

**KRESSLER, KENNETH FARRINGTON**  
**LETTERS: 1917 – 1919**

**SKILLMAN LIBRARY**  
**LAFAYETTE COLLEGE**

## **BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH**

Kenneth Farrington Kressler was born in Easton, Pennsylvania on March 17, 1895. He was the son of William J. and Gertrude Kressler. He attended the Easton schools and the Lerch Preparatory School in Easton. A member of the Class of 1918 at Lafayette College, Kressler's studies were interrupted by World War I. He trained with Section 61 of the Lafayette College Ambulance Unit of the United States Army Ambulance Service in Allentown and Tobyhanna, Pennsylvania before being sent to active duty in France in December, 1917. Between January 1918 and March 1919 Kressler was assigned to Section 643 of the 20th Division of the French Army. He was awarded the Croix de Guerre for gallant action in war. At the end of the War, he attended the caucus in Paris at which the American Legion was born.

After returning to Easton, Kressler graduated from Lafayette College in 1920 with a bachelor's degree in philosophy. While at the College, Kressler was a member of the Phi Gamma Delta Fraternity and President of the Franklin Literary Society. He was also an organizer and the first commander of the Brown and Lynch American Legion Post 9 in Easton. He went on to a long career in finance as president of the Easton insurance firm of Kressler, Wolff, and Miller, Inc.; of the Kressler, Wolff, and Miller Acceptance Corporation; and of the Northampton Consumer Discount Company.

For twenty-three years, Kressler was chairman of the Northampton County Republican Committee. He also served on the state Republican Executive Committee. Kressler served two terms on the Easton City Council from 1920-1928 and was the Northampton County Clerk of Orphans' Court from 1928-1930. In 1954, he made an unsuccessful run for the state Senate. Kressler was Vice-President of the Easton Area Chamber of Commerce in 1964 and president of that organization in 1965.

Kressler headed many fund raising campaigns including the 1965 Downtown Improvement Group, several Easton Hospital fund drives, the Easton Area United Fund and its campaigns, and the New Era drive for Lafayette College in 1946. A generous benefactor to his alma mater, Kressler also helped found the Friends of Skillman Library in 1964. Kressler was appointed a trustee of the Moravian Seminary for Girls in 1960.

Community awards received by Kressler include the Benjamin Rush Award from the Northampton County Medical Society in 1962, the distinguished citizen's award from the Easton Area Sales and Marketing Executives in 1963, the Joseph E. Bell '29 Distinguished Service Award from the Lafayette College Alumni Association in 1964, and the "Service to Mankind" award from the Easton Sertoma Club in 1965. Kressler also received awards from the Phillipsburg Exempt Firemen's Association and the Four-County Fireman's Association in 1965 and a medal from the fund-raising firm of Marts and Lundy for outstanding leadership in philanthropic enterprises.

Kressler was married to Elizabeth Bloom in 1939. He died on September 22, 1966, at the age of 71.

## **SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE**

The Kenneth F. Kressler Collection (1917-1919) contains eighty-seven letters Kressler wrote to his family in Easton, Pennsylvania while he served with the United States Army Ambulance Service during World War I. The letters document Kressler's training in Pennsylvania during the latter half of 1917 and his service in France from January 1918 to April 1919. Many of the letters were numbered by Kressler himself and there are several letters missing from the sequence. There is a large gap from June 5 to October 29, 1918. Also included in the collection are a few photographs and printed material.

The earliest letters, written during the summer of 1917 through September 1917, tell of Kressler's experiences with Section 61 of the Lafayette College Ambulance Unit. Written from Camp Crane in Allentown, Pennsylvania, they express the enthusiasm of a young volunteer ready to serve his country and eager for a commission. The letters dated October 29, 1917 through December 1917 were written from Tobyhanna, Pennsylvania. During this period, the Lafayette Unit was part of SSU 561 stationed at Tobyhanna until they were transferred to France on December 26, 1917.

The first two letters of 1918 were written aboard the S.S. Pastores on Kressler's journey to France. They describe conditions aboard the ship as well as the wartime rules for travel. Section 561 arrived at Brest, France on January 17, 1918. Once in France, the Lafayette Unit became scattered, and Kressler was assigned to work with Section 643 of the Twentieth Division of the French Army.

Strict censor rules regarding correspondence prevented locations from being mentioned. However, the Kressler letters vividly describe the various villages he passed through and the French people he came in contact with. Of particular interest is the relationship Kressler developed with two French families during his stay in France. Also, the letters written after the Armistice give good descriptions of the mood of the country after the War. The documents tell very little of Kressler's actual service experiences during the war, but they do tell of his various day-to-day duties with the ambulance corps and that of the other members of his unit. The number and content of the Kressler letters reflect the closeness Kressler had with his family. They express the many times his thoughts were of home and the happy times he spent there. They also show the concern Kressler had for the future of his younger siblings and the deep admiration he had for his mother. Thirty-seven of the letters were written to her.

The letters also reveal Kressler's religious faith. This was especially true when he received the news that his brother had died in January 1919, following a tragic accident at Bethlehem Steel. This means of demonstrating his grief was used to comfort his parents following his brother's death.

Further information on Camp Crane and SSU 643 of the United States Army Ambulance Service Association can be found in [The History of the United States Army Ambulance Service with the French and Italian Armies 1917-1918-1919](#) by John R. Smucker, Jr. (located in Special Collections, call number 940.475/S666u).

A calendar of the letters is available at the repository.

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**INVENTORY**

**Box 1**

<u>Folder</u>	<u>Letters: 1917-1919</u>
1	1917 (August-October)
2	1917 (November-December)
3	1918 (January-February)
4	1918 (March-April)
5	1918 (May-June)
6	1919 (October-December)
7	1919 (January-February)
8	1919 (March)
9	Miscellaneous
10	Photographs (Wartime)
11	Photographs