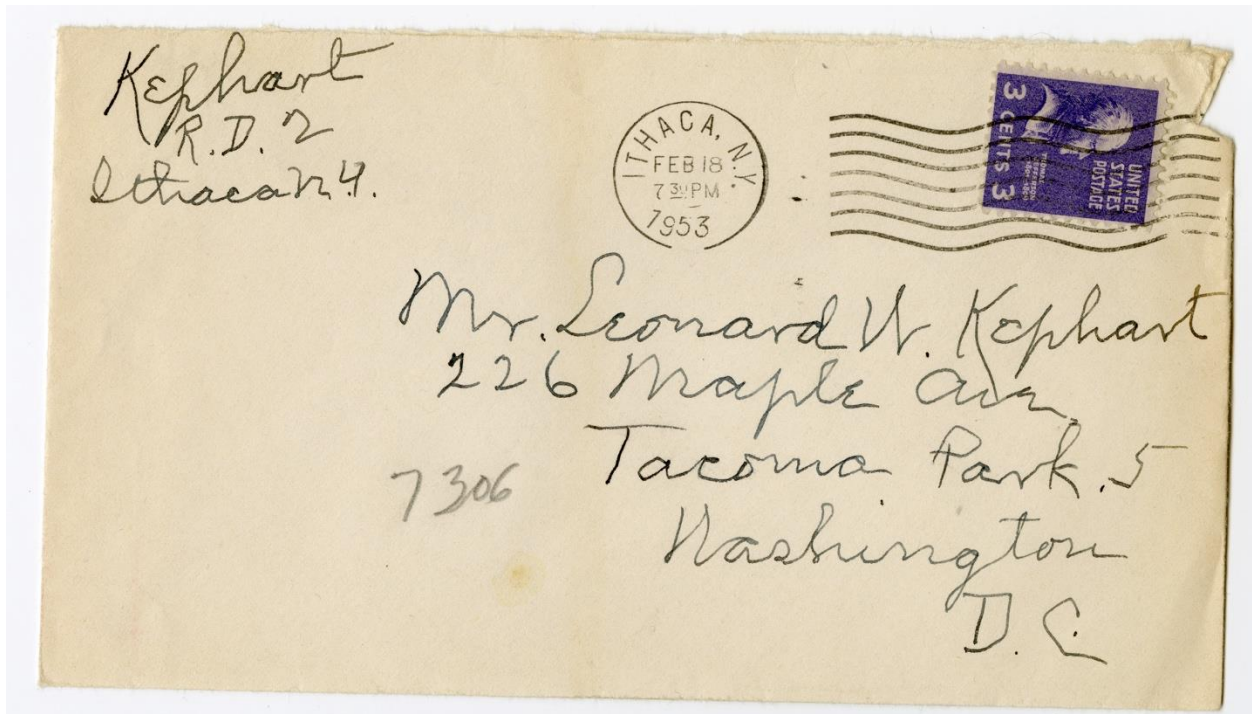


Laura Kephart's Letter to Leonard Kephart
February 18, 1953
Hunter Library MSS 16-02-01-15-002



Above: Envelope in which the manuscript was sent

Transcribed and Edited by Steve Zwilling

For ENGL 618: Research Methods in English

Instructor and General Editor: Dr. Laura Wright
20 November 2020

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

American travel writer and librarian Horace Sowers Kephart (1862-1931) is best known for his travel and the books resulting from his excursions, *Camping and Woodcraft* (1906) and *Our Southern Highlanders* (1913). He was born in 1862 in East Salem, Pennsylvania, to Reverend Isaiah Kephart (1832-1908) and Mary Elizabeth (Sowers) Kephart (1842-1920). Isaiah instilled in Horace his love of nature and history. Horace attended Lebanon Valley College, receiving his bachelor's degree in 1879. He continued his education for a year at Boston University and spent much of that time at the Boston Public Library. Horace found his calling as a librarian and obtained a job as a library resources supervisor at Cornell University. While at Cornell, Horace enrolled in graduate courses and worked for Willard Fiske, the university's first librarian. Fiske invited Horace 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.

While they were both attending Cornell University, Laura met Horace, whom she later wed, and they had six children together, Leonard, Cornelia, Barbara, Margaret, Lucy, and George. In 1887, Horace married Laura White Mack (1862-1954). Horace and Laura had an unusual marriage; however, they always remained committed to their union. Horace passed away due to a car accident at age 68 in 1931, and Laura passed away at age 92 in 1954—not long after this letter was sent. Other people referenced in this letter include Mr. (Howard) and Mrs. (Julia) Riley, Mr. (Karl Herman) & Mrs. (Lucy Wheeler) Fernow, in-laws, and references to Kephart's children.

The following edition is created from the manuscript of Laura's letter written to her son, Leonard Wheeler Kephart (1892-1988) on February 17, 1953. Throughout this letter, Laura discusses her loneliness in Dodd Nursing Home in Ithaca, New York. The Dodds potentially were a prominent family in Ithaca. Laura vacillates between this feeling of loneliness and her appreciation for her children's love. Laura explains her issues with moving from her daughter's (Lucy Fernow, 1893-1977) home, discusses the family's lifestyle in the nursing home, her status as a "paying guest", and facetiously warning that her right to live is compromised because of her age. Laura concludes the letter with appreciation and gratitude for her children and her family, who send her valentines and love from California, Australia, and other far-away places.

The letter's recipient, Leonard, was the son of Horace and Laura Mack Kephart and was born in January 1892 in Ithaca, New York. Leonard graduated from Cornell University in 1913. He studied agriculture and eventually worked for the Bureau of Industry, Department of Agriculture in Washington D.C. While working for the Bureau of Industry, Kephart published a bulletin about lawn grasses for the Federal Bureau of Plant Industry. To explore more about his interest in grass, Kephart took a trip to Africa to see if he could use it for his ongoing research. Kephart became the first American to scale Africa's highest Peak, Mt. Kilimanjaro. Unfortunately, Kephart's research was inconclusive, but instead, he discovered three new varieties of clover. Leonard married Frances Jane Frazer in 1916, and they had three children, Jane, Barbara-Ann, and George together.

Editor's Note

This edition of Laura Kephart's letter to Leonard Kephart uses a diplomatic feature where the text is reproduced in the same format as the letter appears to be written to preserve the original document's authenticity. The letter was written on what I can only assume is February 17, 1953, given there was a time/date stamp for February 18, 1953, at 7:30 pm from Ithaca, New York. Laura's use of punctuation (quotation marks, parenthesis, underlined words, and commas) have been maintained throughout the transcription. Laura tends to use incorrect antecedents/determiners and punctuation, avoids comma usage, and includes sentence fragments. These stylistic specificities have also been preserved.

This transcription is a reproduction of the original letter by Laura. The transcription does not include any indications of page breaks. Moreover, the use of indentations throughout the letter is employed to maintain the original document's layout.

Laura Kephart emphasizes some words and phrases by underlining or using quotation marks. Laura does not cross her *t*'s directly on the letter meant to be crossed within the *t* because the line is usually found to the right of the *t*; therefore, the editor cannot duplicate Kephart's *t*'s because of this handwritten complication. Laura's penmanship changed significantly in twenty years (1933-1953), but here are some features of Laura's handwriting to take note:

- One can easily misinterpret the lower-case *e* as a lower-case *a*.
- Laura uses a small cross or plus sign in place of the word "and" or using an ampersand.
 - For clarity and editorial choice, an ampersand has been used instead of Laura's plus sign.
- Laura occasionally leaves large spaces similar to an indentation within a line when beginning a new sentence. The editor has chosen to use the "tab" button to indent these areas whenever it occurs; one cannot concretely discern if this is intentional or not.
- All line breaks have been preserved as shown in the manuscript's original format, rather than line up the words compared to the line above.
- A few words are underlined to signal they would be italicized or quoted, and therefore emphasized.
- A beginning quotation mark is omitted in one place.

Manuscript Description

Laura Kephart's letter is written on the front and backside of one stationary page that was once white but is now aged to yellow. It measures 7 ¼" (tall) by 10 ½" (wide) and has been folded in half: once in half, so that the side of the page meets the other side, leaving one distinct folding line on the page. The text is black and faded in some areas and darker in others, showing both age and the re-dipping of the pen with new ink as the letter goes on. There are indications in the creases that the letter has been folded back and forth often. The letter was accompanied by an envelope that is thin and discolored yellow from age. It measures 7 ½" (tall) by 3 7/8" (wide) and has been torn long ways at the top. A substantial tear was removed from the top right corner along the top of the page, leaving a missing chunk about a ¼" into the envelope. Based on the context of the letter, the author appears to be Laura, Leonard's mother. There is a random "7306" written just below the address but for an unknown reason. The stamp reads, "Thomas Jefferson (1801-1809)" which is a stamp from the 1938 Presidential series 1938 known affectionately at the "Prexies."

The digital photos found in this transcription were taken from Western Carolina University's Hunter Library from Digital and special Collections.

Dear Leonard,¹

I guess you can't expect
me to make so fine a
letter as yours, even if I
had the material, all I
do is move from Farnow² to
Dodd³ & back to Fernow.⁴

The idea is that I
must not stay here alone.⁵
I agree with the idea, but
not the necessity for me to
move each time they do.

Lucy⁶ says she can't
find any one to stay here
with me.⁷

¹ Leonard Wheeler Kephart (1892-1988) is the oldest son of Horace Sowers and Laura Mack Kephart. Leonard is 61 years old at the time of receiving this letter. At this time, Leonard and his family were living in Takoma Park, Maryland, a suburb of Washington D.C. Leonard worked as a senior agronomist for the Department of Agriculture until 1949. From 1950 until he retired a second time in 1957, Leonard worked for the World Bank as an advisor on agricultural projects in various countries worldwide. ("The Washington Post" 1988)

² Laura accidentally uses an *a* in "Fernow" instead of an *e*.

³ The editor can presume they are referring to Mr. (unidentified first name) and Mrs. (Nora) Dodd, owners of the Dodd Nursing Home in Ithaca, NY. ("Ithaca Numerical Street Directory: Householder Telephone & Property List" 584).

⁴ The Fernows: Karl Herman Fernow (1893-1983) married Lucy Wheeler Kephart (1893-1977), the fourth child of Horace and Laura Kephart. Karl Fernow was a Cornell University professor specializing in diseases found in crops, especially potatoes. Karl Herman Fernow (1893) was the son-in-law of Horace and Laura Kephart Fernow ("News and Reviews: Karl Herman Fernow" 798).

⁵ Horace Kephart passed away in a car accident in Bryson City in 1931. Laura was widowed for 22 years at the time of this letter. She was never re-married. ("Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930," Ithaca, Tompkins County, New York.)

⁶ Lucy Kephart Fernow is Laura's fourth oldest child out of six.

⁷ "Any one" should be combined into a single word. This text is not an instance of the context indicating any *single* one where the word would be separated into two individual words.

Mrs. Dodd⁸ says “I have
ten nieces, several of whom are old enough
to do the job.”⁹

The Dodds have a
rather large “Nursing
Home.”¹⁰ She is “The Dodds”
he has a fine business
& does not want her to
work at all, except to make
a home for him.¹¹

She is fine at the job
& loves it so much she
has finally broken down
trying to do the work of
two women.¹²

⁸ Mrs. Dodd is unidentifiable. Based on Ithaca New York directories, Mrs. Nora Dodd was co-owner of the Dodd Nursing Home in Ithaca, NY on 602 Elmira Rd (Agway Petroleum Corporation 584).

⁹ The actual number of nieces is unidentified. The editor assumes Laura is referring to Mrs. Dodd relieving some of her responsibilities and delegating tasks to her living kin. Laura has 13 grandchildren and 19 great-grandchildren. (“Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930,” Pleasantville, Westchester, New York).

¹⁰ The Dodds were a family in Ithaca, New York, who ran a nursing home where Laura Kephart stayed. However, there are hints of her only staying occasionally (see footnote 2). Laura refers to Mrs. Dodd as the sole force of The Dodd’s household, possibly insinuating Mr. Dodd worked too often at the Nursing Home. The reason for the quotations around *Nursing Home* is unidentified. It could be an emphatic indicator (Directory of Medical Facilities. Health Care Financing Administration, Medicare Bureau 33).

¹¹ The “Dodd” in question is Mr. Dodd and is the nursing home's co-owner, preferring his wife to be a homemaker. According to the letter, Mr. Dodd owned six businesses. Quotation marks around “The Dodds” are misused and implemented to show emphasis; however, she could be quoting herself from earlier in the same sentence.

¹² It is unclear what Laura means precisely by “two women”, but the editor can assume Laura is referring to Mrs. Dodd as protective and diligent with her job responsibilities.

As I am only “A
paying guest”¹³ so am
charged only a boarding
price. She loses money
on me.¹⁴ She won’t take
more pay, so she loses money
if I stay there.

 If the Rilies¹⁵ would
be reasonable & drop their
Christian science,¹⁶ I
could live where I really
own a right to live, it would be more easy
for us all.¹⁷

 I advise you not to
Live to be 91 years old, unless you have
some one to live there with you.¹⁸

¹³ According to the 1965 passage of Medicare and Medicaid, the government paid only 10 percent of the nursing home expenditures. In 1950, there were fewer than 9,000 nursing homes with approximately 250,000 beds. Total spending for nursing home care was just \$187 million, or 1.5 percent of national health expenditures. Nursing homes ha[d] to supplement th[at] need by charging patients and their families higher prices. (Gray 496).

¹⁴ The reason for the quotation marks around *a paying guest* is unidentified. Laura seems to use quotation marks as an emphatic indicator.

¹⁵ The Riley’s are Laura Kephart’s sister, Julia’s, in-laws. Laura has two siblings: George Mack, who was two years older, and Julia, who was fifteen years younger. Her extended family was well established in Ithaca, with the Macks serving as judges, merchants, and elected officials.

¹⁶ Laura is referring to the Riley’s making their annual trip to The First Church of Christ, Scientist in Boston, Massachusetts. Laura had on-going qualms with the way Christian Science promoted itself and the implications of the Unitarian faith. (Kephart, Laura letter to Leonard Kephart 1946)

¹⁷ Laura used an incorrect compound adjective, “more easy” which should be written as easier.

¹⁸ When Horace left the family in 1909, Laura moved back with her parents for the next ten years and raised her kids through college. During this time, she held various jobs to support her six children, including cooking, sewing, tending children with disabilities, giving piano lessons, and splitting firewood. She then worked as a clerk in a

This, so far, is a rather
doleful letter, but should
not be so construed.

If you could see the
pile of letters & valentines I
have had from Australia
& California¹⁹ & other far away
places, you would not say
I could be a lonely person.²⁰

I think few people, who
live to be that my age, could
have more happy lovely memories.²¹

Few women have such
A large family without at
least one undesirable members.
I can be proud of each of
you, if I can't see you often.

factory for \$35 a month, \$40 after four years. Religion was important to Laura and she served as superintendent of the Unitarian Church's Sunday School. She had been supported by her children but mostly living in a nursing home. She never re-married. (George Ellison and Janet McCue. "Back of Beyond: a Horace Kephart Biography" 2019.)

¹⁹ Leonard, and more so Horace, had letter correspondence with a supposed distant relative, Calvin Ira Kephart. Calvin claimed to share a great-great-great-grandfather with Horace Kephart, Henrich Gebhardt; however, the genealogical path does not line up as one Henrich hails from Switzerland and the other hails from England. Calvin voices this concern in a later letter. (Kephart, Calvin letter to Horace Kephart 1921).

²⁰ The reason for the valentines from "California & Australia, & other far away places" is unidentified. The editor can assume her children have sent letters (especially Leonard, having traveled extensively for his job) on their travels with family, colleagues, and distant relatives (see footnote 1 above).

²¹ According to the University of California Berkley, females' average life expectancy was 72 years of age. Laura had regular correspondence with her children up until she died in 1954. (MacroTrends, 2020)

All love a mother can

give goes to each of you²²

-Mama²³

²² Laura regularly wrote and received letters to and from family members, especially her children.

²³ “Mama” is an informal word for mother. Mama is usually used by young children therefore, this is probably used as a term of endearment. Adults sometimes use mama to refer to their mothers, especially when they have a close relationship.

Annotated Bibliography

“1938 3c Jefferson, Purple.” Mystic Stamp Company – America’s Leading Stamp Company, 2020, <https://www.mysticstamp.com/Products/United-States/807/USA/>

This source explains the cost and history of the stamp on the letter’s envelope.

Agway Petroleum Corporation. “Ithaca Numerical Street Directory: Householder Telephone & Property List 1970.” *Agway* (Ithaca, NY), 1970.

https://www.tcpl.org/sites/default/files/content/archive/ICD_1970_StreetDir.pdf

This resource provides information about the surname Dodd and its involvement in the Ithaca city community.

Ancestry Library, 2008, accessed <https://www.ancestrylibrary.com/>, 1997.

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

The Alstrum family tree provides a detailed family tree of Horace Kephart’s family and is very useful for quickly finding members of the Kephart family.

— “U.S., School Yearbooks, 1900-1999 for Leonard Kephart” Ancestry Library, 1913

[https://www.ancestrylibrary.com/interactive/1265/40392_b074193-](https://www.ancestrylibrary.com/interactive/1265/40392_b074193-00154?pid=242598743&backurl=https://search.ancestrylibrary.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?_phsrc=jmj205%26_phstart=successSource)

[00154?pid=242598743&backurl=https://search.ancestrylibrary.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?_phsrc=jmj205%26_phstart=successSource](https://www.ancestrylibrary.com/interactive/1265/40392_b074193-00154?pid=242598743&backurl=https://search.ancestrylibrary.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?_phsrc=jmj205%26_phstart=successSource)

This resource provides information about Leonard Kephart’s education at Cornell such as the year he graduated and what his degree was in.

Cornell Chronicle “This Week in Cornell History: August 27, 2014.” *Cornell Chronicle*, 27 Aug. 2014, <https://news.cornell.edu/essentials/2014/08/week-cornell-history-0>. Accessed 16 November 2020.

This article discusses Leonard Kephart’s travels to Africa and his discovery of three new varieties of clovers.

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This source discusses the lives of Horace, Laura, and Leonard, among others, in great detail, giving dates and important events in their lives.

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

This Western Carolina University special and digital collections resource contributed biographical information on Isaiah and Horace Kephart, as well as information on the Kephart genealogy.

Health Care Financing Administration. *Medicare/Medicaid Directory of Medical Facilities*. United States, Health Care Financing Administration, Medicare Bureau., 1977. Available from https://www.google.com/books/edition/Directory_of_Medical_Facilities/I7wRi0ihYeEC?hl=en&gbpv=0

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and the Impact of Ownership on Quality, Cost, and Access. Available from:

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Kephart, Calvin Letter to Horace Kephart. 11 November 1921. Box 1, Folder 07. MSS80-24.

Horace Kephart Collection. Hunter Library Special Collections, Western Carolina University, Cullowhee, NC.

Kephart, Leonard Letter to Horace Kephart. 14 December 1921. Box 1, Folder 27. MSS80-24.

Horace Kephart Collection. Hunter Library Special Collections, Western Carolina University, Cullowhee, NC.

This journal includes information about the Kephart family and the correspondence between Leonard and Horace about their distant relative Calvin Ira Kephart.

Kephart, Laura M. Letter to Leonard W. Kephart. 26 March 1934. Box 1, Folder 12. MSS12-05-

01-08-004 Horace Kephart Collection. Library Special Collections, Western Carolina University, Cullowhee, NC.

This source includes census records for the Kephart family, their in-laws and extended family, and some friends of the family.

Kephart, Laura Letter to Leonard Kephart. 7 October 1946. Box 2, MSS16-02. Horace Kephart Collection. Hunter Library Special Collections, Western Carolina University, Cullowhee, NC.

This letter provided the information for the Riley's relationship to Christian Science.

Kephart, Laura Letter to Leonard Kephart. 18 February 1953. Box 2, Folder 15. MSS16-02.

Horace Kephart Collection. Hunter Library Special Collections, Western Carolina University, Cullowhee, NC.

This is the original letter from Laura Kephart to Leonard Kephart and was used to transcribe and create the edition.

Kephart, Horace. *Our Southern Highlanders*. United States, Outing Publishing Company, 1913.

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www.macrotrends.net/countries/USA/united-states/life-expectancy.

This source provides information for the life expectancy and its averages from 1950-2020.

"News and Reviews: Karl Herman Fernow." *American Potato Journal*, vol. 60, no. 10, 1983, pp.798-799.

This is an obituary for Karl Fernow found in the American Potato Journal. It contains a brief yet invaluable biography of Karl and discusses his travel to Germany in 1933.

The Washington Post. "Retired USDA, Bank Official Leonard W. Kephart, 96,

Dies." *Washington Post*, 13 February 1988,

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/local/1988/02/13/retired-usda-bank-official-leonard-w-kephart-96-dies/c39a0dea-73ea-4a18-82ce-10329b4c2aee/>

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