

Letter from Thompson School

Letters provide a window to history that other documents often miss. So, we were delighted when Wallace Jarrell offered digital copies of a letter written in 1891 by his wife's relative, John Henry Kennedy from Siler City's Thompson School to another relative, Thomas Wesley Ritter. Only two pages long, the letter provides details about a student's experience at the school that we have not seen recorded elsewhere.

The Thompson School

The Thompson School was a private boarding school that operated in Siler City from 1887 to 1897. It was considered to be one of the outstanding preparatory schools in North Carolina for that era. Located where Siler City's City Hall now stands, the two-story, fourteen-room frame building was later used for the Siler City Institute and even later as a public grade school. The building was demolished in the 1930s.



Thompson School, Siler City, NC. From The Architectural Heritage of Chatham County, NC

Professor J. A. W. Thompson opened the school in January of 1887 in Siler City. At that time, the school had only about forty students—five from town and thirty-five boarding students from Professor Thompson's Oakdale School in Alamance County. The Siler City Thompson School grew rapidly. The 1889 directory listed 162 students—seventy from the Siler City area and ninety-two from elsewhere, including other states. Courses at the school included a three-year college preparatory course, English, French and German, Music, Drawing, telegraphy, and physical training (military drill and calisthenics).



This envelope from the Thompson School was contributed to the CCHA collection by Jonus Nobles. It touts the school as "A first class Boarding School with a Military Organization."

Thomas W. Ritter and J. H. Kennedy

Wallace provided the following background information and photos about the letter's author, J. H. Kennedy, and its recipient, Thomas W. (Tommy) Ritter.

Uncle Tommy, as we called him, was born in Moore County in 1874. He became a teacher for some period of time, and later went to work for the railroad and moved to Star, in Montgomery County. There he became the Depot Agent. Tommy Ritter lived until 1973.



J. H. Kennedy



Thomas W. Ritter

Mr. John Henry Kennedy was a cousin, or perhaps a second cousin of T. W. Ritter. J. H. Kennedy was born 20 March 1873 in Moore County, attended the Thompson School, and also became a Depot Agent, I believe at Gulf, then later farmed in Lee County, and died in 1950.

The Letter from Thompson School

J. H. Kennedy's letter was written on 6 December 1891, while Kennedy was a student at Thompson School, and addressed to Mr. T. W. Ritter, Noise, NC. Noise was a community in Moore County, just south of what was then the Chatham/Randolph county line. Both Kennedy and Ritter were about seventeen or eighteen years old when the letter was written.

The following transcription was provided by Wallace Jarrell. Wallace copied the spelling and punctuation as closely as possible and provided a few corrections in brackets to make the text more intelligible. Images of the original letter follow.

Siler City, N.C. Dec. 6th 1891

T. W. Ritter

Noise, N.C.

My Dear sir

Having been loansum [lonesome] over here by myself since I came here I take the pleasure of writing you a few lines to inform you that I like my new home Very Well. I am in health and prosperity and sincerely hope you are the same. Tommy I wish you would come over and go to school with me You could soon learn penmanship Completely. Prof. Cox gives a daily lesson of one hour every evening.

I just Wish you were here to see the military Works. the boys are all furnished with guns The military Works consists of brich [breach] loading rifles With bayonets attacked [attached] to them also two large drums and swords

Capt. W. S. Durham is the Commander My Teachers are Kind. I recite my lessons to three different teachers Prof. McNeil, Thompson and Johnson

This School Consist of 8 teachers I don't know how many Scholars I have not seen them all yet. I am acquainted with four or five

this is a nice little town on the CF&YV R.R. daily mail Traines the town consist of a few rogues they broke into two stores on last thursday night and taken 20 cents in money was all that was mised

please Write to me by next mail and tell me how you are ~~at~~ getting all [along] at school I Will be at home Christmas hoping to hear from you soon

I Remain

&

Truly

J. H. Kennedy

Silver City N.M. Dec 6th 1891

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J. K. Miller

My Dear Sir

Having been
brought over here by myself
since I came here I take the
pleasure of writing you a few lines
to inform you that I like my
new home very well I am in health
and prosperity and sincerely hope
you are the same. Tommy I wish you
would come over and go to school with
me you could soon learn penmanship
completely. Prof. Cox gives a daily
lesson of one hour every evening.

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I donot now how many scholars
I havenot seen them all yet. I am
acquainted with four or five
this is a nice little town on the
C. & N. Y. R.R. daily mail train
the town consist of a few rogues
they broke into two stores on last
Thursday night and taken 20 cents
in money was all that was missed
please write to me by next mail
and tell me ^{how} you are ~~at~~ getting
all at school I will be at home
Christmas hoping to hear from
you soon

I Remain

Truly

J. P. Kennedy



M. E. Ritter,
Poise N.C.