

Kathleen Harriman with Major General A. R. Perminov, the Soviet officer in charge of the joint U.S.-Soviet shuttle operation that allowed U.S. bombers to land on Soviet territory (Poltava, June 2, 1944).

Photos courtesy of David H. Mortimer.



BY GEOFFREY ROBERTS

“DO THE CROWS STILL ROOST IN
THE SPASOPESKOVSKAYA TREES?”

THE WARTIME CORRESPONDENCE OF KATHLEEN HARRIMAN¹



When Kathleen Harriman arrived in Moscow in October 1943, one of the first people she met was Ivy Litvinov, the English wife of Maxim Litvinov, the former foreign commissar. “I hear that you and your father enjoy bridge. Isn’t it too bad we can’t play with you,” said Mrs. Litvinov. “My education on life in Moscow,” recalled Kathleen many years later, “had begun.”²

Kathleen met Ivy a few times during the war. “She’s sort of a bitch but rather an amusing one and certainly worth cultivating,” she told her sister Mary.³

Another of Kathleen’s acquaintances was Polina Zhemchuzhina, the wife of Litvinov’s archrival and successor as foreign commissar, Vyacheslav Molotov. Kathleen—or Kathy as she usually signed her letters—liked Polina, too, although she felt uncomfortable when the Soviet grand dame insisted on holding hands. “Mme. Molotov is a sweet little thing,” Kathy reported to Pamela Churchill. “She plays the harp, I gather. Is middle-aged with large quantities of braided undyed blond hair.”⁴ By the end of the war the two women had become almost intimate. At a Kremlin banquet in May 1945, Polina sent a bottle of “vodka” across the table to Kathy: “She met my eye, and we drank a silent toast. The bottle she sent me contained Narzan water. Friendship of the first order!”⁵

Kathy also liked Polina’s husband. “Moly,” as she called him, had “a hellova sense of humor and nice twinkling eyes.” She thought it a hoot when a deadpan Molotov made a joke at Stalin’s expense about sycophantic toasts at a dinner party for Winston Churchill in October 1944:

There were toasts to everyone and Stalin was very amusing when Moly got up and raised his glass to Stalin with a short conventional phrase about “our great leader.” Stalin, after he’d drunk, came back with “I thought he was going to say something different about me!” Moly answered with a rather glum: “It’s always a good one,” which I thought was very funny.⁶

Kathy was impressed when Molotov personally delivered the news of President Roosevelt’s death to the house of her father, the American ambassador. “For all that can be said about M. being an impersonal, cold man, he, that night, showed good instincts. Ave said that he was much upset—shocked—as I guess everyone was.” She also thought Molotov was “rather sweet” when he sat next to her at the memorial service for Roosevelt in Moscow.⁷

Unbeknownst to Kathy, there were personal and political tensions between Litvinov and Molotov, which sometimes bubbled to the surface in relations between the two wives. At an all-female tea party hosted by Polina in June 1945, “Mrs. Litvinov behaved abominably... She lambasted everything brought to



From left to right: Kathleen pins a German Iron Cross on U.S. General Ira Eaker; Kathleen works as a journalist in London; Kathleen cuts the ribbon to open an exhibition at VOKS on USAF bombing, with Averell Harriman and Vladimir Kernenov, head of VOKS.

us... Towards the end, Mrs. Moly got exasperated ... Mrs. Litvinov gave the impression of literally being slightly mad—a change that has taken place in the last few months. I’ll be surprised if she is ever again produced at such a function.”⁸ This happened at a time when Ivy’s husband was becoming ever more isolated and marginalized within the People’s Commissariat of Foreign Affairs.⁹

Kathy was twenty-five when she arrived in Moscow. For the previous two years she had worked as a journalist in London where her father, Averell Harriman, was Roosevelt’s lend-lease coordinator. In London, Kathy met Winston Churchill, the press baron Lord Beaverbrook, the Minister of Information Brendan Bracken, and many other eminences of the British war effort.

As her father’s companion and aide, Kathy spent a lot of time with sophisticated, older people; she had little time for the frivolities of her own generation, especially if they didn’t share her passion for the allied cause. “This past week,” she wrote to Mary in June 1941,

I spent most of my evenings being entertained by younger generation guards. They all remind me of the perennial Southern country gentlemen of the pre-Civil war days—very dashing, good looking ... but not very intelligent—in fact, intensely boring after 10 minutes.... Perhaps I’m being a little cruel. When the time comes, they’ll probably all be very brave and die fighting. But actually for dinner I’d rather have an interesting older man to talk to. I hope that doesn’t sound too strange.¹⁰

Kathy was disgusted by a letter from Mary in November 1941 that reported some of her friends back home wanted the Nazis to win. It “made me see red,” she wrote in a furious response.¹¹

One person of the same generation who did influence Kathy was Pamela Churchill, the wife of the prime minister’s son, Randolph. Pamela, Kathy wrote to Mary soon after her arrival

in London, was “a wonderful girl; my age, but one of the wisest young girls I’ve ever met—knows everything about everything, political and otherwise.”¹² Famously, Pamela had an affair with Kathy’s father during the war, a romance that was rekindled in the 1970s when she became Mrs. Harriman.¹³ Kathy knew about the wartime affair—since the three of them shared an apartment in London, she could hardly not. It was not a subject of general discussion, but there is one explicit reference to the affair in Kathy’s correspondence with Pamela during the war and she sometimes alluded to it in her letters to Mary—“the funny thing about England is that age makes no difference. Tonight Pam is dining with a guy who is Ave’s age.”¹⁴

Writing letters was Kathy’s alternative to keeping a diary. She wrote hundreds of them about her experiences in London and Moscow, her encounters with members of the Soviet-Western military-political elite, and her trips during the war to Italy, North Africa, Sweden, Yalta, and the killing grounds of Katyn. Political as well as personal, her letters are full of astute and often funny observations about the historical events she witnessed. They provide a vivid and sometimes offbeat picture of life in the upper circles of the Grand Alliance as well as insights into Moscow life during the latter stages of the war.

Many of the letters were written on the hoof and retain a raw, visceral quality. But Kathy also wrote with an eye to posterity and in the knowledge that some of her letters would be shared or summarized to family, friends, and acquaintances. When she was in Moscow many of her letters were posted via diplomatic bag (others went via personal couriers), so they had to be read and okayed by her father. Some of Kathy’s letters to Pamela Churchill had a wider circulation. In April 1944, Winston Churchill’s wife Clementine wrote to Kathy that “Pam has shown me the delightful long letters you have written to her... I think your letters ... will make a wonderful book one day—not, however, to be published just now!”¹⁵

Unlike some of her contemporary counterparts, Kathleen wrote no memoirs¹⁶ and resisted the idea the letters should be published, at least in her lifetime. She was scathing about those whom she felt had cashed in on their brush with fame during the war: “As peace returned many underlings of the war leaders sprang into print. I felt they abused their wartime privilege (& luck) of being on hand as history was made & swore I’d not do likewise.”¹⁷

The existence of Kathleen Harriman’s wartime correspondence is no secret. It has been known to historians at least since the publication in 1975 of *Special Envoy to Churchill and Stalin*—Averell Harriman’s war memoirs, coauthored by Elie Abel. As part of his research, Abel asked Kathy for copies of her letters, which he then quoted extensively in the book. Some of the things that Kathy wrote in her letters are now part of the folklore of the Grand Alliance. For example, Stalin’s response to a toast to the Big Three as the Holy Trinity that Churchill must be the

Holy Ghost as he flew around so much. Unrecorded by Kathy was whether Stalin thought that if he was God, then Roosevelt must be Jesus!¹⁸

Rather than hand over copies of her original letters to Abel, Kathy retyped and edited them. It was the edited versions that were placed in the chronological files of the Averell Harriman Papers in the Library of Congress (LC), opened to historians after Averell’s death in 1986. According to the LC guide to the Harriman collection, the letters written by Kathy are “filled with

“I think your letters ... will make a wonderful book one day—not, however, to be published just now!”

—Clementine Churchill

The horse named Boston, a gift to Kathleen from Stalin, had served in Stalingrad.





the narrative detail generally absent from the ambassador's memoranda and letters."

I came across the letters in September 2001, on my very first trip to the United States. As the 9/11 drama unfolded I was combing through the Averell Harriman Papers looking for material to include in my book about Stalin and the Grand Alliance. The letter of Kathy's that hooked me was her description of the nature of diplomatic reports, written soon after she arrived in Moscow:

These are lengthy and usually manage to say nothing at all of importance. If you don't say anything you don't get blamed for creating an impression which at some future date will be proven false. So, to cover up this failure to say a damned thing worth saying, the writer resorts to verbiage. The guy on the receiving end can't understand what the hell the report is about, but since the words are strung at impressive length, he figures he should be impressed and to cover up his failure to be so, he files the report away and all is forgotten.

To this letter Kathy added a PS: "On re-reading, I've discovered I'm in a very blasphemous mood. So please for God's sake read this letter and tear it up and don't show it to anyone."¹⁹

After that I began systematically to seek out and copy her letters, which were dispersed throughout the hundreds of "chronological files" in the Harriman collection. As a Soviet specialist I found especially intriguing her perceptions of Soviet leaders and the communist system, which often confounded Western Cold War stereotypes. Kathy evidently went to Moscow with an open mind. Early on she decided that being in Russia was not as bad as she feared and more interesting than she expected. "Maybe I haven't made life in Moscow as enticing as I intended. But by comparison to what critics painted it to be, it's damn near paradise."²⁰ On another occasion she wrote: "You know the Russians are such nice people—if only we could get to know them—then perhaps I might be able to begin to understand them."²¹

Kathy's moods and attitudes toward Russia did wax and wane, generally in sync with the ups and downs of Soviet-American relations during the war. High points were Tehran and Yalta and low points the controversy about aid to the Warsaw Uprising and the post-Yalta wrangling over the composition of the Polish government. "The war is going wonderfully well again now," she wrote to Mary in March 1945, "what with the offensive on the Western Front. Gosh it's exciting. But the news is slightly dampened here by our gallant allies who at the moment are being most bastard-like. Averell is very busy—what with Poland, PWs, and I guess the Balkans. The house is full of running feet, voices and phones ringing all night long—up until dawn."²²

Kathy was determined to avoid what she called the "Moscow rut"—living in a diplomatic enclave cut off from the country and its people, resentful and alienated from the communist regime

“You know the Russians are such nice people—if only we could get to know them—then perhaps I might be able to begin to understand them.”

and having little idea of the life and attitudes of the great mass of the population. Moscow was an impersonal town but “for all its apparent impersonality, it’s got atmosphere. It’s a town where foreigners get depressed, because they can’t become part of the town.”²³

Resolved to become part of the town, Kathy spent a lot of time learning Russian and became socially functional in the language, able to make polite, if stumbling, conversation at receptions, propose toasts, and translate those of her father. She tried as much as she could to interact with the world beyond Moscow’s diplomatic circles, visiting Soviet schools and hospitals, for example. She also had her own interests—skiing and riding (she was a top-class performer at both)—which she pursued vigorously. Kathy became something of a minor celebrity in Russia during the war. According to the *New York Herald Tribune*, she was the best-known American woman in the Soviet Union after Eleanor Roosevelt and the Hollywood musical star Deanna Durbin.

Kathy’s main function in Moscow was to act as her father’s hostess and to preside over Spaso House, the grandiose but dilapidated residence of the American ambassador, which was located in Spasopeskovskaya Square in the Arbat district. Her task was not without its challenges in the face of wartime shortages and the arcane nature of Soviet bureaucracy. Kathy also had to cope with numerous American visitors to Moscow during the war—Harry Hopkins, Dwight Eisenhower, Lillian Hellman, James Conant, Bill Donovan, James F. Byrnes, to name but a few. “I still think I ran a reasonably successful boarding house,” she recalled.²⁴

Kathy had a day job, too, with the Office of War Information (OWI) in Moscow, where she helped to produce a daily English-language news bulletin and worked on the launch of *Amerika*—a glossy U.S. propaganda magazine aimed at ordinary Soviet citizens. In her London letters Kathy wrote a lot about her work as a journalist, but she rarely mentioned the OWI in her Moscow correspondence, presumably because the job was not that interesting compared with her other activities.

I don’t suppose I was the first historian captivated by Kathy’s letters but I had what was, perhaps, a novel idea: that they should be published as an independent source and record of her experiences, not merely serve as an appendage to her father’s career.

As a historian who specializes in dead people, it did not occur to me that Kathy might still be alive until after I got back to Ireland. To my delight she was, and in November 2001 I wrote to her making my pitch for an interview:

At first I read [the letters] for light relief, and with no little amusement. I often found myself laughing aloud at your descriptions of incidents and personalities. Then I became captivated by your picture of diplomatic life in Moscow during the war. It finally dawned on me that your observations on the times and its politics offered unique insights and evidence that ought to be available to a wider public. The letters are an invaluable source of information on your father’s mission to London and Moscow. They illuminate the character and personality of wartime politicians and diplomats. . . . The letters are astutely observed, well-written, lively, graphic, personable, very human . . . what more can I say?²⁵

And so I was granted a face-to-face meeting and was able to talk to Kathleen for several hours in her New York apartment in March 2002. Conducted as an open-ended conversation rather than a formal interview, my purpose was to find out more about the letters, the circumstances in which they were written and to fill any gaps in my knowledge. What I didn’t anticipate was that Kathy would do her homework before the meeting and, for the first time in years, reread the letters. From my point of view that was not such a good idea. I was seeking additional information, not what I could read in the letters myself. As I often tell my students, it was a classic example of the perils of oral history. You think you are getting access to the person’s memory when, in fact, you are the beneficiary of their research! But during the course of the conversation—most of which I tape recorded—I found out quite a lot from Kathy, and I left New York well-satisfied with the results of my research.

I wasn’t the first person to talk to or interview Kathy about her wartime experiences, but I had the impression that previous interviewers had been more interested in her father, or Yalta, or even George Kennan, than they were about her.

A favorite topic for other interviewers was Katyn, which Kathy was keen to talk to me about as well. In January 1944, three months after she arrived in Moscow, Kathy went with a group of American journalists to Smolensk to inspect the mass graves at Katyn, which the Red Army had recently recaptured from the Germans. Kathy had some firsthand experiences of war from

Left (facing page): Portrait of Kathleen by Cecil Beaton.



From left to right: Sarah Churchill Oliver, Anna Roosevelt Boettiger, and Kathleen Harriman at the Yalta Conference (Livadia Palace, February 1945).

her time in Britain but nothing that could have prepared her for what she witnessed at Katyn.²⁶ Shortly after she returned from Smolensk she wrote to Elsie Marshall, her former governess:

Everything was swell—a whole private train just for the press.... The trip was on the gruesome side but most interesting and I thoroughly enjoyed it—and the chance to see some countryside other than Moscow for a change. I imagine one of these days I'll get round to sitting down and typing out for you what happened etc. At the moment it's a bit late & I'm too sleepy.²⁷

Four days later, on January 28, 1943, she wrote a long account of her trip in a letter to Mary and Pam:

The Katyn Forest turned out to be a small measly pine tree woods. We were shown the works by a big Soviet doctor who looked like a chef in white peaked cap, white apron, and rubber gloves. With relish he showed us a sliced Polish brain carefully placed on a dinner plate for inspection purposes. And then we began a tour to each and every one of the seven graves. We must have seen a good many thousand corpses or parts of corpses, all in varying degrees of decomposition, but smelling about as bad. (Luckily I had a cold, so was less bothered by the stench than others.) Some of the corpses had been dug up by the Germans in the spring of '43 after they'd first launched their version of the story. These were laid in neat orderly rows, from six to eight bodies deep. The bodies in the remaining graves had been tossed in every which way. All the time we were there, the regular work of exhuming continued by men in army uniform. Somehow I didn't envy them! The most interesting thing, and the most convincing bit of evidence, was that every Pole had been shot through the

back of the head with a single bullet. Some of the bodies had their hands tied behind their backs, all of which is typically German. Next on the program we were taken into post mortem tents. These were hot and stuffy and smelt to high heaven. Numerous post mortems were going on, each and every body is given a thorough going over, and we witnessed several . . . personally. I was amazed at how whole the corpses were. Most still had hair. Even I could recognize their internal organs and they still had a good quantity of red colored "firm" meat on their thighs . . . You see, the Germans say that the Russians killed the Poles back in '40, whereas the Russians say the Poles weren't killed until the fall of '41, so there's quite a discrepancy in time. Though the Germans had ripped open the Poles' pockets, they'd missed some written documents. While I was watching, they found one letter dated the summer of '41, which is damned good evidence.²⁸

On the basis of the reports from Kathy and other members of the group, the U.S. government accepted the Soviet version of events that the Germans had shot the Polish POWs in 1941. After the war Kathy was called before a congressional committee to explain her role in the Soviet cover-up of the fact that they were the real culprits. But I wasn't too interested in interrogating Kathy about Katyn because it seemed to me that there was little to say other than that the Soviets had put on a good show to fool her and other observers. But I did suggest to Kathy that her (second) letter about Katyn had been a bit flip in the circumstances, as if she was using dry humor to distance herself from the horror of what she was seeing. To which she raised an eyebrow and replied: "Yes, well what would you expect me to do—try and get closer?"

My conversation with Kathy coincided with another important development on the research front. The Pamela Harriman papers (she died in 1997) had recently been deposited in the



From left to right: First U.S. food ship in Britain under Lend-Lease. Kathleen on far right with Lord Woolton and Averell Harriman (1941); Atlantic Charter Conference. President Franklin D. Roosevelt and Prime Minister Winston Churchill aboard the *HMS Prince of Wales*, at far left, Averell Harriman talking with Harry Hopkins (1941); Yalta Conference. Seated: Churchill, Roosevelt, Stalin; Harriman, standing behind Stalin (1945).

Library of Congress. They were not yet open to scholars, but I had special permission from her son, Winston, to make copies of the letters that Kathy had written to Pam during the war. Many of the letters that Kathy wrote to Pamela were copies of ones she'd sent to Mary and vice versa. She was also in the habit of writing more than one version of what was essentially the same letter. But there were plenty of letters in the Pamela Harriman collection that were unique to that source. There were also copies of letters that Pamela had written to Kathy during the war, which were pretty boring. Pamela was on record as saying that you should never commit anything too revealing to print, and it showed! The strange thing was that Kathy was always writing to Pamela about how wonderful her letters were and asking her to send more. She said the same to other correspondents but, with a very few exceptions, she did not keep any of these letters. After the war she retrieved letters she had sent but not copies of the incoming correspondence. The Kathleen Harriman correspondence is a strangely one-sided source.

Perhaps the most interesting find in the Pamela Harriman papers was some new letters to her from Kathy that she wrote while attending the Yalta conference.²⁹ Kathy was one of three women at Yalta, along with Anna Boettiger and Sarah Oliver, respectively the daughters of Roosevelt and Churchill. Kathy got to make the trip in order to keep Anna company, which worked out fine because the two women got on well together.

Kathy traveled to Yalta two weeks before the conference to help with preparations.³⁰ She went by train, a journey that took three days. As she wrote to Mary afterward, she passed through so many completely flattened towns and villages that she became immune to them.³¹ On the way the party stopped at Kharkov, a city that “was far less destroyed than most big towns,” she wrote to Pam on January 30. In this same letter Kathy described a conversation she had with her father in Moscow before they

left for Yalta: “one evening Ave & I sat up for hours and hours talking about you & he & Marie [Harriman’s wife and Kathy’s stepmother]—he was more or less thinking out loud and needless to say got nowhere. He just can’t make himself make a decision while the war’s on & life’s so unsettled—and I rather imagine Marie feels the same way, too.” As far as I can tell this is the only direct reference to Pamela’s affair with Averell in Kathy’s correspondence.

The conference began on February 4, and on February 7 Kathy recounted this incident to Pamela:

A couple of days back an amusing thing happened. Sarah & Anna & I were standing in the entrance room, outside the conference hall, waiting for things to break. They did quickly—Vyshinsky & UJ [Uncle Joe, i.e., Stalin] came out ... in search of a John. UJ was shown to one & came out quickly—washroom without toilet. By that time the PM was occupying the next nearest John so one of our embassy boys took Stalin ’way the hell down the hall to the next nearest toilet. In the shuffle, Stalin’s NKVD generals got separated. Then there was havoc—everyone running around whispering. I think they thought the Americans had pulled a kidnapping stunt or something. A few minutes later a composed UJ appeared at the door & order was restored!

Kathy’s letters reflected the mood of the conference, especially American perceptions of progress in the negotiations. Referring to the agreement on the establishment of the United Nations, Kathy wrote to Pam on February 8 that “there was great rejoicing last night they sold UJ on Dumbarton Oaks. Very good indeed.”

It was Kathy’s first meeting with President Roosevelt and he was a great hit with her. “The Pres is absolutely charming, easy to talk to on any subject.... The Pres is getting a big kick out

of presiding over the meetings (he's the youngest you know)." Kathy was equally impressed with Stalin:

He was in top form—a charming, gracious, almost benign host, I thought, something I'd never thought he could be. His toasts were sincere and most interesting—more than the usual banalities. He insulted no one ... but kidded Gusev [Soviet ambassador to Britain] for being such a gloomy man.

In another letter Kathy wrote:

At times, Stalin just sat back and smiled like a benign old man, something I'd never thought possible. Anyway, I was much impressed. He toasted Churchill as the great war leader who'd taken command when England was without fighting allies. His tribute to the President is harder to explain. Stalin talked about America miles from the war and her leader who prepared her for that war.³²

When she got back to Moscow (by air this time) Kathy wrote to Pam that "as you must have gathered, the conference was a terrific success—I think it surpassed everyone's hopes & expectations—even those who to date had but small dealings with our friends." She added a note of caution, however: "You can imagine how elated Ave is—though Lord knows what trouble his new job as Polish government conciliator will bring."

As I had promised, I made a copy for Kathy of her letters to Pamela, and she was delighted to be able to reread them after nearly sixty years.

The letters to Pamela added yet another layer of interest to the research, but my main mission was stymied by Kathy's continuing veto on publication, notwithstanding my efforts to persuade

her of the difference between publishing contemporaneous letters—warts and all—and self-serving memoirs. Nor was she impressed by my suggestion that publication of the letters would turn her into a twenty-first-century feminist icon! She was happy to let the copies she had made reside in the Library of Congress and to leave it at that. "You are absolutely correct my interest in publishing my letters still nil," she wrote to me in 2003. But she did add an enigmatic coda: "You're welcome!"³³ A couple of years later Kathy had a stroke and our communications ceased. I had other projects, which was one reason for the long delay in this article about her letters. Another reason was that I was not convinced that a description and analysis of the correspondence would be an adequate substitute for publication of the letters themselves. After her death in 2011, I revived my interest and in April 2014, I was given access to Kathy's private papers by the family and discovered that the story of her correspondence was more interesting and complex than even I knew.³⁴

For a start, only half the surviving letters—or versions of them—are in the Library of Congress in either the Averell Harriman or the Pamela Harriman Papers. There are a large number of additional letters among her private papers. In total there are about 200 letters amounting to some 200,000 words of text.

Kathy wrote to many different people during the war, but the main part of her correspondence has three distinct, albeit interwoven, strands, each with its own characteristics.

First, there are the letters to her sister Mary. These are the most "political" letters and the ones she expected to have a wider circulation among family and friends. In these letters Kathy most often adopts her role as an observer of peoples, places, and events. The feeling is that she is writing for an audience, and for posterity, or at least for her father's future memoirs, which is mentioned as a possible use for the letters.



From left to right: Kathleen skiing in Sun Valley, early 1940s; Kathleen and Stanley Mortimer at the Arden Field Trials, 1951; Kathleen Mortimer surrounded by her family. Standing: Gigi, James, Avie, David, Shelley, Prue, Jay; seated: Lily, Nick, Max, Kathleen, Harry (Christmas Eve, 2008).

“[Stalin] was in top form—a charming, gracious, almost benign host, I thought, something I’d never thought he could be. His toasts were sincere and most interesting ... ”

Second are the letters to Pamela Churchill. These letters are more private, personal, and revealing, written to an intimate friend as opposed to sister, even though she was evidently close to Mary. These had a wider circulation, too, but I am not sure that Kathy expected that.

Third are letters to Elsie Marshall or Mouche as she was called. Mouche was Kathy’s childhood English governess and remained a Harriman family retainer. These letters are the least political—more practical than personal—and filled with requests for things Kathy wanted sent to her or for Mouche to do on her behalf. A recurrent request was for more silk stockings not only for Kathy herself but to give as gifts. One lucky recipient in Moscow was Mme. Maisky, wife of the former Soviet ambassador to London, Ivan Maisky. However, she sent the stockings back with a note saying: “I do not require stockings. I have plenty of my own. Good stockings are so precious nowadays that I am sure you will find someone of your American friends who will need them.”³⁵

By no means were all the letters to Mouche of a practical character. It was to Mouche that Kathy wrote about the Victory Parade in Red Square in June 1945, an event she and Averell came close to boycotting on the spot when they arrived to find they were expected to stand next to the Japanese ambassador. They were found another place to stand, but the Japanese stayed because the Soviet Union had yet to enter the war in the Far East.

Zhukov took the salute on a white charger, Kathy reported. “Everyone was beautifully trained—the whole thing most effective. Rokossovsky—the other mounted marshal, almost came to grief. His horse wasn’t the best trained.” An interesting detail was that in Kathy’s perception, the German military banners famously piled against the Kremlin wall “were flung at Zhukov’s feet—a swell idea.”³⁶ Stalin was supposed to be the star of the show and he would not have been just pleased by such an image, nor is it one that features on Soviet newsreel of the event.

The Victory Parade is sometimes confused with the May Day parade in Moscow that year, led by the Chief of the General Staff Alexei Antonov, who also rode a horse, which, according to Kathy “was a beautifully trained animal—as Antonov was obviously no horseman!”³⁷ I’m not sure that Kathy attended the May Day parade, but a month later she was at a dinner with Averell and Stalin. A newsreel of the parade was shown, and Averell expressed interest in the horse that Antonov was riding, which developed into a more general conversation about horses. This led to Stalin giving Averell and Kathy a horse each. Kathy’s horse was from the Don Basin and had served at Stalingrad. Called Boston by the Soviets, the horse was shipped to the United States

after the war—an event that received a lot of publicity.

There is a large tranche of letters to Mouche in Kathy’s private papers³⁸ together with many additional letters to Mary, especially from the time she was in London. These show even more clearly than those already in the Library of Congress what an important, formative influence Kathy’s London period was and how it prepared her for the personal and political challenges of Moscow.

When the tape recorder was switched off, I asked Kathy what was missing from the letters deposited in her father’s papers in the Library of Congress. The retyped letters are full of ellipses so there was no secret there had been lots of omissions. She told me that it was personal stuff and family business, not matters of public interest. Her answer satisfied me. It was her private correspondence, and what she had decided to make public in the letters was revealing enough, both about herself and the people she had met.

It emerged that her self-censorship was quite extensive, including the unfortunate omission of some vivid descriptions of places she visited during the war. Most of the omissions were, as she said, of a personal nature. Comparing the original letters in her private papers with the edited versions in the LC, I found Kathy omitted a lot of incidental remarks (“I’m bored with writing now so I’ll guess you’re bored reading this. My love to you all—Kathleen”)³⁹ as well as what I would call “girlie” talk about perfume, clothes (“that’s the most divine nightie I ever owned. Pam thinks it is respectable enough for evening dress”),⁴⁰ and magazines (“read the New Yorker from cover to cover, it’s the joy of my existence”).

In the LC versions of the letters there are numerous references to “boyfriends” (none of them serious, it seems), but quite a few such references were omitted. In Moscow the Soviets fixed Kathy up with a Russian boyfriend—a veteran of the siege of Sebastopol—but she had that situation well under control, as she did all her other dalliances. In particular, Kathy was wooed by a number of older men during the war, but there is no evidence that anyone succeeded in winning her. Her sex life during the war was not an issue I was inclined to pursue when I interviewed her but—off tape—I gently suggested she must have been the recipient of many approaches from men during the war. She claimed not to have been “hit on” very much, but the letters tell another story.

More important were Kathy’s redactions of critical remarks about people who were not public figures and had a right to their own privacy (this is the 1970s, remember, and those concerned may well have still been alive). For example, Kathy’s description

of the nineteen-year-old daughter of the Mexican ambassador in Moscow: “Daughter is pretty—talks a blue streak and loves ‘boogie-woogie’ dancing. She wants to have dancing parties every week. Looks like trouble to me.”⁴¹ On the other hand, public figures, especially politicians and celebrities, were fair game, including the Mexican ambassador whom she described as a sex maniac. Among the joys of Kathy’s letters are the sketches and put-downs of famous people. One favorite of mine is her description of Tito, whom she met on a trip to Italy in August 1944:

Tito himself is small and heavy set. Very handsome with a strong face. Slit steel blue eyes that were cruel and hard looking but when he smiled or laughed, as he frequently did,

his whole face lit up and made him appear less foreboding. What surprised me most was his hands—they didn’t fit in at all, being smooth and well-kept, the hands of a pampered politician rather than a guerrilla chieftain.... He’s a good answerer of questions, does it directly without hedging, but seemed to lack the creative imagination to expand. He’s very literal, with a good sense of humor and likes about the same kind of joke a Russian would. In other words, he’s very easy to talk to.⁴²

Kathy could be kind, too, especially to heroes. Omitted from an edited letter in the LC was this description of her meeting with Sir Hugh Dowding, the head of Fighter Command during the Battle of Britain. She met him at his London club and

“What surprised me most was [Tito’s] hands—they didn’t fit in at all, being smooth and well-kept, the hands of a pampered politician rather than a guerrilla chieftain.... He’s a good answerer of questions, does it directly without hedging, but seemed to lack the creative imagination to expand.”

¹ Based on a talk at the Harriman Institute in April 2014, with thanks to David Mortimer for giving me access to the private papers of his mother, Kathleen Harriman Mortimer.

² K. Harriman Mortimer, “Do the crows still roost in the Spasopeskovskaya trees?” unpublished memoir, nd.

³ Kathleen to Mary, March 8, 1945, Averell Harriman Papers, Library of Congress Manuscript Division (hereafter: AHP, LC), container (hereafter: c) 177, chronological file (hereafter: cf) March 7–10, 1945.

⁴ Kathleen to Pam, February 27, 1944, Pamela Harriman Papers, Library of Congress Manuscript Division, file marked “Kathleen Harriman, Wartime Correspondence, 1943–1946” (hereafter, PHP, LC).

⁵ “Do the crows still roost in the Spasopeskovskaya trees?”

⁶ Kathleen to Pam, October 16, 1944, AHP, LC, c.174, cf. October 15–16, 1944.

⁷ Kathleen to Pam, April 12, 1945, PHP, LC. Kathy started and dated this letter the day Roosevelt died but did not finish it until several days later.

⁸ Kathleen to Mary, June 8, 1945, AHP, LC, c.179, cf. June 8–14, 1945.

⁹ See G. Roberts, “Litvinov’s Lost Peace, 1941–1946,” *Journal of Cold War Studies*, vol.4, no.2, Spring 2002.

¹⁰ Kathleen to Mary, June 27, 1941, AHP, LC, c.159, cf. June 16–27, 1941.

¹¹ Letter to Mary, November 21, 1941, AHP, LC, c.161, cf. November 1–24, 1941. The cited paragraph was omitted from the edited version of this letter in the Library of Congress.

¹² Letter to Mary, May 30, 1941, AHP, LC, c.159, cf. May 22–31, 1941.

¹³ On Pamela, see F. Costigliola, “Pamela Churchill, Wartime London, and the Making of the Special Relationship,” *Diplomatic History*, vol.36, no.4, September 2012.

¹⁴ Kathleen to Mary, mid-June 1941, Kathleen Harriman Mortimer private papers (hereafter: KHM). The quoted sentences were omitted from the version of the letter deposited in the Library of Congress: AHP, LC, c.159, cf. June 16–27, 1941.

¹⁵ Clementine Churchill to Kathleen, April 4, 1944, AHP, LC, c.172, cf. April 1–11, 1944. Pamela also sent copies of the letters to Edward R. Stettinus, Roosevelt’s under secretary and later, secretary of state, who told Pam that he had “read the letters from Kathleen with tremendous interest.”

¹⁶ The only exception is a three- to four-page memoir cited in n.2 that she wrote for Rebecca Matlock, wife of Jack Matlock, U.S. ambassador to the Soviet Union, 1987–1991. To my knowledge the only other thing that Kathy wrote about her experiences in Moscow, apart from the letters and some interviews just after the war, was an article on “Opera in Russia Today,” *Opera News*, March 25, 1946.

¹⁷ Letter to author, December 10, 2001.

¹⁸ Kathleen to Pam, October 16, 1944, AHP, LC, c.174, cf. October 15–16, 1944.

¹⁹ Kathleen to Marr and Marie [Kathy’s stepmother], November 17, 1943, AHP, LC, c.170, cf. November 8–17, 1943.

²⁰ Kathleen to Mary, Thanksgiving Day, 1943, AHP, LC, c.170, cf. November 18–28, 1943. The sentences cited were omitted from this edited version of the letter in the LC.

²¹ Letter to Elsie Marshall, March 10, 1944. KHM private papers.

reported home: “The American conception of the London conservative club is without exaggeration. I walked into the library and at least 20 chairs were filled with readers of the London Times. No one looked up.... Sir Hugh is about to retire. They haven’t any place for him in even the administrative end of the RAF. They don’t either need him or want him.”⁴³

It is a pity that Kathy culled so much personal material from the copies she made for Elie Abel. In their complete versions the letters are a rich source for social and cultural historians as well as those whose interests are primarily political. Kathy’s editing of the letters made them seem more political than they actually were and had the effect—deliberate I think—of focusing the reader’s attention on their historical content. But even at their most personal, the letters are never just about Kathy herself—they are about conveying to others her experiences, the people she meets, the circles she moves in, and the events she witnesses. More than once in her letters she cautions her correspondents that when she relates who she has met and what she has done, she is being descriptive not boastful.

I met Kathy only once and had just a brief correspondence with her. I know her mainly through my encounter with her letters and, more recently, her personal papers. What strikes me most about her now was how self-effacing she was. It was, I feel,

this self-effacing quality that helped her in the circumstances of war to transcend the limitations of her background and youth and to create an enduring account of her experiences in London and Moscow.

Kathleen Harriman’s mission to Moscow ended in January 1946 when she returned home with her father—an epic three-week voyage that took in India, China, Japan, Honolulu, and, finally, San Francisco. After the war she retired from public life, married Stanley G. Mortimer, changed her name to Kathleen Harriman Mortimer, settled down, and raised a family. Except to people like me, she rarely talked about the war, or her letters, but she sure went to a lot of trouble to preserve her legacy and to shape our perceptions of it. □

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The editors wish to thank David H. Mortimer for graciously providing the photographs that appear in “The Wartime Correspondence of Kathleen Harriman.”

²² Kathleen to Mary, March 8, 1945, AHP, LC, c.177, cf. March 7–10, 1945.

²³ Kathleen to Pam, November 1943, AHP, LC, c.170, cf. November 18–28, 1943.

²⁴ “Do the crows still roost in the Spasopeskovskaya trees?”

²⁵ Author to Kathleen Harriman, November 12, 2001. I tracked Kathy down via H-Diplo, one of whose subscribers put me in touch with her son David.

²⁶ As a journalist in London, Kathy started by writing human interest stories but then moved more toward political news and war reportage.

²⁷ Kathleen to Elsie Marshall, January 24, 1944. This letter is in Kathy’s private papers.

²⁸ PHP, LC. There is also a copy of this letter in Averell Harriman’s papers in the relevant chronological file.

²⁹ PHP, LC. Kathy’s letters to Mary and Mouche about Yalta may be found in the chronological life AHP, LC, containers 176–177.

³⁰ Kathy’s trip to Yalta and other places while she was in Moscow, including going back to Britain and the U.S. for short periods, are easy to track because Averell Harriman’s private secretary, R. P. Meiklejohn, kept detailed itineraries. These may be found in the chronological files in AHP, LC containers 170–182.

³¹ Kathleen to Mary, February 16, 1945, AHP, LC, c.177, cf. February 13–17, 1945.

³² Kathleen to Mary from Yalta, AHP, LC, c.176, cf. February 1–5, 1945.

³³ Fax to author, June 12, 2003.

³⁴ Marie Brenner has also had access to these papers and published an article in *Vanity Fair* in November 2011, “To War in Silk Stockings.” Brenner concentrates on Kathy’s London period and on the triangular relationship between Kathy, Pamela, and Averell. My reference to the *New York Herald Tribune* comes from her article.

³⁵ Mme. Maisky to Kathleen, June 22, 1944, KHM private papers.

³⁶ Kathleen to Mouche, June 26, 1945, KHM private papers.

³⁷ Kathleen to Mary, June 4, 1945, AHP, LC, c.179, cf. June 1–7, 1945.

³⁸ I am not sure that Kathy had all her letters to Mouche to hand when she provided Abel with copies of her correspondence. I have the impression that a whole bunch only came to light after Kathy died.

³⁹ Original letter, Kathleen to Mary, August 23, 1941, KHM private papers.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, September 16, 1941.

⁴¹ KHM private papers. The quoted words were omitted from the version that Kathy edited for the Library of Congress: Kathleen to Mary, June 9, 1944, AHP, LC, c.172, cf. June 1–9, 1944.

⁴² Kathleen to Mary, September 1, 1944, AHP, LC, c.174, cf. September 1–5, 1944.

⁴³ Original letter to Mary, May 30, 1941. KHM private papers. The edited LC version from which this passage is omitted may be found in AHP, c.159, cf. May 22–31, 1941.