

Laura Kephart's Letter to Leonard Kephart

May, 20 1946

Horace and Laura Mack Kephart Family Collection, Add. #2: MSS 16-01

Transcribed and Edited by

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For ENGL 618: Research Methods in English

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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 was created based on the letter from Laura (L.M. on envelope) Kephart to her son, Leonard Kephart. The casual nature of this letter leads the transcriber to believe this was one of many regular correspondences between mother and son. In the letter, Laura discusses an article that Leonard had written, wondering about how much he had been paid to do the work described; her recent infatuation with crossword puzzles and their igniting of her curiosity with language, which she followed by creating entertaining tongue twisters; a production of a play depicting the founding of Cornell University; brief updates on family members Manton and Lucy –there is a strange paragraph that seems to be in reference to the railroad strike of May 1946 during her section about Lucy, but the content of the paragraph is perplexing, to say the least – and a tragic car wreck from a few days prior, which resulted in injury and death to two pedestrians and damage to businesses.

Laura Mack Kephart, born Laura White Mack on Valentine's Day (February 14) 1862 in Ithaca, N.Y., married Horace Kephart and birthed six children: Leonard, Cornelia, Barbara, Margaret, Lucy, and George. Laura had a sister, Julia Whiton, and a brother, George William Mack. By the time of this letter, Horace Kephart had been dead for 15 years. Laura Kephart spent her entire life in Ithaca and was deeply connected to the Cornell community. Though Horace left to found what would later become the Great Smoky Mountains National Park in 1904 – with a brief reconciliation attempted in 1908-09, Laura remained loyal to her husband, never speaking a cross word or letting her children think anything less than greatness of their estranged father. Laura passed away on 20 December 1954.

Leonard Wheeler Kephart led an extraordinarily under-recognized life. Born 10 January 1892 in Ithaca, NY. Leonard attended Cornell, like so much of his family, and served in the Army during World War I. After the war, he began his work with the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) as an agronomist. During a trip to Africa in 1927, Leonard became the first American to climb to the summit of Mount Kilimanjaro, the highest point on the continent. Leonard lived in Takoma Park near Washington D.C. for the remainder of his adult life, working as a senior

agronomist on weed control for 36 years, until he retired in 1949. His retirement was short lived, Leonard worked at the World Bank from 1950-57 as an advisor for agricultural projects and investments. Leonard Kephart passed away 10 February 1988 at the age of 96.

Editor's Note

This transcription of Laura Kephart's letter is a diplomatic transcription attempting to recreate all elements of the original letter – any extra marks, line breaks, and page breaks. Laura's handwriting in this letter is clearer than other manuscripts from the Kephart Digital Collection, leading to annotations focused more on background and contextual information. Each footnote denotes a single annotation for ease of reference for readers. Information for this transcription derived from multiple sources such as: *Ancestry Library Edition*, *History.com*, *The Washington Post*, and Cornell University's website. Laura does have a few distinguishing features in her writing:

- Capital “W’s” have an extended center point that confuses readers until a pattern is established.
- She uses a + instead of spelling out the word “and.”
- The shape of her lower case “p’s,” is inconsistent, some close fully, others remain open.
- She tends to make little distinction between lower case “m’s” and “n’s.”

Final Note: in her address to Leonard's children in the letter's closing, she uses “xxx,” which is meant to represent the hugs and kisses symbolism of “xoxo” – only Laura excludes the hugs.

Manuscript Description

Originally, the paper Laura Mack Kephart used to write to her son, Leonard on 20 May 1946 would have been white, but after decades of wear, a beige hue has overtaken the envelope and pages. The former, an envelope with dimensions of 6 ½ inches by 3 ½ inches, shows “L.M. Kephart 111 Ferris Pl. Ithaca, N.Y.” etched in the top left corner. Opposite, in the right top corner, lies a three-cent Thomas Jefferson stamp. The white profile of the President sits atop a blue background. A post office stamp creates a wave effect beginning at his upper lip, the secondary stamp indicates the postal service's mark in “Ithaca, NY on 21 May 1946 at 1:30 PM.” In the center of the envelope the recipient's address reads, “Leonard W. Kephart 226 Maple Ave. Takoma Park, D.C.”

The pages held within the confines of the stamped envelope tell a story – one sheet, measuring 10 ½” by 8”, turned horizontal and folded in half, displays the text like a book. This story might

not be a pivotal moment in the movie of Laura or Leonard's life, but this story has value just the same. In a letter that reveals casual aspects of Laura's personality, the handwriting is clean and accurate – only one word is crossed out due to misspelling or wrong word choice. The story is as disjointed as the events that make up a late May weekend. Each moment is a recollection of the mundane to keep Leonard in the loop, and shows readers a piece of the full character that is Laura Kephart on aged, un-lined white paper with yellowing edges.

Transcription

(Manuscript pg. 1)

Ithaca, NY. May 20, 1946¹

Dear Leonard -

My brain is in a whirl
trying to figure out, how much
you were paid an hour for the
work done on the weeds
reported in your article². ~~Thi~~
Those poor miners + R.R. men³!
And they were paid to leave
their jobs, as you pointed out
to the breakman. I read the
article to Julia⁴, but spelled the
name of the acid + left it to
her to pronounce — she didn't.

Doing crosswords⁵ has made
me interested in our language
+ what is must be for a for-
eigner to learn — Joe Smith feels
great store on the store of goods

¹ 111 Ferris Pl. where Laura lived while writing this letter. Leonard lived at 226 Maple Ave. Takoma Park, D.C.

² Publication with the USDA on poison ivy, poison oak, and poison sumac from August, 1945 (Kephart, Crooks) .

³ Railroad strike of 1946. 250,000 railroad workers nationwide were on strike for four days in May, 1946 (Garlock).

⁴ Julia Whiton, Laura's sister (*Ancestry Library*).

⁵ Unable to locate, possibly *New York Times* or *Ithaca Journal*.

in his store. Do you shed a tear

(Manuscript pg. 2)

when you tear yourself from a
place or tear your clothes.

I read your letter, but John has
not read it — will read later⁶.

 This place is full up⁷
over the week end. “Pat” Oakie⁸,
who rooms here, had relatives
come to witness the performance
of What Happened to Ezra Cornell’s
Cow Pasture⁹, which Pat wrote.
She is a post-grad in Dramatics
+ has done a fine job on the
play. I wish it could be put on
re-union week, but Prof. Drummond¹⁰
thinks it would not be possible
to keep the performers here.

 Manton + Dorothy¹¹ were here
for the first time in months.
Manton gets down quite often,
especially since he has a car,
but Dorothy has to make so many
business trips to Chicago etc., usually
is not able to get here.

⁶ Tongue twisters showing curious use of English language, no apparent significance.

⁷ Julia’s boarding house in Ithaca, NY.

⁸ Pricilla Oakie (*The Cornell Bulletin*).

⁹ Play performed in 1946 about the founding of Cornell University (*The Cornell Bulletin*).

¹⁰ Head of Drama department at Cornell during time of letter (Glaser).

¹¹ Manton was Laura’s nephew (Julia Whiton’s son), Dorothy was unable to be identified (*Ancestry Library*).

(Manuscript pg. 3)

Don't see much of Lucy,
since they moved back to the
farm, as Henry¹² has gone on a
strike, or rather he has lost some
of his innards, which are so out
of style they cannot be replaced.
Lucy is snooping around junk
files hoping to find some.

A car got out of control
Sat., up on Mitchell St. It
went down State St., swiped
two parked cars took to the side
walk opposite the Ithaca Hotel¹³,
smashed the windows of the
Card Shop, Wilson's oculist, The Spa,
restaurant + a jewelry store. Broke
both legs of a woman pedestrian
+ killed another pedestrian. The
car was full of children + driven
by a woman, none of whom were
hurt more than shaken up +
bruised some. She said her gear(s)

¹² Lucy was Leonard's sister. Henry seems to be a different Henry than Cornelia's (Lucy and Leonard's sister) spouse (*Ancestry Library Edition*).

¹³ Information about the accident remains elusive. Despite finding an issue of the *Ithaca Journal* for the weekend of the accident, access to the site was restricted. Parameters of this project and limited time hindered accessing archives of periodical over digitized versions. Ithaca Hotel stood from 1935-1966. After being demolished, it was rebuilt and renamed as The Hotel Ithaca as part of "Urban Renewal" efforts (PocketSights). Other businesses seem to be local to Ithaca and without names, unable to locate.

(Manuscript pg. 4)

+ brakes refused to work + the car
had been overhauled the day
before. These hills are sure +
always easy to navigate.

Lucy just came in + visited
until now it is time for the
postman.

Love to all + xxx
for the third generation — the
other two perhaps have outgrown
them¹⁴.

Mama

¹⁴ Affections to Leonard's children: Jane, George, and Barbara. Genealogical information showed George as only child (Ancestry Library), yet Leonard's obituary listed the siblings. It is unknown which represent the different generations Laura mentions (*The Washington Post*).

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