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The Medium and the Message in Early Twentieth Century Postcards Picturing Courtship and Romance

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The Medium and the Message in Early Twentieth Century Postcards Picturing Courtship and Romance

By Rosemary Herbert, *University of Akron*

A thick binder of vintage postcards snares attention as it stands shelved among hundreds of others in the archive at the University of Akron's Cummings Center for the History of Psychology, in Akron, Ohio. It may be fairly said that each of the binders here — that together hold a collection of an estimated 200,000 to 250,000 postcards donated to the university by psychologist David P. Campbell — bears an intriguing label. And, without exception, these labels stimulate speculation. Well might one wonder what kind of fashions will be shown in a binder titled "Hats," what sort of felines may lurk in the "Cats" binder, which establishments may merit a picture on a postcard filed in the volume of "Institutions", or just what a collection of cards categorized as "Leap Year Feminists" will tell us about social history. The binder labeled "Lovers Portrait Vol. I" is no exception in sparking speculation. But this one goes beyond that, as this researcher learned, to arouse expectation. Even before one opens the binder, it is irresistible to assume that this one, among them all, is going to contain sweet "I miss you" missives, delightful details of dates and assignments, and daring declarations of love from one sweetheart to another.

Even a quick perusal — who can resist paging through the images of lovers and their messages in hurried eagerness, before the earnest archiving work begins? — reveals that this binder holding cards mostly from the first two decades of the twentieth century is one that will provide a lesson in letting go of expectations even as it becomes a study in surprises. That's because many who chose to communicate on these postcards depicting lovers in drawing rooms, idyllic parkland settings, and even perched upon the moon itself appear not to be writing to their sweethearts, but to their cousins, Moms, and military pals. Even when lovers do write to their sweethearts, most seem to have taken the advice that was given to George Bernard Shaw's Eliza Doolittle before she attended the races at Ascot: Confine your remarks to the weather and your health. While it is obvious that the postcard, with its written message exposed for anyone to see, was not a private means of communication, this reticence on the part of sweethearts may be further explained by researches into mail carriers' duties, which more than a century ago, often occasioned waiting with mail in hand for the recipient to come to the door.

To be sure, there are some postcards in the Lovers Portrait Vol. 1 binder that express romantic sentiments. These span the gamut from compliments, to longing, humor, and even scorn. But most senders here detail everything from the abovementioned weather and health to travel plans and train arrivals, farm and school activities, local dances and holiday parties, and heartfelt pleas for more news from home.

This is surprising enough to the modern eye, but even more stunning is a card picturing a joke about lovers being “mortgaged” to one another, upon which one woman writes to let her female cousin know about two deaths in the family. The choice of a humorous card about male-female love as the medium for such a news sparks all kinds of speculation: Was this card just ready to hand or did the sender choose it deliberately? While that is a question we cannot answer, we can look into the phenomenon of postcard publishing and find out what led to an explosion of this industry in the United States and elsewhere at the time that this card was written. This and other postcards written by or to cousins also engenders research on family relationships – particularly the marriage of cousins -- in the early 1900s.

The motive for selecting an image of romantic love between a young soldier and a young woman as the medium for a message from a dutiful son to his mother is also something we cannot know. But his earnestness to write the card in time to get it into the mail does spur investigation today into the frequency of mail pickup and delivery in the United States in the early twentieth century.

Whether or not the images and messages are related, again and again, postcard images and captions that so strongly speak to love and courtship call to mind the famous phrase coined by media analyst Marshall McLuhan: “The medium is the message.” McLuhan came up with this notion in his groundbreaking 1964 book, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. Later, he created another landmark volume that literally, in photos and other visual material, illustrates his view that media itself delivers a message, no matter what else it spells out or broadcasts. When that new book was published in 1967, McLuhan welcomed as a happy accident a misprint in the title that changed the phrase to “The Medium is the Massage” because it added another nuance to the notion that media itself has an impact on the person who experiences it.

In this binder of postcards, nuances abound. And the notion that the medium may massage or manipulate the viewer’s emotions seems altogether likely, as is the possibility that at least some of these cards were selected simply

because they were handy, to bear messages having nothing to do with the image on them.

This examination of representative postcards from the Lovers Portrait Vol. 1 volume in the David P. Campbell Postcard Collection will use the postcards dating from the early twentieth century and the messages on them to illuminate facts about postcard production, postal history, family relationships, daily life, fashion strictures, and much more. With each card inspiring a piece of detective work that brings to light a nugget of information about a time gone by, this work also generally represents the kind of curiosities that the collection as a whole brings to light. It is hoped that it will serve as a kind of introduction to The David P. Campbell Postcard Collection for future archivists and scholars.

It may seem more specific to the Lovers Portrait cards to state that with many senders saying nothing about romantic love on postcards depicting it, the question hovers: How much is the medium actually the message, or at least a message that accompanies the mundane or disparate tidings that the senders write? But the question, as other archivists of the broader collection have shown, applies to utterly different topics depicted on postcards, too.

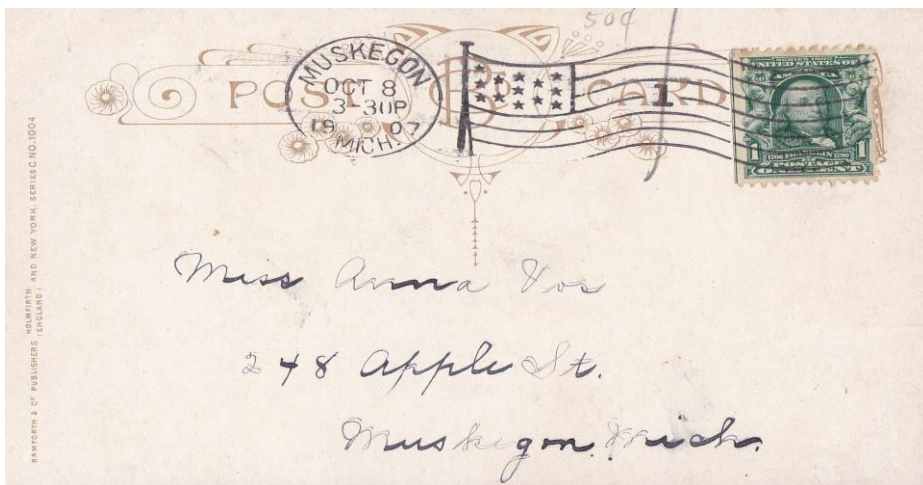
With this in mind, the reader is invited to view 20 representative postcards from the Lovers Portraits Vol. 1 binder along with accompanying commentary. While discovering fascinating facts, here one will also share in the privilege of perusing the words correspondents chose to write more than 100 years ago.

The medium is the message for mystery senders

This examination begins with postcards in our binder that bear no identifying information about the senders. As these cards will show, it is a matter speculation as to why each sender chose not to identify himself or herself.



I'd kiss you if I only had the nerve.

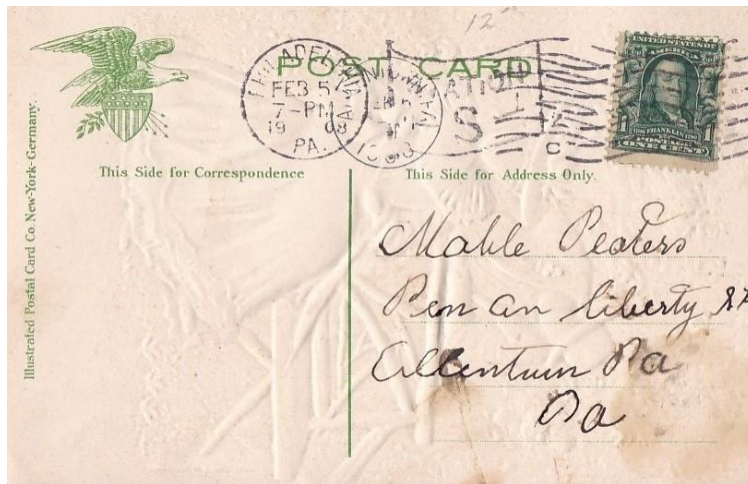
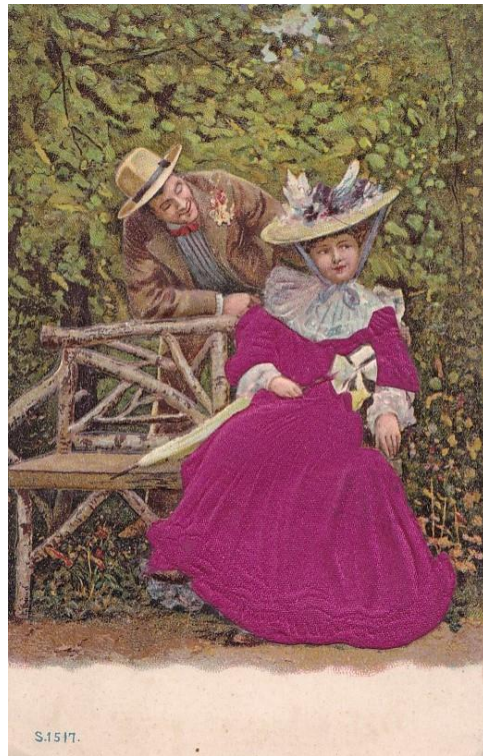


LovPortVI_117

The image on this postcard postmarked 1907 depicts a man with finger to lips as if he's considering what to do as he regards a woman in a loud-patterned dress and hat adorned with flowers. Meanwhile, she sits beside him with eyes closed and hands clasped primly in her lap. The sender appears to let the postcard

caption deliver the message: “I’d kiss you if only I had the nerve.” Adding neither message nor signature, the sender may have enjoyed setting up a guessing game for the recipient — Miss Anna Vos of Muskegon, Michigan — or might have assumed she would recognize the handwriting. Or privacy may have been the most important concern here.

A duty of early letter carriers underlines the fact that at the time this card was posted, postcards were far from a private means of communication, not only because their messages – which were not enclosed in envelopes -- were exposed, but because postmen often had idle moments in which to read them. According to the [United States Postal Service](#), letter carriers at this time hand delivered items to customers, retaining the piece of mail until it could be delivered in person if the customer did not respond to a “knock, ring or whistle” at the first attempt to deliver. Even in 1914, two years after new customers were required to provide a slot or receptacle for mail to be left in and local postmasters and been charged with asking existing customers to do the same, then Postmaster General Daniel C. Roper estimated that a letter carrier spent on average 30 to 60 minutes per day waiting for customers to respond so that mail could be hand delivered. At this time, these postal workers also were expected to walk some 22 miles per day, carrying satchels filled with up to 50 lbs. of mail. With this in mind, it seems postcard writers of the early twentieth century would be aware that even a letter carrier with a literally heavy work load likely had the time to peruse writing that was not enclosed in envelopes. It wasn’t until March 1, 1923 that all customers were required to provide a mail receptacle so that a letter carrier could leave the letter in it without waiting to deliver it in person – and linger to hand it to – the addressee.



LovPortV1-001

The sender of this postcard apparently believes the image of a man smiling as he leans over the shoulder of a woman seated on a garden bench says it all. There is no caption spelling out any sentiment in words. The postcard bears only the address of a woman in Allentown, Pennsylvania,

and is postmarked in 1908. The anonymous sender may have simply been enjoying acting as a secret admirer here. Or privacy may have been the greater concern.

Embossed and featuring a velvet-like texture on the woman's dress, this card was published by the Illustrated Postal Card Company of New York and Germany. Thanks to advances in printing process and the products of luxury paper manufacturers -- *Luxuspapierfabriken* -- Germany had become a major center for postcard publishing beginning in the 1870s, notes [The Postcard Album: Postcard Printer and Publisher Research](#). At this time, growth in the fancy paper trade helped expand a boom in publication and worldwide export of postcards from Germany. "Deluxe Paper" manufactured then, this source says, "covers a wide field of paper articles incl. greeting cards. The major printing process for these goods was chromolithography, colourful [sic.] printed by 12-16 different colour runs, then often embossed, gilded, die-cut etc."

The medium IS the message

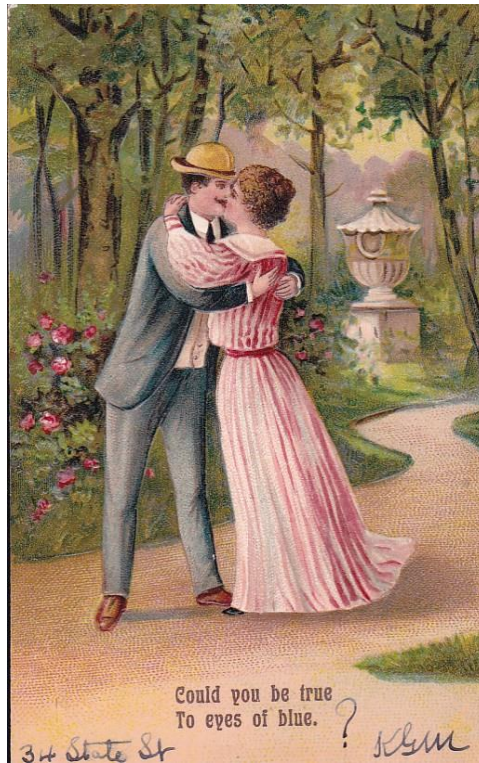
Next, we look at representative cards where the medium *is* the message. Here, the senders allow the images and captions speak for them, adding no additional message and, in some cases, no signature or other information beyond an address.



LovPortV1_32

This postcard sent in 1912 from Geneva, New York, to a woman in the same city has no message except the signature “Charlie.” With its caption CAN I BE YOUR RAIN BEAU? and depicting a couple sitting together in the pouring rain, the card is an example of the use of puns on postcards. This sort of sweet pun was common to Valentines then and to this day. According to the deltiology website, metropostcard.com, the publisher of this postcard specialized in lithographic

postcards in a “Comic Series” and with holiday motifs. The J.J. Marks firm was in business from 1908 to 1912, in New York, N.Y.

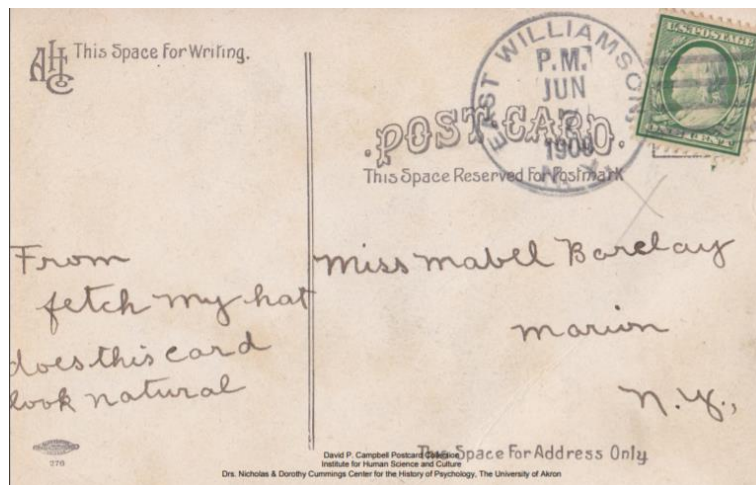


LovPortV1-006

The sender of this postcard adds a question mark after the printed caption: Could you be true To Eyes of blue. Is this a case of copyediting or an attempt to draw an

answer from the object of affection? The fact that a return address and initials are added suggests that an answer would be appreciated. The card was mailed from Newark, New Jersey, to Buffalo, New York, in 1912. This postcard bears no publication information identifying the manufacturer or year of printing, but its caption on the back, comprising the word for “postcard” in nineteen languages including English, is testimony to the world-wide popularity of the medium in the early twentieth century.

On these, the sender underlines -- in the written message or in annotations -- the image, sentiment, and occasionally a caption, on the postcard. Sometimes, such senders seem unconcerned about the fact that the postcard is not a private means of communication.

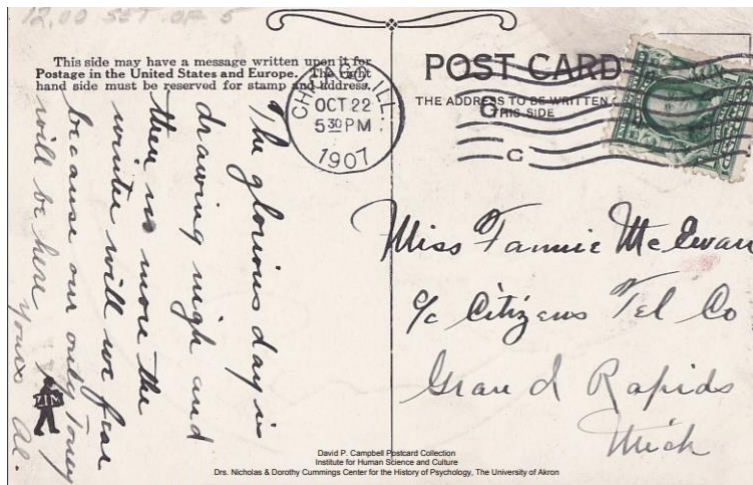


LovPortV1-256

The sender of this postcard, which depicts a man and woman embracing and kissing in a park, asks, “Does this card look natural” and identifies him- or herself as “fetch my hat.” It seems highly likely that the recipient will know who the sender is, while others who may see the postcard and its message may not. The

lack of punctuation and capitalization in a handwritten message is common to many of the postcards written at this time.

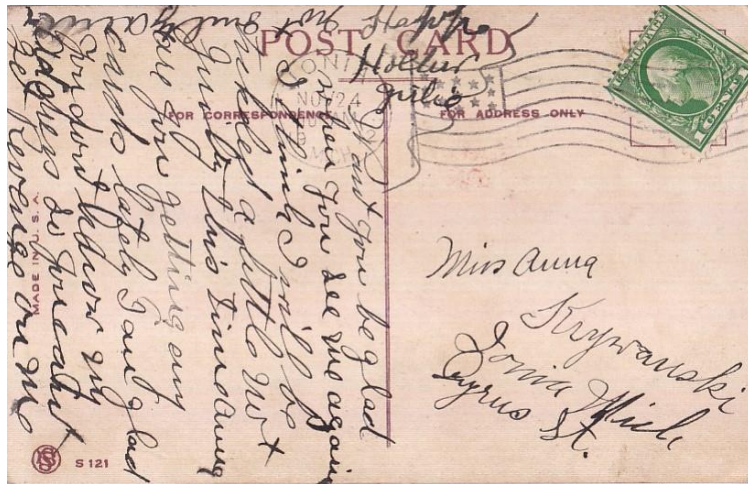
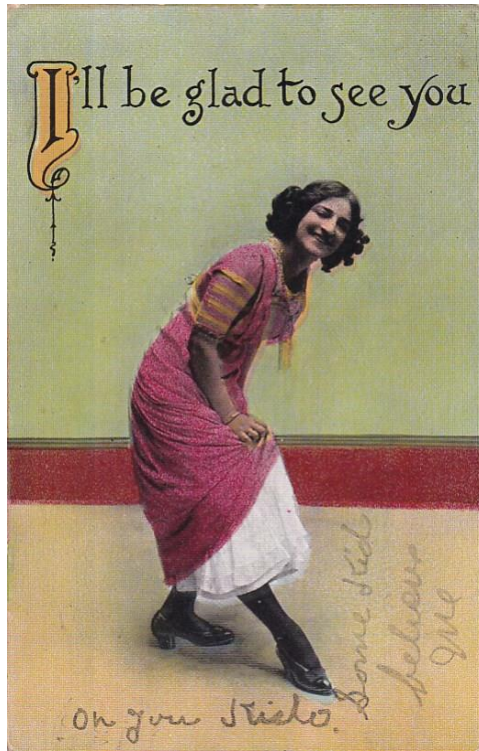
A logo on the back of this card points to a workers' union. In a long oval motif, it reads: "ALLIED PRINTING TRADES COUNCIL CHICAGO." In the center of the device are printed the words "UNION LABEL". This trade union is still in existence, and according to the [Union & Trade Services Department of the AFL-CIO](#), currently "is made up of Printing, Publishing and Media Workers Sector (PPMWS) of the Communications Workers of America and the Graphics Communications Conference (GCC), a division of the Brotherhood of Teamsters." Then as now, the union logo, which the trades council refers to as a "bug," named the city where the item was published.



LovPortV1_005

Not all lovers are shy or concerned about privacy, as this postcard addressed to a Grand Rapids, Michigan, woman in care of a telephone company — might this be her workplace? — proves. Here a man called Al celebrates his love and eagerness for his Touey to join him: “The glorious day is drawing nigh,”

Al writes, “and then no more the winter will we fear because Touey will be here.” This humorous cartoon card, picturing a couple perched on a sliver of Old Man Moon, with that celestial body smiling sarcastically at the pair, bears the title “MOONING” and the cautionary caption. “Don’t believe him, Miss, its all Moonshine!” But Al annotates the image to ensure that the recipient, Miss Fannie McEwan, has doubt about his truthfulness, writing: “I ain’t a fooling Miss it is not Moonshine with Touey and Yours Truly AL”. The postcard sent in 1907 from Chicago, Illinois, is a colorful example of the cartoon postcard. This was just one style of illustration that postcards featured during what is known as The Golden Age of Postcards in America, which began in the United States in that year. The card is particularly amusing because although it bears a cautionary caption, the writer has thrown all caution to the winds in his effusive message and annotations.



LovPortV1_052

This postcard depicting a woman lifting her long skirt to reveal her petticoat and ankle may have been considered mildly risqué in 1912. That's because, although they were easing at this point, the moral strictures that had been reflected in the accepted fashion code of the Victorian Age still held considerable sway in the first years of the new century. At their height, those strictures made

the baring of most female body parts, including the ankle, taboo to the point of indecency. As is noted in an article titled, ["The Fetishization and Objectification of the Female Body in Victorian Culture."](#) "Certainly the strict dress codes of the time [Victorian Age] denote that female legs and ankles remain covered under swathes of fabric and to bear them is considered wholly indecent." The end of the Victorian Age was marked by the death of Britain's Queen Victoria in 1901, but the changes in attitude and fashion were only gradual after that.

The caption on this card, "I'll be glad to see you" delivers a double entendre, while the sender's annotation on the front of this card seems to underline a saucy intent: "Oh you [illegible]. Some Kid believe me" it reads. The theme of "seeing" one another is continued in the sender's high-spirited message on the back: "Won't you be glad when you see me again I think I will be tickled a little not guilty this time Anna are you getting any cards lately I am glad you don't know my address so you cant get Revenge on me not guilty Anna Happy Hollier girlie".

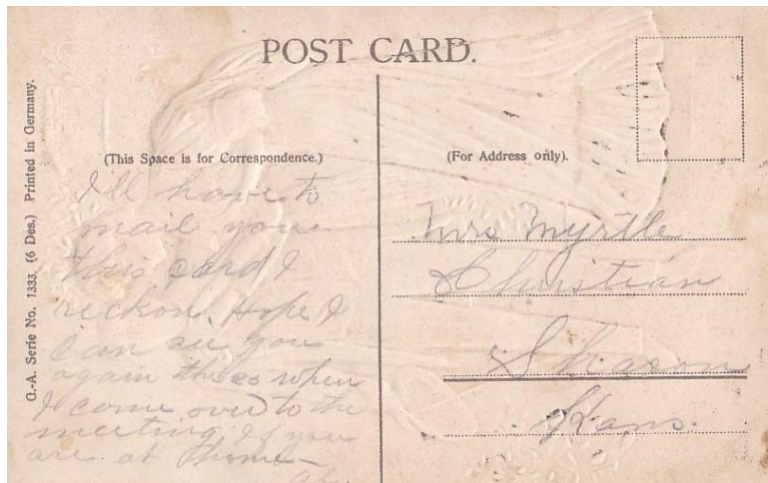


LovPortV1_105

This photo postcard captioned “I WOULD SHARE EVERYTHING I HAVE WITH YOU” and showing a man and woman on their knees apparently biting into the same cookie, or perhaps positioned tongue-to-tongue, is among the most suggestive in this binder. In the message penned on the back, sender J.T. tries to impress his sweetheart with his industriousness, then asks, “Please answer with

a long letter. You know the kind. Lots of love, J.T.” This postcard was mailed from Kokomo, Indiana, to Alexandria in the same state in 1916, at a time when the heyday of postcard publishing in the United States was drawing to an end.

“Until 1915, German printers had dominated the market in postcard publishing,” [The Smithsonian Institution](#) reports. But with the advent of World War I, American printers, who lacked the technology that German printers possessed, produced the bulk of postcards available in the U.S. With quality down, the craze for postcard collecting also diminished. This postcard, with a far-from-sharp black-and-white photo, may well be an example of the poorer printing quality for postcards at this time.



LovPortV1_002

A sender called Al may or may not be underlining the caption on this card that says, “When we are married, What will you do.” Writing to Mrs. Myrtle Christian, who presumably is or had been married (perhaps even to Al), he says “I’ll have to mail you this card I reckon.” But unless it was placed in an envelope,

this card without stamp or postcard appears never to have traveled through the post. Meanwhile, is Al's "I'll have to mail you this card" indicating that it's the only card he has ready to hand, or does he mean that the card with its portrait of lovers in a garden and words about impending marriage demanded to be selected for her? The remainder of his message, like countless others on postcards of the time, suggests a time for sender and recipient to meet and is not signed with an endearment.

It is important for viewers of cards like this one to remember that assumptions are not facts. While the image on this card leads us to think that the sender is a man writing to his sweetheart, it could be a fellow writing to a friend or relative, even his mother. Even when the choice of the postcard is mentioned, it can still be unclear if the image and caption on it are intended to say anything for the sender.



LovePortV1_077

On a card bearing the caption “Dear, let me keep this pretty flower In memory of this happy hour” a man named Frank delivers his plea to his “Dear friend Genevieve”: “I want some one to love me and i want some one to call me Dear do you think you could.” Frank’s poor handwriting and spelling contrast with

the elegance of the couple depicted in fancy dress before a piano, but the sentiment is no less earnest. The card was sent from Ilion, New York, to Utica, New York, in 1911.

The medium contrasts with the message

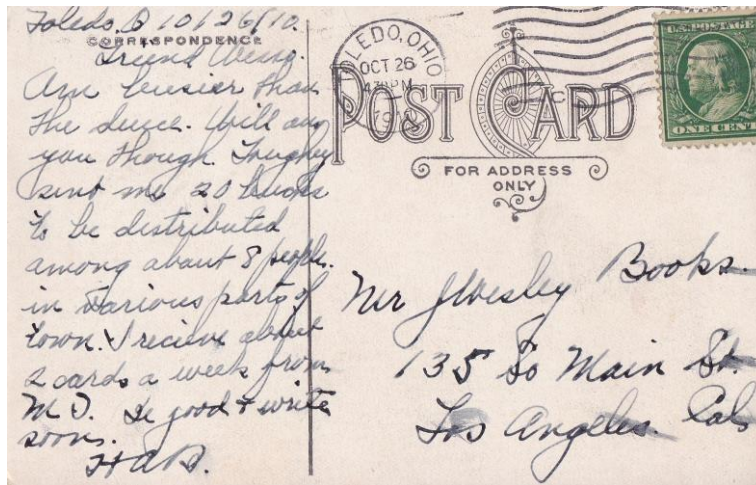
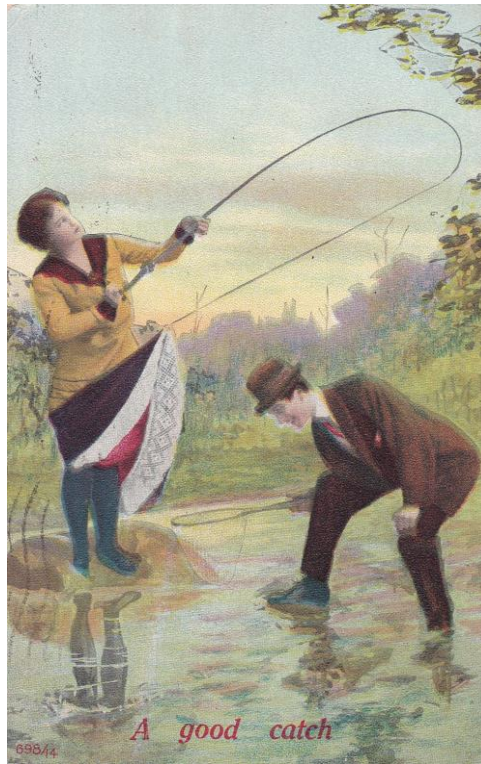
Numerous postcards in our collection bear high-flown images of romance, although the messages written on them are utterly down to earth. In many cases, they offer mundane reports, which also provide a window on daily life in early twentieth-century America. Some, like the next postcard discussed here, deliver sad and even shocking news.



LovPortVol1_097

This postcard has to be the most outstanding example in our binder of the disconnect between the medium and the message. It is also an example of a card sent from one cousin to another, more about which will be discussed later in this paper.

Here, the contrast between the joke and courtship image on the card's picture side and the message it carries is so great as to be shocking, even more than 100 years after it was written and sent. That's because, on a card depicting a couple embracing and kissing and bearing the caption, "We're Mortgaged to Each Other," the female sender lets her cousin, another woman, know: I suppose you will be surprised to hear my father has been dead and Buried since the 4 of August.... Poor Patsy got killed by the train nobody knows how". One can hardly fathom how a card with a humorous image about male-female courtship, and in the utterly public postcard format, would be chosen to bear such dreadful news. Is it fair to speculate that in this case the card was the only one readily available to the sender? If so, then this example does help to underline the impression gleaned elsewhere in this collection that people often picked up whatever postcards they could find, without considering whether or not the image, caption, theme, or tone of the picture side had anything to do with their messages. This example is wake-up call to the archivist and scholar to guard against assumptions about the meaningfulness -- or lack of it -- of postcard images.

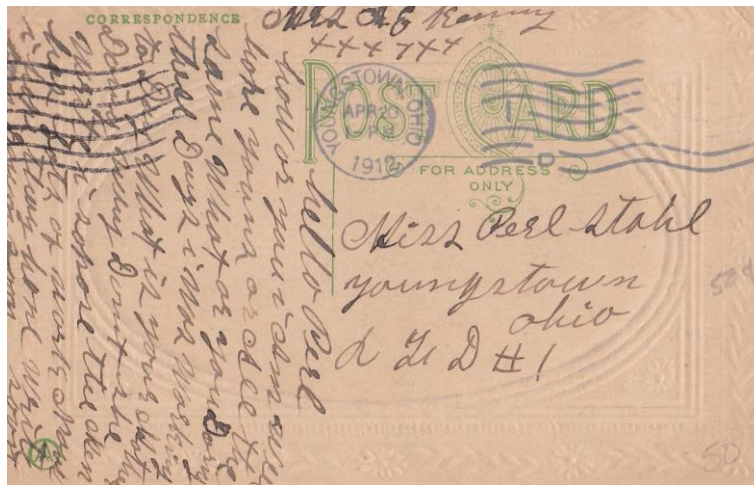
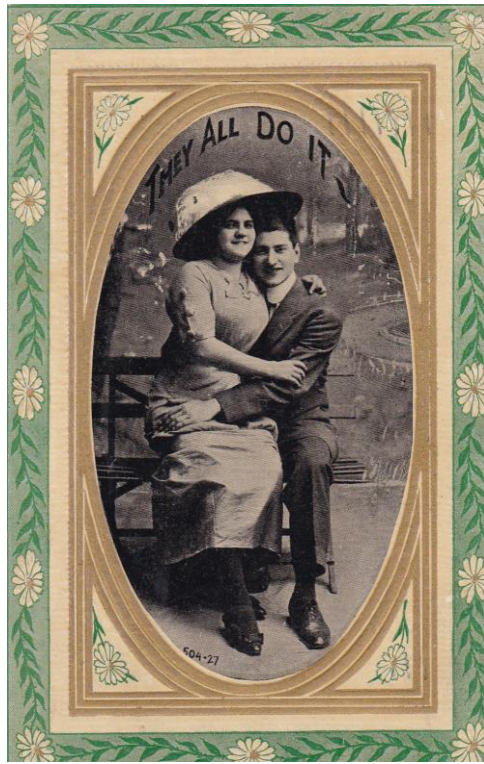


LovPortV1_100

Here, the sender from Toledo, Ohio, chooses a humorous card as the medium for a message sent to a Los Angeles man about being “busier than the deuce” upon receiving “20 lemons to be distributed among about 8 people in various parts of town.” The message seems unrelated to the postcard’s image,

which shows a woman casting a fishing line which, caught in her hem, lifts her skirt and petticoat to reveal her stocking-covered legs. A man dressed in a suit, tie, and hat, holds a fishing net while he wades in the fishing stream and gazes at a reflection in the water of the woman's legs. Sent in 1910 to Mr. Wesley Brooks of Los Angeles, California, by a person who signs the card "HAD", this postcard bears the caption, "A good catch".

This card, like most in this binder, features what is called a split back. According to [The Smithsonian Institution](#), The Golden Age of Postcards in the United States began in 1907, when the Postmaster-General issued an order "granting privileges to privately produced postcards that were already granted in international mail" and another order that "ushered in the Divided Back Period, which spans 1907 to 1915." The divided back provided space for message and address on one side of the card.



LovPortV1_067

Likely unintentionally, the caption on this card — “THEY ALL DO IT”— is echoed in a writer named Kenny’s message all about “Doing” things. Amusingly, in a message where, in general, uppercase letters are absent, the word “Doing” is always given an uppercase “D” as are all words that begin with that

letter. “hello Perl,” Kenny begins. “how ar you I am well hope yours ar all the same What ar you Doing these Days What is your Mother Doing Why Don’t she write.” While the postcard’s printed caption and image suggest lovers like to sit close to one another or that men and women are all apt to fall in love — “THEY ALL DO IT” — the message talks about mundane doings, even of the recipient’s mother, apparently having nothing to do with courtship. Therefore, Kenny’s message underlines the “DO IT” aspect of the caption, but not in the romantic department. Kenny does sign his name following several x’s representing kisses, however. Kenny mailed his card in 1912 from Youngstown, Ohio, to Miss Perl Stahl, whose address is in the same city.



LovPortV1_131

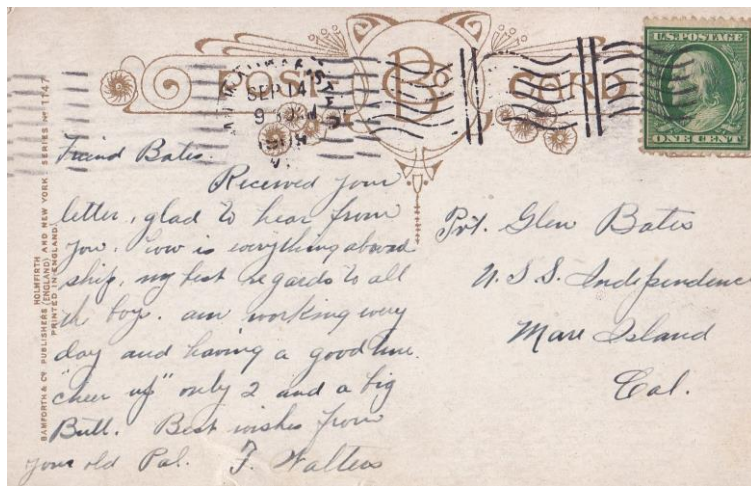
This unusual postcard shows a man ravishing a woman (bending her backward) in a field, with the caption “WILL YOU BE GOOD NOW?” But the message is from a woman named Hilda to her female friend Ivy about working outdoors, husking corn, rainy weather, and plans for “halloween” night

shenanigans. The notion of the vampire leaps to mind when one looks at the image. Could this inform sender's choice of the card for message about Halloween?

The window that this missive provides on harvest time and work and leisure pursuits in Indiana in the second decade of the 1900's is a delightful aspect of this card, as is the writer's characterization of a man, perhaps the recipient's husband, here: "why don't you come down and get your old rooster to bring you..."

The border on this postcard is notable for its lack of connection to the rural, hayfield image: It depicts a pattern of coral and seashells. According to [The Smithsonian Institution](#), postcards with white borders were common on cards published in the United States during World War I and through 1930, because they saved ink in the printing. However, this one has a colored printed border that would obviously not have save ink and is used to ornament and frame the card's central image. It is only known from a postmark lacking its last digit that this card was sent between 1910 and 1919.

The publisher, identified from the logo printed on the back of an intertwined S and B as Samson Brothers of New York, N.Y., was in business from 1909-1919, the deltiology site, metropostcard.com, states. The company was known for cards depicting "blacks, romance, greetings, holiday cards and humor," this source says.



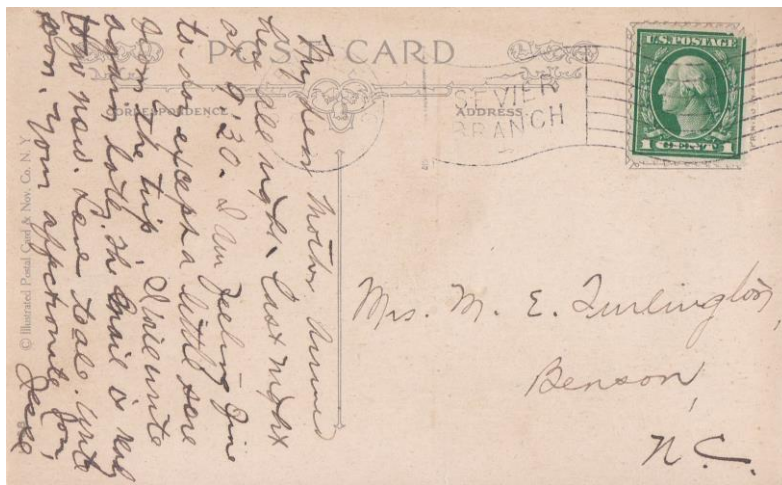
LovPortV1_099

A sender who signs the card "your old Pal F. Walters" chooses this card depicting a man and a woman embracing and kissing under moonlight on a bridge, and featuring the caption, "A Bridge game," to write to Pvt. Glen Bates, who is aboard ship at Mare Island in California. Underlining the fact that Walters sees

Bates as a friend, the “old Pal” even begins the card with the salutation, “Friend Bates.” It is tempting to assume that that this communication is from one man to another, but it is wise to remember that it is possible that a woman concerned about privacy may have penned this card to Pvt. Bates. Whether the card was sent from one male friend to another, or from a woman to a man, the selection of the image of romantic love may have been significant or possibly only reflects the fact that the card was ready to hand.

It’s no accident that this card published by Bamforth & Co. of Holmfirth in West Yorkshire, England, features a pun about the “game” of love. According to [Collectors Weekly](#), Bamforth and Company went on to produce saucy postcards, notably of seaside scenes, with “zinger” wording which, viewed with the image, would deliver “a smile — or a guffaw.”

“Collector’s Weekly” goes on to say, “In 1910, the British publishing company Bamforth & Co. Ltd. capitalized on the popularity of coastal towns as the locale for daytrips and vacations. These postcards, sold in tourist boutiques at the beach, feature a risqué joke or double entendre. Seaside postcards exploded in popularity in the 1930s and remained popular as swimsuits got smaller and smaller into the 1970s. An ever-popular gag in Bamforth cards shows a comic situation caused by a man ogling a woman’s breast or butt.”



LovPortV1_122

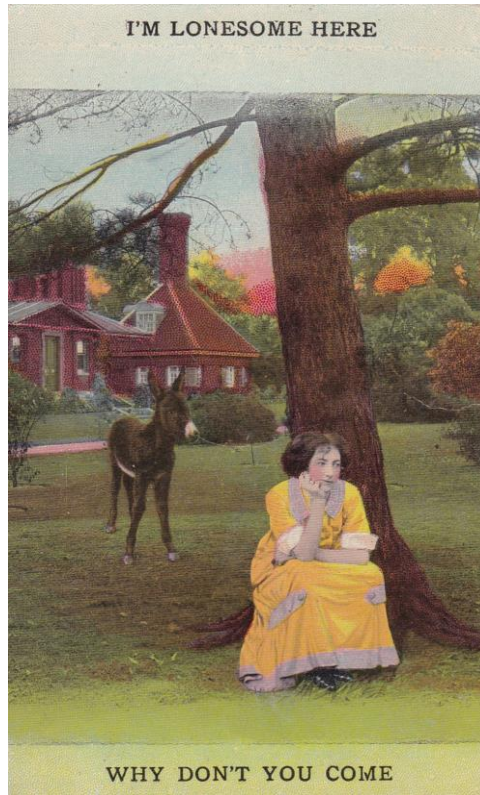
To let his “dear Mother” know he has arrived at his destination safely but “a little sore from the trip,” a dutiful “affectionate” son chooses a postcard sporting an image of a young soldier about to kiss the cheek of his young sweetheart. The card also features the caption, “PARTING IS SUCH SWEET SORROW.” The

sender, Jesse, here gives us a window into a time when communication depended on the mail. “I’ll write again later,” Jesse writes. “The mail is ready to go now.”

Written by a loving son, the image of young lovers on this postcard nevertheless seems, to the modern viewer, an unusual choice for a son to send to his mother. Is it possible that the card was all he had ready to hand in time to put in the outgoing mail? We cannot know why he chose a card with this image, but we can speculate that the caption would have been meaningful to mother and son. What is certain from this card’s message is that, for Jesse, getting one piece of mail sent in a mail pickup might still allow him to send a second missive off later in the same day. And given that, according to a deltiology website, metropostcard.com, “In the first half of the 20th century it was not uncommon in many communities to have two mail deliveries a day” Jesse’s mom might have more than one opportunity to receive it.

Medium contrasts with words of warning – or scorn

Some of the most attention-getting postcards in the Lovers Portrait Vol. 1 binder display high emotion in senders’ messages. And while some do express love and affection, others, including the following examples, deliver words of warning or scorn.

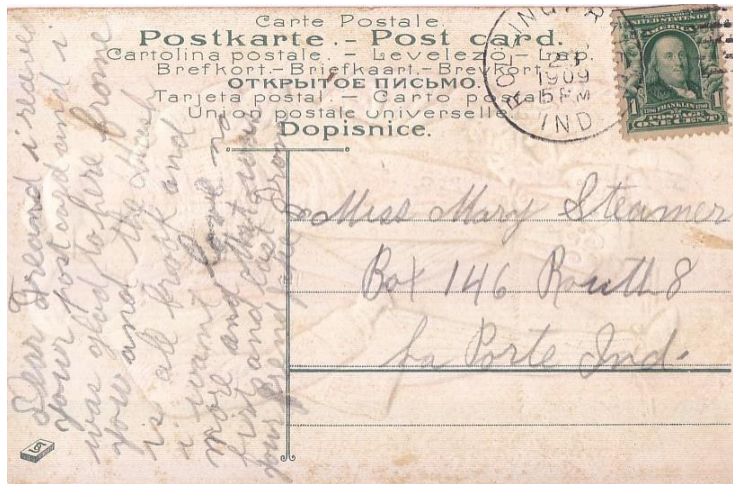


LovPortV1_070

Frequency of mail delivery in the early twentieth century is clear in the message on this card, as sender Catherine apparently entertains the notion that the card with its scolding words will arrive before she does “in a few more hours”.

This postcard showing a woman sitting beneath a tree, with a many-chimneyed house and a donkey in the background is captioned “I’M LONESOME HERE WHY DON’T YOU COME”. Catherine’s message on it indicates she is keen to get home to the recipient she calls “Chicken.” But apparently, some reprimanding is in store. “I didnt get the letter I expected so you will get it good and hard when I see you next,” Catherine warns.

Postmarked at 6 p.m., at Vandalia, Michigan, on July 31, 1913, and addressed to a recipient in Niles, Michigan, about 20 miles away, this card may reasonably have been expected to be delivered that same evening. That’s because, according to the [United States Postal Service](#), “letter carriers were encouraged to deliver mail frequently and promptly — generally twice a day to homes and up to four times a day to businesses.” The letter carriers typically worked nine to eleven hours a day. Although, in 1888, Congress decreed that eight hours constituted a work day, the 40-hour work week itself was not instituted until 1935. At least, as of 1888, letter carriers who worked more than eight hours a day received extra pay for the additional hours. It was not until 1950 that the second residential delivery was discontinued in most cities. Additional deliveries to businesses were later phased out.



LovPortV1_035

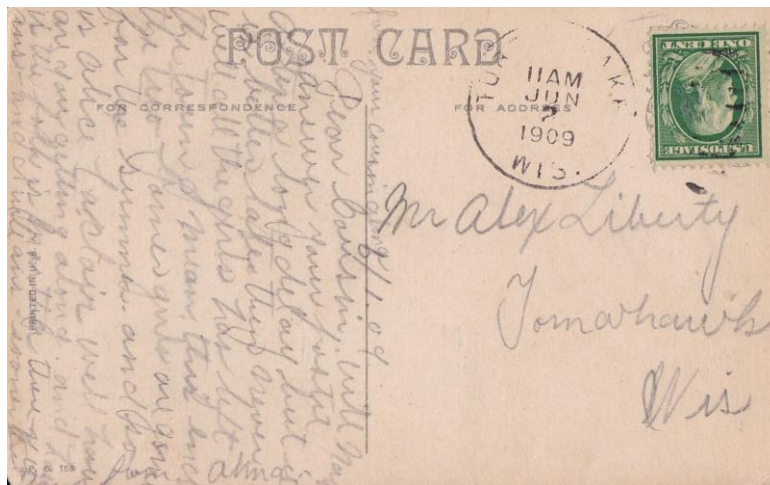
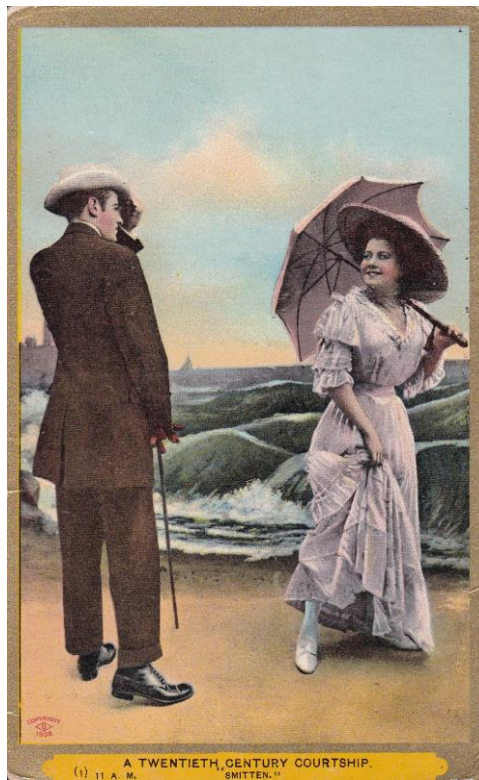
This postcard proves that the medium can provide a sarcastic, even painful, contrast with the message. For his agitated message about the end of affection, one man in Indiana in 1909 chooses a postcard picturing a couple holding hands and the caption, “Where so e’er I am, below, or else above you, Where so e’er you are, my heart shall truly love you.” The sender writes, “Dear Freand I received your

postcard and I was glad to here frome you and the Mash is all brook [broke?] and I want love no more and that was first and last from your frend Jake.” This message also betrays Jake’s frustration in what appears to be an agitated scrawl. Is this a lover spurned? Or is he doing the spurning?

A printer’s device on the back points to this postcard being published in Berlin, Germany, by the Otto Schloss company, a large manufacturer that used the chromolithography process and was also in the paper wholesaling business. According to Metropostcard.com, the company, which was founded by Otto and Frieda Schloss, was in business from the 1890’s to 1920.

Courtship images, cousins’ correspondence

The postcards in our binder include many sent from cousin to cousin, with messages varying from the mundane to stirring, and their tones ranging from newsy to affectionate. Some stir speculation about how common romantic relationships and marriage among cousins had been in the early twentieth century.



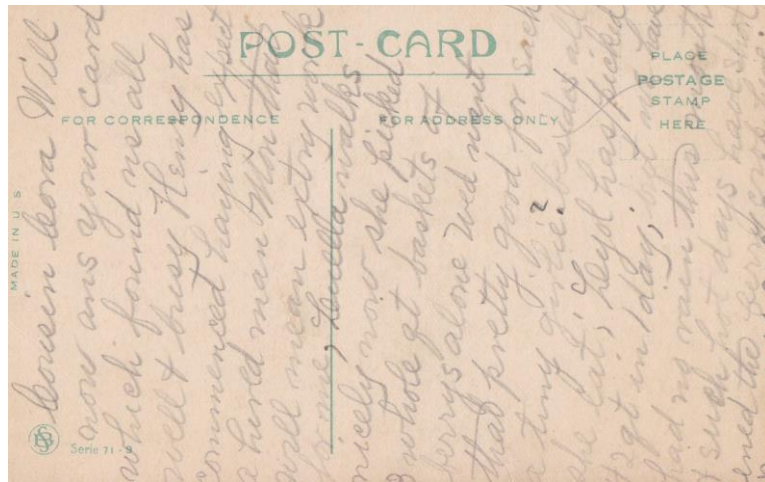
LovPortV1_075

This is one of several postcards in our Lovers Portraits Vol. 1 binder that are sent from cousin to cousin. This postcard pictures a woman beside crashing waves at the seaside lifting her dress to show her ankle to a man who tips his hat at her. Captioned “A TWENTIETH CENTURY COURTSHIP ‘SMITTEN’” it

carries the female sender's message (and double signature) to her male cousin: "Dear Cousin. Will now answer your postit after a long delay but it is better later than never well all the girls has left town I mean this end the two Garner girls are gone for the summer. and so is Alice Laclair well how are you getting along and how is the folk is [illegible] there you ans — and I will ans – sooner [illegible] from Alma from your cousin Alma 6/1.04"

With local news and the "better later than never" cliché, this message seems anything but definitely connected to the image of flirtation and ogling that adorn the picture side of the card. As we have seen with a son and his mother, postcard writers of a century ago did use cards showing images of romance and courtship to carry messages to relatives who are likely not their lovers.

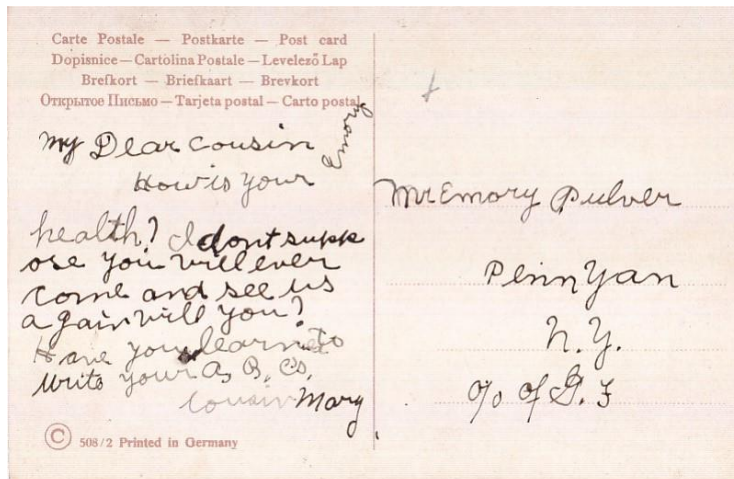
But, with cousins, is this necessarily the case? According to the [New York Times](#), "Historically, marriage between cousins has been seen as desirable in many parts of the world, and even today, slightly more than 10 percent of marriages worldwide are between people who are second cousins or closer." According to KC and Christie Smith, writing for the cousins' advocacy website, [cousincouples.com](#), first cousin marriages are currently allowed in 26 of the United States and "It is estimated that 20 percent of couples all worldwide are cousins." Notable people who married their first cousins who married include Albert Einstein and Charles Darwin.



LovPortV1_129

This postcard from one cousin to another depicts a rustic scene in which a man lighting his cigarette has his watch picked from his pocket by a woman. The cautionary caption with its double entendre – “SHE HAS SUCH TAKING WAYS” – may draw a chuckle. The unidentified sender’s message covers the

entire back of postcard and offers a window on daily life in rural America. "Cousin Cora," the writer begins. "Will now ans your card which found us all well and busy Henry has commenced haying expect a hired man Mon that will mean extra work for me, Luella walks nicely now she picked 3 whole qt baskets of Berry's alone Wed wsnt that pretty good for such a tiny girlie? Besides all she eat; Loyola has picked 42 qt in 1 day; but as we have had no rain this month and so few hot days have shortened the berry crop here. Beware of Pick Pockets Cora". The unsigned card has neither stamp nor postmark.



LovPortV1_031

This postcard is another that begs the question of whether a female cousin intentionally chose an image of courtship and kissing for her male cousin, or whether it was just a conveniently available card. Here a sailor leans through an open window to kiss a young woman. The writer does seem eager to see her relative. “My Dear Cousin Emory”, she writes. “How’s your health? I dont

suppose you will ever come and see us again will you? Have you learned to write you're A, B, Cs. Cousin Mary The recipient is Mr. Emory Pulver, of Penn Yan, New York. But was this card ever sent? Did Mary think better of mailing the image of sweethearts to her cousin? Was the card delivered in person, without a letter carrier go-between? We cannot answer these questions, but we can see that the card bears no stamp and no postmark.

Conclusion

A study of the Lovers Portrait Vol. 1 binder in the David P. Campbell Postcard Collection at the University of Akron's Cummings Center for the History of Psychology is a lesson in letting go of assumptions and a spark for speculations that lead to research into facts and curiosities in early twentieth-century American life. In this regard, this binder may be seen as representative of the broader collection. Overall, the images on these postcards neither predict the content or tone of the messages written upon them, nor make clear the emotional roles of the recipients in the lives of the senders. They raise the question about how much the medium in itself delivers a message – but they do not answer that question. They do hint at the history of postal delivery, provide details of daily life, demonstrate the poor writing skills of many senders, and tell us much about fashion, publishing history, and the preoccupations of senders. Throughout the work of archiving these postcards and the messages that they carry, it is a privilege to be given a window into the personal lives of people who penned messages ranging from the high-flown to the mundane more than a century ago.

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