

**I.L. Kephart's Letter to Horace Kephart**  
September 11, 1888

**Hunter Library MSS12-05\_01\_01\_002**

Transcribed and Edited by  
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For ENGL 618: Research Methods in English  
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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 I.L. Kephart's letter to Horace Kephart on September 11, 1888. In this letter, Isaiah asks Horace about his family's wellbeing. He spends the majority of the letter recounting the praise one of Isaiah's students gave following his visit with the young Kepharts in New Haven, Connecticut. Isaiah ends the letter by requesting that Horace write back soon with more information on how Cornelia Kephart, one month at the time of this letter, is doing.

I.L. Kephart, or Isaiah Lafayette Kephart, was born on December 10, 1832, in Clearfield, Pennsylvania. Growing up, Isaiah worked as a lumberman and worked up to a pilot to haul lumber rafts down the Susquehanna River. He and his brothers did some carpentry during the winter as well. By the time he reached adulthood, Isaiah Kephart became ordained as a minister in 1857. He preached in three counties of Pennsylvania while in school—Clearfield, Indiana, and Cambria—and met his future wife, Mary Elizabeth Sowers, marrying her on November 28, 1861. They moved to East Salem soon after the wedding. In 1863, Isaiah enlisted in the Union Army for the Civil War and served as chaplain for six months. He then re-enlisted and joined the front. After the war, he began teaching along with his ministry. He taught at Western College in Iowa, where he served for three years as the college's treasurer and two years as the college's first librarian. He also served as the college town's mayor for one term. After Western, the Kepharts spent some time in California before Isaiah moved his family to Illinois, where he taught at Westfield College and served as its president. Isaiah died on October 28, 1908.

The letter's recipient, Horace Sowers Kephart, was born on September 8, 1862, in East Salem, Pennsylvania. He and his family moved to Jefferson, Iowa, when Kephart was five years old due to his father's new position at Western College, where Horace Kephart attended at the age of 13. In 1876, he enrolled at Lebanon Valley College and then to Boston University. At Boston, he spent the majority of his time in the Boston Public Library, which sparked an interest in librarianship. A year later, in 1880, he enrolled in graduate classes at Cornell University, studying political science and history. For financial support during this time, Kephart took a position at the university library as an assistant. He met Laura White Mack, his future wife, in 1884 at Cornell, though she was not a student. The two married in 1887, after he returned from working with Willard Fiske in Italy and accepted a position in Yale College's library. The couple spent three years in New Haven, Connecticut, before moving to St. Louis, Missouri in 1890 to work as director of the Mercantile Library.

During the decade Kephart spent here, the Spanish-American War broke out in 1898, and Kephart began recruiting men for a company of sharpshooters to prepare for an emergency deployment. The company never truly formed, as the war only lasted eight months. The sharpshooters did rekindle Kephart's writing interest. He published in various magazines as well as his own books, such as *Our Southern Highlanders* and *The Book of Camping and Woodcraft; A Guidebook for Those Who Travel in the Wilderness*. Kephart resigned from his position at St. Louis Mercantile library due to his health and focused on his writing. He moved to North Carolina in 1904 to continue pursuing his interest in and writing about nature. He was an effective advocate for environmental conservation and contributed in the institution of the Appalachian Trail. His time spent in western North Carolina and his dedicated literature of the

area became one of the largest motivators for the creation of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Presently, Kephart continues to remain one of the most influential regional writers.

### **Manuscript Description**

Kephart's letter is written on the front and back of one piece of paper, measuring 8 inches (height) by 5 inches (width). The paper looks to be torn from a notepad—the top of the paper is rough and is missing a corner on the left. A paper clip imprint can be seen in the upper left corner, about one inch in from the edge. The finished letter was folded horizontally in thirds to fit into the envelope. Underneath his signature, Isaiah Kephart drew a line with two vertical diagonal lines in the middle.

Attached to the letter is an envelope with an incorrect address. The coloring is a much darker tan than the letter itself and much more worn. There is a torn right side and top left corner. Two pieces of some sort of binding are stuck onto the middle of the envelope, and a faded line where the rest of it was can be seen. There are also two stamped notes from the post office: "Returned to Writer" in purple and "No such street in Boston, Mass." in blue. "Father L." is handwritten along the left edge of the envelope, possibly referring to Isaiah being Horace's father and L. as in Lafayette. Two blue lines cross out the address. The envelope is about 3 ½ inches (height) by 5½ inches (width).

### **Editorial Statement**

This transcription of I.L. Kephart's letter to Horace Kephart is a diplomatic edition, meaning it portrays the text as it appears in the witness. All line breaks, spellings, punctuation, and other marks are preserved in the transcription. The placement of the heading and greeting also attempt to replicate those from the manuscript. The transcription follows the original letter page by page in order to minimize confusion and to easily allow the reader to follow the narrative, enhancing the reader's experience. 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 of the edition is for aesthetic purposes and allows for more information in a smaller amount of space.

I.L. Kephart has readable handwriting, good spelling, and decent punctuation. Some notable features in this letter that I included are words that run from one line to the next, a misspelling of Laura ("Lara") at the beginning of the letter, and the line under his signature.

Westfield, Ill.

9-11-1888.

Dear Horace,

The address on the enclosed envelope will tell why the enclosed letter did not reach you promptly. It is strange that I should make such a mistake.

We are all well and hope this will find you, Lara, and Miss Cornelia all the same.<sup>1</sup>

Mr. L.E. Miller, one of our students,<sup>2</sup> called last evening and gave us a glowing account of his visit to New Haven,<sup>3</sup> and especially of the kindness shown him by you and Laura. He thinks that you are very finely situated, and that Laura is one of the handsomest and finest women in the world.

He described your home and

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<sup>1</sup> Lara = Laura Kephart (1862-1954), Horace's wife. Isaiah correctly spells her name later on this page. Miss Cornelia refers to Cornelia Kephart (1888-1947), Horace and Laura's oldest daughter.

<sup>2</sup> L.E. Miller is unknown. Isaiah Kephart was teaching at Westfield College during this time. The director of the college, according to the return address on the envelope included with the letter, was J.A. Miller, which could be a relation. Another possibility is a relation to Rev. George Miller, with whom Isaiah worked at Western College.

<sup>3</sup> Horace and Laura moved to 33 Beers Street, New Haven, CT, after they married in 1887.

thinks you are exercising great good sense in your living where you do instead of living in the heart of the city.<sup>1</sup>

We are succeeding well in our work here, – the college year has opened well.<sup>2</sup>

We all send our love. Please answer soon, as we are anxious to hear from you – especially to learn how the baby is getting along.<sup>3</sup>

Affectionately,  
I.L. Kephart<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Nothing notable has been found to be happening in the city during this time, so the meaning is likely that the Kepharts are outside the bustle of the city.

<sup>2</sup> Westfield College

<sup>3</sup> The baby = Cornelia Kephart, who was one month old at the time of this letter.

<sup>4</sup> Isaiah Lafayette Kephart (1832-1908), Horace's father.

## Works Cited

*Ancestry Library*. Ancestry, 2019. *ProQuest*, <https://www.ancestrylibrary.com>.

Ellison, George and Janet McCue. *Back of Beyond: A Horace Kephart Biography*. Great Smoky Mountains Association, 2019.

Kephart, I.L. Letter to Horace Kephart. 11 September 1888. Box 1, Folder 1. MSS12-05 Horace Kephart Collection. Hunter Library Special Collections, Western Carolina University, Cullowhee, NC.