



Epistolary research relations: Correspondences in anthropological research: Arensberg, Kimball, and the Harvard-Irish Survey, 1930 1936

Title	Epistolary research relations: Correspondences in anthropological research: Arensberg, Kimball, and the Harvard-Irish Survey, 1930 1936
Author(s)	Byrne, Anne
Publication Date	2017-10
Publisher	University of Notre Dame Press

TWO

Epistolary Research Relations

Correspondences in Anthropological Research:
Arensberg, Kimball, and the Harvard-Irish Survey, 1930–1936

ANNE BYRNE

INTRODUCTION

In public and personal archives scattered throughout the United States lie the professional correspondences and personal letters of the Harvard-Irish Survey research team (1930–36) that came to Ireland in the early years of the twentieth century to conduct an archaeological and anthropological study of a “modern society” (Byrne, Edmondson, and Varley 2001, 2015; Byrne and O’Mahony 2012, 2013).¹ The published works of the Survey shaped the evolution of Irish archaeology and social anthropology. The physical anthropology publications receive less attention, but *Family and Community in Ireland* ([1940] 2001) by Conrad Arensberg and Solon Kimball is a classic—a controversial, frequently cited ethnographic study of Irish rural family and community life. Along with *Family and Community in Ireland*, Arensberg (1910–97) and Kimball (1909–82) published on methodological and theoretical issues introducing comparative, field-based community studies as “a substantially new anthropology,” making a

significant contribution to the interdisciplinary study of modern European and North American societies (Comitas 1999, 811). In Ireland, Arensberg and Kimball devised a new paradigm for studying culture and community, characterized as “the intensive observation of the minutiae of social life,” and it had far-reaching effects.²

Focusing on the social anthropology strand of the Harvard-Irish Survey, this chapter examines unpublished professional and private letters of the first visit of an American team of anthropologists and archaeologists to Europe. How letters are deployed in the Survey, who writes to whom, what is relayed, requested, or refused: these themes inform the dynamics of research relations and the deployment of a novel research strategy providing a focus on informants’ voices, perspectives, and practices in service of the Survey. A narrative approach to the analysis of letters is introduced.

Two slim brown-paper folders, frayed with age, lie on my desk. Bundles of correspondence on brittle yellowing sheets of paper of various sizes, neatly labeled and categorized, are inside. Some letters are typewritten on headed note paper, letter characters paler here, darker there, reflecting the uneven spread of ink on typewriter ribbon or the varying force of fingers striking typewriter keys. The day, month, and year are duly noted, the address of the recipient clearly placed on the top left-hand corner of the page, followed by a singular “*Dear Sir.*” The content is closely crowded onto the page, utilizing all available space, signed off with the flourish of a handwritten signature, bold in blue ink. Handwritten letters in pencil on pages torn from school copybooks have their places in the archive too, carefully numbered page by page.

Some bundles of letters are substantial, indicating regular exchanges of correspondence, perhaps maintaining old or building new relationships. Others are one-off invitations to attend events or a kind acknowledgment of books received from secretaries of learned societies and state bodies. The personality and character of the writer is suggested by the quality and shape of the paper, the color of the ink, the size and form of the handwriting, the forceful expression of ideas, the colloquial use of language, the formality of tone, the regretful refusal, the polite inquiry, the gossip conveyed, the rude interjection, the news of the day. The immediacy of the voices and the urgency of the content are as compelling as the materiality of the physical presence of the letters, working to dissolve the illusion of time between now and then. Preserved for more than eighty years, these aged, fragile letters were intended by Arensberg and Kimball to be kept

and read at some future time, perhaps by themselves or by an unknown person. I have acquired Survey letters, diaries, and documents from public and private archives.³ Transcribing and reading these letters aloud provokes the imagination and pushes the mind into a different space, time, era.⁴ What can they, these writers of letters, tell us, the unintended recipients, the not-addressed audience? How can these letters inform us about the experiences of the unseasoned young American anthropologists, Arensberg and Kimball, as they set about their research tasks in the towns and countryside of 1930s Ireland? What else can we learn from letters in the archive?

LETTERS IN AN ARCHIVE

The letters of the Harvard-Irish Survey archive, grouped by missive purpose, reveal that the bulk of the correspondence pertains to the professional and organizational aspects of initiating, managing, and maintaining a large research expedition abroad over a long period of time. As such the letter is an important medium of professional exchange and ongoing contact. These include letters between the Harvard-based architects of the Survey, Earnest Hooton⁵ and William Lloyd Warner,⁶ as they seek funding from American and Irish sponsors, clarify the rationale of the Survey, involve other significant academic and influential players, and plan comprehensive media campaigns in the United States and Ireland.⁷ The aim of the media campaign is to broadcast the intention to undertake “a scientific study of a modern nation” while preparing the local people to accept, for the long duration, groups of American anthropologists and archaeologists living and working in their midst.⁸

Many of the letters in the archive are written on one side of the Atlantic Ocean and intended for a reader on the other side. Warner reports regularly to Hooton from Ireland during his initial foray in 1931 and 1932 while he was making a preliminary survey of the twenty-six counties of the Irish Free State. County Clare on the west coast of Ireland is deemed the most suitable location for a detailed study of Irish society. In this he may have been influenced by Éamon de Valera, head of the Irish Free State government and whose party, Fianna Fáil, dominated Clare politics. Clare was much visited by Irish and European scholars; writers and artists in search of inspiration and authenticity might also extend a welcome to

anthropologists from the next parish—America. Clare was also an area in which collectors from the Irish Folklore Commission (IFC) worked (Lysaght 2008).

Acquiring letters of introduction from those who could ease the way in Ireland was a preoccupation in the early stages of the Survey. This was particularly successful given the fractious, volatile political context of a society in the aftermath of the War of Independence (1919–21) and the Civil War (1922–23).⁹ Bishop Fogarty and de Valera, representing opposing political positions, had extended verbal and written approval to the project, which could now proceed with episcopal and political blessings. Securing written approval for the research program was entirely Warner's initiative. For example, Warner sought a meeting with de Valera (in June 1932) in which it was agreed that he himself would draft the letter of approval and that de Valera would sign it. Warner writes to de Valera: "You asked if I would send you a brief description of the research project that Harvard University is starting in County Clare. You also requested that I write the kind of letter of approval I wish you to sign on my behalf."¹⁰ Sensitive to lingering post-Civil War antagonisms, Warner was anxious that the presence of the three research teams (archaeological, physical, and social anthropological) should not cause any offence. He writes: "I got the letter I wanted from de Valera signed on official stationery and I have used it in the proper quarters and kept it out of sight in other places. I had a long talk with the Bishop some time back and found him a very agreeable and nice person. He is a violent antagonist of de Valera's" (Byrne, Edmondson, and Varley 2001, xl). De Valera's letter of approval for the survey is explicit in his expectation that the archaeological and socioeconomic study of the Irish people "be in no way political but only interested in obtaining the objective truth through careful collection of the facts."¹¹ Warner provides academic and professional referees should de Valera wish to check the research intentions of the Harvard team. These referees, George O'Brien (National University of Ireland), Delargy (Séamus Ó Duilearga, Irish Folklore Commission), and Adolf Mahr (National Museum) were to play an important role in the subsequent scrutinizing of at least one Survey publication on behalf of de Valera, the classic social anthropology account *Family and Community in Ireland*, authored by Arensberg and Kimball (Byrne 2014).¹² Delargy provided an extensive range of contacts and letters of introduction for Arensberg and Kimball.¹³ He wrote directly to people in Clare with requests either to provide accommodation or to

put the anthropologists in touch with people who were knowledgeable about local customs, mores, and folkways. In his field notes, Arensberg describes his meeting with Stephen Hillary (Stiofán Ó hEalaíre), a renowned storyteller and “Ireeshin” (a keeper of the Irish tradition): “An old man, dressed in very ragged and shabby clothes, sat huddled over a small turf fire, whose smoke finding no chimney, filled the house. The house had the basest appearance, though a dilapidated and half empty dresser was there. I introduced myself. Stephen was very glad, had had a letter about me from Delargy, was pleased to see me.”¹⁴ Delargy’s letter endorses Hillary’s lore and local knowledge, emphasizing the value of his contribution to the American research. Despite his frail health and indigent circumstances, Hillary is happy to be of service to the Survey.¹⁵

Much of the correspondence between Arensberg and Kimball moves between the United States and Ireland as the anthropologists negotiate their contacts with Irish town and country people, preparing the way for each other as one arrives or the other leaves the field. They exchange observations, ideas, analytical schema, and plans for lectures for their PhD theses and publications. Their epistolary relationship is affectionate and considerate. They pay careful attention to each other’s thoughts and ideas, taking time to work out an understanding of new cultures and communities. Though their letters contain gossip, inquiries about the well-being of family and adventures of friends, the bulk of the content is a dialogue of ideas generated from their observations of family and community relations. Both Arensberg and Kimball sketch out theoretical interpretations and rehearse readings of events in their letters to each other, asking questions and expecting answers. Replies are gratefully acknowledged and systematically interrogated; reasons are given for rejection, acceptance, or expansion of the other’s suggestions. These intellectual exchanges are mediated by the slow passage of the time taken to write, send, read, respond, and dispatch the letters across the ocean. In the 1930s the material conditions of the postal system were such that, borne by ship, it took two weeks for a letter to travel from the west coast of Ireland to the east coast of the United States. The practice of corresponding, begun in Ireland, was maintained throughout their professional lives, even when Arensberg and Kimball lived and worked together in New York City. Insights into their intellectual development and career paths, their support for each other’s work as they contributed to the growth of anthropology in the United States, are evident in these letters.

Letters of introduction allowed Arensberg and Kimball to access and recruit a wide range of informants from all classes and professions—entrepreneurs and civil servants, property owners and laborers, town-dwellers and country folk alike—to be of service to the Survey. In a letter home, Arensberg describes his first week in Ireland: “It seems I have quite a connection here and the traditional Irish hospitality doesn’t fail. I saw two professors, three civil servants, a judge, a senator, a student, lots of them, some fox-hunting aristocrats, some stout-drinking democrats, and the United States chargé d’affaires, so you can imagine I wasn’t without companionship.”¹⁶

Letters of introduction are also a feature of the correspondence. The embossed calling card with the lavishly printed name enclosed in a diminutive but heavy cream envelope introduces Arensberg, “who is spending the holiday season alone in Ireland.” Another recipient is urged to “show him some fun.” Arensberg’s family background is one of industrial wealth and property ownership, and the resultant network of familial connections were made available to him in Europe. A letter of introduction to author, physician, and prominent member of the Irish literary revival movement, Oliver St. John Gogarty, for example, is in the archive. The private and personal letters home to parents, family, loved ones, and friends reveal the displacement keenly felt as the young Arensberg resigned himself to a long, cold winter in Clare, aware of the intellectual, physical, and emotional challenges of coming to know and understand a culture both similar and strange. The expression of intimate thoughts is reserved for those who will read his regular missives from a hoped for sympathetic disposition: “Dearest Peggie . . . Meanwhile I must admit that I do miss you. . . . You’d laugh if you could see me, especially in the dejected privacy of my own hotel room. It is so cold in the morning that I lie awake quite a time, trying to make up my mind to put the feet out and on the floor. I sleep every night curled around a hot water bottle of metal, a godsend but a poor substitute for better things.”¹⁷ The anticipation of receiving letters from home is recorded, reminding us of a different era in which news traveled slowly and showing the extent to which the anthropologist was physically and socially remote from all that was familiar: “It is just a month since I set sail . . . so I don’t know what has happened to anyone, not having had a single letter of any sort. They are piling up in Ennis, at least I hope so, for I want to have a regular feast when I arrive there a week from now and read them all.”¹⁸

The personal demands on adopting the role of anthropologist in a new setting are revealed as Arensberg describes the contrast between his private and public personae: “I wonder sometimes what impression I must make, a fellow consumed with energetic good fellowship, full of interest, ready to listen to anybody on any subject, and the next glum, speechless (for after a day of it, fatigue leaves me so tired stuttering sets in, worse than ever before, a bad sign) and retiring—for after the day of it I’ll hide out, seeking privacy for thoughts and my own life.”¹⁹

Other letters in the archive are written as official reports to Survey directors at Harvard, outlining main activities, meetings, locations, progress, observations, and concerns of the newly arrived anthropologists in Ireland. Much of their time is spent meeting and talking with a wide range of people from all sectors of Irish society. The rich and detailed empirical content of these letters, though preoccupied with figuring out the network of local and familial relationships within households, on farms, in the market, church and public house, between kin, neighbors and friends, prefigure the larger themes of the importance of reciprocal relations for the continuity of farm family, economy, and community, with which Arensberg and Kimball became consumed. In the first year of fieldwork, understanding the Irish class system, and the connections between political party allegiances, professional and informal associations, and class mobility, is a preoccupation of the anthropologists—indeed one that persists throughout their time in Ireland. Despite extensive correspondence, their general analyses of the class system is not now known, as the later published work and their reputation is focused in the main on the small farmer class.

Arensberg writes to Warner and Kimball from Clonmel, County Tipperary, November 27, no year noted. Clonmel offers a point of contrast to Ennis and their investigations there:

It is now month since I left you all and about time to make a general report of what has happened. . . . I met various people including a bank manager, the county engineer, a local doctor, a dispensary doctor, the home assistance officer. . . . I am scheduled to-morrow for intensive investigation of the rate books and am going with the agricultural officer and get in with a few farmers. I haven’t much control over the selection so far, having to take what comes, but in the town I begin to know my way about as I have already charted the whole

place out and with the help of several editions of the newspaper and Thom's Directory of Ireland I have a pretty good index to those in business and in the professions and in official positions which makes the whole of the upper middle and lower upper classes.²⁰

These letter "reports" provide an insight not only into theoretical interests but also into the everyday practices of the anthropologists observing and familiarizing themselves with the culture, economy, religion, class structure, and politics of Irish society. Though there are exceptions, in this period in which social anthropology is growing as an academic discipline, anthropologists did not write about their methodology. Discussion of the trials and challenges of fieldwork or the revelation of internal dispositions, sentiments, and thoughts were not encouraged. Through an analysis of letters in the archives, we can appreciate this history.

NARRATIVE ANALYSIS OF LETTERS

Though widely used as sources in historical, literary, and biographical research, the problematic status of letters as reliable, representative documentary evidence of relationships, practices, or even as referential accounts of events in time is much written about (Stanley 2004; Jolly and Stanley 2005; Halldórsdóttir 2007). What can the researcher make of a letter? What is the basis for interpreting the meaning of the account? Having only one side of the correspondence, working with partial and incomplete stories, having little biographical information on the lives of the correspondents, not knowing how to decode what the in-text and personal judgments and references to persons, places, or events might mean or how to gauge the relationship between correspondents, all these factors pose significant challenges to researchers interested in letters. Ethical dilemmas arise concerning the lack of direct consent from the author to use the contents of a letter for research, despite the existence of the collection in an archive. Revealing the identity of the author of letters or those written about, particularly if they are not public figures, is also problematic.²¹ Halldórsdóttir (2007) notes that relatives can be concerned about what is written about their forebears; the sensitive researcher will respect the signatory, the addressee, and the topic of the letter, evaluating what information is relevant for research. Other shortcomings of using letters

in research include the unavoidable clumsiness of language as expressed in-text—lacking the interactional, face-to-face, nonverbal cues, we may overauthorize the text to interpret what is meant. A letter written in 1930 but read decades later provokes interpretation in the context of the present. Discretion is advised.

Stanley (2004, 202–3) frames the letter and correspondence as text and as an interpersonal process of communication. Letters mirror features of all social interaction, being dialogical, that is, communications between people based on turn-taking and reciprocity. They are also perspectival in that their structure and content changes according to the particular recipient and the passing of time. Letters have emergent properties, with their own preoccupations, conventions, ethics, and a form that is universally recognizable but that can be subverted by individual practice (Stanley 2004, 217). Given these characteristics, we will find a narrative approach to the analysis of letters useful. Slow to filter into the social and human disciplines, the importance of narrative for framing, understanding, and interpreting experience and organizing knowledge of the world is now widely recognized by scholars and researchers (Cortazzi 2001; Bruner 2002; Mishler 1986). Hinchman and Hinchman (1997, xvi) advise that narrative (stories) in the human sciences should be defined provisionally as discourse with a clear sequential order that connects events in a meaningful way for a definite audience and thus offers insights about the world and/or people's experiences of it. A narrative can also be understood as a story with a plot involving a change in the situations or fortunes of a main character. Accordingly, the three key features of narratives are chronological, meaningful, and social.

Narratives commonly found in texts are part of the ongoing effort to make tentative, contingent sense of an experience or to share knowledge. Approaching the narrative analysis of letters as both a produced text and ongoing interpretive process provides the opportunity to focus on the roles of narrative participants in constructing accounts and in negotiating perspectives and meanings (Cortazzi 2001, 384). Advising researchers to pay attention to the functional, contextual, and performative aspects of narrative, Cortazzi outlines a number of reasons for doing narrative analysis as part of ethnographic research. First is a research concern with approaching the meaning of experience from the narrator's point of view. Narrative analysis can also support an orientation to the representation of voices,

majority and minority, or aspects of speech that reflect corporate, organizational, and professional interests as well as private, personal, or familial interests. Narrative analysis offers the insider's view of a situation or professional occupation, proffering a public profile to fit the human qualities of personal or professional practices. This aspect emerges in the evaluations of stories that may stress such humane values as love, dedication, patience, enthusiasm, sacrifice, struggle through hard work, and humor (Cortazzi 2001, 387). Finally, in doing narrative analysis, the techniques and strategies that writers use to tell their story are brought into awareness.

Despite shortcomings and complexities, letters are useful texts with which to work, particularly over a series of interchanges. Since I am interested in the voices, professional and personal perspectives of correspondents, in how research relationships are co-constructed and manipulated, and in the human qualities evoked in writing relationships, I focus on a category of Survey letters that deserves closer scrutiny. Both Arensberg and Kimball engaged in a research strategy that may have been novel in its time—the deliberate use of the letter to gather additional data from informants after the anthropologists had returned to the United States to write.²² The bulk of these letters are written between 1933 and 1937, with one or two in the 1950s and one from 1976. What kind of information did the anthropologists seek and from whom? How was this information used? How effective was this request to engage informants in further research and letter-writing activities? What responses did they receive? What were the local and personal consequences of this strategy to engage informants in epistolary relations? What can be learned about the politics and practices of field work relations from letters in an archive?

EPISTOLARY RELATIONS

In his diary, Kimball writes about the difficulty of accurately recording the richness of the stories told to him, depending only on his memory:

This sketchy account is the result of one of the greatest disappointments I felt in this work. Here was Danny giving me word for word his whole interpretation of the ritual and symbolism of the mass, and I wasn't able to take it down, and fondly thinking I could remember

it the next day, I discover to my horror that this is about all that is left of it except the nebulous impressions which must serve to set off another train like this one some day, to be better recorded.²³

Was it such frustration with delusive memory and after-the-fact note-taking that motivated Arensberg and Kimball after they had left the field to correspond with informants?

Writing to Kimball, Arensberg comments: "You seem to be spreading sunshine and light with your letters to various people here, four or five of them seemed pretty gleeful at getting letters from you."²⁴ Kimball has returned to the United States to make sense of the material gathered on town and country life in Clare and writes to informants seeking further information and clarification on observations and events. A small farmer, writing in 1936, explains credit relations between shopkeepers and farmers:

You asked me what is meant by gombeenism. Well I will tell you. . . . I will give you myself for instance. I am dealing with say Malones. I could be dealing their for years there was a bill of five pounds in me there. . . . I wanted stuff they would give stuff that would raise the bill again and so on I was never clear. They wanted me to leave them my whole years produce and why not when I was not clear. If I went to town for a half sack of flour and got it at a shilling cheaper at any other house and they to find it out I would have an attorney letter before a week . . . they are all right going robbers so the finish up of all of them is to go to the bad and to the devil because they are not being honest so that is gombeenism.²⁵

His letter details his customary obligation to the credit system and the consequences in law should he default on his debts. He vividly communicates his indignation for shopkeepers charging excessive rates to debtors, who are obliged to continue to trade with them—precisely because of the obligation of their debts.

As proprietor and owner of The Copper Jug, a public house, grocery, and stable yard for country people coming to sell at the markets and buy from the merchandizers of Ennis, Edward Kerin was a significant informant for Survey team members, who took regular refuge in his hostelry. Kerin introduced the country men and women, urging them to tell their

stories to the anthropologists, advised Arensberg and Kimball on villages and townlands to be visited, and on the possibilities of accommodation in the remoter parts of Clare. Kerin is a regular and willing correspondent from 1933 to 1936:²⁶ “Dear Mr Arensberg, I wish to acknowledge the receipt of your letter and I must assure you that I felt very happy when I read it through. One thing I felt especially was: you showed sincerity and friendship in a marked way right throughout your epistle. You spoke as it were from the heart and your spirit seemed to be in every line.”²⁷ Copies of Arensberg’s letters to Kerin were not in the archive at the time of my writing, and we can only conjecture how Arensberg might have phrased his request for information. We are dependent on Kerin’s replies as an echo of what precisely the anthropologist sought to know from local informants.

The substance of Kerin’s richly descriptive letters concern the apprenticeship system, the employment of shop assistants, marrying “into a shop,” rituals associated with “walking the shop” (similar to “walking the land” in assessment of a marriage bargain), the lives of single women as shopkeepers, shopkeeper vis-à-vis customer etiquette, and the economic and familial relationships between town and country people. He explains why shopkeepers prefer to recruit country “lads” as apprentices: “(1) he can be more easily bent to the employers will, in doing many small jobs outside of his new calling (2) it is expected that people will give their trade where the boy is employed and also his folk will canvas their friends to support the House. In other words its better business to get in the country lad.”²⁸ Young men between the ages of nineteen and twenty sought to serve their time in the drapery, grocery, hardware, and chemist shops of Ennis, learning a new trade for a period of three to four years. Legal contracts were signed, the parents paid a fee of thirty to sixty pounds to the owner of the business, the apprentice received five shillings a week, and lived with his employers, who were in loco parentis. Kerin wrote that the indentured apprenticeship system “was a very good one,” particularly for controlling and restraining young men as “other wise he was a free lance to run away when he choose to go, (away) back home where he was perhaps not wanted, or join the army or become a corner boy. In such cases (runaway) the employer can have the lad brought back by force if necessary or by law.”²⁹ Kerin, like others, is pleased to be of service to the anthropologists: “Don’t spare me if I can be useful at any time to you. It will be a pleasure to me only to look up anything you want in reason.”³⁰ Based

on their experiences and observations, informants provide insider information and in situ examples of ongoing communal relations. Perhaps this was the first time farmers and shopkeepers had been requested to observe and write about their own and others' lives? Arensberg and Kimball provide the questions, the writers of letters lived the answers. Bishop Fogarty provided information on priests' salaries and clerical matters. We can only assume that on reading these firsthand verbatim accounts of lives observed at close quarters, Arensberg and Kimball knew that they had struck a seam of gold.

However, not all of the correspondents were as keen to comply with these missive requests. Dermot Foley, director of the county library, explains to Kimball: "I didn't reply to your letter requesting photographs—deliberately. I couldn't hold a camera and apart from that it was a tall order. Oh! Much too tall. What the devil were you thinking about anyway."³¹ Foley was a regular correspondent and well situated in literary and cultural society. Turning the request around, he seeks to secure U.S. funds to support an Irish literary periodical: "By the way I am about to ask you a favour. . . . There is a new magazine coming out next month called Ireland To-Day. I became interested in it, after a tout of theirs told me that their would be no kow-towing to Church or State. . . . What I want you to do is to see if anyone around Harvard would spend a bob on it."³² The demands made of informants were extensive. In addition to looking for a list of published works and reports on banking, Arensberg writes to George O'Brien asking a series of questions on the differences between banks and agricultural credit corporations, the conditions under which loans are extended to farmers, types of collateral security required, the consequences for banks in extending credit to farmers and shopkeepers, a list of the directors and owners of banks, where shares are held, and an analysis of the relationship between Irish and English banks. O'Brien replies that the Banking Commission itself is seeking such information. In these two instances, the correspondents candidly refuse the onerous invitation to become epistolary informants to the Harvard-Irish Survey. Why they decline we can only conjecture. Their perceived relationship to the anthropologists, based on an assumed similarity of class, occupation, and income, may have been primarily social, based on a class-based interaction in the clubs and societies of Ennis. Arguably, they refused because they could. Their friendly relationships with the anthropologists did not depend on acquiescence to the request.

LOCAL SURVEY INFORMANTS

For local informants who continued to supply Arensberg and Kimball with detailed insider information about town and country life, what was the incentive or motivation to correspond? For Danny Bourke, the role of Survey informant presented an opportunity to expand his social relationships and perhaps to improve his limited economic prospects in 1930s Ireland. In a letter home describing his work, Arensberg portrays his impressions of Bourke:

My job here is to live with them, observe them, and work with them—in fact I'm sort of reporter at large with a scientific kink, and it is an engrossing job which keeps me running from high to low among them, from the local bishop, a benign old prelate given to unexpected (and sometime embarrassing, for his parishoners) political outbursts, and the district judge, a clear eyed young puritan, to Bourke, labourer and handyman at fairs, who though he rolls his eyes up to heaven in conversation and is devout enough to be a daily communicant, has an inexhaustible fund of local anecdote, history, scandal and opinion.³³

Contact with Survey members provided Bourke with an opportunity to weave himself into a social and professional setting from which he might otherwise be excluded because of the constraints imposed on someone of his class by Ennis society. Bourke possibly began to revalue his own stock of mundane knowledge, understanding that his extensive networks of contacts, insider perspective on labor disputes, union affairs, the politics of a conflict-based society, and the stories about his own community were much valued by the visiting Americans. When the anthropologists returned to the United States, their relationship with Bourke continued through letters.

Bourke had much to relate and was a willing, literate informant to the Survey. Writing in black ink, in sloping clear manuscript on cream paper cropped to a standard size, he describes himself as union secretary, active in the local labor union. He provides privileged access to an urban labor and class setting unfamiliar and closed to the anthropologists. Bourke's letters contain detailed reports of particular incidents, focusing on the conditions of labor and the thinly veiled political hostilities between the opposing forces of the Civil War.

His first letter opens with an account of a dispute involving unionized and nonunionized workers in which blows are exchanged, followed by prosecutions and a trial. He outlines the circumstances that led to a three-day strike, a closure of the council quarry at the center of the dispute, and the attempts to find a reasonable solution to the affair. Bourke discretely checks that Arensberg is acquainted with all the facts surrounding the violent death of the son of a union member, the custodial sentences imposed on the assailant, and the consequent effects in the county elections. He brings news of the composition and first meeting of the urban council. Bourke's reports of incidents are without judgment, refraining from evaluation. The first letter concludes with greetings to other members of the Survey in the United States and news of plans to marry. He conveys his attachment to Arensberg and his willingness to be of service to the Survey: "I always felt happy in your company and will at all times be only too pleased to be of service to you in anything you require me knowing that on your part that it is reciprocal."³⁴ Bourke reminds Arensberg that theirs is a relationship based on mutuality. What it is that he expects or is promised in exchange for information on current affairs is not clear: "I will now leave it to Mr Kemble to tell you all concerning my romance as you know I am a bit shy in expressing my delicate affairs on paper or . . . we will have a long chat when next we meet. I have reserved the two drinks that I was to have from you last Christmas until we meet again."³⁵ But the last sentence in the letter that provides a clue to understanding Bourke's missive intentions. Capturing the underlying theme of the letter, evoking the relationship between anthropologist and informant, Bourke has not forgotten the two drinks Arensberg promised him. He waits in eager expectation of the anthropologist's return to Ireland.

Months later, the proportion of event reports compared to personal news is inverted in the second letter. Though Arensberg has not replied, Bourke continues the correspondence and informs him that "I was expecting that we would have you back again this winter. I hope to see you in Ireland again."³⁶ He provides news of the building of the laborers' cottages in Ennis, the first introduction of unemployment assistance for workers, and he explains the basis of "means testing" to qualify for the new social welfare schemes. Bourke provides Arensberg with firsthand news of the establishment and practices of the welfare institutions of the new state. This second letter reveals more biographical details rather than further information on social conditions:

I am sure Mr Kemble has already informed you that I am about to change my condition in life this year. Well to be candid I am intended to get married on November 14th with Gods help. I felt I should let you know as I am sure you will be interested in my welfare. It is about time for me although it is a serious undertaking more especially when one is not too well placed with regard to worldly goods. However we have got to trust in Gods goodness and do the best we can.³⁷

The theme of mutual interest in one another's affairs is repeated in this letter. Bourke consistently expresses interest in the welfare of Survey team members, wishing them "the best of good luck and success."³⁸ He expects that they reciprocate this interest.

There is a break in the archive record, and by the third letter, dated September 1935, it is clear that Arensberg is writing with a request to Bourke to identify the names of all current members of the laborers' union. Having conveyed good wishes to Arensberg and his new bride on behalf of himself and his wife, Bourke complies with the request. He also provides an account of the progress of the slum clearance schemes and his eagerness to improve his own poor living conditions.³⁹ Houses in the clearance areas are without water, sanitation, or lighting, providing only very basic shelter for many families. He recalls the time when Arensberg visited him, and, though ashamed of his circumstances, he allows that the anthropologist has a broader understanding of individual and social conditions: "I was not entitled to one of the present cottages as I am not in First Clearance Area. My wife felt very much disappointed as we are very anxious to get out of the locality we are in at present. I had to trample on human respect the day I brought you down to visit us. However you understood the nature of things."⁴⁰ This is a prelude to the remainder of the letter. Bourke hopes that Arensberg is satisfied with the information supplied and reminds him of his reliance on friends for paid work: "It may be a little while before we meet again. I am not as you know permanently occupied however I can manage alright with the various little remunerative jobs from my friends from time to time."⁴¹ He also passes on an indirect admonishment to Kimball: "He never wrote to me, however out of sight out of mind. I hope he is well."⁴²

The final letter in the archive has no date, but it is likely to have been written in 1936. Bourke is no longer in the informant's role and supplies

no new information in this letter. He seeks acknowledgment from Arensberg that he received the list of union members as requested. He presents his complaint at first through his friends: "My friends here are very much surprised at no little appreciation been shown to me for information that I supplied you with while on your research work at Ennis." He gives an example of another assistant to the physical anthropologists of the Survey, whom he knows and who was "handsomely rewarded for services." And then on his own behalf he directly requests

some recompense. I am sorry to find myself obliged to bring this to your notice but circumstances make it so and I would be really obliged should you bring it to the notice of your authorities that a man in Ennis in poor circumstances rendered you some service that is worth appreciation. Mr Kemble one day remarked at the Hotel that ye would send me a present on the occasion of my marriage but that was all I heard of it on his going away it was a cold goodbye. I never heard from him since.

Bourke ends this letter trusting that Arensberg will understand the request and reiterates his offer to be a trusted informant to the Survey in the future: "I trust that you will not think this ill of me but I would be very grateful should you secure for me some recompense as I need it very much at present. Should you do so you may count on me for any further information you may need from time to time."

A trajectory of Bourke's role as Survey informant can be gleaned from his professional and personal biography—at least to the extent that can be known from an analysis of his letters to Arensberg. His location as secretary to the laborers' union endows him with privileged knowledge of the internal workings of the union and the power of group solidarity. He is also aware of the role of the union in engaging with institutional structures and relations that regulate the recruitment, wages, and employment conditions of working men. The professional context in which Bourke operates seeks to improve employment conditions for the working classes, to move away from "grace and favor" and the use of influence as a basis for recruitment, particularly by public bodies. And yet he finds himself precisely in this relationship with the anthropologists of the Survey, a relationship he seeks to renegotiate as reciprocal without knowing whether the reward, monetary or otherwise, will be forthcoming. In order to re-

quest some recompense, Bourke reveals more and more of his personal biography, his intimate affairs, to justify his request for money. We learn of his constant movement from address to address, his journey towards marriage, his poor economic prospects, his impoverished living conditions, and his reliance on his friends for paid work. Throughout the series of letters his repeated and muted attempts to request some form of payment for information provided are evident. By the final letter, there is a change in the balance from Survey information to personal information—and a distinct alteration in tone. He finally finds the wherewithal to ask directly for financial reward for the information provided.

His motivation in becoming an epistolary informant could be driven by his poor economic circumstances, being unemployed and having to provide for a family. Perhaps he does not want to lose face vis-à-vis friends and acquaintances? Perhaps his request for payment for services rendered is based on his understanding of social relations as having reciprocal elements, even if it is only a few drinks at Christmas—reciprocity as a means to preserve his self-respect and sense of his own worth. In his letters, he is concerned to maintain his valued relationship with the anthropologists and retain his identity as Survey informant. Bringing to bear his understanding of reciprocity in social relations and attention to the human values of trust, friendship, cooperation, and willing service on behalf of another, he actively seeks to persuade the anthropologists of his deserving case. He works hard to realize a perceived opportunity. The outcome is unknown.

A caveat is necessary. It is clear from the enthusiasm of those who either received letters from or wrote letters to the anthropologists that Arensberg and Kimball skillfully initiated and maintained warm fieldwork relations with research informants. Many informants commented on their close personal relations with the anthropologists, offering to be of service to the researchers, as reflected in the phrase “don’t spare me.” Bourke is no exception to this. As tempting as it is to conclude from his letters that he may have been treated unfairly, we have no way of knowing whether or not this is the case. He is not alone in requesting recompense—other informants made similar requests of the Americans. There is no evidence in the archives that informants to the social anthropology strand of the Survey were paid for their information. The vividness and immediacy of the letter form provokes emotional and moral responses. On reflection, in this case at least, we lack sufficient evidence to justify them. Perhaps this

particular exchange indicates certain flaws in Arensberg's and Kimball's field relations, but perhaps it does not—we do not know enough about this particular correspondent to tell. This highlights the particularity of working with material of this kind. Letters are extraordinarily illuminating within the range they cover, but this range can be patchy and uneven, full of light and shade. Nonetheless, they are a valuable research reservoir, powerfully evocative of the community of events and relationships in which the Harvard-Irish Survey was embedded.

CONCLUDING COMMENT

A focus on a selection of the professional and private letters of the anthropologists reveals the importance of the correspondence to the initiation, maintenance, and evolution of research relationships in the Harvard-Irish Survey. An examination of the contents of the letters reveals that written correspondence is deployed in the service of the Survey for practical and utilitarian purposes (e.g., seeking funds, descriptive reports of research activities completed, planning next steps, analysis of interviews). Letters of introduction are sought from influential persons as a seal of approval for the work of the Survey and to secure informed local contacts. At the conclusion of the fieldwork phase of the Harvard survey, formal correspondence between the president of Harvard University, James B. Conant, and President de Valera leave a record of the significance of the research for the Harvard researchers, their gratitude for the “friendly cooperation” enjoyed, and their appreciation of funding for the Survey provided by the Irish Free State.⁴³ The evidence from the archive also reveals the unanticipated consequences of involving powerful political figures such as de Valera in research relations. For example, the Harvard research team may well have been surprised to receive a cablegram some years later from de Valera, which “strongly” advised against publication of *Family and Community in Ireland* on the grounds that it “will cause considerable misunderstanding and resentment.”⁴⁴ The publication was amended, the “most objectionable parts” removed, and the page proofs subsequently destroyed.⁴⁵ This is a clear example of the pressure of political power and perhaps a form of state “censorship” on a text whose provenance was external to the state in question and that was interpreted as critical of that state and its institutions. The letter in the archive, as evidence of state “suasion” at the

very least, is crucial to understanding the history and politics of research relations at all levels. The evolution and development of collegial and intellectual relationships can be traced through the letters: for example, theoretical schema and arguments for the analysis of Irish society are rehearsed and worked out through these epistolary exchanges. A more emotional, personal register is evoked in the letters home.

By specifically engaging research informants in epistolary relations, Arensberg and Kimball deployed a novel research strategy in their ethnographic study. In their letters, research informants continued to provide the anthropologists with detailed accounts of Irish town and country life. The content of informants' letters found their way into the published works, in some instances without much additional interpretation. A narrative analysis of the letters reveal informants' perspectives and immediate concerns, the situated knowledges of the workings of a particular profession or practice, described in terms of their own experience and often in vernacular speech. We learn too of the pressing economic and social circumstances for those at the bottom of the class system and of the socio-demographic and political contexts in which the anthropologists carried out their work. Such was their impact on the local population, all informants were keen to preserve their relationship with the anthropologists. The skill, warmth, and perhaps imperfections of the anthropologists' field-work relations are evident in the letters, but caution is nevertheless advised when reading the letters. Though the selection of and contact with informants is crucial for providing insider information on the observed group or community, little attention is usually paid to informant voices, perspectives, and practices. These letters fill that gap to some extent.

NOTES

I wish to acknowledge Ricca Edmondson and Colm Byrne for generous review advice and the IRCHSS Senior Research Fellowship scheme (2006–7) that supported the research from which this chapter is drawn. My deep appreciation to Vivian Garrison Arensberg, who provided generous access to the private archive of Conrad Arensberg and whose spirit continues to invigorate this research.

1. The archive of Conrad Arensberg was donated by Vivian Garrison Arensberg to the National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution, in 2011.

2. Extract from Irish Field Diaries of Conrad Arensberg (n.d.).
3. The Peabody Museum, Harvard University; Teachers College, Columbia University, New York; the Newberry Library, Chicago; and Rockefeller Archive Center, New York.
4. All letters are transcribed here as written, including spelling, punctuation, and grammatical errors.
5. Earnest Hooton (1887–1954), Anthropology Department, Harvard University, was the director of the Harvard-Irish Survey and is considered to be the founder of physical anthropology in the United States.
6. William Lloyd Warner (1898–1970) was responsible for the Survey in Ireland. He is the pioneer of community studies in the United States, first devised in Newburyport, Massachusetts.
7. Funding sources included the Rockefeller Foundation, Harvard University, Irish Americans, the Irish Board of Works, and the National Museum of Ireland.
8. Phrase from a letter by Éamon de Valera to Lloyd Warner (August 19, 1932) leader of Fianna Fáil, the party that came to power in 1932. His motivation for supporting a “scientific” study was mirrored in the extensive efforts deployed by the Irish state to create a national culture and a distinctive Irish identity. The revival of the Irish language and Gaelic games, for example, was part of that project.
9. The Anglo-Irish Treaty (1921) marked the end of the War of Independence, a conflict between the Irish Republican Army and the British government in Ireland. A civil war quickly followed, led by pro- and anti-Treaty factions, ending with the defeat of the latter. Northern Ireland was established under the terms of the 1920 Government of Ireland Act. See French (2013) for an account of the persistence of political violence in the postconflict Irish Free State.
10. Letter from Warner to de Valera (July 25, 1932).
11. Letter from de Valera to Warner (August 19, 1932).
12. De Valera circulated copies of the page proofs of *Family and Community in Ireland* to these referees and subsequently requested that Harvard University Press reconsider publication of particular chapters in the text.
13. The precise nature of the contact between the Irish Folklore Commission and Harvard-Irish Survey remains to be investigated.
14. Extract from Irish Field Diaries of Conrad Arensberg (n.d.; Book 1, March 14–19, 1933, interviews on pp. 8–76).
15. There is some overlap between the collecting activities of the Irish Folklore Commission (IFC) and the Harvard-Irish Survey. Both were interested in oral accounts of folklore, customs, and traditional practices in Clare. Though the IFC and Ó Duilearga informally supported the Survey, no formal

academic partnership evolved. The Swedish ethnological survey of Ireland conducted by Åke Campbell and Albert Eskeröd was conducted under the auspices of the IFC; see Lysaght (2008) for an excellent account of the IFC in Clare.

16. Letter from Arensberg to Walsh, Nov 27, 1932 (Arensberg n.d.).
17. *Ibid.*: Letter from Arensberg to Walsh, December 9, 1935.
18. *Ibid.*: Letter from Arensberg to Walsh, November 27, 1932.
19. *Ibid.*
20. *Ibid.*: Letter from Arensberg (not signed) to Warner and Kimball, November 27, no year.
21. Correspondents' names have not been altered in the letter excerpts used here.
22. Although letters are used as evidence and source material for a number of classical ethnographic studies—see Thomas and Znaniecki ([1918–1920] 1996)—engaging a range of informants to provide specific information over a period of time appears to be a distinctive research strategy of the Harvard-Irish Survey.
23. Interview, p. 35, December 13 and 15 (no year). Box 2, folder 7, Ayer Manuscript Collection, the Newberry Library, Chicago.
24. Letter from Arensberg to Kimball, January 29, 1935 (Arensberg n.d.).
25. *Ibid.*: Letter from Callinan to Kimball January 25, 1936. Part cited also in Arensberg and Kimball ([1940] 2001, 404).
26. A letter written in 1976 to Arensberg from other members of the Kerin family is also in the archive.
27. Letter from Kerin to Arensberg December 9 (Arensberg n.d.).
28. *Ibid.*: Letter from Kerin to Kimball January 26, 1935.
29. *Ibid.*
30. *Ibid.*
31. *Ibid.*: Letter from Foley to Kimball, May 11, 1936.
32. *Ibid.*
33. *Ibid.*: Letter from Arensberg to Walsh, December 21, 1932. Also cited in Byrne, Edmondson, and Varley (2001, xlix).
34. *Ibid.*: Letter from Bourke to Arensberg, July 6, 1934.
35. *Ibid.*
36. *Ibid.*: Letter from Bourke to Arensberg, October 27 1934.
37. *Ibid.*
38. *Ibid.*
39. The slum clearance schemes continued in Ennis until the 1970s.
40. Letter from Bourke to Arensberg, Cornmarket, Ennis, September 20 1935 (Arensberg n.d.).
41. *Ibid.*

42. Ibid.
43. Letter from C. Cap to de Valera, June 17, 1937, National Archives, Harvard University, Research Work in Ireland, File 95 (97/9), Dublin, Ireland.
44. Letter from de Valera to Dumas Malone (HUP), February 1, 1940, National Archives, Harvard University, Research Work in Ireland, File 95 (97/9), Dublin, Ireland.
45. Byrne (2014) discusses this act of censorship and its consequences for the scholarly reception of *Family and Community in Ireland*. Extract from Note, June 3, 1943, Reference RA 556/39, National Archives, Harvard University, Research Work in Ireland, File 95 (97/9), Dublin, Ireland.

REFERENCES

Published

- Arensberg, Conrad M., and Solon T. Kimball. (1940) 2001. *Family and Community in Ireland*. Ennis: CLASP Press.
- Bruner, Jerome. 2002. *Making Stories*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Byrne, Anne. 2014. "State Censorship and the Publication of *Family and Community in Ireland*." Presentation to the School of Political Science and Sociology, National University of Ireland, Galway, May 20.
- Byrne, Anne, Ricca Edmondson, and Tony Varley. 2001. "Arensberg and Kimball and Anthropological Research in Ireland: Introduction to the Third Edition." In Arensberg and Kimball, *Family and Community in Ireland*, 1–101. Ennis: CLASP Press.
- . 2015. "Anthropological Research in Ireland: Arensberg, Kimball and the Harvard-Irish Mission of the 1930s." In "Society and Nationhood," special issue, *Irish Journal of Sociology* 23 (1): 22–61.
- Byrne, Anne, and Deirdre O'Mahony. 2012. "Family and Community: (Re)telling our own story." *Journal of Family Issues* 33 (1): 52–75.
- . 2013. "Revisiting and Reframing the Anthropological Archive: The Harvard-Irish Survey (1930–1936)." *Irish Journal of Anthropology* 16 (1): 8–15.
- Comitas, Lambros. 1999. "Conrad Maynardier Arensberg." *American Anthropologist* 191 (4): 810–17.
- Cortazzi, Martin. 2001. "Narrative Analysis in Ethnography." In *Handbook of Ethnography*, edited by Paul Atkinson et al., 384–94. London: Sage.
- Elliot, Jane. 2005. *Using Narrative in Social Research: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*. London: Sage.

- French, Brigitine M. 2013. "Ethnography and Postconflict Violence in the Irish Free State." *American Anthropologist* 115 (2): 160–73.
- Halldórsdóttir, Erla Hulda. 2007. "Fragments of Lives—The Use of Private Letters in Historical Research." *NORA Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research* 15 (1): 35–49.
- Hinchman, Lewis P., and Sandra K. Hinchman, eds. 1997. *Memory, Identity, Community: The Idea of Narrative in the Human Sciences*. New York: SUNY Press.
- Jolly, Margaretta, and Liz Stanley. 2005. "Letters as/Not Genre." *Life Writing* 2 (2): 91–118.
- Lysaght, Patricia. 2008. "Documenting the Tradition: The Work of the Irish Folklore Commission and Some of Its Collectors in County Clare." In *Clare History and Society*, edited by Matthew Lynch and Patrick Nugent, 541–87. Dublin: Geography Publications.
- Mishler, Elliot G. 1986. *Research Interviewing: Context and Narrative*. London: Harvard University Press.
- Stanley, Liz. 2004. "The Epistolarium: On Theorising Letters and Correspondences." *Auto/Biography* 12:201–35.
- Thomas, William I., and Florian Znaniecki. (1918–1920) 1996. *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

Unpublished

- Arensberg, Conrad M. n.d. Irish Field Diaries. Transcribed by Anne Byrne from VG Arensberg, Private Collection, New York.
- De Valera, Éamon. 1932. Letter to William Lloyd Warner, August 19. National Archives, Harvard University, Research Work in Ireland, File 95 (97/9), Dublin, Ireland.
- Warner, William Lloyd. 1932. Letters to Éamon de Valera, July 25 and August 19. National Archives, Harvard University, Research Work in Ireland, File 95 (97/9), Dublin, Ireland.