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PHILATELIC GENEALOGY IN MICHIGAN: IMMIGRANT ORIGINS

by James R. Miller

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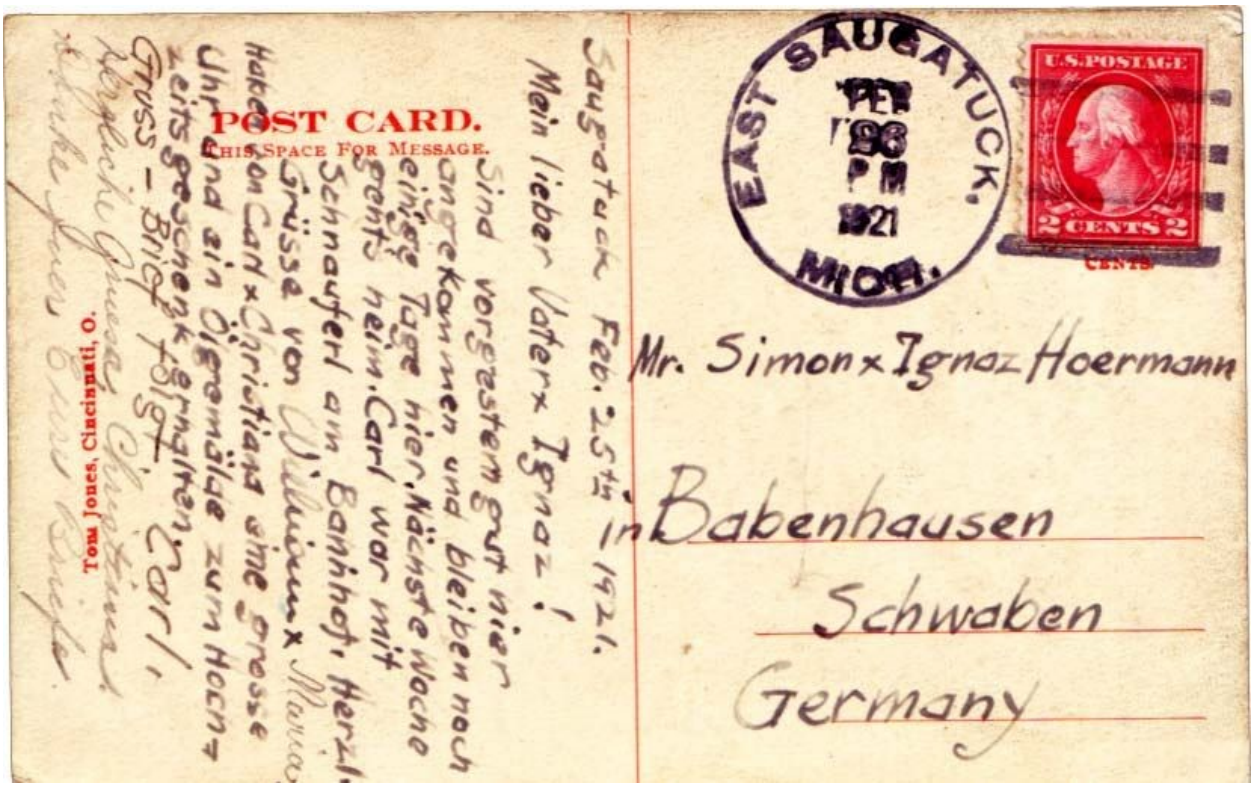
Old envelopes and postcards from postal history collections are a source of genealogical information.[1] This paper presents twenty-one old envelopes and postcards from Michigan with key genealogical data on the sender and recipient (when available) to introduce the Philatelic Genealogy website and database (http://philgen.org). The website was launched in March 2009 to begin building a digital archive of envelope and postcard images with genealogical value and to promote an exchange between postal history collectors and genealogists. The site has grown to more than 1,250 envelopes and postcards. Every item includes a photograph (used with the owner's permission) and U.S. census or similar details on the sender and/or recipient. The website currently has 56 envelopes and postcards sent to/from Michigan.

Finding a European immigrant's birthplace can be difficult. An address or a postmark can provide a clue. Simon Ignaz Hoermann of Babenhausen, Germany received a postcard from East Saugatuck, Michigan in 1921.[Figure 1] The postcard text begins "Mein lieber Vater Ignaz" (My dear Father Ignaz). The postcard is signed by both "Carl" and "Christina." A Carl and Christina Hoerman are in Saugatuck in the 1930 U.S. census.[2] A Carl Hoerman of East Saugatuck applied for a U.S. passport in 1921 and stated that he was born in Babenhausen.[3] The envelope, by itself, could have been a starting point to search for the Hoermann family home in Europe. As with any source of genealogical information, an old postcard must be used in combination with other sources before reaching any conclusion. This postcard, and the envelope that is shown next, were found for sale for $10 each on a postal history vendor website that has given permission to *Philgen.org* to use more than 850 pictures of envelopes and postcards sent from Michigan.[4]



Anton Lorcke of Highland Park, Detroit, Michigan sent an envelope to Riesa, Germany in 1932.[Figure 2] An Anton Paul Alfons Lorcke applied for U.S. citizenship in Detroit in 1934[5] and an Anton Lorcke appears on a

1934 passenger list with a home residence of Highland Park.[6] An Anton Lorcke appears on a 1929 passenger list as born in Namslau, Germany but with a last permanent residence of Riesa, Germany.[7] This envelope could have served as a starting point to search for Anton Lorcke's birthplace in Germany.

Figure 2 1932 envelope from Detroit, Michigan to Riesa, Germany (Photo courtesy of Jim Forte Postal History)

Three other envelopes appear to point to a family's home before coming to the U.S. Mr. Angel Cantera of Waltz, Michigan received an envelope from Santander, Spain in 1939 (viewable on *Philgen.org*, search on Cantera). An Angel “Cantery” and his parents Fabian and Genevieve, from Spain, are in Detroit (20 miles northeast of Waltz) in the 1930 U.S. census.[8] A Fabian and Genevieve(?) Cantera appear on a 1923 passenger list bound for Detroit that shows their birthplace as Santander.[9] A K. H. Matthaei of Detroit wrote to Marburg an der Lahn, Germany in 1926 (viewable on *Philgen.org*, search on Matthaei). A Konrad H. Matthaei of Detroit applied for a U.S. passport in 1910 and stated that he was born in Marburg, Germany.[10] These envelopes could also have served as starting points to search for the person's home in Europe. An envelope sent to John Mulder of Muskegon, Michigan from Uithuisterneeden, Netherlands in 1902 has been presented elsewhere as showing his place of origin.[11]

Other envelopes and postcards were sent to/from Michigan residents and involve the person's (or the person's parents') home country. Each is viewable on *Philgen.org* by searching on the person's last name or city, including details on where the item was found. Not every item will necessarily involve the person's place of origin, but may be worth pursuing if other information is not available. Henry Ahlemann of Riga, Michigan wrote to Berlin-Lichterfelde, Germany in 1902. Ole Amble of Gowen, Michigan wrote to Kaufranger(?), Norway in 1919. John W. Applin of East Tawas, Michigan wrote to Winslöf(?), Sweden in 1911. Jutta Bakka of Detroit, Michigan wrote to Hellerup, Denmark in 1937. Elsie Bosshard of Detroit, Michigan wrote to Bad Soden am Taunus, Germany in 1935. Rudolph Cernkovich of Bradley, Michigan wrote to Zagreb, Yugoslovia in 1951. Joseph Czarkowski wrote to Bydgoszcz, Poland in 1922 (but Bydgoszcz is not shown as his birthplace on a 1911 passenger list [12]). Nicolas Grimaldi of Saginaw, Michigan received an envelope from Lusciano, Caserta, Italy in 1947. Halvor (Harvey) Gundersen of Manistee, Michigan received an envelope from Aasnaes, Norway in 1873. Grace Hudson of Marlette, Michigan received a postcard from Blake, Ontario, Canada in 1910. Edward Kenrick of Hillsdale, Michigan received an envelope from Walsall, Staffordshire,

England in 1867. Karl Koslowski of Detroit, Michigan received an envelope from Riga, Latvia in 1922. Victoria Magreta (Magretta) of Detroit, Michigan received an envelope from Zegrze, Poland in 1921. Fred Nielsen of Pentwater, Michigan received an envelope from Aarhus, Denmark in 1877. Frank Rucinski of Hamtramck, Michigan received an envelope from Sokolow Podlaski, Poland in 1931. Otto Scherer of Detroit, Michigan received an envelope from Frankfurt am Main, Germany in 1928.

I hope this article has shown you how postal history can help locate an immigrant ancestor's birthplace. In addition to place of origin, other envelopes and postcards show our ancestors' family connections within the U.S., political and social interests, military service, work, and recreation.[13] Many more envelope and postcard photos involving Michigan residents are available and most have not yet been placed on *Philgen.org*. Postal history being sold on the Internet, at stamps shows, and in auction catalogs is classified by its stamps and postmarks. The purpose of *Philgen.org* is to make postal history accessible to genealogists by identifying the senders and recipients of envelopes and postcards. Anyone wishing to contribute a scan/photograph of an envelope or postcard or who is interested in helping to add Michigan envelopes and postcards to the website is invited to contact the author. Photographs and data posted for each item will be credited to the person and/or their genealogical or philatelic association.

Notes

1. James R. Miller, "Philatelic Genealogy: Old Envelopes, Postcards, and Immigrant Origins," *New England Ancestors* 10:2 (2009): 37–38 and "Philatelic Genealogy Update: An Initial Assessment of the Genealogical Value of Old Envelopes and Postcards," *American Ancestors* 11:1 (2010): 45 [both viewable at http://philgen.org, click on NEA Article or American Ancestors in the Main Menu].
2. 1930 U.S. census, Saugatuck Township, Allegan County, Michigan, ED 3-33, p. 2B (written), NARA series T626, roll 973. Viewed on *Ancestry.com*.
3. U.S. passport application of Carl Hoermann, number 32,318, Kent County, Michigan, issued 10 May 1921, NARA series M1490, roll 1,602. Viewed on *Ancestry.com*.
4. Jim Forte Postal History (http://postalhistory.com, go to "U.S. by State," click on Michigan; accessed 7 June 2010).
5. Index Cards to Naturalization Petitions for the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Michigan, Southern Division, Detroit, 1907-1995, Anton Paul Alfons Lorcke (L-620), NARA series M1917, roll L-560 to L-653. Viewed on *Ancestry.com*.
6. Passenger and Crew Lists of Vessels Arriving at New York, New York, 1897-1957, S.S. *Hamburg*, arrival date 10 August 1934, NARA series T715, roll 5,527. Viewed on *Ancestry.com*.
7. Passenger and Crew Lists of Vessels Arriving at New York, New York, 1897-1957, S.S. *Hamburg* arrival date 14 January 1929, NARA series T715, roll 4,412. Viewed on *Ancestry.com*.
8. 1930 U.S. census, Detroit Ward 18, Wayne County, Michigan, ED 82-623, p. 9A (written), NARA series T626, roll 1,057. Viewed on *Ancestry.com*.
9. Passenger and Crew Lists of Vessels Arriving at New York, New York, 1897-1957, S.S. *Paris*, arrival date 18 December 1923, NARA series T715, roll 3,426. Viewed on *Ancestry.com*.
10. U.S. passport application of Konrad H. Matthaei, number 34,501, Wayne County, Michigan, issued 2 July 1910, NARA series M1490, roll 117. Viewed on *Ancestry.com*.
11. The envelope to John Mulder was presented in two articles, cited above in endnote 1.
12. Passenger and Crew Lists of Vessels Arriving at New York, New York, 1897-1957, S.S. *Roon*, arrival date 30 March 1911, NARA series T715, roll 1,649. Viewed on *Ancestry.com*.
13. For examples of other types of information available from postal history, see James R. Miller, "Philatelic Genealogy in Iowa: An Introduction," *Hawkeye Heritage*, Vol. 44, No. 1 (2010): cover, 7-14; James R. Miller, "Philatelic Genealogy in Minnesota: An Introduction," *Minnesota Genealogist*, Vol. 40, No. 4 (Winter 2009-2010): 9-14; and James R. Miller, "Philatelic Genealogy in Ohio: An Introduction," *Ohio Genealogy News*, Vol. 41 (Spring 2010): cover, 6-9 [all viewable at http://philgen.org, click on Iowa, Minnesota, or Ohio in the Main Menu].

Acknowledgments

The author thanks Jim Forte Postal History for the use of photos, the genealogists who responded to email and message board queries, and Lisa Birsinger for database and website support.