

**Jonathan Keith Esser Collection, 1899-1920**  
**(Correspondence Series)**  
**J. Keith Esser Letter, 23 October 1910**

**Transcription**

[Transcription of a letter Jonathan Keith Esser (1893-1963) wrote to his mother, Isabelle Simpson Esser, 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.]

Sunday Oct 23 [1910]

Dear Mother:

Owing to our coming straight to Lindenfels instead of Darmstadt I suppose there will have been some delay in our mail communications. However I rec'd your letter of Oct 9<sup>th</sup> – this past week on arriving here last Sat. I sent you a few postals with some news of my whereabouts and doings – In that I told you that we would probably not have good mail communication until our return to Darmstadt this coming Sat or (Oct 29).

Our trip from the landing in Holland (Hook of Holland) or near Rotterdam our stay in Rotterdam a wonderfully interesting & quaint Hollandish city, through Germany up the Rhine and then here was interesting and full of interest.

I think to any one seeing Europe the first week or so is by reason of the novelty etc more interesting than years of traveling afterwards.

Even now we are becoming somewhat accustomed to the sound of the strange language, queer houses, customs etc so that I believe the charm of the novelty as I say is most lasting. As you note on paper heading Lindenfels i.O. translated means Lindenfels in the Odenwald – the latter being a district as you would say Saranac in the Adirondacks.

We are located in a hotel – service good, meals fine. Lindenfels being somewhat inaccessible is not known generally to American tourists but popular among the Germans as a summer or air resort as they call it.

Something like Eaglesmere in situation.

The money system we picked up rapidly, a matter of necessity in order to save being skinned alive by the tradespeople, who make a point of taking advantage of Americans who are looked upon as millionaires by this class of people – I can see Mrs. Schlagel's prototype on every side of me – especially in the case of the women working and grubbing in the fields with the entire family – a striking feature of Germany's social system as applied to the lower classes is what is known as the communal or communistic system wherein adjoining villages club together as it were owning the farm & forest lands in fact everything almost in common, working them together and dividing the yield or products. Under the circumstances it appears to work well. With the result however that one man never rises above the other – and they are

buried as they live in their little communal graveyards, every grave being marked with the same little white cross.

However the scheme is carried out even in the roads between neighboring villages (which are on the average not more than 2 miles apart) the road sides invariable [sic] being planted with fruit and nut trees, every tree numbered, the crop being divided. Then again the density of population has compelled the utilization of every foot of ground – the forests being planted only on mountainous rocky ground of use for nothing else.

I think the frugality & economy of the Europeans, the little I have seen, is astounding.

Leaving the Hook of Holland the natives even gathered up scraps of bread thrown from the car windows.

In the forests a stick of wood is rare. The twigs are used for firewood and brooms.

There are so many many new and novel customs to a newcomer that they are hard to remember and must be seen to be appreciated.

Of course we are in the country, but at the same time we have probably a better opportunity to see and observe the people & their customs than tourists skimming through the cities & resorts.

Everywhere there are old castles (ruins) & places & things of historic interest. From my bedroom window I can look over about 100 yds into the walls & towers of a famous feudal castle shown in the postals sent.

Rambling through the woods, one is liable to run into an old marking stone of 1500 or 1600 marking the boundaries of some old baron.

These petty barons and kingdoms were at the time of Caesar overthrown and welded into principalities.

Below the hotel (we are situated on an eminence similar to the switch back station) in the midst of a field stands an old stone crucifix, probably placed there by some fervid Lutheran at the time of the religious revivals of which Germany was a hot bed.

You can see that every little walk or ramble is full of double interest.

The funnest thing is to see herds of big fat Germans, either walking clubs or a family or several families, enjoying their Sunday with long jaunts. A strong contrast to the American always looking for a chance to hop on behind and ride.

These parties occasionally stop for a glass of wine at the hotel here and start out yoadling [sic] and singing down through the village streets. Their utter indifference to foolish conventionality is somewhat refreshing.

Their great love for family & family ties is pleasing. Their home is the centre of everything. At Rotterdam we met a gentleman in a café who had been a 1<sup>st</sup> cabin passenger he introduced us to a Rotterdam gentleman he was talking to. Inquiring of the man where we could find a theatre or place of amusement were surprised to learn that the city of 2 or 200 thousand boasted of little or nothing in the amusement line until later in winter. He then explained to us that the Hollander especially spent most of his time at home. Somewhat different from the American club man.

Dr. Schenck's summer villa is situated in this village. Last week his mother, a fine old German lady speaking broken English celebrated her birthday. We sent her flowers and a committee composed of the

school "honor" committee, of which I am now a member called upon her to offer our congratulations. Her manner reminded me so much of grandma's.

Today (Sunday) the villagers and surrounding country side are celebrating some kind of a local Thanksgiving or fest.

Streets are filled with people – merry go rounds, shooting galleries, etc.

My first introductions to the European Sunday. Friday night we held our monthly sangerfest in the midst of the ruins of old Lindenfels castle. The party being given by Dr. Schenck. Incidentally – not because he gave us a fest – the more I see of him the more I admire him – his whole life is just wrapped up in his desire to impart forestry to his pupils. You can imagine the sangerfest held as it was, the old walls lit up with a tremendous bon fire was a weird and fantastic one.

Among the visitors were a number of fat portly and courtly German friends of the Dr.'s including the "oberforester" or forest master of the section to whom when introduced we had been coached by Dr. the proper angle at which to take off our hats and bow again & again... It was all very funny.

We have opportunity to observe some wonderful results of the German forestry methods.

We walk from here to Darmstadt next Sat 29<sup>th</sup> and will thus have a good opportunity to see more of the country at first hand.

I just reread your letter regarding father's operation – money on deposit – etc.

Really I do not need the black bag our side trips are mostly walking and even the suit case was considerably knocked around in coming. Yes I had my black coat – have it with me. Haven't had an unpleasant day since I left you.

Air is good here and am feeling well myself. So glad you are well fixed with servants. Some day I shall send Mrs. Schlagel a postal from Germany.

By the way ran across the name of "Rauch" in the village.

Last washing done here was fair & cheap. Well will say goodbye hope I haven't missed anything of personal interest.

Love to yourself. Mary Millard & regards to Trot.

Affectionately  
Keith.

One of the boys has his mother's brother with him – Dr. House & his wife. Herr Kern & his – we have quite a colony all together.

Your letter to Darmstadt was forwarded. Mail addressed there will reach me OK until I get back there

Hôtel „zum Odenwald“, Lindenfels i. O.  
 Filial-Anstalt No. 8. Bes.: A. Vogel. *Sunday*  
 Lindenfels i. O., den *Oct 23 1910*

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[page 1 of 8]

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[page 2 of 8]

Hôtel „zum Odenwald“, Lindenfels i. O.  
 Filial-Anstalt No. 8. Bes.: A. Vogel. #3  
 Lindenfels i. O., den 1910

However the scheme is carried out even on the roads between neighboring villages (which are on the average not more than 2 miles apart) the road sides invariably being planted with fruit and nut trees, every tree numbered, the crop being divided.

Then again the density of population has compelled the utilization of every foot of ground - the forests being planted only on mountainous rocky ground of use for nothing else.

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[page 3 of 8]

Everywhere there are old castles (ruins) & places & things of historic interest. From my bed room window I can look over about 100 yds into the walls & towers of a famous feudal castle shown in the postal sent.

Rambling through the woods, one is liable to run into an old working stone, 1500 or 1600 marking the boundary of some old baron.

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These parties occasionally stop for a glass of wine at the hotel here and start out walking and singing down through the village streets.

[page 4 of 8]

Hôtel „zum Odenwald“, Lindenfels i. O.

Földm. Ausgab. No. 5.

Bes.: A. Vogel.

Lindenfels i. O., den 1911

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[page 5 of 8]

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[page 6 of 8]

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[page 7 of 8]

Your letter to Darmstadt was forwarded. Mail addresses there will reach me O.K. until I get back there.

[page 8 of 8]



[envelope]