

Chas Askins' Letter to Horace Kephart
May 8, 1898

Hunter Library MSS12-05_04_35_006

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 Chas Askins' letter to Horace Kephart on May 8, 1898. Within this letter, Askins responds to Kephart's advertisement on compiling a company of sharpshooters. He mentions specifically that he saw the advertisement in a daily paper and in the magazine *Shooting and Fishing*, which was the title of the National Rifle Association's (NRA) publication at the time of this letter and is now titled *American Rifleman*. Askins then goes on to discuss his qualifications for such an organization, disturbingly noting that man-hunting and man-shooting would be a great sport. He mentions two specific rifles in the letter, the second of which he has just ordered: Colt 32/20 and Pope 28.30.140.

Chas Askins, a.k.a Charles Askins, was born on November 9, 1861, in Illinois. A shotgun expert and author of many articles and books on guns and hunting, Askins became friends with Kephart during his travels to St. Louis, Missouri, to join matches at shooting ranges such as Bobringville and Creve Coeur Lake. Askins became a major in World War I and continued his writing afterwards. He died on December 1, 1947, from cerebral thrombosis.

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

Askins' letter is written on two pieces of paper, one side each. The paper itself is 9¾ inches (height) by 7¾ inches (width). The second page has wrinkles on the bottom and middle of the paper, possibly from getting wet and drying. The letter is folded in half horizontally and in thirds vertically to fit into an envelope. When the paper is held up to the light, watermarks can be seen. "Record Bond 18" appears on the right side of the first page. The second page has two marks: "Record B" on the upper left side and "895" on the bottom right side.

Editorial Statement

This transcription of Chas Askins' 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.

Askins' handwriting is difficult to read in some places. He has a significant loopy style, featured in how he writes the capital K, S, and D. His lowercase "p" is also a notable feature to mention, as the line extends above the loop of the p. Many of the lists in the letter do not have commas, which I retained in my transcription. On the second page, Askins added in the word "etc" as an afterthought, it appears, as it is squeezed into the small space between the words "windage" and "but." One word is marked out twice diagonally at the end of the letter, and I showed this with the strikeout feature.

Kinloch Mo. May. 8. 98

Mr Horace Kephart
Mercantile Library
St Louis Mo

Dear Sir:

I noticed in a daily and also in Shooting and Fishing that you were to organize a company of Sharpshooters.¹ Am some what interested and would like to know all about it. I shouldn't mind belonging to such an organization provided it was to be used by the Government only for special service. I have had 20 years experience of such work as would go a long way to fit a man for service as a sharpshooter. I have spent years of my life in the fields and woods shooting hunting camping and tramping with a gun.² Have often thought that the very finest sport of them all would be man hunting and man shooting considered purely as a sport. I guess this is a chance to test my theory.

¹ *Shooting and Fishing* was the title of a periodical for firearms enthusiasts. The title has changed a few times over the years: *Rifle* (until 1888), *Shooting and Fishing* (until 1906), *Arms and the Man* (until 1923), and *American Rifleman* (current). An example of the advertisement can be found in a newspaper clipping attached to J.A. Sobolewski's letter to Horace Kephart (HL MSS 12-05 04 35 009).

² Tramping = "to walk for long distances in rough country" (*OED*)

Of course like the balance of the boys I am a great rifle crank,¹ and know a good deal about trajectory velocity accuracy windage, etc but I have the advantage of most² of them in that I have made a study of shooting at unknown distances in the fields and woods. Have spent many days with a rifle afield judging ground firing shots and pacing the distance to verify the judgment of the eye. I also put in several years as a snapshot with a rifle before I began off hand target work.³ I began with glass balls and finished with quail. A number of sportsmen now in St. Louis have seen me kill quail with a rifle ball. At one time when in company I killed 3 at a rise with a Colt 32/20 rifle – the birds getting up slowly.⁴ I have not tried this in about 4 years but that length of time ago. I could any day demonstrate my ability to kill quail or other flying game with a rifle ball. I do not tell this any oftener than I want to be set down for a liar, but it is quite true for all that. Have ordered a Pope 28.30.140 and will⁵ be with you for practice by and by.
Yours, Chas Askins⁶

¹ rifle crank = a good shot

² etc: This word is speculative, as the word is smudged and cramped into the space.

³ This is another reference to the advertisement, where Kephart lists a requisite of shooting off-hand.

⁴ Colt 32/20 rifle = a Colt model rifle with .32 caliber, 20 grain bullets

⁵ Pope 28.30.140 = Pope rifle, .28 caliber, 30 grain powder, and possibly 140 grain muzzle-loading bullet, though Pope's catalogue lists the grains for M.L. Bullets as 118 and 138 for a .28 caliber rifle.

⁶ Charles Askins (1861-1947), author and shotgun enthusiast. Askins often came to the St. Louis area to join Kephart in shooting matches. The tenth census confirms his name as Chas during his young adult life.

Works Cited

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