

**Laura Mack Kephart's Letter
To Leonard W. Kephart
March 12, 1946**

Transcribed and Edited by
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For ENGL 618: Research Methods in English
Instructor and General Editor: Dr. Laura Wright
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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.
 - i. 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.
 - i. 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.
 - i. 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.
 - a. 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

The following transcription is created from the manuscript of Laura Kephart's 1946 letter to her son Leonard Kephart (1892-1988). Mrs. Kephart writes her son to discuss her opinions on a Cleveland Orchestra Concert she went to and her desire to visit loved ones in Washington. She also informs him of the dates of upcoming class reunions, and his niece Laura's graduation. Lastly, she discusses the varied hair and eye color of their family members in opposition to others who have apparently questioned the parentage of Mary Ann's child.

Laura White Mack Kephart, the sender of the letter, was born in Ithaca, New York in 1887. She shared six children with her husband, American travel writer Horace Sowers Kephart (1862-1931), whom she met at Cornell University. One of those children was Leonard Wheeler Kephart, the recipient of this letter, who, at the time of sending, lived in the Takoma Park neighborhood of Washington D.C. with his wife, Frances, and their children Jane, George, and Barbara.

This manuscript could be of interest to those who want to learn more about the intricacies of the Kepharts' lives outside of Horace's. He died in a car accident around 15 years before this letter was written, and the family had lived separately for many years before that with Mrs. Kephart and the children in New York and Mr. Kephart in the mountains of Western North Carolina. This document sheds light on the relationship that the family members have with each other because it shows Laura missing her family members, longing to visit, and wanting to support their important events. Those who are interested in how the family was perceived by others could be interested in this document as well. It exposes a bit of the gossip about child legitimacy that was being spread at the time, as well as how Ms. Kephart responds to it. Finally, I think that people interested in the family's financial hardships could use letters like these to get a sense of their situation. Not only does Laura allude to not having many quality items, she alludes to the fact that the home that they spent a good portion of their lives in, was not in as good of shape as it had previously been as well.

Manuscript Description

This letter was written on the front and back of one piece of pale beige paper measuring 7 ¼ inches wide by 10 ½ inches tall. The envelope that it was in measures 6 ½ inches wide by 3 ½ inches tall and is beige in color. The letter is in good shape with no tears, stains, or disfigurement, other than a folded corner and creases in the paper that hint at the paper being folded in uneven thirds in order to fit into the envelope. The envelope is in fair shape with no visible stains, with one very small hole at the bottom of the envelope, and the crease of a previously folded right corner.

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, all of Laura's grammar marks and spelling have been retained, which may result in some errors that do not hinder the text's readability. In instances

where Mrs. Kephart crossed a word in her letter, a similar visual was attained with using the strike-through function. Each line of the letter is its own line in the transcription, and separate pages of the manuscript are denoted within the text.

Here are some notable features of Laura Kephart's writing:

- The word “and” is replaced with an ampersand-like symbol that at times resembles a plus sign and at other times resembles a triangle. It has been replicated using +.
- There are words that she hyphenates that are not usually hyphenated, but they have been replicated as she wrote them.
- In the last paragraph of the letter she varies her spelling of blond and blonde with no regard to the gender of the subject, so each instance is replicated as she wrote it.
- The way she draws certain letters is unique:
 - There are times when the horizontal lines of her Ts do not intersect the vertical line. These have been replicated as normally crossed Ts.
 - Her letter p is written very similarly to the letter f.
 - Her Fs are drawn with an additional loop the bottom that looks like a number 8
 - Her letter w looks like a capitalized H in some instances.
 - Her capitalized Gs differ from a normal capital cursive G
 - All of these letters have been typed as normal and there are no notes distinguishing them within the transcription.

Lastly, below the letter d in “Grandpa” and p in “Plymouth” in the last paragraph on the second page of the letter cases, Laura adds extra line or symbols that could not be replicated. Below the d was a vertical line with two shorter horizontal lines intersecting it, and below the P is a symbol reminiscent of the pie symbol. They do not appear to be marks made for the purposes of editing or proofreading, but their purpose remains undiscovered.

Transcription

[MS Page 1]

Mar. 12, 1946

Dear Leonard,¹

Guess all the news went in my yesterday's letter to Jane², except Lucy³ took on a cold + I took on her ticket to the Cleveland Orchestra Concert⁴ last night. Some concert but I could hardly "see the woods for the trees⁵." Mr. Leinsdorf⁶ outdid Mr. Dawn⁷ at his worst. However it was a finest kind of production- they couldn't keep from playing, he pulled it right out of them. Aside from the aesthetic pleasure it always interests me to see a job so well done, if it is no more than ditch digging.

As to the Washington⁸ trip, you know how I long to see those babies⁹ while they are babies, but- I have no clothes suitable for going visiting. My wardrobe is all right for the farm¹⁰, + gets by at 111¹¹ because it looks as good as the house (in a way I am glad Julia¹² can't see her¹³ house) + Every one

¹ Leonard Wheeler Kephart (1892-1988) son of the sender, Laura Mack Kephart, and writer Horace Sowers Kephart was married to Frances Frazer. They had three children: James, George, and Barbara. (Keith Cooper Family Tree)

² Jane Frazer Kephart (1918-2014) was the granddaughter of Laura Kephart and daughter of Leonard Kephart. In the letter sent to her on March 11th, Laura Kephart discussed moving, the farm, and a letter from her grandfather. (Keith Cooper Family Tree)

³ Lucy Wheeler Kephart (1893-1977) was one of Leonard's younger sisters and Laura's fourth child. (Keith Cooper Family Tree)

⁴ The Cleveland Orchestra Concert was founded in 1918. It grew to be very well respected and admired and is now noted as one of the best orchestras in the world. ("Mission and History")

⁵ This phrase is from the UK, the US alternative would be "can't see the forest for the trees." Both phrases mean that a person is "unable to understand a situation clearly because [they] are too involved in it." (Cambridge Dictionary)

⁶ Erich Leinsdorf (February 4, 1912-September 11, 1993), an Austrian born American conductor, was the music director of the Cleveland Orchestra from 1943-1946. ("Leinsdorf, Erich")

⁷ Unidentified

⁸ Leonard lived in the Takoma Park neighborhood in Washington, D.C.

⁹ Leonard had three children at this time, but none of them were particularly young. At the time of this letter Jane Frazier would have been 28, George Overton would have been 26, and Barbara Ann would have been 22. (Keith Cooper Family Tree)

¹⁰ Laura lived with her daughter's family at 3062 Borchom Drive in Ingham county, Michigan, which was a farm. ("1940 United States Federal Census")

¹¹ This is a reference to her address, 111 Ferris Place. All her children lived in that home in the past ("1910 United States Federal Census")

¹² Julia Whitton (1877-1963), Laura's younger sister and Leonard's aunt, was married to Howard Riley. (Keith Cooper Family Tree)

¹³ Laura may have thought of 111 as Julia's home because Julia continued living there when she left and because Howard owned the home and became head of household after their father Horace's death in 1910. They continued

knows me + my unstylish ways. If you think you can pass this part of it, I could make the trip any time convenient to you, + be ready on a minutes notice, as my training

[MS Page 2]

along that line has been A I ¹⁴. The class re-unions¹⁵ are June ~~20~~-21-22-23. If they are of interest to you this year, I could come down by train + you could bring me back at that time. Perhaps the Moores¹⁶ could be here then; Cornelia¹⁷ said they hoped to come East this year.

Laura's¹⁸ graduation begins June 23 + I have thought about going up for that, as there are more of my friends in Boonville¹⁹ now than, there are here. I would like to go up there, before I settle down for the summer. It looks now unlikely, that I will ever go back to the farm. However that story is long & the bridge can be crossed after it is built.

Tell Mary Ann²⁰ that your Grandpa K.²¹ was not a real blonde, but he had the blue-est of blue eyes; my Grandpa Mack²² had the redest of red hair; "myself when young" had golden

owning the house and marking it as their place of residence on the census until at least 1940. ("1940 United States Census")

¹⁴ This was written as an uppercase I but is presumably a 1. This phrase means to be very good or top quality. ("A1")

¹⁵ Both Leonard and Laura studied at Cornell University. Leonard was in the class of 1913. ("George S. Kephart Family Papers")

¹⁶ The Moores consisted of Cornelia Kephart Moore, her husband Henry Carleton Moore, and their daughters Virginia, Jeanette, and Susan Evelyn. They lived in Michigan and would be traveling East if they came to visit. (Keith Cooper Family Tree)

¹⁷ Cornelia Ferris Kephart Moore (1888-1947) Leonard's older sister and Laura's oldest daughter. (Keith Cooper Family Tree)

¹⁸ Laura Mack Bird (1929- 2004) was the daughter of Barbara Kephart. Laura, Leonard's niece and Laura's namesake granddaughter, would be around seventeen years old at the time of writing. She married James D. Warren in 1948. (Keith Cooper Family Tree)

¹⁹ Boonville, a village in Oneida County, NY, is home to Hamilton College (Laura Wright) where Horace Mack graduated 1898 ("George S. Kephart Family Papers")

²⁰ Undiscovered

²¹ Grandpa K could be short for Kephart, meaning Leonard's paternal grandfather. Horace Kephart's father was Isaiah Lafayette Kephart (1832-1908). He was married to Mary Elizabeth Sowers and spent much of his life in Pennsylvania, Iowa, and Ohio. (Keith Cooper Family Tree)

²² Laura's paternal Grandpa was Horace Mack Sr. (1799-1855). He was married to Eliza Ann Ferris, and they had eight children together. (Keith Cooper Family Tree)

blond hair & still have green eyes, so Budgr²³.
can be blond if he wants to, but will probably
outgrow it. So, Mary Ann's jibers²⁴ can just
swallow their words. Quite often the purest
bred purple petunia will produce a pink flower,
& the ditto Plymouth Rocks²⁵, a pure black fowl.

Love to you all,
Mama²⁶

[MS Page 3 (Envelope)]

L.M. Kephart
111 Ferris Pl.
Ithaca N.Y.

(Ink Stamp)
Ithaca, N.Y.
March 12
12:30 PM
1946

(Postage Stamp)
United
States
Postage
Thomas
Jefferson
1801-1809
3 CENTS 3

Mr. L. W. Kephart
226 Maple Ave.
Takoma Park.
D.C.

Budpr's blond hair²⁷

²³ Name undecipherable

²⁴ A jiber is one who jeers or doubts (Laura Wright).

²⁵ Plymouth Rocks are chickens that are black and white (Laura Wright).

²⁶ Laura Mack Kephart (1962-1954) was the mother of Leonard Wheeler Kephart and his five siblings, and wife to Horace Sowers Kephart (1962-1931) (Keith Cooper Family Tree).

²⁷ This phrase stands out because it is the only writing in the letter that is not written in pen, and the only instance of handwriting that does not match Laura Kephart's cursive-like script.

Annotated Works Cited

Cambridge Dictionary, Cambridge University Press, 2020, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/>.

This source was used to find the definitions of colloquialisms used throughout the letter.

- "A1." *Cambridge Dictionary*. Cambridge University Press. 2020.

- "Can't See the Wood for the Trees." *Cambridge Dictionary*. Cambridge University Press. 2020.

"George S. Kephart Family Papers, #3268." *Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections*, Cornell University Library.

This source was used to find information about the colleges that some family members went to.

"Keith Cooper Family Tree." *Ancestry Library*. <https://www.ancestrylibrary.com/family-tree/tree/58127222/family?cfpid=34555571809&fpid=34555391668&usePUBJs=true>, Accessed October 2020

This source was used to find all of the family members' lifespans, locations, and the names of their children and spouses.

Kephart, Laura M. Untitled Letter. 11 March 1946. Western Carolina University's Hunter Library Special Collections, Cullowhee.

Laura's letter to Jane to was mentioned and was therefore summarized in the footnote.

"Leinsdorf, Erich." *The Scribner Encyclopedia of American Lives*, Volume 8, 2020.

This source was used to find additional information about Erich Leinsdorf, the Cleveland Orchestra Concert director.

"Mission and History." *clevelandorchestra.com*. The Cleveland Orchestra. 2020

This source was used to find information about the Cleveland Orchestra and its directors.

Wright, Laura. Message to Carra Hurley. 17 Nov. 2020. E-mail.

This email clarified many questions and provided definition of unfamiliar terms such as jiber, Boonville, and Plymouth rock.

U.S. Census Bureau. "Sixteenth Census of the United States: 1940." Meridian, Ingham County, MI, n.d. *AncestryLibrary.com*.

The source showed that Laura lived in Michigan with her Cornelia's family.

U.S. Census Bureau. "Sixteenth Census of the United States: 1940." Ithaca, Tompkins County, NY, n.d. *AncestryLibrary.com*.

This source showed that Julie Whitton Riley continued living in the 111 Ithaca home.

U.S. Census Bureau. "Thirteenth Census of the United States: 1910." Ithaca, Tompkins County, NY, n.d. *AncestryLibrary.com*.

This source showed that Laura and all the Kephart children lived in the 111 Ithaca home together with Horace and Lucy Mack before the children grew up and moved out.