

Jonathan Keith Esser Collection, 1899-1920
(Correspondence Series)
J. Keith Esser Letter, 30 October 1910

Transcription

[Transcription of a letter Jonathan Keith Esser (1893-1963) wrote to his sister, Mary Dodson, while he was a Biltmore Forest School student on a class field trip to Europe in 1910. The original spelling and formatting of the letter has been maintained in the transcription without any editorial correction. Digital scans (150 dpi; maximum pixel limitation of 600 pixels) of each page of the letter are included at the end of this document. The letter is part of the [Jonathan Keith Esser Collection](#) held by the Library and Archives of the Forest History Society in Durham, North Carolina.]

Darmstadt – Germany:
Sunday Oct 30 – 1910

Dear Mary:

Yesterday (Sat) Oct 29 – we walked from Lindenfels in the Oden-wald to Darmstadt, a distance of about 20 miles. Field work is always carried on by these little walks so that we have the advantage of seeing the country quite intimately.

Quite naturally we are constantly bumping into what seems to us peculiar European customs – novel ways of doing things. On the other hands the sight of 50 students tramping through the countryside and villages strikes the natives just as humorously.

So looking at it from both sides – it is all very funny.

Last week I wrote mother and suppose she sent you my letter.

Since then we have made excursions in various directions, sometimes riding part way in their funny little railway coaches, so that with our tour in to Darmstadt we have practically covered most of the odenwald a district about 30 miles long and 20 miles wide.

Last week as one of the school committee – 5 of us took dinner at Dr. Schenck's upon Mrs. Schenck's invitation. This was their villa at Lindenfels. They live very nicely having a pretty home and spacious grounds. Old Mrs. Schenck is a perfect old lady – the Dr.'s married sister is a bright well educated woman speaking English very well.

The dining room was furnished in a rather characteristic german style of opulence – heavily rafted and adorned with deer heads etc. Dinner was served in courses, as usual there being about 3 meat courses. Incidentally, I think, a dish of ham and eggs will be a luxury. Rhine wine (the finest imaginable) and champagne were served.

Herr Kern, Schenck's German assistant went with us. So from him we gathered what is what in Germany. The Invitation was given for 8 pm so we crossed the family threshold on the hour – talked about 5 minutes and sat down immediately – the meal lasted about 2 hours.

The most peculiar custom according to our ideas is the taking your leave immediately on arising from the table. Shaking hands vociferously with your host & hostess and leaving.

In a way under certain circumstances it is rather a common sense way. It eliminates all stiff and labored efforts at entertaining an hour or so before a meal and the often drawn out evening afterwards. The Schenck's town house is an old fashioned substantial villa on the outskirts of the town (Darmstadt). Surrounded as is the universal custom here with beautiful shrubbery & trees. After getting our bag & trunks looked after we proceeded to house hunting from addresses & prices furnished by Herr Kern.

Three of ~~our~~ us liked the first place we investigated so well, and did not go any further.

Pleasantly and conveniently situated ~~on~~ in the most desirable residential sections – surrounded by some very imposing private residences and grounds.

In a pension (french accent given) or somewhat a modification of our apartment houses.

We have 4 rooms – that is 3 bedrooms and a study between us, breakfast (of coffee & rolls) free – our other meals are taken out. Coal or coke fire extra & electric light. For 100 marks a month for the 3 or \$25.00, about \$8.30 a piece. Coal light & meals (tickets at 30 ¢ a meal) will probably bring it up to 25.00 a month – washing of course extra. This may be a minimum estimate but at any rate our cost of living especially in a large city will be comparatively very much cheaper than America. Our lady landy is most earnest kindly & solicitous for our well being in her typical German manner. One of our three, partially speaks German so we manage to get along all right. That is when her conversational speed limit is not too fast. Occasionally when she gets too deep for our fellow interpreter – she will question as to whether not he “forstays” (spelling N.G.). We have grown so accustomed to saying – “yah-yah” that it becomes a matter of habit, whether we comprevous or not. Often she will doubt our “Yah-yah” – shake her head dubiously – tell us we “nicht forstay” and start all over again. So in this respect we are very lucky.

Yesterday when the grafting baggage man endeavored to charge us 75 ¢ for 3 trunks – we called upon our buxom and reliable land lady who sallied forth in great fury and talked the cowering baggage master first from one side of the street to the other.

They are certainly scrupulously clean & tidy.

As it is at present, I am well satisfied with our situation. By German custom or law (I guess) we are compelled to stay a month at least and give 15 days notice before leaving. Both my room mates are good fellows, quite gentlemanly & good students. One of them formerly a Yale & Wisconsin University fellow lives in Greenwhich. The other before joining the school was principal of a high school in Wisconsin.

In this respect also I am perfectly satisfied.

Last week I put in some interesting days planting conifers.

Perhaps for your own planting you may be interested in what I gathered. In the case of hemlock pines spruces etc spring and fall planting is best or the periods when vegetation is dormant. Always replant more especially in the case of young plants say 8” to 2 ft high at the same depth of their former planting. Young trees take hold better in transferring better than old ones owing to their vigorous growing vitality. Spade up ground well for a distance equal to the spread of their roots. In replacing ground put the top earth under and around roots – being the richest ground – and the bottom earth in on top. For quickest results, it is important to give the roots their natural spread or position. An uninjured root system, helps considerably. Don't allow the root system to upturned that is [hand drawing w/ “tree” label] but always down or their natural position [another hand drawing]. In the broad leafed trees, maple catalpa etc. – in transplanting, clipping back or trimming down the top is important. This allows the interrupted growing

period of the root system to catch up to top, otherwise there is too much top to be nurished by an enfeebled root system. Clipping back is done of course only to the broad leafed trees.

I believe you would find the tulip tree (yellow poplar) (another name) a beautiful, satisfactory and fairly rapid grower. Has a beautiful trunk and leaves and a tulip like flower in spring.

Darmstadt is a city of 300,000 very metropolitan in appearance, the centre of the soldiery and artillery of the grand duchy of Hesse-Darmstadt which of course in Germany means considerable. The parade ground are in the next block.

Also the seat of some universities & technical schools.

Adjoining our rooms some Hollandish Duke is living – a student at one of the universities.

In addition the famous Darmstadt Horticultural Gardens – the most complete in the world will give us unusual opportunities in tree identification etc. The microscopical laboratories of the University are open to our use. The ways these Germans get away with beer & wine is something remarkable. Last evening in the restaurant it seemed to be commonplace for them to have 3 & 4 tremendous beer glasses & steins with their meal.

Whiskey is practically unknown – cognac taking the place.

The absence of butter unless paid for extra is trying.

At Lindenfels the proprietor as a favor finally gave us butter with our breakfast rolls – I think the quality of it however what little you do get, would make mother open her eyes.

Their feather bed covers are not without humor – baths are extra 25 cts. However we are going to get bath tickets at the D. Natatorium said to be the finest in the world for 10 ¢ per. Funniest thing of all is the universal cane habit adapted by the school.

Everyone in Germany with the exception of the peasants wield canes. Ours however bought in the odenwald are a combination of utility and style, having a heavy iron spike or tip for climbing. Today we are having the first rain (aside from a day in the English Channel) since we left Michigan. I believe we have cold wet winters in this section.

We have very good operas here. The black forests lie just south of the city. Getting into them by train or trolley.

These letters I realize are drawn out tiresome affairs but I feel better after I get the 101 impressions I gather from week to week out of my system. I lost my fountain pen on a walk last week and felt lost myself until I discovered an American fountain pen in a shop window this morning. I can't help letting you of my barber shop experience yesterday.

Shops were peculiarly clean & handsome. Barbers in white smocks & very clever with razors and shears. Before taking your seat on the throne you were compelled to laboriously crawl through the neck hole of a white night gown very voluminous and apparently wrapped around like a mummy being prepared for burial. A shave hair cut & shampoo in good style cost 1 mark or 25 cents. In spite of all the interesting strange & absorbing things & experiences here in Germany I think of you all continuously and wonder what is going on at Mauch Chunk & Morea. I appreciate it all the more when I realize it is due to the kindness & forethought of you and mother and appreciation of this nature can be felt better than expressed.

Millard's bright & happy little photo on my desk is a constant reminder of a new family relation and I shall look forward with great pleasure to the day when I see him, and see the wonderful progress he will probably have made by that time.

Tell Trot I am unconsciously & constantly interested in comparing the German coals, their funny little coal cars, hardly larger than the Morea gun boats whenever I see them with the American.

The use of briquettes or compressed coal seems to have been carried to quite a degree of success. Judging from the universal use of same. Also saw an illustration of some German coal stripping.

Well goodbye love to one all.

Affectionately
Keith

My address is
#26 Heidelberger Str.
Darmstadt
Germany

Love to Mother

Use a 5 ct stamp via England

Digital Scans

Darmstadt - Germany
Sunday Oct 25-1910

Dear Mary:

Yesterday (Sat) Oct 29 - we walked from Rindelsfeld in the Odenwald to Darmstadt, a distance of about 30 miles. Field work is always carried on by these little walks so that we have the advantage of seeing the country quite intimately.

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So looking at it from both sides - it is all very funny.

Last week I wrote mother and suppose

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she sent you my letter. ⁽²⁾

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The dining room was finished in a

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Rhine wine (the finest imaginable) and Champagne were served.

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~~At~~ Dinner was given for 8 P.M. so we crossed the family threshold on the hour - talked about 5 minutes and sat down immediately - the meal lasted about 2 hours.

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host & hostess and leaving. ⁽⁴⁾

In a way under certain circumstances it is rather a commonsense way. It eliminates all stiff and labored efforts at entertaining an hour or so before a meal and the often drawn out evening afterwards.

The Scheuch's town house is an old fashioned substantial villa on the outskirts of the town (Darmstadt), surrounded as is the universal custom here with beautiful shrubbery & trees.

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Pleasantly and conveniently situated

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the most desirable residential sections - surrounded by some very imposing private residences and grounds.
On a pension (French accent given) or somewhat a modification of our apartment houses.
We have 4 rooms - that is 3 bedrooms and a study between us, breakfast (of coffee & rolls) free - our other meals are taken out. Coal or coke fire extra & light. for 100 marks a month for the 3 or 2 1/2, about 8 3/4 a piece.
Coal light & meals (tickets at 30¢ a meal) will probably bring it up to 25¢ a month - Working of course extra.
This may be a minimum estimate but at any rate our cost of living especially in a large city will be comparatively very much cheaper than America!
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One of them formerly a Yale & Macmillan University fellow lives in Greenwich.
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The absence of butter unless paid

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But Ruedenfelz the proprietor as a favor finally gave me butter with our breakfast rolls - I think the quality of it however what little you do get, would make mother open her eyes.
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(13)

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(14)

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Affectionately
 Keith

My address is
 # 26 Heidelberger Str.
 Darmstadt
 Germany

U.S. Stamp
 via England

Love to mother

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Oct 30th
 of Darmstadt

Mrs. Truman M. Dodson
 28
~~Morea Colliery~~ *Decorated school + etc*
 Morea
~~Pennsylvania~~
 U.S.A.

Via England
 Hermer Str. *home*

Handwritten address:
 Mrs. E. W. Bass
 March Chunk



[envelope]