

Laura Kephart's Letter to Jane Frazer Kephart

March 11, 1946

Manuscript: HL_MSS16-01_02_12_03_01



The envelope in which the manuscript was kept.

Transcribed and Edited by

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ENG 618: Research Methods in English

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23 November 2020

Outline of the Series

This transcript and its bibliography, footnotes, and explanatory material was prepared as a final assessment in ENG 618: Research Methods in English, a compulsory gateway course for the M.A. in English at Western Carolina University. This project is the culmination of the work done in ENG 618, deferring to our judgment regarding the viability of our editorial decisions, revolving around the following learning objectives:

1. By the end of the semester, students will be able to conduct appropriate, effective, and ethical scholarship.
 - a. Effectively locate, assess, 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. Locate and assess appropriate *advanced scholarship* (print and electronic scholarship) and apply that research to specific disciplinary questions or issues.
 - Students will be able to find a variety of scholarship, assess both the appropriateness and rigor of that scholarship, and incorporate that scholarship correctly and effectively to the scholarly work at hand.
 - c. Construct accurate bibliographic citations and incorporate reference citations according to standard styles for the discipline.
 - Students will be able to annotate, abstract, and cite materials following standard MLA format as well as other citation styles common to their area of study (APA, CMS).
2. By the end of the semester, students will be able to conduct basic editorial work and evaluate the editorial work of others.
 - Students will be able to understand the process by which the texts we use are available.

The following transcription project is presented as submitted by the student editor. While great care was taken in conducting research and assembling the text and annotations, errors are always possible. Good scholarship requires checking of sources and corroboration by authoritative sources. It is hoped that the annotation and transcription of these materials will be useful to the institution, students, scholars, faculty members, and other patrons and users of WCU's Special Collections resources.

Introduction to Manuscript

The following manuscript is a transcription of a letter from Laura Kephart, wife of writer Horace Kephart, to their granddaughter, Jane. The original is dated Mar. 11, 1946. Within this letter, Laura's tone is warm and conversational, mainly delegated to family gossip and updates, though she also states her intentions to enclose a copy of an old letter written by Horace for Jane's father to peruse, but I was unable to find any document that could fit this description. It is interesting to note that Laura calls Horace's manuscript "a beautiful tribute," which denotes possible sentimental or scholarly attachment, or perhaps a combination of the two. In any case, Laura's letter would be of great interest to Kephart scholars who are engaged in research on his works and looking to gain deeper insights on relations within the Kephart family.

Laura Kephart was born Laura Mack White in 1862 in Ithaca, New York ("Find a Grave"). In 1887 she married fellow Cornell alumni Horace Kephart, with whom she would have six children. In 1904, Laura and Horace parted ways, but never formally divorced^[LW1]. While Laura dedicated herself to raising their family in Ithaca, Horace found his way to western North Carolina, spending the next ~~thirty~~30 years traveling the region, writing and publishing articles, books, and pamphlets about his experiences before dying in an automobile accident in 1931 ("Horace Kephart: Timeline"), 15 years before Laura's letter to Jane was written. Until her death in 1954, Laura was plagued by recurring bouts of ill health, but her loyalty to her family and her husband's memory never wavered.

Jane Frazer Kephart, the recipient of this letter, was born in 1918 to Leonard Wheeler Kephart, the eldest son of Horace and Laura. In 1939 Jane married Ralph Waldo Keller and the couple would have three children; Richard, James, and Barbara ("Find a Grave"). Kephart-Keller would be widowed in 1988 and pass away in 2014.

Editor's Note

In my approach to annotating and transcribing Laura's letter to Jane, my goal was to remain as close to the textual source as possible (meaning any grammatical issues, spelling errors, or syntactical faults were preserved). I found her handwriting fairly easy to comprehend and the first draft of my transcription was completed relatively quickly. Any pertinent background and contextual information ~~have~~has been supplied to the best of my ability.

Although Laura's penmanship was mostly legible, there are also several distinguishing features in her handwriting, grammar, and syntax to take note:

- The lowercase "p" can easily be misinterpreted as a lowercase "f", and her lowercase "m" and "n" also look similar, as do the lowercase "r" and "v", "e" and "c". Likewise, Laura's capital "Z" can also be mistaken for a capital "B".
- Misinterpretation can also extend to the written number one (1) and a capital "I," along with the capital "O" and the number zero (0).
- Laura often doesn't fully close her lowercase "p's"; her lowercase "t's" don't always fully cross, and the lowercase letters "m, n, e" are stretched out.
- At times Laura lacks usage of commas, a stylistic quirk that has also been preserved.
- Laura tends to save room by abbreviating, supplementing full words with letters. In most cases, it is evident what or whom the abbreviations represent; however, in some instances, the meanings are not so clear. I've

annotated the initials to the best of my ability and can be referred to via footnote. All annotation sources are assembled in the bibliography.

- For example, “R.I.” is Rhode Island; “S.E.” is southeast; “P.V.1.” is Private E-1 (military rank). The word “and” is often substituted with an ampersand (&).

Manuscript Description

Laura’s letter is a folio, written on a thin, double-sided sheet of paper that’s been folded in half. Impressions of Laura’s handwriting can be seen on both sides of the paper, which appears to have originally been white, but has faded and yellowed over time. The manuscript itself measures 8 in. (tall) by 10 ½ in. (wide). The text is black and is faded in some areas and darker in others, seemingly written with a pencil. Other sections appear to be written with a fountain pen, but this remains unclear.

Curiously, the manuscript does not include the original envelope that the letter was sent in, which seems to suggest that the original envelope was lost or misplaced over time. The envelope itself is thin, stained, and yellowed, measuring 7 ½ in. (tall) by 3 7/8 in. (wide). A three-cent stamp is adhered to the top right corner with wavy lines from a meter mark in the foreground, while the upper left-hand corner is slightly creased and torn. The envelope has been cut open, as if by a letter opener, on top, and is postmarked Chappaqua, New York; Mar 13, 1933.

Front of Envelope: Mr. Leonard W. Kephart
226 Maple Ave.
Takoma Park
D.C.

Back of Envelope: Mrs. Horace Kephart
Chappaqua N.Y.

Unless otherwise noted, information on the Kephart family (i.e., birth and death dates, names, etc) were found via Ancestry Library Edition. Special thanks given to WCU's Special Collections department at Hunter Library.

Transcription

MS Page #1

Mar. 11, 1946

Dear Jane¹

There have been many moves² & then more moves lately, until I don't know which way I am heading -- if there is still a head, which is doubtful. With all the moving Julia³ and I found a letter -- copy enclosed -- which will interest your father⁴, if not any of your younger generation. I had copies made so each of his grandchildren could have one, because it is such a beautiful tribute from a very worth while man.

The farm has been cleared of all except the two-legged animals & these are all new stock. A couple -- the husband just returned from the Pacific last week -- are in downstairs & two boys upstairs. A third boy is to go in with the couple -- "the female of the species" to be responsible for the eats. The upstairs has been furnished & hot water just in etc. etc. I said as part of my war work, I would stay down here or go on the farm, whichever place was not

¹ Jane Frazer Kephart (1918-2014), granddaughter of Laura and Horace. Was 28 at the time of this letter (Alstrum Family Tree).

² This nomadic period in Laura's life began after nearly losing her life, and all of her possessions, in a house fire in early 1940 (Ellison and McCue 378). At the time of this letter, Laura was residing at her sister Julia and brother-in-law's home as a boarder.

³ Julia Whiton Mack Riley (1877-1963), younger sister of Laura, was 68 at the time of this letter (Pears Family Tree).

⁴ Leonard Wheeler Kephart (1892-1988), eldest son and third child of Laura and Horace (Alstrum Family Tree). Was 53 at the time of this letter.

MS Page #2

wanted by some other body. So here I am & doubt very much if I ever go back on the farm. Howard⁵ is getting \$50 - for down stairs & \$30 - for up which is more than it is worth.

David⁶ has graduated into an ensign & is in Newport R.I. expecting to go to sea very soon. He has signed up for 18 months, I think it is. Roy Ferris⁷ has joined the army for a year, which will let him out in time to enter Cornell⁸ next Fall. He is P.V.⁹ having shipped P.V.O.¹⁰ He could have taken the exam for higher rating but it would require a longer enlistment. He is to report at Camp Sheridan Mar. 14 for - at last accounts - a trip to S.E.¹¹ Germany.

Will you please tell me when Mary Avery's¹² & Jack's¹³ birthdays come. I don't seem to have them on my list.

Marnie¹⁴ went to a party at the Alpha Zeta¹⁵ house, which gave her father much pleasure - [illegible deletion] her too. It was her first contact with them. Things collegiate here are more nearly normal, now the services are

⁵ Howard W. Riley (1879-1971), husband of Julia, father of Manton L. Riley (1911-2001), and brother-in-law to Laura; was 67 at the time of this letter (Pears Family Tree).

⁶ David K. Fernow (1926-1992), grandson of Horace and Laura through their daughter Lucy Wheeler Kephart (1893-1977). Was 20 at the time of this letter (Alstrum Family Tree).

⁷ Roy Ferris Kephart (1927-2006), grandson of Horace and Laura through their son George Stebbins Kephart (1894-1961). Was 18 at the time of this letter (Alstrum Family Tree).

⁸ Cornell University was the *alma mater* for various members of the Kephart family, including Horace ("Horace Kephart: Timeline").

⁹ Laura's abbreviation for military rank "Private E-1" ("Private (rank)," 2020).

¹⁰ Acronym unidentified.

¹¹ Laura's abbreviation for "Southeast".

¹² Unidentified.

¹³ Unidentified.

¹⁴ Margaret Bird, daughter of Barbara Kephart Bird (1897-1985), youngest daughter of Horace and Laura (Ancestry Obituary Index).

¹⁵ [Alpha Zeta was a co-ed, honors, social, and professional fraternity at Cornell University for life science and agriculture students \(Alpha Zeta Cornell\). At the time of this letter, Alpha Zeta had been a chapter at Cornell for 45 years.](#)

letting go & she is very happy in her work.
I am surely glad she is having a bit of this
saner life. We are hoping every day
to get word, that some of you will soon be
coming this way. Please make it soon as good
weather comes. Love to you all. Granny.

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Works Cited

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