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ENGL 618

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### Edition of Kephart's Letter (#7)

#### **Introduction**

Horace Kephart—author, naturalist, librarian—is a renowned authority on the cultural and natural history of southern Appalachia. His two most famous books, *Camping and Woodcraft* (1917) and *Our Southern Highlanders* (1922), remain popular to this day for their practical advice for outdoor activities and narrative account of the people and environment of the Great Smoky Mountains (“Horace Kephart, Biography”). Determined to preserve the last great forests in the Eastern United States, Kephart was instrumental in establishing the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. He also took an active role in the creation of the Appalachian Trail (Ellison xlv). His contributions provide an invaluable record of a previously overlooked and often misunderstood land and people.

Kephart was born in 1862 in Pennsylvania but spent most of his childhood in Jefferson, Iowa, a village about 50 miles northwest of Des Moines (Ellison xi). It was on these plains of Iowa that Kephart began to cultivate the identity of the “solitary adventurer” (xii). He was educated at Western College and Boston University. In 1880, he moved to upstate New York and assumed the supervision of cataloging the library’s holdings at Cornell University. He worked under the direction of Willard Fiske, the university’s first librarian. Five years later, he followed Fiske to Florence, Italy, where they worked together cataloging Fiske’s enormous collection of titles by and about Francis Petrararch (xiv-xv). Upon returning to the United States, Kephart achieved national recognition as director of the Mercantile Library in St. Louis, Missouri (“Horace Kephart,

Biography”). During this time he also gained experience in writing about his outdoor excursions in Missouri and Arkansas for various sporting and outdoors magazines. Eventually, due to “nervous exhaustion,” he quit his job as librarian and sought solace in the mountains of western North Carolina (“Horace Kephart, Biography”). He took an interest in his new natural environment and the culture of its inhabitants. Relying on his background as a librarian, “much of his understanding of the region came through readings on the topic to which he added his personal observations” (“Horace Kephart, Biography”). In 1931, Kephart was killed in a car accident near Bryson City, NC, at the age of 68. He is buried in the town’s hilltop cemetery, which overlooks the mountains beyond (Ellison xlvi).

In this letter to Kephart, Marc Woodmansee, employee of Standard Oil Company, writes about a variety of topics and seems to have had a friendly relationship with Kephart. It also appears that Kephart was interested in writing about Woodmansee’s private gun collection. In 1921, he published an article in *All Outdoors* magazine titled “Early American Rifles De Luxe: Some Remarkable Specimens in the Collection of Marc Woodmansee” (Hunter Library, “Horace Kephart, Bibliography”). According to 1920 U. S. Census data, Woodmansee was living in Des Moines, Iowa, during the time of his correspondence with Kephart (the letter is dated May 2, 1919). Toward the end of his letter, Woodmansee refers to his Kentucky rifles that Kephart will be writing about in an upcoming article for a sporting magazine. This letter would be of interest to anyone who is conducting research on Kephart’s writing career, specifically on the work he did for popular outdoor magazines of the day, including *Sport Afield*, *Field and Stream*, *Forest and Stream*, and *Outing Magazine* (Ellison xxxiii). Gun collectors may also have an interest in Woodmansee’s letter to Kephart due to his reference to the Kentucky rifle and the gun collection of Charles M. Schott, Jr.

The letter is printed on Standard Oil Company letterhead and comprises of three pages. The first two pages are written on the front and back of the same sheet of paper. At the bottom of the first page, Woodmansee writes (over) to indicate more text on the back, and at the top of the second page, he uses a caret (^) to insert two words above the first line of text. Woodmansee uses a script handwriting that is sometimes difficult to read due to several factors. In his lowercase *t*'s, the bar is often written far to the right of the upward stroke (rather than perpendicular). His lowercase *w*'s and *m*'s are almost identical. His lowercase *e* is sometimes written as a capital *E* tilted to the left, which makes it look like a lowercase *r*. Comparing my letter with others who were working with Kephart's letters helped me to identify these quirks in Woodmansee's handwriting and transcribe some of the more inscrutable letters or words.

### **Editorial Statement**

I reproduced the letterhead as it appears in the original letter to show that Woodmansee chose to write this letter on business versus personal stationery. This choice shows that the correspondence between them was perhaps more professional in nature, and it reflects the biographical information of Woodmansee's employment at Standard Oil.

The letter is written on three separate pages, but I chose to combine them into one cohesive letter. I did, however, keep his editing marks between pages one and two. At the bottom of page one, he writes (over), which I italicized to indicate that this word is not part of the sentence itself, but rather is a note to flip the letter over to continue reading on the back. I used the carat symbol to reproduce the one he uses to show the inserted text of "and there" at the top of page two. This editing choice shows that perhaps Woodmansee initially forgot to write "and there" and corrected this omission by using the carat to insert the missing words.

I kept the original indentation to show Woodmansee's choices in shifting to new paragraphs. His letter has eight paragraphs, and the indentation helps to visually portray the numerous topics he covers. For a three-page letter, eight paragraphs is a lot, so the indentation reinforces the slightly rambling nature of his writing.

The inconsistencies in Woodmansee's handwriting result in an irregular use of capitalization. For example, his *e*'s sometimes appear to be a capital *E* in the middle or end of a word, as is the case in the word *Greene* in the second paragraph. I chose to normalize capitalization because otherwise it would be odd to have random letters that are capitalized for no apparent reason in a printed version of the letter. Woodmansee's handwriting also makes it extremely difficult to differentiate between a comma and a period, so I made editing choices for these punctuation marks to reflect my own estimation of when Woodmansee intended to end a sentence or connect clauses. For example, the mark used in the greeting of the letter looks exactly the same as the mark used at the end of a final sentence in a paragraph. I chose to use a comma in the greeting, as is standard, and I used a period in cases where he is clearly ending a sentence. In some cases, it is less clear whether he is ending a sentence or connecting ideas with a comma. In the first paragraph, he writes, "There is no one at our house except my mother and I. So when you come you can study Kentucks and rest without disturbance." Between the words *I* and *So*, the mark he uses could either be a period or a comma, but because he clearly writes a capital *S* in *So*, I used a period to indicate the beginning of a new sentence with *So*.

I kept Woodmansee's use of underlined words and quotations marks in all cases except for one. In the fifth paragraph, Woodmansee writes the titles of two magazines as "Outing and All Outdoors." In fact, *All Outdoors* is a previous title of *Outing*, so they are actually the same publication. However, writing the titles as "Outing and All Outdoors" misleads the reader to

believe this is the complete title of the magazine. To avoid this confusion, I separated the titles into “Outing” and “All Outdoors.”

Woodmansee has several spelling errors in his letter, some of which I corrected and others I preserved. In the first paragraph, the word *Read* is misspelled as “Ried.” I did not see any purpose in keeping this mistake. In the sixth paragraph, he misspells *inane* as “innane,” which I corrected as well. Instead, I decided to keep misspelled words that reflect a colloquial or quirky use of spelling. These words include *thro* and *hi* (paragraph three) *bot* and *thot* (paragraph five), and *em* (paragraph eight).

In summary, my editorial intention was to preserve elements of the letter that lent to its character and conveyed Woodmansee’s voice as a writer while correcting errors that otherwise would be confusing or meaningless. The final product is a diplomatic edition of the letter that aims to preserve the original look and experience of reading the letter.

Standard Oil Company<sup>1</sup>  
(Indiana)

Sales Department

Department Correspondence  
Des Moines Branch  
and Agencies

M. Storer, Manager  
Amos Ball, Asst. Manager

Des Moines, IA., May 2, 1919  
In your reply refer to file no.

My dear Kephart,

Read your kind letter week or more ago, and mighty pleased to know that there is a possibility that you will be coming this way. Some time during this year and any time you see fit to come, you may be sure of a welcome. There is no one at our house except my mother and I. So when you come you can study Kentucks<sup>2</sup> and rest without disturbance.

By the way, next time you are writing, tell me when and where you resided in town. You mentioned that when you were out this way, that you would visit Greene County.<sup>3</sup>

Since writing last I've been up thro Northern Minnesota thro the cut over timber land, and where the timber cruisers<sup>4</sup> are still cutting. This country has a few settlers here (*over*)<sup>and there</sup> but in the main it is still a "hi" country.<sup>5</sup> Lake Vermilion is one of nature's beauty spots, and is destined to be one of the world's breathing places.

A few days ago I sent your friend copy of sale catalogue, "Schott Collections."<sup>6</sup> Keep it for future reference.

Am certainly pleased to know that you are to have a hand in shaping up "Outing" and "All Outdoors" magazine.<sup>7</sup> I began my subscription to Outing in 1902 or 3 and have every copy up to

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<sup>1</sup> Standard Oil Company and Trust was founded in 1863 and was the industrial empire of John D. Rockefeller. The company controlled the refining of 90 to 95 percent of all oil produced in the United States. Under the 1890 Sherman Antitrust Act, the U. S. government filed suit against the company in 1906. By 1911 the company was dissolved. Today, however, oil companies such as Amoco, Chevron, Exxon, Mobil, and BP trace their origins to Standard Oil (Encyclopædia Britannica Editors).

<sup>2</sup> A reference to the Kentucky rifle. This rifle actually has no affiliation with Kentucky. The first recorded use of its title is "believed to be in a song written about 1815 describing the Battle of New Orleans in 1812, but the 'Kentucky' tag stuck and its use has continued ever since" (Wilkinson 195). Its origins are attributed to the German hunting rifle (196).

<sup>3</sup> County in Iowa and location of Jefferson (Kephart's childhood home).

<sup>4</sup> Timber cruising is the "process of measuring forest stands to determine stand characteristics, such as average tree sizes, volume, and quality. The primary purpose of cruising is to obtain a volume estimation to appraise and prepare timber sales" (United States, Dept. of Agriculture).

<sup>5</sup> "high country": from the Canadian French *pays d'en haut* (18th cent. or earlier); the forest hinterland northwest of Lake Superior, probably with reference to the distance inland rather than to the altitude of the region (*OED*).

<sup>6</sup> A reference to the auction catalogue of Charles M. Schott, Jr.'s gun collection. Schott was a well-known gun collector in New York City. He was a student of a particular type of pistol called the "detonator", which replaced the "flintlock" pistol. After his death in 1919, about 700 items were auctioned off at a public sale. The remaining 100 or so items were donated to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, of which he was a lifelong member ("Recent Accessions").

<sup>7</sup> *Outing* began publication in 1882 and covered a variety of sports activities. It ended in 1923. Previous names included *The Wheelman* and *All Outdoors* ("Outing").

1916. It then had gotten so poor that I discontinued my subscription and since then have bot it locally, doing this however only when there was some-thing I thot worthwhile.

The "All Outdoors" I have a complete file from 1st issue to present. But during past 18 months, I've found very little in it. Each month a page or two is wasted on that inane subject of imaginary wild animals.

Say. Wonder if it would be asking too much of you to send me an autographed copy of one of your books, preferably "Our Southern Highlanders"<sup>8</sup> if you are in position to do this without cost to you, while I'll appreciate it mightily.

I do not wish to make a pest of myself, and certainly do not expect you to take up your writing time on me. But I do wish to keep in touch with you at least until you see the "Kentucks" for I feel sure that you will be interested in them to the extent that you will "write em up" and I know of no one who could handle a gun article as intelligently as you could.

All for now.  
Sincerely always,  
Marc Woodmansee

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<sup>8</sup> Kephart's narrative study of Southern Appalachia's environment and culture. According to one reviewer of the period, Kephart has done "more than novelists and orators to vivify the picture and vitalize the life of that wonderful world and more wonderful people" ("Our Southern Highlanders").

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