

Laura Kephart's Letter to Leonard Kephart

April 5, 1934

Hunter Library MS 12.05-01-08-006

Transcribed and Edited by Sarah Rhu

**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 to the Letter

American travel writer and librarian Horace Sowers Kephart (1862-1931) is best known for his books *Our Southern Highlanders* (1913) and *Camping and Woodcraft* (1906). He was born in 1862 in East Salem, Pennsylvania, to parents of Swiss descent. His father, the Reverend Isaiah Kephart (1832-1908), instilled in him his love of nature and history. Horace received his bachelor's degree from Lebanon Valley College in 1879. He continued his education for a year at Boston University and spent much of that time at the Boston Public Library. Horace decided to pursue librarianship as a career and obtained a job as supervisor of library resources at Cornell University. He also enrolled in graduate classes in history and political science there. While at Cornell, Horace worked for Willard Fiske, the university's first librarian. When Horace graduated in 1884, Fiske invited him to tour Europe with him to search for books for Cornell's president. Horace and Fiske returned to the U.S. in 1886, and Horace attained a position as an assistant in Yale College's library.

In 1887, Horace married Laura White Mack. She was the same age as Horace and had lived all of her life in Ithaca, New York, where her father was assistant treasurer at Cornell. Horace and Laura's first child, Cornelia, was born in New Haven, Connecticut, in 1888. Their second child Margaret was also born there, in 1890. That same year, Horace acquired a job as director of the St. Louis Mercantile Library, the oldest library west of the Mississippi, and the family moved to Missouri. Horace and Laura's first son, Leonard, was born on a return trip to Ithaca in 1892. The rest of their children, Lucy (b. 1893), George (b. 1894), and Barbara (b. 1897), were born in St. Louis. While working at the library for over a decade, Horace received national recognition for his articles about camping and hunting. In 1904, he suffered a nervous breakdown and went to rest briefly at the home of his father in Dayton, Ohio. Horace decided that he needed to leave the city, so he quit his job and moved to western North Carolina.

Laura took the children back to her parents' home in Ithaca. Except for an attempted reconciliation from 1908 to 1909, Horace and Laura never lived together again. Laura raised the children with little financial support from her husband or her family. However, the two never divorced, and they continued to correspond throughout Horace's life. In the meantime, Horace lived as an outdoorsman in the mountains and published his books and articles in magazines. He also helped establish the Appalachian Trail and Great Smoky Mountains National Park. In 1931, Horace died in an automobile accident in Bryson City, North Carolina. His close friend James "Jack" E. Coburn was named administrator of his estate. *Our Southern Highlanders* and *Camping and Woodcraft* are still in print, and Horace remains one of the most influential writers of western North Carolina.

Western Carolina University's Hunter Library Special Collections holds Laura's correspondence with her son Leonard after Horace's death. Like all of his siblings, Leonard Kephart (1892-1988) lived at home while attending Cornell. He married Frances Frazer in 1916, and they had three children: Jane (b. 1918), George (b. 1920), and Barbara (b. 1923). The family lived in Takoma Park, Maryland, and Leonard worked as an agronomist at the U. S. Department of Agriculture.

In this letter, dated April 5, 1934, in place of a will, Laura writes to Leonard about the allocation of her possessions. She discusses items such as Horace's family Bible, her great-grandfather's

trunk, the family furniture, her jewelry, and some old music. Laura also updates Leonard on the status of some of their family members, like his older sisters Cornelia, who lived with her husband and three daughters in East Lansing, Michigan, and Margaret, who resided in the Bronx, New York City. Laura mentions the health of her brother George, who was considering moving from Montana back to Ithaca. She seems to anticipate her own death with health problems such as glaucoma. However, she did not die until 1954 at the age of ninety-two.

This manuscript is of interest to those tracing the distribution of the Kepharts' belongings, especially Horace's family Bible. Unfortunately, Laura lost her old house in Ithaca, where she kept most of these articles, in a fire in 1940, so if her descendants had not yet claimed them, some of the items may have perished. This document may also appeal to people looking to shed light on Horace's wife's side of the family and what his children did after the author's death.

Editorial Statement

This transcription of Laura Kephart's letter to Leonard Kephart is a diplomatic edition, meaning that it reproduces the text of the letter as alike in appearance to the original as possible in order to preserve its authenticity. For example, Laura's punctuation, such as her use of commas, quotation marks, and parentheses, and some lack of apostrophes in possessive nouns, has been retained. Other grammatical errors, like sentence fragments, have also been replicated. In the case of this letter, this type of transcription does not inhibit its readability.

The transcription reproduces the letter in order by page to enable the reader to follow the narrative. It uses page breaks to indicate the end of each page and brackets to signal such editorial interjections. Similarly, indentations are employed to designate the layout of the paragraphs and closing of the letter. Double-spacing, line breaks, and centering replicate the way the text fits on the page.

Laura Kephart has some distinctive features of punctuation and handwriting, most of which have been preserved. For instance, she underlines words for emphasis, and these underlines have been retained. Laura crossed out two words, which have been replicated with strikethroughs. However, she frequently crosses her t's with the bar a space to the right, a feature of her handwriting which is not possible to reproduce in print. She also sometimes uses the plus sign ("+") for "and," which has been replaced with an ampersand for more traditional print.

Laura often abbreviates family and place names with initials. In some cases, it is evident to whom or what these abbreviations refer. In others, it is not so clear. The initials and all other proper nouns are annotated to the best of the editor's ability. Footnotes, rather than endnotes, are used so that the reader can quickly access the information without losing their place in the letter. Sources for the annotations are listed in the bibliography at the end of the edition.

Manuscript Description

Laura Kephart wrote the first page of her letter on white stationary which measures 10 (length) by 7.75 (width) inches. The stationary has faded to beige from age. The paper is creased twice vertically, almost in thirds, and once horizontally, closer to the bottom of the sheet. The ink becomes darker toward the end of each page.

The second page of the letter has uneven edges on the top and bottom, as if it was torn from another sheet. It measures 3.75 (length) by 7.25 (width) inches. The paper is light blue with short, slightly darker fibers inside. It may be rag paper, made from old clothes, and it is slightly thicker and heavier than the first page. It is creased twice vertically into uneven thirds which match the first page.

The envelope, like the first page of the letter, was white but has faded to beige with age. It has been cut open, as if by a letter opener, on top, and the stamp has been cut out. Laura addressed it in the center, under where the stamp used to be, to "Mr. Leonard W. Kephart, 226 Maple Ave., Takoma Park D.C." The postmark above reads, "White Plains, N. Y., APR 6, 6:30 PM, 1934." The return address is on the other side, at the bottom of the envelope, below the seal. It reads, "Mrs. Horace Kephart, Chappaqua N. Y."

Transcription

[MS page 1]

April 5, 1934

Dear Leonard,

Instead of a will, I am going to give you all my “things” now. There are too many whereases & heretofores for me to bother.

George would like the old Gebhardt Bible, but thinks it should go to you & Buddy as the eldest males in two generations.¹ It looks to me that is the logical disposition. If, instead of the Bible, you rather have the old Joshua Ferris (Gramp’s grandfather on his mother’s side) trunk you may.² Then G. can have the Bible.³ The trunk is the little one we had in the sitting room on Powhatan; Gramp used it when he went to college.⁴ These two

¹ The name “Kephart” is a Swiss dialectical variant of the German “Gebhardt.” The early Kepharts were Swiss and may have used this alternate spelling of their last name (Kephart and Funk 11-12). George Stebbins Kephart (1894-1961) was the fifth child and second son of Horace and Laura Kephart. Buddy is likely a nickname, perhaps for George Overton Kephart (1920-2011), Leonard Kephart’s son and the oldest male of Laura Kephart’s grandchildren.

² Joshua Ferris (1763-1848), Laura Kephart’s great-grandfather and Leonard Kephart’s great-great-grandfather. Gramp is Horace Mack, Jr., (1883-1910), Laura Kephart’s father and Leonard Kephart’s grandfather.

³ George Stebbins Kephart (see footnote 3).

⁴ Perhaps Powhatan Lakes, Virginia. Connection to Laura Kephart unknown, although there was a Margaret Dowd Kephart who lived in Powhatan, Virginia, until 2016 (“Obituaries - Aug. 10, 2016”). May also be a street name, unidentified.

[MS Page 1]

things seem to be the most manly of my
possessions.

The furniture, jewelry etc. B. & I will
portion out to the best of our ability & then
the girls can trade among themselves if they
want to so do, without the help of lawyers.⁵

“The girls” are Cornelia, Margaret, Lucy, Barbara
& Frances, because they have daughters.⁶

We will divide them so that each granddaughter

[over]

⁵ Barbara Bird (nee Kephart, 1897-1985), sixth and last child of Horace and Laura Kephart. At the time of this letter, Laura Kephart was staying with her daughter in Chappaqua, New York.

⁶ Cornelia Kephart Moore (1888-1947), oldest child of Horace and Laura Kephart; Margaret Kephart (1890-1972), second child of Horace and Laura Kephart; Lucy Wheeler Fernow (nee Kephart, 1893-1977), fourth child of Horace and Laura Kephart; Barbara Bird (see footnote 5 above); Frances Frazer Kephart (1887-1971), wife of Leonard Kephart and daughter-in-law of Laura Kephart.

can share equally as possible.⁷

There is some old music of Aunt Cornelias
& Nannies (I think there is some of Nannies)
& mine, which is not so old.⁸ I have been told
that any old music is valuable. You & Cornelia
may share this; if neither of you want it,
it can go elsewhere.

The division will be made fast as possible,
because I want to clean things up before I go
to Ithaca. That will be as soon as the chance
comes. Can't do much about it this week as
B. is on another nursing-housekeeping job
which keeps her from 7:30 A.M. to about 7 P.M.⁹

Your Uncle George is not well and wants
to come back to Ithaca.¹⁰ If he decides to make
the move, he will live at the Riley farm,
either in part of the old house or will build

⁷ Cornelia Kephart Moore had three daughters: Virginia Moore (1920-2014), Jeanette Moore (1922-2016), and Susan Moore (b. 1923). Lucy Wheeler Fernow had one: Mary Elizabeth Fernow (b. 1924). Barbara Bird had two: Margaret Bird (b. 1925) and Laura Mack Bird (1929-2004). Frances Frazer Kephart also had two: Jane Frazer Kephart (1918-2014) and Barbara Ann Kephart (b. 1923). Margaret Kephart actually did not have any children, so Laura Kephart's statement "they have daughters" may only be referring to Cornelia, Barbara, Frances, and Lucy. She had, in total, eight granddaughters.

⁸ Aunt Cornelia unidentified, unless she is Cornelia Kephart Moore (see footnote 6). Nanny likely Lucy Wheeler Mack (1838-1925), Laura Kephart's mother.

⁹ Barbara Bird (see footnote 5).

¹⁰ George William Mack (b. 1860), Laura Kephart's brother. As of 1930, he lived in Ophir, Montana, where he worked as a carpenter ("Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930," Ophir Township).

[MS Page 2]

a cabin.¹¹ He wrote about it & so did Charlie Anderson; we all agree it is the fine thing to do.¹² Charlie wants us to chip in & have the tools sent to Ithaca. He says they are too good to be practically given away out there. Then they will be divided among any of the family who wants them.

Cornelia plans to drive to Ithaca April 20 to get Cousin Susie.¹³ She offered to pay the expenses if C. would do it.¹⁴ She probably will stay in E.L. until school closes.¹⁵ Then the Moore's will ~~for~~ bring her back & return home

¹¹ Howard Wait Riley (1879-1971), Laura's brother-in-law, married to her sister Julia Whiton Mack (1877-1963). As of 1830, Riley resided in Ithaca, New York, and the "Fifteenth Census of the United States" lists his wife and son as living on a farm.

¹² Charlie Anderson unidentified.

¹³ Likely Susie Lenore John (b. 1902), granddaughter of Horace Kephart's uncle Ezekiel Boring Kephart, and therefore Leonard Kephart's second cousin (Horace Kephart Journal 17).

¹⁴ Cornelia Kephart Moore (see footnote 10).

¹⁵ East Lansing, Michigan. As of 1930, Cornelia Kephart Moore lived in Meridian Charter Township in the city, where she worked as an assistant editor and her husband, Henry Carleton Moore (see footnote 15), was a professor at Michigan State University. Their daughters Virginia, Jeanette, and Susie would have been in school as they were fourteen, eleven, and ten years old, respectively, in April 1934 ("Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930," Meridian Township).

[MS Page 3]

by way of Carlisle.¹⁶ Carleton's sister lives there & Father Moore is with her.¹⁷ He is "practically bedridden." I would like to get to Ithaca in time to see her, but am afraid it can't be done.

Please answer this at once & send the copy of Coburn letter.¹⁸ If my interest money gets here I may go down to M's apt. (!) for a few days next week.¹⁹ We drove down to the Bronx Zoo last Sat. Took our lunch & went on down to M.'s apt. She came just

[over]

¹⁶ Henry Carleton Moore (1889-1967), Cornelia Kephart Moore's husband. His family lived in Carlisle, Pennsylvania (see footnote 17 below).

¹⁷ Henry Carleton Moore (see footnote 16 above). His sister Margaret "Nellie" Moore (1881-1973) lived in Carlisle as of 1930 ("Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930," Carlisle). Henry Warfield Moore (1855-1939), Henry Carleton Moore's father, died on January 22, 1939, in Carlisle, of "chronic myocarditis" which had onset "several years ago" (Death Certificate for Henry W. Moore).

¹⁸ John E. "Jack" Coburn, close friend of Horace Kephart and executor of his estate (Ellison and McCue 370). The letter Laura Kephart refers to is dated March 19, 1934, and can be found in the Horace Kephart Collection at Western Carolina University. In it, Coburn details his administration of the estate to the Mount Kisco, New York-based attorneys Ticknor and Ticknor (Coburn).

¹⁹ Margaret Kephart (see footnote 6) lived in the Bronx, New York City, as of 1930 ("Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930," Bronx Borough).

[MS Page 4]

after we did. She is looking well & we had a nice visit.

Lovingly

Mama

I may not deliver all of the jewelry etc. just now, as some of it I wear, but it will reach you all, when I am no more. Dr. Weinberg (oculist) told Cornelia that it is now known that “glaucoma is caused by some systemic ~~poison~~ infection such as teeth or tonsils. Is not hereditary.”²⁰

²⁰ Dr. Weinberg unidentified.

Annotated Bibliography

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Coburn, J. E. Letter to Ticknor & Ticknor. 19 March 1934. Box 5, Folder 52. MS 12-05.5.

Horace Kephart Collection. Hunter Library Special Collections, Cullowhee, NC.

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

This recent biography of Horace Kephart offers the most up-to-date account of his life.

Horace Kephart Journal 17. Box 63. MS 80-24. Horace Kephart Collection. Hunter Library Special Collections, Cullowhee, NC.

This journal of Horace Kephart's includes a family tree of descendants of his grandparents, Henry and Sarah Kephart.

"Horace Kephart: Revealing an Enigma." Hunter Library Special Collections and the Mountain Heritage Center, Western Carolina University, 2005.

This online exhibit presents biographical information for Horace Kephart as well as a timeline of his life.

Kephart, Cyrus J. and William R. Funk. *Life of Rev. Isaiah L. Kephart, D. D.* United Brethren Publishing, 1909.

This biography of Horace Kephart's father, written by his relative, provides family trees for the earlier generations of Kepharts as well as information about the origin of the name "Kephart."

Kephart, Laura. Letter to Leonard Kephart. 5 April 1934. Box 1, Folder 8. MS 12.05-01-08-006.

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This obituary of Margaret Kephart Dowd suggests a link between the Kephart family and Powhatan, Virginia.

U.S. Census Bureau. “Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930.” Bronx Borough, New York City, NY, April 7, 1930.

---. “Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930.” Carlisle, Cumberland Country, PA. April 5-7, 1930.

---. “Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930.” Ithaca, Tompkins County, NY. April 12, 1930.

---. “Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930.” Meridian Township, Ingham County, MI. April 26, 1930.

---. “Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930.” Ophir Township, Powell County, MT. May 12-14, 1930.