

Laura Mack Kephart's Letter
To Leonard W. Kephart
October 7, 1946



“Listening to the Word” (Horace Kephart Photo Album)

Transcribed and Edited by

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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 is created from the manuscript of Laura Mack Kephart's letter written to Leonard Kephart on October 7, 1946. In this letter, Laura Kephart shows great concern for family and careful attention to the words and arrangement of newspaper headlines and church advertisements. The first page of the letter contains general family news and updates: her granddaughter Laura's college enrollment and an upcoming trip for Howard Riley and her sister, Julia. On the next page, Laura offers a strong condemnation of the Unitarian Church, provoked by ads she has seen in the newspaper. Additionally, she discusses the world headline of the week: the trials at Nuremburg where high-profile Nazi criminals were sentenced after WWII. The letter concludes in lighthearted correspondence in which Laura documents her schedule the day prior and gives a few more updates on family and friends living in Ithaca, New York.

Horace Kephart (1862-1931) met his wife, Laura White Mack (1862-1954), while working in the library at Cornell University, and they went on to have six children: Leonard, Cornelia, Barbara, Margaret, Lucy and George. Laura's upbringing in the Unitarian Church differed to Horace's upbringing, and Laura later served as superintendent of the Unitarian Church Sunday School. Laura and Horace never legally separated after marrying in 1887, but Laura lived in Ithaca for much of her life and supported Horace until his death by car accident in 1931. Laura was 84 when she wrote this letter from Ithaca, New York, where much of her extended family settled. In 1940, after a house fire, Laura needed financial assistance. Helped by her sister, Julia Mack and Julia's husband? Howard Riley, she was likely staying with them at the time the letter was written.

The letter's recipient is Horace and Laura's third child and first-born son, Leonard W. Kephart (1892-1988). Leonard graduated from Cornell University's Agriculture Department in 1913. He married Frances Frazer in 1916, and they had three children: Jane, George, and Barbara. Leonard had an interesting life and corresponded with family by letter frequently. In 1927 he represented the U.S. Department of Agriculture on a plant-collecting trip in East Africa specifically to hunt for new grasses. He ended up discovering three new varieties of clover and becoming the first American to scale Mt. Kilimanjaro. At the time of the letter, Leonard was 54 and living in Montgomery, Maryland. At the time of his Fourth Registration WWII draft card in 1942, he was still working for the Department of Agriculture's Bureau of Plant Industry in Washington D.C. There are several more transcribed letters from Laura to Leonard in this collection.

This manuscript reveals insight on Laura Kephart as a mother and a thinker. She is opinionated and has choice words in her critique of religious ads and the news occurring after WWII. Laura stayed informed on current matters, often consuming news from the *Christian Science Monitor*. The letter reveals that with Leonard, she could share candid thoughts and feelings. *Back of Beyond: A Horace Kephart Biography* says, "We know from Leonard that Laura was 'not afraid to speak her mind, that she was accepting and not quarrelsome'" (qtd in Ellison and McCue 31). Laura Kephart at this time of her life was bold and opinionated about news and her religion. Laura Kephart died on December 20, 1954 and is buried alongside Horace in Ithaca, New York.

Editor's Note:

This edition of Laura Kephart's letter to Mr. Leonard Kephart uses a diplomatic format. This format is used to recreate the appearance and presentation of Laura Kephart's original document as closely as possible. This transcription was produced as a reproduction of the original letter, with the original manuscript's indentions and line breaks kept similar fashion.

The transcription includes a bracketed title with a page number to indicate the beginning of one of Mrs. Kephart's four pages. All underlines, extra marks, deletions, and line breaks have been recreated to the extent possible. Laura Kephart's use of punctuation – such as parentheses, quotation marks, insertion carrots, and question marks – has also been maintained throughout. When the symbol “^” appears in the transcription, Kephart has written words smaller above the line as an added revision. Kephart's sign for “and” looks similar to a plus sign, so the ampersand or “&” is used in the transcription to indicate this symbol. Kephart uses abbreviations in many cases, especially when referring to days of the week. There are some distinguishing features of Kephart's penmanship to note. Several of her t's are uncrossed with a slight flick at the top. Some of the lower-case n's and m's are stretched out to sometimes resemble w's.

Annotations are provided via footnotes that include in-text citations corresponding to the Works Cited list. In sentences with multiple annotations, the footnote's superscript is put after the word it explains. Annotations are intended to provide background information as well as supplementary contextual information to help readers grasp the historical setting of which the letter is originally produced. While the exact ads and articles Laura Kephart makes mention of in the letter could not be located, similar sources from the same time were corroborated and used for footnotes in order to provide a deeper understanding of some of the references Kephart made.

Manuscript Description

The letter is a two-page document with writing on the front and back of each side for a total of four pages. Each page measures 10 ½” x 8”. The ink is black, and the stationery is plain and yellowing over time. The paper appears thin and somewhat transparent, as the ink on the other side is clearly visible. There are visible creases made on the page; however, information on the fold and physical appearance of the document is limited because only a scan of the original manuscripts from WCU Special Collections was available to examine during the hybrid semester.

Oct. 7, 1946

Dear Leonard¹,

Speaking of saving paper, how about the size of the new stamps?² The enclosed probably served its purpose as well as the new ones. I found it in one of the old books that Helen Bradley gave me.³ If it is no good, it will weigh as much in your waste paper as it would in mine.

Laura registered in Syracuse last Mon.⁴ She writes "I'm registered in English, Citizenship, Geology, Philosophy, Editorial Practice I, Russian! & tennis for Gym. So I'll be busy enough to

¹ Leonard W. Kephart (1892-1988), Horace and Laura Kephart's third born child. Was 54 at the time of this letter (Ancestry Library)

² No stamp was enclosed. The rate for a domestic letter in 1946 was 3 cents per ounce (U.S. Postal Service).

³ Helen Bradley could not be identified, though in a previous letter to Leonard from March 26, 1934, Laura refers to a Helen who is "Mrs. Angel's daughter" (Clay ed.).

⁴ Reference to Laura Mack Bird (1929-2004), granddaughter of Horace Kephart and Laura White Mack. Laura is registering at Syracuse University (Ancestry Library).

suit me!”

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Marnie⁵ is to register Mon.

The family may be down for
the week end to bring her &
her impedimenta.⁶ The Rileys
leave tomorrow “Early”, which
in Howard’s mind means 8
o’clock, but in performance is
apt to be 11+.⁷

Some young folks are
to have the big room upstairs to
house them until they can have
their new quarters. He will take
care of the furnace. I know how
to shovel coal in & ashes out of a
furnace, but am ignorant as to
which button to punch to get
what result.⁸

⁵ As indicated in an earlier letter from Laura to Leonard on March 14, 1934, Marnie may be Margaret Bird, daughter of Barbara and Royal Bird (Blevins ed. 2)

⁶ Things which impede or encumber progress; baggage (OED).

⁷ References to Howard Wait Riley (1879-1971) and Julia Whiton Mack (1877-1963) (Ancestry Library). Laura was likely staying with them at this time, for Laura’s sister, Julia, was said to have helped her when few others would (Hargrave et al).

⁸ The “he” here likely references Howard Wait Riley (1879-1971) (Ancestry Library).

The Rileys are going to Boston.⁹

Their annual crusade to the

Mother Church First Church of

Christian Science¹⁰ etc. ad fin¹¹.

⁹ Reference to Howard Wait Riley (1879-1971) and Julia Whiton Mack (1877-1963) (Ancestry Library).

¹⁰ Reference to Christian Science, one of the most successful religious movements of 19th century America founded by Mary Baker Eddy. In 1881 Boston was established as the church's headquarters, and the mesmerizing "Mother Church" was built in 1895 (Prothero and Queen).

¹¹ Abbreviation of ad finem meaning "to the end" (The Law Dictionary).

The Unitarian Church is
having a new forward impulse.¹²

The recent pamphlet Why I
believe in the advertising (that
is not the word used, but that
is what it is) of the Unitarian
Faith.¹³ It is short articles written
by prominent¹⁴ with their pictures.

The latter I compared with the
pictures of the Germans just
sentenced at N-berg.¹⁵ It was
right interesting & enlightening.

I tried to compare the Germans
with four-footed animals +
think Goering¹⁶ is a hyena, an

¹² Laura Kephart had an upbringing in the Unitarian Church, which was a rational contrast to the traditional religious approach Horace Kephart had been exposed to, at the time when they met at Cornell University in 1883 (Ellison and McCue 31). Here she seems to be using “forward” to mean more liberal.

¹³ Ads in the New York Times for the Unitarian Church the year of this letter distinguish Unitarianism as a faith that is human-centered and attempting to fill a spiritual gap people were feeling from churches that are “not meeting the conditions of modern life” (Display Ad 83) The recurring tagline is “If you are seeking a truly liberal religion, visit a Unitarian Church” (Display Ad 114, 150) Unitarians were reacting to changes in modern science and philosophy.

¹⁴ Laura Kephart appears to have deleted something here.

¹⁵ Reference to the Nuremberg trials, ending on October 1, 1946 where 10 Nazi Party officials and high-ranking military war criminals were sentenced to death and three Nazis walk away free (Foust).

¹⁶ Reference to Hermann Goering, a high-ranking Nazi leader, sentenced to death at Nuremberg.

utterly ruthless coward.¹⁷

Yesterday the Badgers¹⁸ asked
me to drive with them at The
Old Hundred¹⁹, which is the old
Allen farm²⁰ near Buttermilk.²¹ After

¹⁷ Laura calls Goering a “hyena” a term that has been applied to a cruel, treacherous, and rapacious person; one that resembles the hyena in some of its repulsive habits (OED). Goering’s reaction to being indicted on four counts was big in the headlines the week the letter is written. The Chicago Daily Tribune reports, “Goering stood motionless while the translation into German flowed into his ears. A guard tapped him on the shoulder. He turned about, pulling the earphones from his head with temper, and cast a grimace over his shoulder at the bench after he stepped thru a door-way leading to the elevator to the jail” (Foust). This headline provides information on why Kephart may have called Goering a coward. Goering eventually commits suicide before his execution on October 15, 1946.

¹⁸ The Badgers were unable to be identified.

¹⁹ “Old Hundred” is now a senior living center. Owner, Patty Classen, retained the name from previous owners. She does not know why the house is called Old Hundred, but said people used to name their homes for a variety of reasons. She states “Old Hundred” might have been a restaurant or a speakeasy in 1946 (Classen).

²⁰ Previous ownership of farmland could not be identified. This could refer to a farm on Fire Tower Road leading to the 1930’s Civilian Conservation Corps lookout tower, what has been known as Allen Road on Blackman Hill (Office of Tompkins County Historian).

²¹ Reference to a scenic waterfall a few miles from Ithaca. Buttermilk Falls State Park is a 733-acre tract of land bordering the southwest corner of Ithaca, established in 1924 a gift from Robert H. and Laura Treman (Office of Tompkins County Historian).

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dinner we drove to Kings Ferry²²
to call on Ethel & Ed Smith²³, &
Emma & Guy Slocum.²⁴ I had not
seen any of them for years. They
all served well, except Guy who
is fighting arthritis.²⁵

The Fernows are doing fine
with their potatos- about 1/3 of the
crop harvested, & more ^money in^ than the
whole last year's crops welled.²⁶

“Hoping you are the same!”

Love to you all

Mama²⁷

²² King's Ferry, NY is about 30 miles from Ithaca (Google Maps).

²³ These Ithaca residents could not be identified.

²⁴ Reference to Guy Wolf Slocum (1869-1953) and Emma Smith (1869-1956) (Ancestry Library).

²⁵ Reference to Guy Wolf Slocum, who was 77 at the time of this letter (Ancestry Library).

²⁶ Reference to Karl Fernow (1893-1983) and his spouse, Laura's daughter Lucy Kephart (1893-1977) (Ancestry Library).

²⁷ Laura White Mack (1862-1954), father to Leonard W. Kephart. Laura was 84 at the time she wrote this letter (Ancestry Library).

Works Cited

Ancestry Library. <http://www.ancestrylibrary.com> accessed 20 November 2020.

— Alstrum Family Tree.

<https://www.ancestrylibrary.com/family-tree/tree/52323977/family?cfpid=27560934373>

This page was helpful in identifying Laura's family members and providing their birth and death dates. It helped me identify the key facts of Laura Kephart's life.

— Guy and Ethel Slocum

https://www.ancestrylibrary.com/family-tree/person/tree/86975663/person/350010497789/story?_phsrc=uIj88&_phstart=successSource This page provided information on the Slocum family Laura mentions in the letter.

— U.S., World War II Draft Registration Cards, 1942. The National Archives at St Louis; St. Louis, Missouri; World War II Draft Cards (Fourth Registration) for the State of Maryland; State Headquarters: Maryland; Microfilm Series: M1939; Microfilm Roll: 31 This document provided helpful information on Leonard's work and place of residence at the time of the letter.

Classen, Patty. Personal Interview. 17 November 2020.

This interview provided information on "Old Hundred," a place Laura visits the day before the letter.

Ellison, George and McCue, Janet. *Back of Beyond: A Horace Kephart Biography*. Great Smoky Mountains Association, 2019. This biography was very comprehensive and provided insights and small details on Horace Kephart and Laura Kephart's life and relationships.

"Display ad 83 -- no title." *New York Times* 1923. 28 November 1946. Retrieved from <http://proxy195.nclive.org/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/docview/107455069?accountid=14968> This ad provided information on the Unitarian Church's advertising in 1946.

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Foust, Hal. "GOERING AND 10 OTHERS TO DIE AT NUERNBERG: BRITAIN SENDS ROPES AND HANGMEN GOERING TO DIE AT NUERNBERG WITH 10 OTHERS HEAR BRITAIN SENDS ROPES AND HANGMEN GOERING TO DIE AT NUERNBERG WITH 10 OTHERS HEAR BRITAIN SENDS ROPES AND HANGMEN THREE NAZIS FREED." *Chicago Daily Tribune* (1923-1963), Oct 02, 1946, pp. 1. *ProQuest*, <http://proxy195.nclive.org/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/docview/177206946?accountid=14968>. This ad provided information on how Goering was being covered in the headlines when the letter was written to put Laura’s commentary on him in context.

“Horace Kephart Photo Album.” *Horace Kephart: Revealing an Enigma*. Hunter Library Special Collections, Western Carolina University, 2015. This collection provided lots of information on Horace Kephart’s significance and life timeline. It is also the source of the photograph, “Listening to the Word” used on the cover of this edition.

Hargrave, Libby K, Ken Burns, Dale Ditmanson, Dayton Duncan, George Ellison, Susan Shumaker, Steve Watts, and David Wescott. *An American Legend: Horace Kephart, His Life and Legacy*, 2017. This documentary provided lots of specific information on Laura’s life as it relates to her husband, Horace Kephart. It provided insight on the nuances of their relationship and details on Laura’s relationship with her sister, Julia.

Kephart, Laura M. Letter to Leonard Kephart. 07 October 1946. Box 2. Folder 2. MSS 16-01. Horace Kephart Collection. Library Special Collections, Western Carolina University, Cullowhee, NC. The original manuscript written by Laura Kephart to Leonard Kephart.

Kephart, Laura M. Letter to Leonard Kephart. 16 September 1933. Box 1. Folder 8. HL_MSS12-

05 Horace Kephart Collection. Hunter Library Special Collections, Western Carolina University, Cullowhee, NC. http://libres.uncg.edu/ir/wcu/f/Gastle_2020_MSS12-05_01_08_002-Upton.pdf This letter informed me that reading the news was common for Laura and that her newspaper of choice was the *Christian Science Monitor*.

—Letter to Leonard Kephart 14 March 1934, Box 1. Folder 8. MSS12-05 Horace Kephart Collection. Hunter Library Special Collections, Western Carolina University, Cullowhee, NC. http://libres.uncg.edu/ir/wcu/f/Gastle_2020_MSS12-05_01_08_003-Blevins.pdf This letter helped me identify information on the Fervows and Marnie referenced in the letter. It also helped me learn of Laura's background as a Sunday School superintendent for her Unitarian faith.

—Letter to Leonard W. Kephart. 26 March 1934. MSS12-05 Horace Kephart Collection. Hunter Library Special Collections, Western Carolina University, Cullowhee, NC. http://libres.uncg.edu/ir/wcu/f/Gastle_2020_MSS12-05_01_08_004-Rreynolds.pdf This letter helped me get a guess on identifying Helen Bradley and gave me information on The Rileys.

— Letter to Leonard Kephart 5 April 1934, Box 1. Folder 8. MS 12-05 Horace Kephart Collection. Hunter Library Special Collections, Western Carolina University, Cullowhee, NC. http://libres.uncg.edu/ir/wcu/f/Gastle_2020_MSS12-05_01_08_006-Rhu.pdf This letter helped me learn about how Laura lost her home in 1940 before moving back to Ithaca with family.

Kephart, Beth. "A Kephart is the first American to Scale Mount Kilimanjaro," *Beth Kephart Books*, 28 August 2014. This blog documents a neat accomplishment in Leonard's life.

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<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/70285193/leonard-wheeler-kephart>

This source provides information on the death and burial of Laura Kephart. Office of the Tompkins County Historian. "Place Names of Tompkins County," ed. by Carol Kammen, 2004. This source provided information on some of the geographical places and landmarks mentioned in the letter.

Oxford English Dictionary. <http://www.oed.com>, accessed 23 November 2020,

-"hyena | hyaena, n." *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, September 2020,

www.oed.com/view/Entry/90127. This entry provided information on Laura Kephart's

use of this work.

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Prothero, Stephen R., and Edward L. Queen, II. "Christian Science." *Encyclopedia of American Religious History*, edited by Prothero II, et al., Facts On File, 4th edition, 2018. *Credo Reference*, https://login.proxy195.nclive.org/login?url=https://search.credoreference.com/content/entry/fofr/christian_science/0?institutionId=2378. Accessed 11 Nov. 2020. This source provided information on the Church of Christian Science, the inspiration behind the Riley's annual crusade mentioned in the letter.

United States Postal Service. "Rates for Domestic Letters Since 1863." 2020. This source provided information on stamps and postage at the time of the letter.

"What is AD FINEM?" The Law Dictionary. N.D. <https://thelawdictionary.org/ad-finem/>
This source provided information on Laura Kephart's use of this abbreviation.