



The Historical
Society of
Pennsylvania

Collection GSP 001

Calvin I. Kephart

Genealogical research files

1911-1969

13 boxes, 5 lin. feet

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Abstract

Calvin I. Kephart (1883-1969) was a lawyer and hearing examiner with the Interstate Commerce Commission. He taught law as a member of the faculty of the National University (now George Washington University) for twelve years. He held six degrees, and had four books published as well as numerous articles and pamphlets. He was president of the National Genealogical Society (1928-1930, 1938-1940), and helped found the Maryland State Poetry Society. Kephart served in the Army Reserve as an engineer and administrator during the First and Second World Wars; consequently he usually signed his name and was addressed as Colonel Kephart. His wife was Olga Ahlson. The couple lived in Clarendon and then Arlington Virginia; after Kephart retired in 1949, they moved to Shady Side, Maryland, wintering in Tampa, Florida.

The collection is comprised mainly of genealogical research materials related to the Kephart family and related families. In addition to the Kepharts, family names researched include Ahlson, Britten, Collier, Drake, Dun, Heller, Runyan, Rittenhouse, Rubincam (Revercomb), Fretz, and Weisel. Nearly all the genealogical research undertaken concerned families in the family tree of Kephart and his wife. The bulk of the collection consists of ingoing and outgoing correspondence with both the staff of libraries, archives, and historical societies in the United States, Great Britain, and continental Europe (many in Germany), and with relatives, or persons believed to be likely relatives, who were enlisted by Kephart in researching their own family on his behalf.

Kephart collected numerous newspaper clippings about his ancestors and living relatives, which are interspersed throughout the collection. Since he considered himself a historian as well as a genealogist, the clippings not only document marriages and deaths but the occupations and other activities of family members in the 19th and 20th centuries. Prominent family members include Senator Homer E. Capehart of Indiana; nationally known tennis player Dorothy Weisel; and historian and writer Horace Kephart. The collection includes about a dozen letters between Kephart and Horace Kephart. Other materials often found in the genealogical research files are genealogical notes and pedigrees (family charts). In addition, there are photos of family members and of houses

that had belonged to family members; birth, marriage, and funeral announcements; copies and transcriptions of original documents such as wills and other vital records; copies of family histories; short published histories of churches and businesses; and letters and other documents concerning family associations and events. The collection provides extensive genealogical and biographical information on Kephart and related families in the 17th through 20th centuries.

Kephart was also intent on proving that Kephart and allied families descended from the medieval nobility, and on establishing their correct family coat-of-arms. Many of the genealogical research files are primarily about this quest, which Kephart considered to be one of great significance. Kephart was a strong advocate of eugenics, the belief that good breeding results in superior people (and vice versa). He noted that in “the olden times, there were only two classes, nobilis and ignobilis, the former indicated by their [coat-of] arms, the latter without. Literally, the former represented the nobility, the lowest of which was the knighthood...The ignobilis included slaves, captives, lowly peasants, etc.” More generally, Kephart believed that most American colonists who came from continental Europe were “of [noble] stock with coat-of-arms.” Kephart was considered an expert within the genealogical community on heraldry, and wrote two short books on the subject, *Origin of armorial insignia in Europe* (1938) and *Origin of heraldry in Europe...Published under the auspices of the National Genealogical Society, on the occasion of its jubilee (1903-1953)*. Coats -of-arms and noble origins are an intrinsic part of the family histories that Kephart wrote and compiled on Kephart and allied families.

In a similar vein, Kephart encouraged and promoted family associations for the families that he studied. In the letters there are many references to these associations and his role within those associations, which he believed instilled “a proper family pride.”

On occasion the letters in the genealogical research files include reflections on the nature and challenges of genealogical research; his political views and involvement in Republican politics; and comments of a personal nature such as on his health, state of mind, and children’s accomplishments.

The collection includes correspondence with other prominent genealogists, including Edward W. Hocker, Warren S. Ely, William M. Mervine, and Milton Rubincam. Only in the case of Rubincam, whom Kephart regarded as his kinsman and good friend, are there a substantial number of letters, which are interspersed throughout the collection. Some of the genealogical research in the collection was conducted by Rubincam, since both of them were related to the same Rubincam and Rittenhouse families. In an article shortly after Kephart’s death in the *National Genealogical Society Quarterly*, March 1970, Rubincam eulogized Kephart as “a vigorous and controversial writer, a profound thinker, and a man of original ideas...Scholars and friends often disagreed with his conclusions, but all had a deep and abiding respect for his honesty, his integrity, and his fearlessness.” In his will, Kephart left his papers to Rubincam, who decided that the Genealogical Society of Pennsylvania was the proper place for them.

There are also a few “ethnographic” research files in which Kephart corresponded with Eduard van Reeth of Belgium, Dr. Manfred Mayrhofer of Austria, and Professor Robert

M. Zingg, an anthropologist at the University of Colorado. These letters concern some of his theories about the development of early tribes and nations. By 1932 Kephart had begun this research, which culminated in his lengthy book, *Races of Mankind: Their Origin and Migration*, published in 1960 by the Philosophical Library in New York. In this work Kephart claimed to have written the definitive “ethnographic” book on the development of “advanced and retarded races.” The collection also includes advertisements for this book as well as his *Concise History of Freemasonry* (1964); his short pamphlets *True Christianity* and *Origin of the Name “Russia”*; an article in support of eugenics, entitled “World Population Explosion”; a few reviews of his books and articles; and nine letters to the editor from 1961 to 1968, seven published in the *Evening Capital* of Annapolis Maryland. In most of these letters and other writings Kephart expressed his extreme right-wing views—his fierce opposition to racial integration and the civil rights movement; support for the repatriation of African-Americans to Africa; and advocacy of the forced sterilization of the insane, the mentally retarded, prisoners, prostitutes, and women who had one or more illegitimate children.

There are also a small number of personal papers. These include letters to and from family members and friends including Horace Kephart; membership application to the Baronial Order of Magna Carta; materials related to Kephart’s involvement with the National Genealogical Society; “Reminiscences” (1954) by Kephart on his career as a genealogist; and obituaries, and a eulogy and biographical sketch by Milton Rubincam. In his “Reminiscences” Kephart declared that, “The supreme objectives of later life should be enjoyment and achievement, and genealogy combines both, including much romance.”

Overview of arrangement

Series I	Genealogical research files, 1911-1966	169 folders
Series II	Historical and “Ethnographic” research files, 1941-1968	5 folders
Series III	Personal Papers, 1932-1969	5 folders

Separation report

None.

Related materials (at HSP)

The books and manuscripts of a genealogical nature listed below are either written by Kephart or heavily influenced by him. Other genealogical research on the families he has researched is not included. The only exception is a book by genealogist Daniel Cassell, whose research Kephart believed he had “debunked.”

Milton Rubincam papers. This collection includes correspondence between Kephart and Rubincam.

Rubincam, Milton, "Calvin I. Kephart—1883-1969: A Memoir," *National Genealogical Society Quarterly*, March 1970.

Kephart, Calvin, *Ancestors of Calvin Kephart, of Shady Side, Maryland, 1950: Danish Royal Skioldung genealogy of Zincke (Zinck, Zinke, Zink, Zingg) and certain Gebhardt (Kephart, Capehart) families* (FC Ke or Gen Zi2)

Kephart, Calvin, "Correspondence (ca. 1930) concerning a family Bible, supposedly that of Rev. John Kephart, Mennonite preacher" (FC Ke)

Kephart, Calvin, "Capehart (Kephart) families of Philadelphia, Bucks and Montgomery counties, Pennsylvania" (FC Ca)

Kephart, Calvin, "Letters concerning the Kephart (Gebhard) family of Bucks County, Pa." (FC Ke)

Kephart, Calvin, "Britton-Brittain family of England and New York" (FC Br)

Kephart, Calvin, "Drake family of Portsmouth, New Hampshire and Piscataway, New Jersey" (Gen Dr3)

Kephart, Calvin, "Rittenhouse Genealogy Debunked," *National Genealogical Society Quarterly*, December, 1938 (Gen Z49)

Kephart, Calvin, "Rittenhouse of New Jersey" (FC Ri)

Kephart, Calvin, "Remarks to Members of the Weisel Family Association of Bucks County" (Gen Z49)

Kephart, Calvin, "Answer of Dr. Kephart," a reply to Howard Bowditch, "The Beginnings of Armory," reprinted with slight alterations from the *New York Genealogical and Biographical Record*, July, 1939 (Gen Z49)

Kephart, Calvin, *Origin of armorial insignia in Europe*, 1938 (F 656 or Gen Z49)

Kephart, Calvin, *Origin of heraldry in Europe, also of miscellaneous surnames and insignia: a contribution of genealogy and history. Published under the auspices of the National Genealogical Society, on the occasion of its jubilee (1903-1953)* (F 656 K385 1953)

Cassel, Daniel, *Genea-Biographical History of the Rittenhouse Family* (Phila., 1893) (Fa 929.2 R6133c 1893) On the binding, this work is entitled, *Origin and History of the Rittenhouse Family*

Cassel, Daniel, *Family Record of David Rittenhouse* (Phila., 1897) (Fa 929.2 R6133c 1897)

Rubincam, Milton, "Rubincam-Revercomb Family" (Gen Ru1:1-13)

Rubincam, Milton, *Origin of the Revercombs of Virginia*, reprinted from the *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, January 1955 (Fa 929.2 R8963r 1955)

Rubincam, Milton, *The Family of Jacob Revercomb, the First of the Race in Virginia*, reprinted from *Tyler's Quarterly and Genealogical Magazine*, October 1938 (Fa 929.2 R896r 1938)

Languages Represented

English; some correspondence with German and French repositories is in German or French.

Subjects

Heraldry—European—Genealogy
Eugenics—United States
Ethnologists—United States
Genealogy—Pennsylvania
Genealogy—United States
Genealogy—Germany
Genealogy—Professionalism—National Genealogical Society
Racism—Genealogy—United States

Britton, Nathaniel, c. 1635-1684, of Long Island, New York—Genealogy
Britton (Brittain) family—Genealogy
Capehart, Homer E., 1897-1979
Collier family—Genealogy
Drake, Francis, d. 1687, of New Hampshire and New Jersey—Genealogy
Drake family—Genealogy
Dun family—Genealogy
Fretz family—Genealogy
Gebhard, Heinrich, d. c. 1792, of Bristol Township, Philadelphia County—Genealogy
Heller family—Genealogy
Kephart, Horace, 1862-1931—Correspondence
Kephart, Calvin I., 1883-1969
Kephart (Capehart, Gebhard) family—Genealogy
Rittenhouse, David, 1732-1796—Genealogy
Rittenhouse family—Genealogy
Roignon (Runyan), Vincent, d. 1713, of East New Jersey—Genealogy
Rubincam, Milton, 1909-1997—Correspondence
Rubincam (Revercomb) family—Genealogy

Runyan (Roignon) family—Genealogy
Weisel family—Genealogy
Weisel, George Michael (d. 1770), of Bucks County, Pennsylvania—Genealogy

Administrative Information

Restrictions

The collection is open for research.

Acquisition information

Since about 1970 Milton Rubincam was the temporary custodian of this collection, which in Kephart's will was bequeathed to his friend and kinsman Rubincam to examine and decide where these papers should go. In 1991 the collection apparently was given to the Genealogical Society of Pennsylvania. In this transition, Rubincam asked that the collection be described as the gift of Commander Robert D. Kephart and Mrs. William Lee Collier (Calva Kephart), describing himself as "their agent." This information is from two notes that Rubincam left with the collection.

Preferred citation

Calvin I. Kephart genealogical research files (GSP 001), Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

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