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M. Storey-Bates Cards

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The M. Storey-Bates postcard binder includes 132 postcards that date from 1904-1918 and that feature a multitude of images. These images consist of photographs of Edwardian actors and actresses, cartoon illustrations, illustrations created from Dickens, paintings, and much more. All of the postcards that are included in the binder have been mailed to addresses in the United Kingdom, most certainly from other addresses in the UK. The majority of these postcards were mailed to Minnie Storey-Bates (1887-1959) from Ralph Duckworth (1885-1960). Their personal relationship included correspondence that consisted of mundane daily activities, check-ins, best wishes, and courtship. Some of these cards were written in code – numerical, letter, and a combination. While most cards that have been mailed to Minnie are from Ralph, there are cards that have been sent from her mother as well as from friends. Ralph's cards consist of correspondences from Minnie and others. Within the binder, these cards are organized in two sections, first by the recipient (Minnie and Ralph) and then by date. The most predominant theme within the binder are the courtship cards.

The most interesting aspect of the correspondence has been the coded messages mailed specifically between Ralph and Minnie. At the beginning of transcribing messages for the online repository, attempting to crack these codes without a key was difficult. However, upon doing some research, my partner Emma Grosjean and I came across Caroline Leathwood's blog entitled *100 Years of Stories*, which included a blog post entitled *The Secret Code of Ralph and Minnie*. Within this blog, Leathwood describes how she came across postcards for sale at a local market and found many with images of Edwardian actresses that included a numerically coded message on the back. She explained how she became obsessed with learning more about their author, M. Storey-Bates, and the coded postcards. With the assistance of a friend, Leathwood cracked one of the number coded messages. They figured out that the numbers with apostrophes were in fact vowels. So 1'=A; 2'=E; 3'=I; 4'=O; 5'=U.

With figuring this out the author was able to break the code on one of the cards she had purchased. The decoded message stated:

I hope you may be able to get another hundred of Marie. Are you playing golf today? I'm glad I saw you last night if it was only for a minute I can always do my work better when I have seen you. I forgot to ask you last night if you were invited to the Woodcocks?

While working out this code, Leathwood was able to decipher the messages in multiple cards. For more on the story of how Leathwood found Ralph and Minnie's cards and how she deciphered the code please visit her blog at <https://100yearsofstories.wordpress.com/2015/09/25/the-secret-code-of-ralph-and-minnie/>

With this information from Leathwood's blog, we went back to our numerical coded messages and attempted to crack some codes using this guide. The code worked and we also found that we could expand upon it. We have added the following to the decoding key: 0=G; 6=S; 1°=R; 1=B; 7=P; 2=D; 8=K; 3=T; 9=N; 4=F; 5=L. With the combination of the code that the author provided and our expansion upon it, we have decoded almost all of the numerically coded postcards. We have found that out of the 132 cards about 17 of them are of coded messages. However, these are not just numerical, which I will go into further detail below.

What was most interesting about these coded messages is that as we went through and deciphered them we found that none of them carry anything that would be considered salacious or necessary to hide from public eye. For example, one deciphered message states: "Dear Minx, Have you heard this riddle, I think it is rather a good one. "If Mississippi lent Missouri her New Jersey what did Delaware? Alaska." Other coded messages were very similar and consisted of sweet messages of Ralph informing Minnie of what happened during the day and what he planned on doing for the rest of the day. One such message read: "Here is another card of Dombey and Son. I'm just off to the city. I'm taking the stick with me. It is fine but not a nice day like yesterday. I hope you have a Happy Birthday today. Yours very sincerely, Ralph." All of these messages seemed to be Ralph and Minnie not only finding a way to keep their messages private but also having an intimate game to keep them entertained through the day as they passed postcards back and forth.

In a post on Instagram, Leathwood offered insight into the postcards that had the letter-coded messages on the back. She actually was able to decode one of these messages as well, which surprised Emma and me, because without the key code we were unsure on how to decipher these particular codes. We felt that since they were letter codes that there were many options of what the code could have

been and with some, and we wondered if they could also be in another language. However, Leathwood was able to find out that in the beginning, the codes were a simple shift in letters: A=B; B=C; C=D; D=E, etc. However, she found that within one of these coded messages Ralph decided to change the letter code. Leathwood found that he not only used the typical shift in letters, he also wrote them backward and in code. The message on the back of the card read:

My darling Minx, you will notice that I am turning every word backwards as well as taking the next letter after the original on in the alphabet which I think makes the code a little harder to read. You see I am so selfish that I am always wanting you to be thinking of me so the harder I make the code the better. I shall be at the vicarage as soon after half past six as I can possibly get tomorrow night. How much did they make at the harvest festival yesterday? From your ever loving Ralph. (Leathwood)

When we found this information to break the letter codes, we were extremely excited. However, we weren't aware of the date that he decided to change his code and we had 131 cards to scan and transcribe in a relatively short amount of time. So, unfortunately, we didn't get to attempt decoding very many of these cards, though we have laid the groundwork for future researchers to undertake that task.

Leathwood and I began an ongoing correspondence about our ongoing interest in the Minnie Storey-Bates cards and the story that they held. Leathwood has collected approximately 500 postcards with correspondence between Ralph Duckworth and Minnie Storey-Bates, which is over 300 more cards than what our collection holds. Her collection of postcards starts their correspondence in 1904, which is the same year as our collection. This would imply that our postcards would overlap. I would be very interested in seeing these cards fully deciphered and placed together in timeline to find the full story they hold.

Leathwood was able to gain a lot of historical information from the cards, discovering that in 1904 Ralph was 19 years old when he started his correspondence with Minnie, who was the daughter of a vicar; we were glad to hear, too, that Ralph and Minnie were married in 1913. Leathwood was contacted by a couple in Australia who read her blog and had come across a photograph of Ralph in their own collection (Figure 1). This piqued Leathwood's curiosity and she continued looking for postcards on eBay. Curiosity ended up getting the better of Leathwood and so she turned to Facebook groups to see if anyone within Haslingden, United Kingdom knew anything about the family. Interestingly

enough, Leathwood was contacted by the descendants of Ralph and Minnie (UA M. Story-Bates Cards BlogLetter to Caroline Leathwood). Their descendants now live in New Zealand and they sent Leathwood an image of the couple on their wedding day (Leathwood). Leathwood thought she had recognized the image before and went through her collection. Leathwood found that in fact, she had this image on a postcard in her collection, but the card was never sent through the mail and underneath the image, there is a caption that stated Good Luck (figure 2). Leathwood also managed to visit the Vicarage where Minnie received most of her cards (Figure 3), as well as the Friarmere, St. Thomas Church in Lancashire, England where Ralph and Minnie were married in (Figure 4).

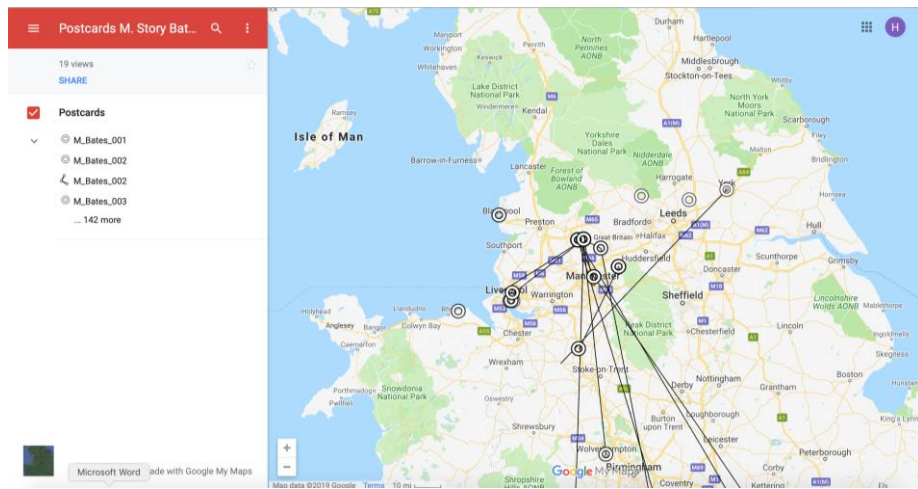
With so many of the cards available to the public to buy and collect it brings the question to mind of how these cards happened to be in this situation instead of with their family? One possibility of an answer came from Leathwood. She was contacted by Ralph and Minnie's great-nephew, who informed her that at some point the collection could have been stolen from Ralph and Minnie's son who suffered from mental health issues (UA M. Story-Bates Cards BlogLetter to Caroline Leathwood, 2018). Before his death in 2001, it seems that he had been living within Ralph and Minnie Storey-Bates's home, which presumably he inherited. The house was burgled so often that the fireplace was removed from the wall. At some point, everything from the furniture to the front-door was taken from the home. While the great nephew didn't state that the cards were one of the items taken from the home, this certainly does leave us with a question of what could have caused the postcards to have been sold at shops, which has led to them being spread across the world.

With the amount of information Leathwood has provided and combined with the cards we have transcribed, we decided to do some research into Ralph and Minnie's lives ourselves. This led us to ancestry.com, where we were able to find three family trees pertaining to them and historical documents. We learned that Ralph – whose full name is John Ralph Duckworth – was born on March 4th, 1885 in Haslingden, Lancashire, England. He had six siblings: three brothers and three sisters. His John father worked as a stock and share broker, as well as a brick manufacturer. Ralph worked as a clerk in HM High Court of Justice Division. He married Minnie Storey-Bates August 12th, 1913 at Friarmere, Delph, Yorkshire. Minnie Storey-Bates was born March 5th, 1887 in Manchester, Lancashire, England. She had five siblings: two brothers and three sisters. Her father Thomas worked as a clergyman. Ralph and Minnie Storey-Bates had two children: one daughter and one son. Ralph was also a private in the military from 1914-1920,

and he obtained the British war medal. Minnie Storey-Bates died in 1959 and Ralph Duckworth died in 1960 (Figure 5).

These postcards are an amazing example of how research in an archives can become personal. When we picked our binder, we had no idea how intricate work on this binder would become. These postcard messages and the research that accompanied them revealed a story that outlined their life. To accompany this description we provide a map that outlines locations to where these cards were sent, which continues to tell the personal history that outlined their everyday life. It also shows how these particular postcards were used. I think that within our world of technology we take for granted the immediate contact that we have with our loved ones. At any moment we can pick up a phone, open a computer, or turn on a tablet in order to access an app and be instantly connected with anyone we would like to have a conversation with, be it through video conversation or instant messaging. However, for Ralph Duckworth and Minnie Storey-Bates, if the conversation wasn't in person, their video chats and instant messaging consisted of letters and these amazingly well written and well-preserved postcards.

Emma has created a map that shows where these postcards were sent from and the distance they took to be received:



<https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/0/viewer?mid=1b-29aULy-izLtTHxOBfUPzetG9iuZgWQ&ll=51.776530082418425%2C-1.662999500000069&z=7>

Leathwood has stated that Ralph Duckworth had a great interest in the past (UA M. Story-Bates Cards BlogLetter to Caroline Leathwood, 2018). I like to think he would have been pleased that people are still interested in his and Minnie Storey-Bates postcards.

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