

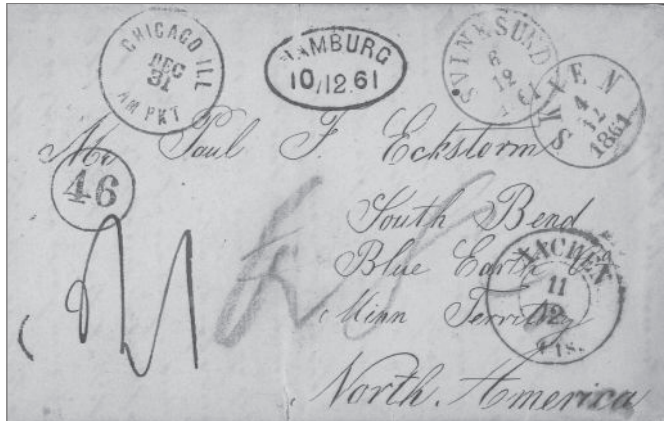
James R. Miller

Philatelic Genealogy in Minnesota: An Introduction



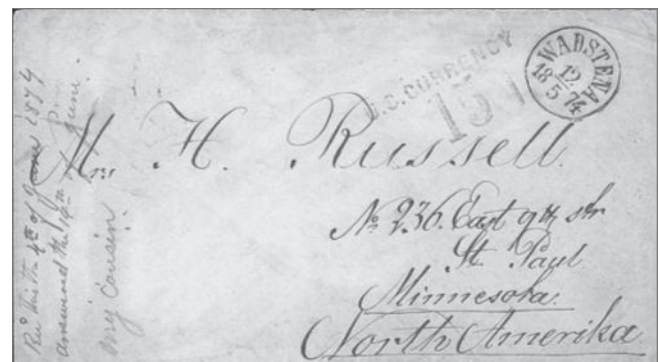
Old envelopes and postcards in postal history collections are a source of genealogical information.¹ This paper presents thirteen old envelopes and postcards sent to or from Minnesota that offer key genealogical data on the sender and/or recipient. These and other images are viewable on the Philatelic Genealogy website and database <<http://philgen.org>>. Launched in March 2009, the goals for the website are to build a digital archives of envelope and postcard images with genealogical value and to promote exchanges between postal history collectors and genealogists. The site material has grown to more than 1,100 envelopes and postcards. Every item includes an image, used with the owner's permission, and U.S. census or similar details about the sender and/or addressee. The website at present has 34 letters and/or postcards sent to, or from, Minnesota.

Finding a European immigrant's birthplace can be difficult. A return address or a postmark can provide a clue. For example, Paul F. Eckstorm of South Bend, Blue Earth County, Minnesota, received an envelope from Skien, Norway, postmarked on 4 December 1861. [Fig. 1] The 1860 U.S. census reports a P. F. Exckstorm, from Norway, living in South Bend.² By 1870, P.



F. Eckstorm, with four children born in Minnesota, had re-located to Chicago, Illinois.³ *A History of the Norwegians of Illinois* states that Paul F. Eckstrom was born in Skien, Norway.⁴ The envelope's postmark by itself could have been a starting point to search for Paul F. Eckstorm's birthplace and parents in Norway.

Mrs. H. Russell of Saint Paul received an envelope from Wadstena (now Vadstena), Sweden, postmarked on 12 May 1874. [Fig. 2] A Matilda Russel, from Sweden, was living in Saint Paul at the time of the 1880 U.S. census, with an address matching the street address on the envelope.⁵ Matilda (apparently Mrs. Henry) Russell, from Sweden, was enumerated in Saint Paul in the 1860 U. S. census.⁶ "My cousin" is written on the envelope, which suggests that Matilda's cousin was living in or near Vadstena. With the additional information of Matilda Russell's maiden name, a search could be started in the Vadstena area for her birth information.



1. James R. Miller, "Philatelic Genealogy: Old Envelopes, Postcards, and Immigrant Origins," *New England Ancestors* 10:2 (2009), 37-8, available online at <http://philgen.org> (click on NEA article in Main Menu); and "Philatelic Genealogy Update: An Initial Assessment of the Genealogical Value of Old Envelopes and Postcards," *American Ancestors* 11:1 (2010), 45.

2. 1860 U.S. census, Blue Earth County, Minnesota, population schedule, South Bend, p. 55, P. F. Exckstorm, National Archives microfilm publication [hereafter cited as NARA microfilm] M653, roll 567; digital images on the Ancestry.com website, <http://www.ancestry.com> [hereafter cited as Ancestry.com].

3. 1870 U.S. census, Cook County, Illinois, population schedule, Ward 15 Chicago, pages 118-19, P. F. Eckstorm, NARA microfilm M593, roll 208; digital images on Ancestry.com.

4. A. E. Strand, *A History of the Norwegians of Illinois*, (Chicago: John Anderson Pub. Co., 1905), 185.

5. 1880 U.S. census, Ramsey County, Minnesota, population schedule, Saint Paul, Enumeration District [hereafter cited ED] 17, p. 43, Russel household, NARA microfilm T9, roll 631; digital images on Ancestry.com.

6. 1860 U.S. census, Ramsey County, Minnesota, population schedule, Ward 1 Saint Paul, p. 18, Henry Russell household, NARA microfilm M653, roll 573; digital images on Ancestry.com.

Figure 1. 1874 stampless envelope from Wadstena (or Vadstena), Sweden to Saint Paul, Minnesota, with note "My cousin." (Image courtesy of Schuyler Rumsey Philatelic Auctions, Sale 27, Lot 93.)

Figure 2. 1861 stampless envelope sent from Skien, Norway, to South Bend, Minnesota. (Image courtesy of Robert A. Siegel Auction Galleries, Sale 939, Lot 11.)

Following arrival in the U. S., immigrants and their children continued to correspond with family members in their home country. August Elsner, a teacher (“Lehrer”) in Frain, Austria, received a postcard from “Frankel,” postmarked 1 August 1913 in Minneapolis, Minnesota. [Fig. 3] A Frank C. Elsner from Austria was in Minneapolis in the 1920 U.S. census.⁷ The postcard text opens with “Liebe Bruder” (Dear Brother) indicating that the writer was corresponding with his family.

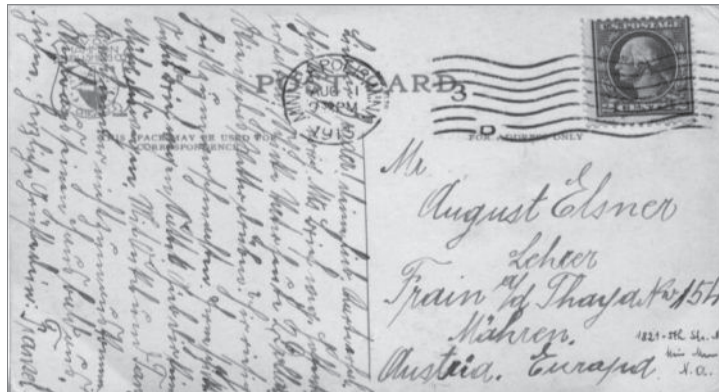
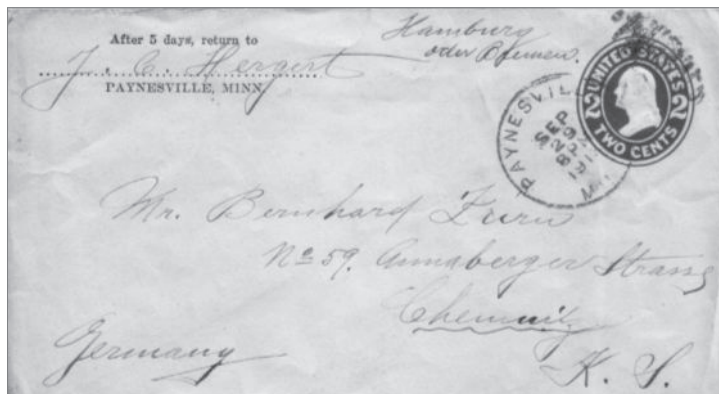


Figure 3. 1913 postcard from Minneapolis, Minnesota, to Frain, Moravia, Austria, that begins “Lieber Bruder” (Dear Brother). (Image courtesy of Jim Forte Postal History.)

J. C. Hergert of Paynesville, Minnesota, wrote to Bernhard Zurn in Chemnitz, Germany, 29 September 1913. [Fig. 4] A Julius C. Hergert from Germany, with wife Emily, was in Saint Paul at the time of the 1910 U.S. census.⁸ A Julius C. and Emily Hergert applied for a U.S. passport in San Francisco, California, in 1922. They stated that they had lived in Minnesota and that Julius was born in Saxony, Germany, the German state in which Chemnitz is located.⁹

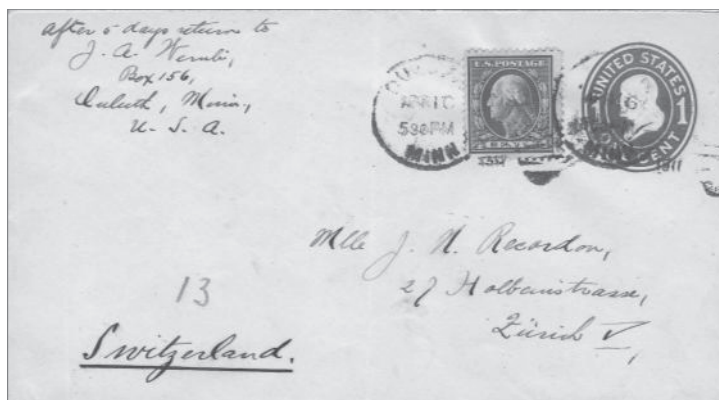


7. 1920 U.S. census, Hennepin County, Minnesota, population schedule, Ward 3 Minneapolis, ED 58, p. 27B, Frank C. Elsner, NARA microfilm T625, roll 833; digital images on Ancestry.com.

Figure 4. 1913 envelope from Paynesville, Minnesota, to Chemnitz, Germany, by persons with the same family name. (Image courtesy of Jim Forte Postal History.)

8. 1910 U.S. census, Ramsey County, Minnesota, population schedule, Ward 6 Saint Paul, ED 78, p. 2B, Julius Hergert, NARA microfilm publication T624, roll 719; digital images on Ancestry.com.

J. A. Wernli of Duluth wrote to Mlle. J. N. Recordon of Zurich, Switzerland, on 10 April 1911. [Fig. 5] We find a Jacob Wernli from Switzerland in Duluth in the 1905 Minnesota state census.¹¹ The names and addresses on these envelopes are potential starting points in searching for the family connections of August Elsner, Julius C. Hergert, and Jacob Wernli in Europe.



9. Passport application of Julius Hergert, number 122,770, issue date 2 March 1922, San Francisco, California, NARA microfilm M1490, roll 1843, digital images in the “U.S. Passport Applications, 1795-1925” on Ancestry.com.

10. “Mlle.” is the abbreviation for the French Mademoiselle, which means “Miss.”

11. 1905 Minnesota state census, Saint Louis County, population schedule, Duluth ward 4, ED 8, p. 20, Jacob Wernli, Minnesota State Archives Microfilm, roll 155, digital images on Ancestry.com.

Figure 5. 1911 envelope from Duluth, Minnesota, to Zurich, Switzerland. (Image courtesy of Robert A. Siegel Auction Galleries, Sale 950, Lot 2378.)

Some envelopes have a sender and an addressee with the same family name, increasing the likelihood of a family connection between the two. Ragnhild Brandrup of Minneapolis, Minnesota, wrote to Ernst Brandrup in Nyborg, Denmark, in 1928. [Fig. 6] A Ragnhild Brandrup from Denmark was enumerated in Minneapolis in the 1930 U.S. census.¹²

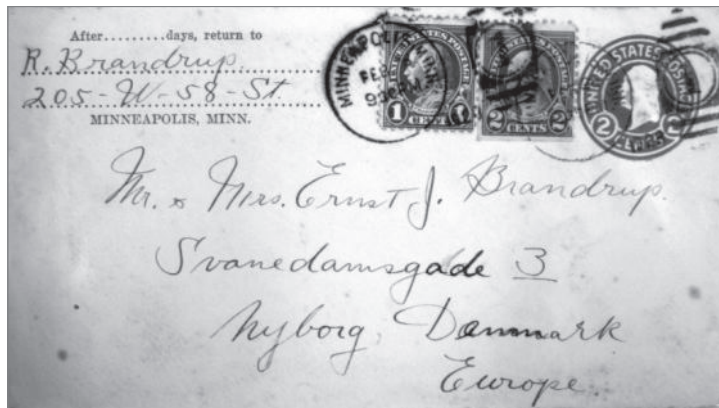
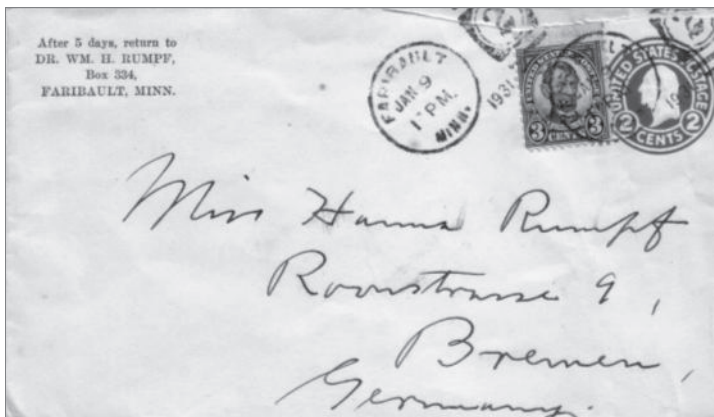


Figure 6. Circa 1928 envelope from Minneapolis, Minnesota, to Nyborg, Denmark. (Image courtesy of Fyns Frimaerke Service.)

Dr. Wm. H. Rumpf of Faribault, Minnesota, wrote to Hanna Rumpf in Bremen, Germany, in 1931. [Fig. 7] A William H. Rumpf, a physician with parents from Germany, is found in Faribault in the 1930 U.S. census.¹³



12. 1930 U.S. census, Hennepin County, Minnesota, population schedule, Minneapolis, ward 12, ED 27-218, p. 23A, NARA micropublication T626, roll 1097; digital images on Ancestry.com.

Figure 7. 1931 envelope from Faribault, Minnesota, to Bremen, Germany, by persons with same family name. (Image courtesy of Jim Forte Postal History.)

Otto Rubischum of Woodstock, Minnesota, wrote to L. Rubischum in Bussnang, Switzerland, in 1896. [Fig. 8] An O. Rubischum from Switzerland was in Burke Township in the 1900, according to the U.S. census.¹⁴ Woodstock and Burke are adjacent jurisdictions.



13. 1930 U.S. census, Rice County, Minnesota, population schedule, Ward 2 Faribault, ED 66-9, p. 5A, William Rumpf, NARA microfilm T626, roll 1124; digital images on Ancestry.com.

Figure 8. Circa 1896 envelope from Woodstock, Minnesota, to Bussnang, Switzerland, by persons with same family name. (Image courtesy of Jim Forte Postal History.)

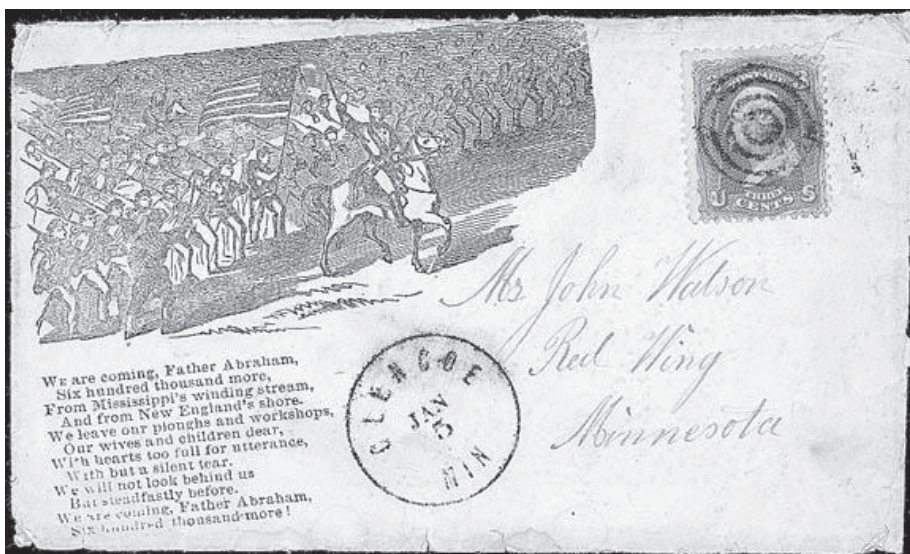
14. 1900 U.S. census, Pipestone County, Minnesota, population schedule, Burke Township, ED 224, p. 1B, O. Rubischum, NARA microfilm T623, roll 364; digital images on Ancestry.com.

Additional envelopes and postcards displayed on the website involving Minnesota residents include those of Charles Bishop (with German parents) of Glencoe; Joseph Hentschel (from Germany) of Marysville; Ole Jorgenson (from Norway) of Norway; Rose Mollet (from Switzerland) of Gladstone; Sarah Mulldoon (with a mother from Ireland) of Saint Paul; Clarence Olsen (with a

father from Norway) of Nicollet; Sven Strand (from Norway) of Madison; and Lempi Thompson (with parents from Finland) of Pike. Each item can be seen on the website by searching on the person's last name or city. Whenever the street address on the envelope or postcard matches the address in the census or other source document, it is noted.

Not all envelopes and postcards sent or from the home country will necessarily involve family and/or the exact birthplace. As with any source of genealogical information, postal history must be used in combination with other sources before reaching any conclusion.

Envelopes and postcards sent within the U.S. can add to our knowledge about our ancestors' times and work. John Watson of Red Wing, Minnesota, received an envelope from Glencoe about 1863. [Fig. 9] A John Watson was in Red Wing at the time of the 1870 U.S. census.¹⁵ The envelope has an illustration of Union soldiers during the Civil War. The postmark does not include the year, but the printed text is based on the lyrics of a circa 1862 song.¹⁶



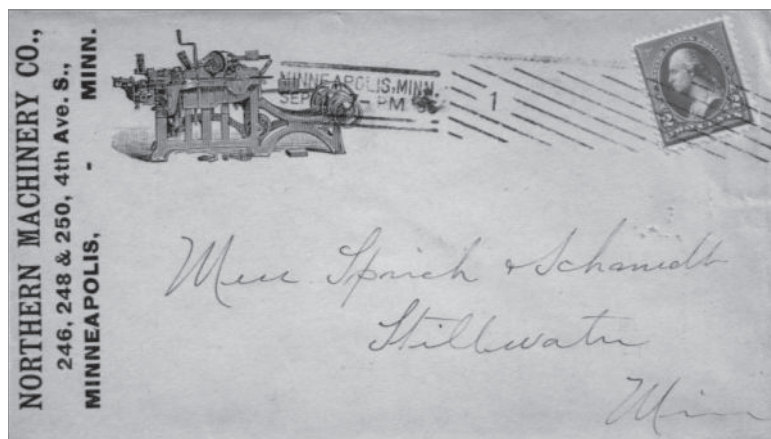
15. 1870 U.S. census, Goodhue County, Minnesota, population schedule, Red Wing, p. 99, John Watson, NARA microfilm T132, roll 5; digital images on Ancestry.com.

16. *600,000 More, We are Coming, Father Abraham*, by A Volunteer [James Sloan Gibbons (Robert Morris)] (Cleveland, Ohio: S. Brainard and Co.), digital images on the Lincoln Bicentennial website, <http://www.lincoln-bicentennial.gov/music-and-the-arts/music/600000-more.aspx> [accessed 26 December 2009].

Figure 9. Circa 1862 envelope from Glencoe, Minnesota, to Red Wing, Minnesota, with illustration of Union soldiers in the Civil War and lyrics from *We are Coming, Father Abraham*. (Image courtesy of Schuyler Rumsey Philatelic Auctions, Sale 26, Lot 1113).

The firm of Sprich and Schmidt in Stillwater, Minnesota, received an envelope from the Northern Machinery Company of Minneapolis in 1896. [Fig. 10] An Adolf Sprich, furniture maker and contractor, and Eugene Schmidt are listed in the 1896-97

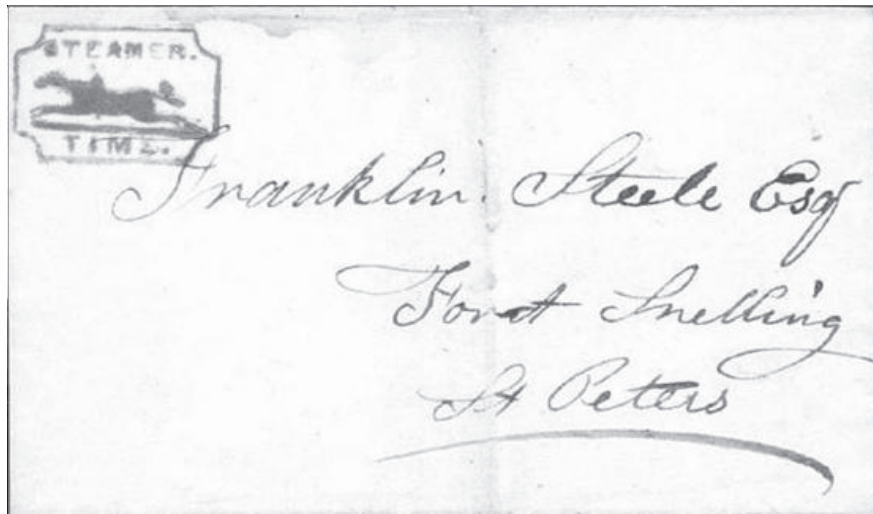
Stillwater directory.¹⁷ The envelope's illustration shows a machine that may have been used by Sprich and Schmidt.



17. *Stillwater [Minnesota] City Directory*, (Saint Paul, Minn.: R. L. Polk and Co., 1896), 227, 238, digital images in "Directories and Member Lists" section of Ancestry.com.

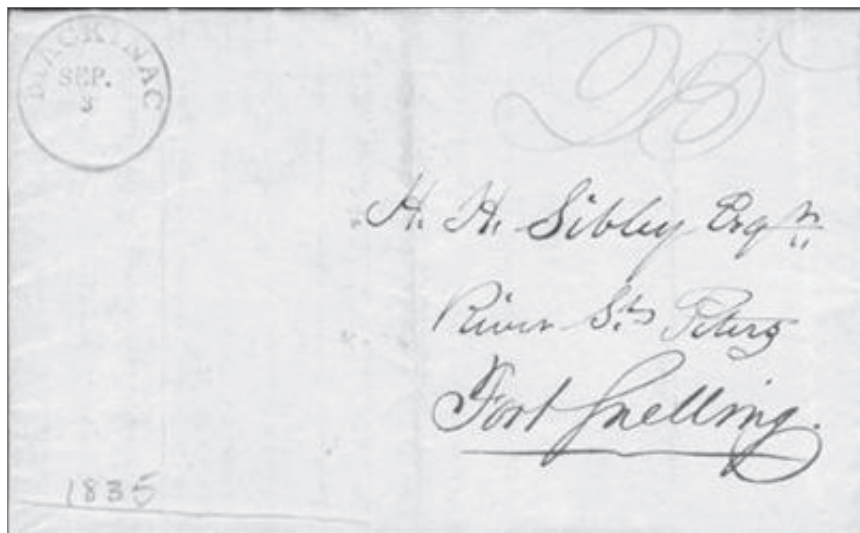
Figure 10. 1896 envelope from Minneapolis, Minnesota, to Stillwater, Minnesota, with illustration of machinery. (Image courtesy of Jim Forte Postal History.)

Franklin Steele of Fort Snelling, Minnesota, received an envelope sent by steamboat in 1845 from Davenport, Iowa.¹⁸ [Fig 11] A Franklin Steele was at Fort Snelling in 1850, according to the U.S. census.¹⁹ Franklin Steele, a land developer, purchased Fort Snelling in 1858 and platted it as a town site.²⁰ The Watson, Sprich and Schmidt, and Steele envelopes provide a glimpse into the lives of the people who received them.



The final two examples are folded letters. Before postage stamps were introduced in the 1840s, correspondence often consisted of a single sheet of paper with a letter written on one side and the address on the other. It was then folded and sealed to make an envelope. Unlike envelopes, which are often empty, folded letters have their original contents (unless the sender was willing to pay twice the postage to include a second sheet inside the folded letter).²¹

H. H. Sibley of Fort Snelling, in what would become Minnesota, received a folded letter from Mackinac in 1835. [Fig. 12] A Henry H. Sibley, trader, was in Mendota in time for the 1850 Minnesota Territorial Census.²² An auction catalog description of this folded letter states that it was sent by Rix Robinson on 22 August 1835 to Henry Sibley, a supply agent for the American Fur Company.²³ Henry H. Sibley would later become the first governor of Minnesota.²⁴



18. Auction catalog, Sale 24 (2 June 2006), Lot 34, Schuyler Rumsey Philatelic Auctions, digital images at <http://www.rumseyauctions.com/cgi-local/viewlot.pl?site=1&sale=24&lot=34> [accessed 3 January 2010].

19. 1850 U.S. census, Minnesota Territory, Dakota County, population schedule, Fort Snelling and vicinity, p. 10, Franklin Steele NARA microfilm M432, roll 367; digital images on Ancestry.com.

20. "Fort Snelling, Minnesota" article on Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fort_Snelling_Minnesota [accessed 3 January 2010], and "Historic Fort Snelling: A Brief History" on Minnesota Historical Society website, <http://www.mnhs.org/places/sites/hfs/history.html> [accessed 15 February 2010]. Steele's plans for the city of Fort Snelling were abandoned with the outbreak of the Civil War.

Figure 11. 1845 stampless envelope sent by steamboat from Davenport, Iowa, to Fort Snelling. (Image courtesy of Schuyler Rumsey Philatelic Auctions, Sale 24, Lot 34.)

21. Vernon S. Stroupe, "What is Postal History?," *North Carolina Postal Historian* (spring 1995), excerpted at the National Postal Museum website, <http://www.postalmuseum.si.edu/statepostalhistory/studyofpostalsystem.html> [accessed 22 Dec. 2009].

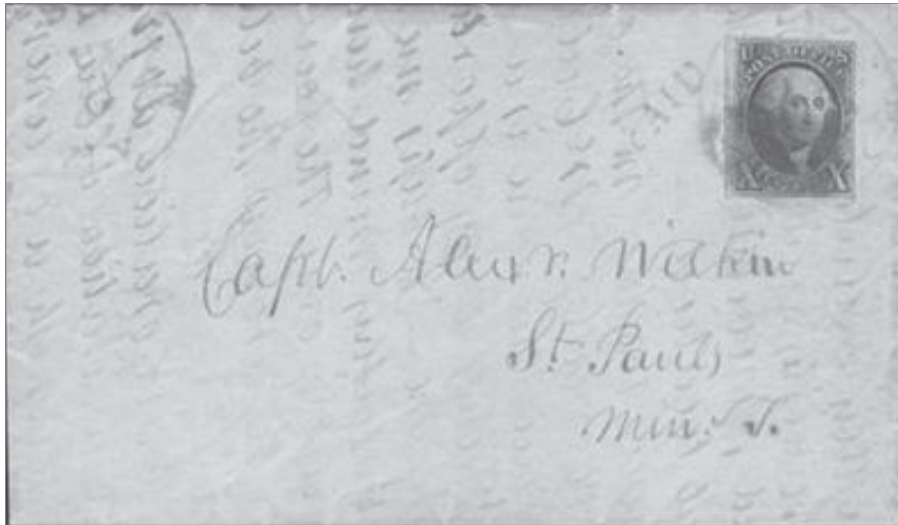
22. Henry Sibley household, 1850 Minnesota Territorial census, Dakota County, Mendota, Minnesota State Archives Microfilm (SAM) 350, roll 1; digital images on Ancestry.com.

23. Auction catalog, Sale 121 (27-29 January 2010), Spink Shreves Galleries, digital images at http://spinkliveusa.com/catalog/catalog_detail.php?lot=121309 [accessed 11 January 2010].

24. "Henry Hastings Sibley" article on Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henry_Hastings_Sibley [accessed 13 January 2010]. For more information on Sibley, read Rhoda R. Gilman's *Henry Hastings Sibley: Divided Heart* (St. Paul, Minn.: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2004).

Figure 12. 1835 folded letter from Mackinac to Fort Snelling. (Image courtesy of Spink Shreves Galleries, Sale 121, Lot 151.)

Captain Alexr. Wilkin of Saint Paul, Minnesota, received a folded letter from Goshen, New York, dated 5 July 1849. [Fig. 13] An Alexander Wilkin was in Saint Paul for the 1850 Minnesota Territorial Census.²⁵ An auction catalog description of this folded letter states that Alexander Wilkin was a colonel in the 9th Minnesota Infantry and was killed during the Civil War.²⁶ The writing on the opposite side of the sheet shows through the sheet. Because of their age and contents, these folded letters hold great genealogical potential.



25. 1850 Minnesota Territorial Census, Ramsey County, Saint Paul, Alexander Wilkin, Minnesota State Archives Microfilm (SAM) 350, roll 1; digital images on Ancestry.com.

26. Auction catalog, Sale 121 (27-29 January 2010), Lot 1072, Spink Shreves Galleries, digital images at http://spinkliveusa.com/catalog/catalog_detail.php?lot=122230 [accessed 11 January 2010].

Figure 13. 1849 folded letter from Goshen, New York, to Saint Paul, Minnesota Territory. (Image courtesy of Spink Shreves Galleries, Sale 121, Lot 1072.)

I hope this article has helped you see the range of information available from postal history. Many more envelopes and postcard photos involving Minnesota residents are available. Postal history vendors have given *Philgen.org* permission to use thousands of photos from their websites and archived philatelic auction catalogs, and most have not yet been placed on *Philgen.org*. More than 1,400 involve Minnesota individuals and places. These are a fraction of available postal history items. Anyone interested in helping add Minnesota envelopes and postcards to the website is invited to contact the author. Images and data posted for new items will be credited to the person and/or their genealogical association.

Acknowledgments

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