

## Philatelic Genealogy: Writing Home to North Dakota in World War I

by James R. Miller

About two million American soldiers, sailors, and Marines served with the American Expeditionary Forces (A.E.F.) in Europe from 1917 to 1919 during and just after World War I. Surviving letters, envelopes, and postcards document their service and show locations served, military rank, service role, and unit numbers that help fill gaps due to the 1973 fire at the National Personnel Records Center.<sup>1</sup> This paper presents two postcards and four envelopes sent home to North Dakota with basic genealogical details on the senders and recipients. The author purchased four items on the internet for \$9 to \$15 each, including two with letters, and two items are from postal history vendors who have given permission for use of their photographs to Philgen.org, the philatelic genealogy website and database (<http://philgen.org>).<sup>2</sup> All locations are in North Dakota except where noted. As with any source of genealogical information, old letters, envelopes, and postcards must be studied in combination with other sources before reaching a conclusion.

Mrs. Ben “Horwits” of Mandan received an envelope from “[Co]ok Edward Earing, 116 Engineer Train” postmarked 24 May 1918 (Figure). An enclosed letter begins “My Dear Sister” and ends “from your brother Ed.” Ruth C. (Mrs. Benjamin A.) Horwitz, born in North Dakota, is in Miles City, Montana in the 1920 U.S. census, and she is shown as Ruth Reynolds, born in Mandan and daughter of Charles Reynolds, in her 1911 marriage license.<sup>3</sup> Edward B. Earing registered with Selective Service in Mandan in 1917, and was living in Mandan in 1912 when he married Bertha L. Reynolds, daughter of C. W. Reynolds.<sup>4</sup> Ruth and Bertha Reynolds,



Figure 1918 Y.M.C.A. envelope from the 116 Engineers to Mandan, North Dakota with censor's stamp and signature, “Soldiers Mail,” and military postmark (Author's collection)

sisters, are in Mandan with their father Charles W. Reynolds in the 1900 U.S. census.<sup>5</sup> Edward Earing sent this letter to his sister-in-law. He thanks her for her recent letter and says he is “a little lonesome, especially when you talk about fishing.” The envelope was provided by the Young Men's Christian Association (Y.M.C.A.), and has a censor's stamp and signature that were

applied after an officer verified that the envelope and letter did not indicate the soldier's location, his unit's morale, anticipated troop movement, or other information that could be useful if the envelope and letter fell into the hands of the German army.<sup>6</sup> “Soldier's Mail,” written in the upper right, was accepted in place of a stamp on mail sent by overseas military personnel from 1917 to 1920.<sup>7</sup>

Mrs. Fred Putnam of McKenzie received a postcard from “Sgt. [Sergeant] Fred Putnam, Co[mpany] C, 319 Field Signal B[attalion]” written 15 August 1918 that begins “My Dear Wife Edna” (viewable on Philgen.org, search on McKenzie). Fred and L. Edna Putnam, husband and wife, are in McKenzie in the 1920 U.S. census.<sup>8</sup> The postcard has a censor's stamp and signature and was provided by “Le Foyer du Soldat, Union Franco-Américaine” and the Y.M.C.A. The Union Franco-Américaine was a collaboration of the American Y.M.C.A. and the French army that built huts for American soldiers to provide canteen service, books, stationery, music, and films.<sup>9</sup> The military postmark includes “702” which is now known to correspond to Paris, France.<sup>10</sup>

Mr. E. C. Ruden of Hettinger received a registered envelope from “C. D. Ruden, Gen[eral] Hosp[ital] 18, B.E.F. [British Expeditionary Force], France” postmarked 26 February 1918 (Philgen.org, Ruden). Earl Clayton Ruden was living in Hettinger when he registered with Selective Service in 1918, and his father Ole C. Ruden is listed on the form.<sup>11</sup> Ole C. Ruden is in Chandler Township (about 12 miles northeast of Hettinger) in the 1920 U.S. census, and O. C., “Erlo,” and Clara Ruden are together in the 1910 U.S. census.<sup>12</sup> This envelope was sent by a sister to her brother. Clara D. Ruden, daughter of O.C. Ruden, was a U.S. Army nurse when she applied for an emergency U.S. passport in 1917.<sup>13</sup> She was in the initial group of 400 U.S. Army nurses that served in France.<sup>14</sup> More than 12,000 nurses would serve by war's end, and 265 died while in service.<sup>15</sup> The “S.18” in the British military postmark and registration (“R”) sticker corresponds to Camiers in the Pas de Calais region of northern France.<sup>16</sup>

Mrs. M. G. Lock of Anselm received an envelope from “Wag[oner] M. G. Lock” postmarked 4 December 1918 (Philgen.org, Anselm). Milton George Lock of Lisbon (about 10 miles southwest of Anselm) registered with Selective Service in 1917, and Milton and Janie R. Lock, husband and wife, are in Lisbon

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in the 1920 U.S. census.<sup>17</sup> Milton George Lock served overseas with the 48th Artillery.<sup>18</sup> The envelope has a censor's stamp and signature, "Soldiers Mail," and a military postmark.

Charles W. Reynolds of Mandan received an envelope from "Pvt [Private] O. H. Reynolds" postmarked 22 November 1918 (Philgen.org, Reynolds). Charles W. Reynolds is cited above with the envelope sent to Mrs. Ben A. Horwitz. An enclosed letter begins "Dear Dad" and closes with "Your Loving Son Oscar." Charles W. and Oscar H. Reynolds, father and son, are in Mandan in the 1930 U.S. census.<sup>19</sup> The letter includes "H.q. [Headquarters] Co[mpany], 61st Art[iller]y," which matches his listing in the summary of North Dakota military service in World War I.<sup>20</sup> He also writes "We are getting good eats and plenty of them," and "It is cold now but by that I do not mean anything in comparison to what we used to go thru at home." The envelope was provided by the Y.M.C.A. and has a censor's stamp and signature, "Soldiers Mail," and a military postmark.

Miss Grace Matticks of Buffalo Springs received a postcard from "W'g'n'r [Wagoner] R. D. Potter" written 23 February 1919 at Camp Pontanezen and signed "Buck" (Philgen.org, Matticks). Grace Matticks is in Whiting (about five miles south of Buffalo Springs) in the 1915 North Dakota census, and Rupert Dougherty Potter was in Buffalo Springs when he registered with Selective Service in 1917.<sup>21</sup> Camp Pontanezen was on the west coast of France in Brest, where most U.S. personnel arrived and departed.<sup>22</sup> Rupert D. Potter and Grace M. Matticks married following World War I, and Rupert and Grace M. Potter, husband and wife, are in Scranton (just east of Buffalo Springs) in the 1920 U.S. census.<sup>23</sup> The postcard has a censor's stamp and signature, "Soldiers Mail," and a military postmark.

This article shows how old envelopes and postcards document our ancestors' World War I experience and provide details that may be unavailable elsewhere. Other postcards and envelopes illustrate where our ancestors lived before coming to the U.S., where family members lived in the U.S., social and political interests, travel and work.<sup>24</sup> Anyone may place a photograph of an envelope or postcard (with the owner's permission) on *Philgen.org* by contacting the author. Photographs and data posted for each item will be credited to the person and/or their genealogical, historical, or philatelic association.

<sup>1</sup> Walter W. Stender and Evans Walker, "The National Personnel Records Center Fire: A Study in Disaster," *The American Archivist*, Vol. 37, No. 4 (October 1974), pp. 521-549 (online at <http://www.archives.gov/st-louis/military-personnel/fire-1973.html>: accessed 21 October 2012).

<sup>2</sup> The Ruden envelope is courtesy of Jim Forte Postal History (<http://www.postalhistory.com/>: accessed 21 October 2012), and the Lock envelope is courtesy of Fyns Frimaerke Service (<http://www.stamps.dk/>: accessed 21 October 2012). The author has no financial interest in these vendors' sales.

<sup>3</sup> 1920 U.S. census, Custer County, Montana, population (pop.) schedule, Miles City, ward 1, enumeration district (ED) 36, sheet 3A (penned), dwelling 43, family 51, Benjamin A. Horwitz; digital image, *Ancestry.com* (<http://www.ancestry.com/>: accessed 21 October 2012); citing National Archives and Records Administration microfilm publication (NARA) series T625, roll 969; "Montana, County Marriages, 1865-1950;" database and digital image, *FamilySearch.org* (<https://www.familysearch.org/>: accessed 21 October 2012); citing marriage license of Musselshell County, Montana, entry for Ben A. Horwitz and Ruth Reynolds, marriage license 12, 10 June 1911.

<sup>4</sup> "World War I Draft Registration Cards, 1917-1918;" digital image, *Ancestry.com*; Edward B. Earing, Morton County, North Dakota; citing World War I Selective Service System Draft Registration Cards, 1917-1918, NARA microfilm M1509, no roll cited; "Montana, County Marriages, 1865-1950;" database and digital image, *FamilySearch.org*; citing marriage license of Cascade County, Montana, entry for Edward B. Earing and Bertha L. Reynolds, marriage license 5493, 11 December 1912.

<sup>5</sup> 1900 U.S. census, Morton County, North Dakota, pop. schedule, Mandan, ward 1, ED 239, sheet 5B (penned), dwelling 92, family 92, Charles W. Reynolds; digital image, *Ancestry.com*; citing NARA series T623, roll 1230.

<sup>6</sup> "War Letter, Censorship!" ([http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/warletters/sfeature/sf\\_censorship.html](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/warletters/sfeature/sf_censorship.html), accessed 23 October 2012).

<sup>7</sup> Van Dam, Theo., editor, and War Cover Club, *The Postal History of the AEF, 1917-1923* (hereinafter *Postal History of the AEF*) (State College, Pennsylvania: American Philatelic Society, 1980): 13-14.

<sup>8</sup> 1920 U.S. census, Burleigh County, North Dakota, pop. schedule, McKenzie township, ED 267, sheet 4B (penned), dwelling 50, family 55, Fred I. Putnam; digital image, *Ancestry.com*; citing NARA series T625, roll 1331.

<sup>9</sup> Timothy C. Dowling, editor, *Personal Perspectives, World War I*; digital image, Google Books (<http://books.google.com/>: accessed 21 October 2012); 236.

<sup>10</sup> Van Dam, *Postal History of the AEF*, 83.

<sup>11</sup> "World War I Draft Registration Cards, 1917-1918;" digital image, *Ancestry.com*; Earl Clayton Ruden, Adams County, North Dakota; citing NARA series M1509, no roll cited.

<sup>12</sup> 1920 U.S. census, Adams County, North Dakota, pop. schedule, Chandler township, ED 6, sheet 3A (penned), dwelling 45, family 45, Oscar E. Ruden; digital image, *Ancestry.com*; citing NARA series T625, roll 1330; 1910 U.S. census, La Crosse County, Wisconsin, pop. schedule, La Crosse, ward 6, ED 102, sheets 11B-12A (penned), dwelling 237, family 264, O. C. Ruden; digital image, *Ancestry.com*; citing NARA series T624, roll 1716.

<sup>13</sup> "Women in the U.S. Army," "World War I (1917-1918) and After" (<http://www.army.mil/women/nurses.html>: accessed 21 October 2012).

<sup>14</sup> "Women in Military Service for America Medical Foundation, Inc.," "exhibits," "archive," "World War I Nurses: The Journal of Emma Elizabeth Weaver" (<http://www.womensmemorial.org/H&C/Exhibits/exhibitsar.html>: accessed 21 October 2012).

<sup>15</sup> "U.S. Passport Applications, 1795-1925;" database and digital image, *Ancestry.com*; entry for Clara D. Ruden, passport issued 4 June 1917; citing NARA, Division of Passport Control: Emergency Passport Applications, 1906-1925 (Argentina thru Venezuela).

<sup>16</sup> Alistair Kennedy and George Crabb, *The Postal History of the British Army in World War I* (Ewell, Epsom, Surrey, United Kingdom: George Crabb, 1977), 63, 190.

<sup>17</sup> "World War I Draft Registration Cards, 1917-1918;" digital image, *Ancestry.com*; Milton George Lock, Ransom County, North Dakota; citing NARA series M1509, no roll cited; 1920 U.S. census, Ransom County, North Dakota, pop. schedule, Lisbon, ward 2, ED 126, sheet 1A (penned), dwelling 11, family 14, Milton Lock; digital image, An-

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cestry.com; citing NARA series T625, roll 1339.

<sup>18</sup> “North Dakota Military Men, 1917-1918”; database and digital image, *Ancestry.com*; entry for Milton George Lock, citing *Roster of the Men and Women ... from the State of North Dakota in the World War, 1917-1918*, Volume 3.

<sup>19</sup> 1930 U.S. census, Morton County, North Dakota, pop. schedule, Mandan, ward 5, ED 330-23, sheet 5B (penned), dwelling 87, family 98, Charles W. Reynolds; digital image NARA series T626, roll 1739.

<sup>20</sup> “North Dakota Military Men, 1917-1918”; database and digital image, *Ancestry.com*; entry for Oscar Harvey Reynolds, citing *Roster of the Men and Women ... from the State of North Dakota in the World War, 1917-1918*, Volume 3.

<sup>21</sup> Census of North Dakota, 1915, Bowman County, Whiting, dwelling 39, family 39, Wesley Matticks; digital image, *Ancestry.com*; citing State Historical Society of North Dakota, microfilm roll ndsc\_6856; “World War I Draft Registration Cards, 1917–1918,” digital image, *Ancestry.com*; Rupert Dougherty Potter, Bowman County, North Dakota; citing NARA series M1509; no roll cited.

<sup>22</sup> “Smedley Butler,” “World War I” ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Smedley\\_Butler](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Smedley_Butler) : accessed 21 October 2012).

<sup>23</sup> “Montana, County Marriages, 1865-1950”; digital image, *FamilySearch.org*; entry for Rupert W. Potter and Mary Angeline Kroetch, marriage license 15,451, County of Lewis and Clark; shows Rupert W. Potter's parents as Rupert D. Potter and Grace M. Mat-

ticks; 1920 U.S. census, Bowman County, North Dakota, pop. schedule, Scranton, ED 28, sheet 4A (penned), dwelling 34, family 34, Rupert Potter; digital image NARA series T625, roll 1330.

<sup>24</sup> To see other types of genealogical information available from postal history, please visit <http://philgen.org>, and in the Main Menu click on Search Database to search on a surname or city; or in the Main Menu click on New England Ancestors, American Ancestors, Minnesota Case Study, Nebraska, North Dakota, or Seattle, Washington for examples showing immigrant origins; on Central NY, Florida, Georgia, Maine, North Carolina, South Carolina, or Western Pennsylvania for Civil War service; on Kansas, Minnesota RPPC, or OK postcards for examples of real photo postcards; on Iowa WWI, Missouri WWI, Western Pennsylvania WWI, or NGS for other examples of First World War service; on Utah postcards for family postcards; or one of the other U.S. state names for a general survey.

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