born in 1879, is the oldest child of Charlie and Sarah Bird, and is six years older than her brother Terrell. At the time this letter was written, she was 30 years old, unmarried and living at home. Minnie was a milliner, with her own shop. It is clear from the correspondence from Alice that the women share a love of fabric and clothing.

This correspondence is particularly interesting due to the nature of Alice's attitude about living in Los Angeles. It would seem that a young woman who lived most of her life in small Appalachian mountain towns would experience culture shock in moving to one of the biggest cities in the world. However, Alice's resilience is apparent, and she gives the impression that she is enamored with her new environment. Alice is clearly well educated, and her letter is composed in a clear, conversational, and clever manner. Her writing reveals her to be a young woman who is intelligent and adaptable to big-city living, dispelling common stereotypes of Appalachian Southerners as simpleminded and backward.

EDITOR'S NOTE

This edition of Alice Bird's letter to Minnie Bird is a diplomatic edition, as such, the text is transcribed to recreate the appearance and retain the authenticity of the document. Within this letter specifically, this style of transcription does not interfere with the manuscript's readability, which is the primary reason for using a diplomatic edition. This edition utilizes page breaks to signal the end of each page and paragraph indents are kept in the same position as the letter. The placement of the heading and greeting also attempt to replicate those from the manuscript. The transcription is formatted as the original letter, page by page, in order to allow the reader to easily follow the narrative. Footnotes are used rather than endnotes in combination with the page-by-page format, so the reader can quickly access background information without losing the context or the place in the letter. The single-spaced layout is indicative of Alice's writing. All spelling errors, shorthand, inconsistencies, and grammatical features of Alice's writing remain the same as they are in the original document. Underlined words in the transcript are replicated and do not indicate italicization. Alice has beautiful script handwriting, therefore, no editorial decisions regarding word choice were needed. The brackets present in the first page of the letter were inserted by Alice and remain in the transcription.

The original document includes page numbers at the top of the pages 2-8, which are included in the transcription.

Proper names, significant places, subject terms, and referenced literature are all annotated using footnotes to provide additional information. Sources for the information within the footnotes can be found in the annotated bibliography at the end of the edition. The overall decision to format the edition accordingly was for accessible comprehension, and quick access to background information through the placement of footnotes.

MANUSCRIPT DESCRIPTION

Alice's letter is written on the front of eight cream-colored, unlined stationary pages. The pages have browned slightly with age. There are tears along the sides of the paper, indicating that the pages may have been torn from a notebook. The pages are creased horizontally in thirds, presumably folded to fit into an envelope for mailing. Each page measures 8 (height) by 5 (width) inches. The paper is thin, light, and feels fragile. Alice used ink to write in a beautiful and easy to read script. She takes care to spell and punctuate correctly, and for several instances when her pen skipped, she went back over the individual letters to ensure they were readable and clear. There is however a discrepancy: the bracketed "[To miss Minnie M. Bird]" is written in pencil and appears to be different handwriting from Alice's. It is possible that it was added when found and collected before donation to WCU Special Collections. Except for the first page, Alice numbered the pages of the letter.

Terrell¹ was going to write some to-night; but a young lady came in to stay a while with me just after I finished this letter and she stayed so late that he did not get a chance to write. I'll answer Joe's letter this evening. Bye, bye.

[to miss Minnie

M. Bird²]

1159 E 39th St.,
Los Angeles, Cal.³
Apr. 1, '09

My dear Minnie:

This is the first day of April; but I'll try to keep this letter from being an "April fool".

I hadn't thought about this being "All Fool's Day"⁴ till a while ago and I've been trying to hatch up an "April fool" joke to play off on Terrell when he comes home to-night.

We were glad to get your letter. We are always so glad to hear from "home".⁵ You see

¹ Terrell Bird (b. 1885), also known as JT Bird, James T. Bird, and J. Terrell Bird, is husband to Alice, and brother to Minnie.

² Minnie M. Bird (b. 1879) is Alice's Sister-in-Law. This bracketed inclusion is in pencil, while the rest of the letter is in pen. It appears to have been added later by a person with different handwriting.

³ Alice and Terrell's home on E 39th St. is located in the Liemert Park neighborhood of Los Angeles, approximately six miles from downtown L.A.

⁴ April Fool's Day became a tradition in England in the 18th century and is first noted in the Oxford English Dictionary in 1702.

⁵ Alice was born in Tennessee, but as of 1900 lived in Cullowhee, NC. She was a transplant to the area, but adopted it as her home.

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it seems just like home to me, too.
Terrell is always so glad to get
letters from you folks. You may
not think so as he never writes;
but he really hasn't much time
and I reckon he thinks it will
be all-right if you hear how
we are living.

I guess I'll write a short
letter this time as I haven't
a thing to tell you.

We had such big plans made
to attend the Jewish wedding and
right at the last got disappointed.
We didn't like it a bit. Sunday
is most always the biggest day
here. They have races, ball -
games, prize fights, and every
known thing. Last Sunday, they

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just tried themselves. The foreman had to send out twenty five extra cars⁶ and Terrell couldn't get off at all. It was too bad. I had gotten me a pretty dress to wear; but it is for summer any way and there'll be lots of places to wear it. I didn't get a suit as I thought I would have to. My suit was not soiled very much and I had it cleaned and pressed, so it was just as pretty as when new. I thought it would be better to save my money for summer clothes as summer is here the greater part of the year.⁷

Mr. and Mrs. Simmons and I went up town to get my dress.

⁶ According to the 1910 US Census, Terrell's occupation is listed as "Conductor" for "ST RR CO." The "cars" Alice is referring to are streetcars.

⁷ Southern California is known for its consistently temperate climate, which would have been a stark contrast to the four distinct seasons with largely varying temperatures of Western North Carolina.

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We went to Hamburgers Store⁸ near
 Broadway.⁹ It is an immense
 building and we had to go
 to the third or fourth floor
 before we got what we wanted.
 It was a special sales day
 and I just wish you could
 have seen the lovely things
 for sale. I declare it just
 took my breath! There was
 everything! We just looked ε
 looked our very eyes out.
 Mrs. Simmons likes to go up
 town just to "rubber"¹⁰ she says
 and she certainly does. She stops
 at every window and looks
 till she gets tired. She is a
 funny old soul. My dress is a
 pale gray toile¹¹ with a white

⁸ Hamburger's Store is an enormous Beaux Arts structure which covers nearly half a block. Built in 1906, it once boasted that it was the largest department store on the Pacific Coast. It still stands today, and is currently undergoing restoration.

⁹ Broadway St. in Downtown L.A. is a historic theater district, home to 12 theaters within nine blocks, and once considered the retail capital of the United States

¹⁰ Colloquial shorthand of "rubberneck," originating and chiefly used in the US, first recorded in 1894. It refers to a person prone to staring.

¹¹ Printed fabrics of historical or pastoral scenes.

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embroidered net waist.¹² I think
it is beautiful.

Well, I began this letter
on the first day of April and I'll
try to finish to-night. Mr. and
Mrs. Simmons are gone to church
and I'm by myself. Terrell
won't be in until nine o'clock.
They go to church quite often
and I stay to fix his supper.
I don't like to be gone when
he gets home tired out with
his long day's work. I'm afraid
to stay by myself tho.¹³ I just
know that something will get
me every minute; but it hasn't
yet.

Terrell was off Friday
afternoon. We left here at four

¹² The waist of the dress Alice refers to as “net” is also known as “tulle” embroidery. It is a floss silk, net-like fabric made by darning or using embroidery stitches on a traced paper design. It was formerly used for trimming party dresses.

¹³ Shorthand for “though.”

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o'clock and never got back till eight.
We took some nice car rides. We
went with Davie on his run and
then came back to town and
took a ride with Ben. We stopped
at West Lake Park¹⁴ awhile. The
moon was shining¹⁵ and we sat
on a bench by the lake. It was
beautiful and made me think
of old N.C. and the dear home
folks. How I did wish you could
all be with us!

We've taken off our heavy under
clothing now and are wearing
summer clothes. Last Thursday
and Friday, the thermometer
stood at 85° in the shade!
I went in my stocking feet
all day. It is very cool
to-night which means rain.

¹⁴ Renamed in 1942 as MacArthur Park, West Lake Park was a popular recreation spot for citizens, with a lake for boating, beaches, and garden paths.

¹⁵ The Farmer's Almanac lists the Full Moon as April 5, 1909 in Los Angeles. Alice began her letter on Thursday, April 1, 1909, so the Friday evening she is referring to would be April 2, 1909, during which the moon phase was a waxing gibbous, at 92% full.

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You wrote me more news than any one from Cullowhee about the appropriations. I'm so glad that dear old Professor has been so successful. He deserves success; for he has put his whole life in that work. It just did my very heart good to hear of it.

We heard that your uncle Jesse Bird's hotel was burned. Is that true? I do hope not.

Well, I wish some body would give me a fine dress. You certainly are lucky. How have you made it?

Yes, tell your mama¹⁶ to write when she gets able. We will be glad to hear from her. My folks write me the longest letters.

¹⁶ Minnie's Mother, and Alice's Mother-in-Law was Sarah E. Bird.

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you ever saw. The last time they wrote, the whole family wrote some and they had to send it in two letters. The children's letters tickle me. They seem to want to see us so much.

Yes, if I were you I would go to Commencement. If you do, why I want you to meet my folks.¹⁷ Mama and Papa are going to try to be there I think.

Now, I'm certainly going to try to find that man for you¹⁸ if that will bring you out here! I'll just do my best and I'll have you out here within a year. Ha! ha!

I'll hush now. Do write soon. Give my love to all the rest of the folks and keep lots for yourself.

Your loving sister, Alice.

¹⁷ Alice's parents were George and Belle McGuire.

¹⁸ Minnie was 31 years old at the time of this letter, unmarried, and living at home.

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