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Levi Pennington

People

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9-3-1965

### Levi Pennington To Edward Kemp, September 3, 1965

Levi T. Pennington  
*George Fox University*

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September 3, 1965.

Edward Kemp,  
Acquisition Librarian,  
University of Oregon,  
Eugene, Oregon. 97403.

Dear Mr. Kemp:--

Your letter of August 31 is received, and naturally it interests me very much. Whether anything will come of it remains to be seen.

For your information I can say that for forty years or so I kept all of my correspondence, and I write from 1000 to 1500 letters a year, and receive nearly as many. And I have kept copies of articles, addresses, short stories perhaps by the dozen, most of which will never give an editor a chance to send me a rejection slip, some that have, and some that were paid for. There are four book-length manuscripts, one a novel, one a "whodunnit", one an "autobiography" of the Apostle Peter and one a religious work, "Fishers of Men."

My correspondence contains, of course, thousands of letters to relatives, most of which would be of no value to anybody else, and letters from them not much better, from the standpoint of any possible historian. (If I were a president of the United States a letter of mine might be of value, as is the letter, his first love letter, written by a former president that happens to be in my desk right now, but won't be there tomorrow.) And I have long known that not one letter out of ten and probably not one out of a hundred was worth preserving, but I never could be sure which one might be of value, so I saved all of them.

This correspondence might have some value as it relates to various organizations and causes with which I have been connected, such as the Newberg Friends Church, the Newberg Ministerial Association, the Newberg Community Hospital, Newberg political affairs, the Herbert Hoover Foundation, Oregon Yearly Meeting of the Friends Church, of which I was Presiding Clerk for a good many years, Pacific College (now George Fox College), the Oregon Council of Churches, the Heifer Project (for overseas relief), Friends Committee on National Relations, ~~the~~ National Council for Prevention of War, the American Friends Service Committee, in which I ~~now~~ hold five positions at present, including personnel Committee, Executive Committee and Administrative Council for the Pacific Northwest Regional Office including Oregon, Eashington. Wyoming, Idaho, Montana, ~~Washington~~ and Alaska, and sundry other organizations and causes.

Since I am now 90 years old it has not seemed fair to leave something like fifty apple boxes full of correspondence for somebody else to struggle with. I have a brother who suggested that I take the whole mass out to some open place and make a gigantic bonfire of it; but I knew there were things in every year that at least my daughters and grandchildren might find of interest.



Some months ago I began to go through this correspondence a year at a time, burning nine tenths of it, for a guess. It has brought protests from some folks who take the opposite position from that of my brother, and think that all of it should be preserved.

Your suggestion of a place to deposit at least some of this material is not the first that I have received. George Fox College (which was Pacific College during the 30 years while I was president) has asked for it, but I do not know what facilities they have for its storage, and there are not many historical researchers who would know of this material or seek it here. Earlham College, my alma mater, has asked for it, and naturally the pull is strong in that direction. Haverford College has made a strong play for this material, and they have probably the largest, certainly one of the largest of the collections of historical material by and about Friends (Quakers) in the United States.

Of course the proper place to seek for the official history of the American Friends Service Committee is in its official records. The proper place to search for the official history of Oregon Yearly Meeting of Friends is in the minutes of that organization. So far as I can see, the principal if not the only value of my correspondence would be to reveal some of the things behind the scenes, and there is some material of that sort in my correspondence, without question.

I have gone into these tedious details so that you can have an idea of the background of my present situation. I have gone through my correspondence up to 1941, burning up probably nine tenths of the material and maybe more. If there has been any loss to posterity, they'll never know it. It is my present intention to continue this morderous task, burning up thousands of letters that meant much to me when they were written, but for which I can see no possible use when I am gone. Unless I dispose of it before my death, my will provides that all my books and papers shall become the property of my older daughter, Mary Esther (Mrs. Cecil E.) Pearson, Box 241, Greene, New York.

Some twenty years ago I began the writing of what I thought of as an account of my life up to that point which might be of interest to my immediate descendants. I did something like a hundred pages, perhaps more; and then I laid it aside and did not touch it again for fifteen years or more. I called it "Random Recollections of Seventy Happy Years." After the death of my wife of more than fifty-five years I had my second book of verse published, and then began writing again on my autobiography, if such a dignified word should be used in speaking of this literary product. This work has not got along very fast, as there have been so many other things to do.

If I ever get this job completed, it may never get beyond manuscript stage. If it ever is published, of course the university ~~can~~ have a copy of it if they desire. It will have to be published at my expense, I am sure, as I cannot imagine any desire for it except from a very limited class of interested folks.

Please excuse this long and tedious recital. But your suggestion is so interesting that I wanted you to understand my own situation. I am not reading all the tens of thousands of letters in the apple boxes that I have filled for so long, a box a year, with



more than a score of the crowded boxes still in the attic, nine out of ten of them awaiting cremation.

Most of the letters require only that I see from whom they come or to whom they have been written. I have not destroyed any of my correspondence with Herbert Hoover, who was a personal friend, a member of the Newberg Friends Church, who had been our guest repeatedly and whose guests my wife and I were both in the White House and in Palo Alto. And all the letters that passed between my wife and me have been preserved, and are not likely to be placed in any library.

If "Random Recollections" ever appears, I shall hope to let you know. I should do at least that.

With the hope that you get better replies to your other letters, I am

Sincerely yours,

Levi T. Pennington.