

The Einsteins as Princeton Neighbors

by JAMES R. BLACKWOOD

ONE of my treasures is a tidy, handwritten note from Albert Einstein, penned a day or two after his wife's death and addressed to my parents, thanking them for their letter of sympathy: "*Ich bin Ihnen dankbar für Ihr besonders warmherzogenes und zartfühlendes Schreiben . . .*"

The story of their friendship began in front of a log fireplace at Springdale. Mrs. J. Ross Stevenson, wife of the seminary president, had invited a few neighbors to meet Mrs. Einstein soon after she and her husband had come to Princeton. Mother was one of these neighbors. The women sipped tea, nibbled cheese and crackers, chatted about neighborly things and the weather. Afterwards, because it was raining, mother offered to take Mrs. Einstein home in the car—a matter of crunching up the gravel drive of Springdale in low gear, crossing Mercer Street, and stopping at the Einsteins' apartment in back of the old Paxton house at the corner of Mercer and Library Place.

Mrs. Einstein wanted to talk; she had a sympathetic ear. The two women sat there talking, talking, until the rain let up and Mrs. Einstein started to open the car door. She paused, laid her hand on mother's arm, and said, "You and Dr. Blackwood must come and visit us."

Father and mother thought that the Einsteins needed their privacy more

A native of Princeton and son of Andrew W. Blackwood, James R. is an alumnus of the College of Wooster and Princeton Theological Seminary. He has served pastorates in Missouri, Ohio, and Florida where presently he is minister in Siesta Key. In 1965 the College of Wooster conferred on him the degree of Doctor of Divinity (honoris causa).

than a visit, and did not go. One day Mrs. Einstein met mother on the street and chided her for not visiting. Later she passed our home, 52 Mercer Street, when mother and I were in the front yard dividing and replanting jonquils. That was in the spring of 1934, when Albert Einstein still was listed in Germany as "Public Enemy No. 1."

My parents were looking forward to a tour of the Holy Land and Europe that summer. As a matter of fact, father had thought of asking Dr. Einstein for an introduction to Zionist friends or Biblical scholars in Palestine. Well, mother decided to go through channels; she put the question to Mrs. Einstein. Would her husband be willing to write the letters? Mrs. Einstein looked at mother in amazement, exclaiming, "But, my darling, I did not know that you are Jews!"

Mother explained that she was a Christian, and a Presbyterian on top of that. Why, then, Mrs. Einstein demanded earnestly, why did my parents wish to meet with Zionists, or with Jewish leaders of any sort? They had a heart-to-heart talk about the roots of Christian faith in the Old Testament. Mother spoke of a common heritage. "Besides," she added, "Jesus was a Jew."

Mrs. Einstein's amazement increased: "Never in my life has a Christian said that to me!"

She hugged mother affectionately.

Then she inquired in great detail about the summer tour. In particular, Mrs. Einstein wanted to know the name of the ship on which my parents would return to the United States, and the date it would sail from Europe. "The *Westernland*," mother told her, giving her the date. Three times Mrs. Einstein repeated, "*Westernland, Westernland, Westernland.*" She also muttered the date of sailing over and over. I wondered why.

Before long my parents had a simple tea with the Einsteins, bread and butter and *Baumkuchen*, a cake made to resemble the rings of a tree, which a friend in New York had sent the Einsteins. They had been saving it for someone special, they said, and had decided that their neighbors must be the ones for whom they had been waiting. My parents were impressed with the Einsteins' welcome, their warmth and humor, their simplicity and, above all, their lack of bitterness. Dr. Einstein could speak plainly about Hitler and the Nazis without emotional trauma.

On 10 May 1934, Miss Helen Dukas typed letters of introduction from Dr. Einstein to Herrn Hermann Struck in Haifa, and to Dr. Hugo Bergmann at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. To the latter he wrote in part: "*Zweck dieser Zeilen ist, Ihnen meinen Nachbarn in Princeton, Herrn Professor Blackwood vom hiesigen theologischen Seminar (Bibelwissenschaft) und dessen Frau freundlich zu empfehlen. Ich hoffe and glaube, dass die kurze Bekanntschaft für beide Teile Interesse bieten wird.*"

My parents went overseas. They enjoyed the summer, though the Atlantic was none too calm on the return voyage from Europe. The ship heaved. On the

second day out, mother, to her surprise, met Mrs. Einstein on deck. Mrs. Einstein drew mother into the cocktail lounge, which was empty at this morning hour. She pointed to one corner of the room, wanting mother to stand there facing outward. Bracing herself, Mrs. Einstein stood facing in, her hands against the wall on either side of mother's body. "If you see anyone—any movement—at the door or windows, give me a sign and I will stop speaking." The words came in hardly more than a whisper.

Briefly, members of the underground had broken into the Einsteins' Berlin home, which the Nazis had confiscated. They had removed some of Dr. Einstein's books and papers, "very dear to him." These had been smuggled out of Germany into Belgium, and were now in the hold of the *Westerland*. But Mrs. Einstein could not get the contraband through States-side customs. If she made the attempt and were discovered, it would cause an international scandal. Therefore, she asked if my parents would bring the precious documents to Princeton.

They had little trouble making up their minds. The smuggled goods did not belong to Hitler. So my parents agreed to take the books and papers through the United States customs, and to keep them for awhile at our home on Mercer Street. In the understatement of his career, father declared them as materials acquired in Europe "for scholarly purposes." After all, who would be likely to challenge that statement from a professor of homiletics?

One September evening the Irish Express left the first part of the shipment, "2 BXS, 2 TRUNKS OF PERSONAL EFFECTS," at our home. Weight:

292 lbs. Charge: \$6.25. Other trunks and boxes came later. These crammed a lean-to shed at the back of the house. Dr. Einstein waited for "the dark of the moon" to come and look at his documents. The night was not only dark but rainy; he wore his raincoat but no hat. His hair looked like a wet mop. Yet Albert Einstein bore himself with quiet dignity. He walked through the front hallway, the dining room and kitchen, and took one step down into the shed. A tense moment! Deliberately he raised the lid of an old, camel-back trunk, and took out a black-bound volume of his early writings. He opened it and glanced down the pages. Dr. Einstein looked sideways at father, held the volume at arms' length, lifted his eyebrows in astonishment, and asked: "Did I write this drivel?"

Both men laughed; that broke the ice. We left Albert Einstein with his books and papers. He was deeply moved to have them in his hands once more. On another dark night, all the trunks and boxes were moved a few hundred yards downhill, from 52 to 112 Mercer Street. We could have guessed (but didn't) that the contents would form the nucleus of the Einstein Collection at the Institute for Advanced Study.

* * *

Late that fall, father and mother had dinner with Dr. and Mrs. Einstein, Margot, and Miss Helen Dukas who cooked and served the meal, a delightful evening full of laughter. Dr. Einstein got out a hat to prove he *had* one; he put it on at a comic angle. He joked about his pipe, which he'd bet his wife he would not smoke until a certain date. He went through a scrapbook filled with cartoons of himself, chuck-

ling, telling the origins of the ones he liked best. During the conversation Mrs. Einstein leaned over to mother and said in a low, husky voice, "1-6-0-6," their unlisted telephone number.

Now and then our phone would ring and one of the Einsteins would ask, hesitantly but not apologetically, for a ride in our car, say, to the grocery or the drug store. Occasionally—not often—one of my parents would phone 1-6-0-6, telling about a drive somewhere and inviting one, both, or all of the Einsteins to go along. As a result of these calls, one way or the other, there were trips to the Farmers' Market in Trenton; to the artists' colony in New Hope, Pennsylvania; to the Delaware Water Gap; to the Jersey shore; to nowhere in particular, just looking at the woods and fields. "It is good to get out into the country," Dr. Einstein said, "to get away from people."

At the Princeton University Chapel, Dr. Einstein and Margot, along with my parents, heard Stokowski conduct Bach's *B-Minor Mass*. Undergraduates climbed helter-skelter over the pews and crowded around Dr. Einstein, holding out bulletins for his autograph.

Dr. John Finley Williamson of the Westminster Choir College was a friend of the family. (In the early 1930's, as a guest in our home, he had avidly taken up father's suggestion that he move the choir school from Dayton, Ohio, to Princeton.) Dr. Williamson liked to draw people from the community into musical events, making them not only listeners but also participants. He was planning a service of Lenten music. Since Dr. Einstein played the violin and belonged to the Princeton community, Dr. Williamson hoped that he would join the orchestra. So he talked

with mother. She was not at all certain about asking, but asked anyway, making sure that Dr. Einstein understood the nature of the request. *Ja*, he knew the Haydn music and cheerfully agreed to fill a chair in the violin section, provided, of course, that there be no undue publicity before or after.

The (then) First Presbyterian Church filled up for the Lenten service. Dr. Einstein's name appeared in alphabetical order among the instrumentalists listed in the bulletin. He let the man who sat next to him tweak the strings and twist the pegs of his violin during the tune-up. The music began. Dr. Einstein, who had his own distinctive ideas about bow markings, nonetheless played with zest and evident skill. He loved classical music for its clarity and precision. Once, though, he made a slip in timing. He winced and looked up with big, apologetic eyes at the conductor, Dr. Williamson, who paid not the slightest attention to him. Some things are more relative than others.

That spring Dr. Williamson set up a festival of contemporary music, with twenty-one American "firsts." Dr. Einstein listened to all twenty-one. While the musicians did their chores, his public face told nothing of what was going through his mind. On a program, however, he wrote: "Brutally cruel. . . . That was just half cultivated. . . . If Spring were so I would prefer always Winter. . . . That may be 'Zephyrs' but it sounds like a thunder storm to me." Each time he handed the jottings to my parents, the pew shook ever so slightly with his laughter.

In a town the size of Princeton, if you drove here and there with the Great One in the car, as I did, people took notice, especially if you honked

and waved at friends. Even more, if you showed up at public events with Dr. Einstein, word got around. Inevitably, requests came to father, cautious or bold attempts to arrange a speech, an interview, an appearance, an endorsement by Dr. Einstein; or, better, an introduction to him in person. If any of these were impossible, money would suffice. Father answered such appeals with a cordial note and maybe a small donation. He did not pass them on to Dr. Einstein.

Princeton Theological Seminary was a different matter. When President John A. Mackay wished to invite Dr. Einstein to the summer Institute of Theology, father thought it a good idea and relayed the invitation. Accordingly, Dr. Einstein made a short speech to ministers gathered in Miller Chapel. Once more, when a group of newly-arrived immigrants came to the Chapel, Dr. Einstein welcomed them with words of wisdom and encouragement. Another group of immigrants came; he spoke again. I think it accurate to say that for fifteen years, at least, in the occasional visits Dr. Einstein made to the seminary campus, the bid went from Mackay to Blackwood to Einstein.

Dr. Emil Brunner, our next-door neighbor while he was teaching at Princeton Seminary, expressed a desire to meet Dr. Einstein. The Brunners and the Einsteins met in our home. They had much in common—language to start with; the two scholars laughed heartily at each other's tales of blunders in trying to subdue the American vernacular to some kind of logic. Their table talk moved from the ridiculous to the sublime as they compared notes on Martin Buber. They had several mutual friends in Switzerland, and a

bit of catching up to do. In World War II a number of their friends had lost jobs, influence, their very lives; they spoke of this tragic era but did not dwell on its lasting hurt. The women did their share of talking. All in all, the conversation had wit, depth, and understanding that reflected a neighborly warmth.

When Dr. Brunner had gone back

to Switzerland, he sent a hand-written message to father. Of all the good memories from the United States, the happiest and best, he said, was that of an evening with the Blackwoods and the Einsteins around a dinner table. Father and mother, too, held this evening as one of the most radiant memories of their twenty years at Princeton Seminary.

Princeton N.J. 10.Mai 1934

Mayor Dizengoff
Tel-Aviv

Sehr geehrter Herr Dizengoff!

Ich benutze die Gelegenheit des Besuches meiner
Nachbarn in Princeton, Herrn und Frau Professor Blackwood, Ihnen
meine freundlichen Grüsse zu übermitteln. Professor Blackwood ist
Biblischer Forscher und Lehrer am hiesigen theologischen Seminar
und als solcher sehr interessiert für die Entwicklung des jüdischen
Aufbauwerkes in Palästina.

Ich höre oft und mit Freude von dem Aufblühen
Tel-Avivs, das schon zur Zeit meines Besuches vor 13 Jahren Ihrer
Obhut anvertraut war.

Freundlich grüsst Sie

Ihr

A. Einstein.

James R. Blackwood collection related to Albert Einstein
From The Shelby White and Leon Levy Archives Center, Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton, NJ, USA.

52 MERCER STREET
PRINCETON

Presented
to
Mr. and Mrs. A. W. Blackwood
by
Elsa & Albert Einstein.
Christmas 1934
(The Madonna)

James R. Blackwood collection related to Albert Einstein
From The Shelby White and Leon Levy Archives Center, Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton, NJ, USA.



52 MERCER STREET
PRINCETON

Presented
to
Mr. and Mrs. A. W. Blackwood
by

Elsa and Albert Einstein.

September 1935

RED STAR LINE

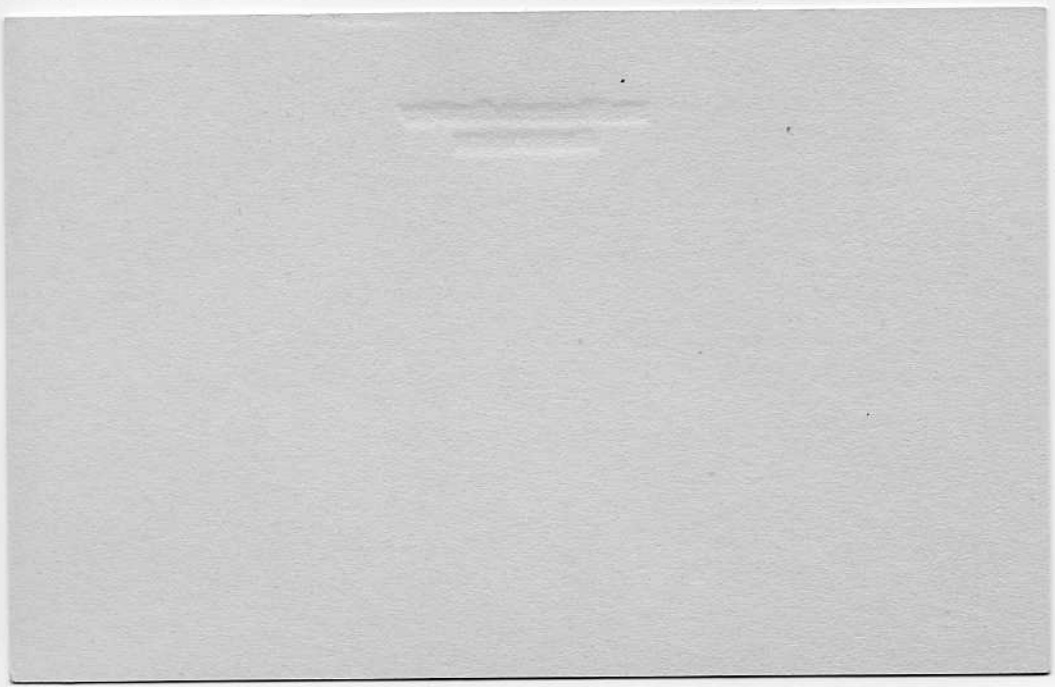
THIS SPACE MAY BE USED FOR CORRESPONDENCE

Mrs. Einstein
Bucky -
58 76" St
N. Y.

THE ADDRESS ONLY TO BE WRITTEN HERE

Linsted, The studio
Watch Hill
(near Westerly)
Rhode Island

ANTWERP, BELGIUM - The "Steen" facing
the River Scheldt.



James R. Blackwood collection related to Albert Einstein
From The Shelby White and Leon Levy Archives Center, Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton, NJ, USA.

From the guest book of
Dr. & Mrs. Andrew W. Blackwood, Sr.,
52 Mercer Street, Princeton, New Jersey

DATE	NAME	ADDRESS	REMARKS
April 30 1935	A. Einstein.	Library Place 2	
"	W. V. Houston		
"	Earle R. Davis		
"	Andrew W. Blackwood	Princeton Seminary	I Cor. 10:13
"	J. R. Blackwood		
"	Mrs. William Houston		
"	Elsa Einstein	Library Place 2	
"	Anna P. White	Pittsburgh, Pa	
"	Harriet Anne Houston.	Pasadena Cal.	
"	Grace Sefton Mayer	360 5th Ave, New York 10 N Y	

DATE	NAME	ADDRESS	REMARKS
4/25/37	Joseph Unglierson	Danville, Va.	
8. I. 38.	Albert Einstein	Princeton	
7. X. 36	Paul Brumm	Zürich, Klusdörfli	
"	John A. Mackay	Princeton N. J.	
	Mary Brummer	Zürich, Klusdörfli 12	
	Jane L. Mackay	Princeton, N. J.	
	Anna P. White	Pittsburgh, Pa.	
Oct 14 '38	Henry S. Brown	Princeton, N. J.	
" "	John E. Krizenga	Princeton N. J.	
" "	Anna J. Krizenga		

James R. Blackwood collection related to Albert Einstein
From The Shelby White and Leon Levy Archives Center, Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton, NJ, USA.

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% DR A BLACKWORD
52 MERCER STREET
PRINCETON NJ

DATE OF SHIPMENT **SEPT 5** POINT OF ORIGIN **NYC** CAR NO. CONT. NO.

NO. OF PACKAGES	DESCRIPTION AND MARKS	WEIGHT	RATE	AMOUNT COLLECT	AMOUNT PREPAID
2 2	HKS AND TRUNKS OF PERSONAL EFFECTS COLLECT ONLY OUR THRU CHARGE OF 6.54 <small>THESE ARE FREIGHT CHARGES - PAYMENTS EXPECTED WITHIN 48 HOURS.</small>	292	THRU	6.54	BILL CHASE

*paid
H. C. C. Lli.*

MAKE CHECKS PAYABLE TO CHASE TRANSPORTATION CO., INC.

12.10.34

My dear Mrs. Blackwood:

Since sixteen days I am laying to bed not being able to move myself, just like a cripple. If Mr. Roosevelt would be aware of my terrible sufferings I am sure he would have still more sympathy for me!!! (He is so fond of cripples).

I am sorry that I can not see you in the next future. Concerning my feelings I would have gone immediately to shake hands with you. Please take this few flowers with the little package of chocolate mints and the english walnuts as a little taken of my gratitude for your great kindness.

With very kind regards, also in the name of my husband

yours very sincerely

Elsa Einstein

Mrs. Einstein is not able to put her signature herself.

J. Dukas

Princeton N.J., den 10. Mai 1934

Herrn Hermann Struck
Haifa,

Lieber Herr Struck!

Ich höre oft und mit Freude von gemeinsamen Bekannten über Sie und Ihr Leben.- Diese Zeilen bringt Ihnen Herr Professor Blackwood (und Frau) vom theologischen Seminar in Princeton, der als Bibelforscher grosses Interesse für das Aufbauwerk in Palästina hat. Ich bin überzeugt, dass ein Gespräch zwischen Ihnen für beide Teile interessant sein wird.

In der Hoffnung, Sie und Ihre Frau wiederzusehn, bin ich mit freundlichen Grüssen

Ihr

A. Einstein.

Watch Hill N.I. den 20. September

My dear Mrs. Blackwood:

Thank you very much for your kind letter. You are a dear one that you offer me to fetch us at the station. We are driving by car from here to Princeton directly and all our baggages we send by American Express.

I had no trouble concerning customs with my seventeen boxes. Three of them were opened and closed immediately. Just to observe the law. But in fact it was done nothing, it was only a gesture.

Yesterday I have been in Princeton for renting the Paxton-house. My staying there was for half an hour, I had to run away forreaching the station at New York at 3 o'clock. Otherwise if I could have saved the time it would had given me real pleasure to drop in for a few moments. Margot has here a real recreation. Her health is so much better. In Princeton I shall see you as soon as I am settled in the house.

Give my very kind regards to Dr. Blackwood.

Most affectionately

yours devoted

Elsa Einstein

Excuse please my
Bad English!

Watch Hill R.I. den 8. September 1934

My dear Mrs. Blackwood:

Please do not think that I am so terribly unmodest to send you once more some trunks. Please let me explain it to you. After the customer's inspection I took the resolution not to trouble you and not to send you one single box or trunk. I wrote a few lines and delivered it to one of the inspecting men that it might be delivered to you. I wrote to you that all the trunks and boxes could go immediately to the basement of the chapel in case that it is permitted. I did not want to trouble you anymore and I decided not to separate one of them. Later on when I have the chance of seeing you I shall tell you why I acted in this manner.

I am sorry that you must think of me that I abused your great friendliness. And this makes me sorry. This trunk which came with an extra post ought to have been put to all the others which I presumed altogether in the basement. Please excuse thousand times for all the trouble you had. When you come to eat "Spätzle" in my house you forget all this bad things and you will have a better impression of me.

We live here in a wonderful spacious, lofty, wide house, directly situated on the ocean and if I would not have this deep grief one could enjoy. Margot's health is better and the issue of the kidney-consultation was a very favorable one. When I came back I felt such a homelike-feeling for this country. Not longing for Europe, not longing for my native country. And not longing for Europe at all, where I have to go through the most cruel events. The only thing I left there and which is dear to my heart is the ashes of my beloved poor child.

Thanks once more from the bottom of my heart. Auf Wiedersehen!
Do not be angry on account of the accumulation of the trunks.

With kindest greetings
Yours very devoted
Elsa Einstein.

Princeton N.J., den 10. Mai 1934

Dr. Hugo Bergmann
Hebrew University
Jerusalem

Lieber Herr Bergmann!

Ich freue mich, dieses Briefchen an Sie zu richten, nachdem wir längere Zeit nichts Direktes mehr voneinander gehört haben. Hoffentlich gelingt es endlich den wahren Freunden der Universität, an dieser gesündere Verhältnisse zu schaffen.

Zweck dieser Zeilen ist, Ihnen meinen Nachbarn in Princeton, Herrn Professor Blackwood vom hiesigen theologischen Seminar (Bibelwissenschaft) und dessen Frau freundlich zu empfehlen. Ich hoffe und glaube, dass die kurze Bekanntschaft für beide Teile Interesse bieten wird.

In der Hoffnung, Ihnen bald Interessantes mitteilen zu können, bin ich mit herzlichen Grüßen an Sie und die Ihren

Ihr

A. Einstein.

P.S. Freundliche Grüße an Frl. Dukas, die vielleicht Herrn Prof. Blackwood manches zeigen kann.

Princeton, 23. 11. 36

Sehr geehrter Herr und sehr geehrte Frau Blackwood!

Ich bin Ihnen dankbar für Ihre besonders warmherzigen
und zutiefstführendes Schreiben. ganz besonders, die auch Sie
zuletzt der Sorge hinter sich haben. Man mag den über-
wuschelichen Dingen noch so ergeben sein, es gibt doch
nichts Schöneres für uns als ächte Menschlichkeit. In
diesem Sinne drückt Ihnen die Hand

Hr. A. Einstein.