

Mrs. Laura Mack Kephart's Letter to Leonard Kephart
October 11, 1946



Laura Kephart

Transcribed and Edited by Haylee Wilkie
For Engl 618: Research Methods in English
Instructor and General Editor: Dr. Laura Wright
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

This edition is created from the manuscript of Mrs. Laura Mack Kephart's letter to Leonard Kephart on October 11, 1946

Within this letter, Laura Mack Kephart details her current life situation to her son, Leonard Kephart. She begins by musing about the current state of how fast travel is, and remarks that she is happy that her son will be able to be established long enough to get familiar with his house. She then moves on to discuss her current housing arrangement. After a fire destroyed housing on a local road, Laura remarks that it has complicated her house guests' locations. She continues to name guests and current events such as Karl's birthday and Lucy's party for him. She ends the letter wishing that she had the funds to create a space for her entire family to come for the summer. Interesting topics within the letter include Laura using a Latin phrase, mention of a fire, mentions of room and board, and holiday plans for the entire family.

Laura Kephart, the author of this letter, was born Laura White Mack in 1862 in Ithaca, New York. Her father, Horace, was 28, and her mother, Lucy, was 23 ("Alstrum Family Tree"). Laura White Mack met Horace Kephart while they were both attending Cornell University. Horace was raised in Iowa but came to Pennsylvania to study at Lebanon Valley College and graduated in 1879. He continued his studies at Cornell University, Boston University, and Yale. While studying, he worked a librarian position at Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut ("Horace Kephart: Timeline"). One year later, in her hometown of Ithaca, Laura White Mack married Horace Sowers Kephart on April 12, 1887. In 1890, Horace Kephart became the head librarian of the St. Louis Mercantile Library and began to build its collection of Western

Americana (“Horace Kephart: Timeline”). This position enables him to create the foundation of his later success and passion: the movement to create the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. In years later, together he and Laura had six children: Leonard, Cornelia, Barbara, Margaret, Lucy, and George (“Alstrum Family Tree”). Before dying, Horace wound up leaving his wife and children, though he and Laura never divorced (Kephart). Horace passed away due to a car accident at age 68 in 1931. Before dying, his life’s work of establishing a national park would be a reality. Two months before his death, the U.S. Geological Board recognized Kephart’s life’s work by naming a peak Mount Kephart (“Horace Kephart: Biography”). Laura passed away 23 years later at the age of 92 on December 20, 1954, and was buried in her hometown (“Laura Mack Kephart”).

The letter’s recipient, Leonard Wheeler Kephart, was the son of Horace and Laura Mack Kephart and was born in January 1892 in Ithaca, New York. His father, Horace, was 29 and his mother, Laura, was 29 (“Alstrum Family Tree”). He married Frances Frazer on November 22, 1916 in the District of Columbia. They had one child, George Overton Kephart, during their marriage (“Leonard Wheeler Kephart”). During his time in university, Leonard studied agriculture which eventually led him to work for U.S. Department of Agriculture. One interesting fact to note is that Leonard was the first American to hike Kilimanjaro, Africa's highest peak. He was in Africa on a search for new varieties of grasses for the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Kephart discovered three new varieties of clover on the expedition (“This week in Cornell history”). He died on February 10, 1988, in Poolesville, Maryland, at the age of 96, and was buried in Beallsville, Maryland (“Leonard Wheeler Kephart”).

Editor's Note

This edition of Mrs. Laura Mack Kephart's letter to Leonard Kephart features a diplomatic format. According to standard diplomatic format procedures, this transcription attempts to recreate the presentation and appearance of Laura's letter: all extra marks and abbreviations have been kept as is in order to retain the original letter's authenticity. The transcription follows the original letter page by page in order to add clarity to the reader and are denoted as [MS page #] to further signal these transitions. In several places throughout the letter, there are multiple annotations to give contextual information about who Laura Mack Kephart is talking about regarding her family. The annotations are provided via footnotes to allow the reader to access information quickly and are used to add details of the setting, people, and places of the letter. The family information featured in the annotations of this document originate from a combination of Ancestry Library Edition, and from Horace Kephart's journal.

Laura Kephart has several distinguishing features in her handwriting, language and grammar which are included in the list below as a reference for readers of the original letter:

- T's are crossed in such a way that sometimes it does not actually touch the base of the T at all, and instead looks almost like a dash.
- Shorthand is used such as using + instead of the word "and."
- The abbreviation nov, is used instead of writing out the entirety of November
- The letter p appears similar to a cursive f
- "And" abbreviated is replicated with +
- Lowercase r looks both like the cursive R and like a V.
- The letter e in lowercase is often the shape of a capital E

Other Editor's Note: there is an instance in which Laura uses a Latin phrase to describe the airplane's speed.

Manuscript Description

The letter is a single document written front to back resulting in two pages. Each page measures 10 ½ inches by seven inches. The first page has Laura Kephart's physical address and name printed at the top of the page referred to as "Mrs. Horace Kephart" located at 111 Ithaca Place, New York. The front has been folded at the top of the page, and the has been folded and has a permanent pressed line. This indicates that it has been folded into thirds to fit into an envelope. The first page is discolored due to age, and has the appearance of a slightly tan color, but the second page is a deeper yellow tan; this may be due to the sun hitting the back of the letter deepening its discoloration. The pages themselves are slightly thicker than present day writing paper and appears to be slightly textured like recycled paper. The text is itself is comprised of black ink from a pen. The writing is mostly horizontal but has a slight lift in the middle of her sentences.

[MS Page 1]

October 11, 1946

Dear Leonard¹,

The plane for N.Y.² went over about an hour and a half ago, so it must be half way there by now. Tempus fugit³ fast enough, but if planes continue to go as they do now – or more so, - passengers will be debarking before they finish loading the baggage. I am glad there is some prospect that you can stay put long enough to get familiar with your own front door.

The Rileys⁴ left yesterday headed for Boston. The Ouderdouks arrived in the afternoon to occupy the big room upstairs until now. I then they can move into more permanent quarters.⁵

The fire that took the new Kleine Rd. quarters certainly has messed up the rooming question here. I was told that the fire has evidently planned to destroy the whole of that development as several other fires

¹ Leonard Wheeler Kephart (1892), oldest son of Horace and Laura Kephart (“Leonard Wheeler Kephart”).

² Abbreviation for New York.

³ Latin for “time flies” (“Tempus Fugit”).

⁴ The Riley’s are Laura and Horace Kephart’s in-laws. Laura’s sister, Julia married Howard Riley (“Laura M Kephart in the 1900 United States Federal Census”).

⁵ Laura is currently staying in a boarding house owned by Howard Riley (“Howard W. Riley in the 1940 United States Federal Census”) The Ouderdouks are the new tenants.

[MS Page 2]

were set in several other spots besides the one that took.⁶

Marnie⁷ comes today. Roy⁸ + Barbara⁹ will be here tomorrow noon. Laura¹⁰ will not be here probably, as she is a bit busy.

Tomorrow is Karls¹¹ birthday + Lucy¹² is having a surprise party for him. Margaret¹³ plans to be here for Thanksgiving. This will stretch out the family visits to last until you all can come up again, I hope. If only I was as rich as I am handsome, I would buy the Riley farm¹⁴ + establish a real Keppy¹⁵ Kamp. That is a grand place to summer children.

Lots of love to you all

Mama

⁶ May be referring to a series of fires that burnt her own home years prior in 1940 (Ellison and McCue 387).

⁷ Marnie is Margaret Bird, daughter of Barbara and Royal Bird, Granddaughter to Laura ("Alstrum Family Tree").

⁸ Roy is short for Royal.

⁹ Barbara is Laura's last daughter ("Alstrum Family Tree").

¹⁰ Barbara's daughter. Laura's granddaughter ("Alstrum Family Tree").

¹¹ Laura's son-in-law ("Alstrum Family Tree").

¹² Lucy is married to Karl and is Laura's third daughter ("Alstrum Family Tree").

¹³ Laura's second daughter ("Alstrum Family Tree").

¹⁴ Farm that Laura briefly stayed in with her sister Julia ("Howard W. Riley in the 1940 United States Federal Census").

¹⁵ Appears to be a play on their last name.

Works Cited

- “Alstrum Family Tree.” *Ancestry Library*. <https://www.ancestrylibrary.com/family-tree/tree/52323977/family?cfpid=27560934008>
- Ellison, George and McCue, Janet. *Back of Beyond A Horace Kephart Biography*. Great Smoky Mountains Association, 2019.
- Kephart, Beth. “Horace Kephart: A Great-Grandfather Appreciation” *Appalachianhistory.net*, <https://www.appalachianhistory.net/2009/05/horace-kephart-great-grandfather.html>
- “Horace Kephart: Biography.” *Horace Kephart: Revealing an Enigma*, Hunter Library Special Collections and the Mountain Heritage Center, <https://www.wcu.edu/library/DigitalCollections/Kephart/index.htm>, Accessed on Nov. 20, 2020
- “Horace Kephart: Timeline.” *Horace Kephart: Revealing an Enigma*, Hunter Library Special Collections and the Mountain Heritage Center, <https://www.wcu.edu/library/DigitalCollections/Kephart/index.htm>, Accessed on Nov. 20, 2020
- “Howard W. Riley in the 1940 United States Federal Census.” Ancestry Library, https://www.ancestrylibrary.com/discoveryui-content/view/9784233:2442?indiv=1&tid=&pid=&queryId=14de2dae7a908e4ecdadcfd974e4cf&usePUB=true&_phsrc=dpV160&_phstart=successSource
- “Laura Mack Kephart. *Ancestry Library*, <https://www.ancestrylibrary.com/family-tree/person/tree/52323977/person/27560934373/facts>

“Laura M Kephart in the 1900 United States Federal Census.” *Ancestry Library*,

[https://search.ancestrylibrary.com/cgi-](https://search.ancestrylibrary.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?indiv=1&dbid=7602&h=76302136&ssrc=pt&tid=52323977&pid=27560934373&usePUB=true)

[bin/sse.dll?indiv=1&dbid=7602&h=76302136&ssrc=pt&tid=52323977&pid=275609343](https://search.ancestrylibrary.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?indiv=1&dbid=7602&h=76302136&ssrc=pt&tid=52323977&pid=27560934373&usePUB=true)

[73&usePUB=true](https://search.ancestrylibrary.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?indiv=1&dbid=7602&h=76302136&ssrc=pt&tid=52323977&pid=27560934373&usePUB=true)

“Leonard Wheeler Kephart.” Ancestry Library, [https://www.ancestrylibrary.com/family-](https://www.ancestrylibrary.com/family-tree/person/tree/52323977/person/27561165760/facts)

[tree/person/tree/52323977/person/27561165760/facts](https://www.ancestrylibrary.com/family-tree/person/tree/52323977/person/27561165760/facts)

“North America, Family Histories, 1500-2000 for Laura White Mack.” *Ancestry Library*,

[https://www.ancestrylibrary.com/imageviewer/collections/61157/images/46155_b289793](https://www.ancestrylibrary.com/imageviewer/collections/61157/images/46155_b289793-01588?pid=878712)

[-01588?pid=878712](https://www.ancestrylibrary.com/imageviewer/collections/61157/images/46155_b289793-01588?pid=878712)

“This week in Cornell history.” *Cornell Chronical*

<https://news.cornell.edu/essentials/2014/08/week-cornell-history-0>

“Tempus Fugit.” *Lexico.com*, https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/tempus_fugit

“U.S., School Yearbooks, 1900-1999 for Leonard Kephart” *Ancestry Library*, 1913

[https://www.ancestrylibrary.com/interactive/1265/40392_b074193-](https://www.ancestrylibrary.com/interactive/1265/40392_b074193-00154?pid=242598743&backurl=https://search.ancestrylibrary.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?_phsrc=jmj205%26_phstart=successSource)

[00154?pid=242598743&backurl=https://search.ancestrylibrary.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?_phsrc](https://www.ancestrylibrary.com/interactive/1265/40392_b074193-00154?pid=242598743&backurl=https://search.ancestrylibrary.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?_phsrc=jmj205%26_phstart=successSource)

[=j mj205%26_phstart=successSource](https://www.ancestrylibrary.com/interactive/1265/40392_b074193-00154?pid=242598743&backurl=https://search.ancestrylibrary.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?_phsrc=jmj205%26_phstart=successSource)