

Philatelic Genealogy in North Dakota: Immigrant Origins and Domestic Family Ties

by James R. Miller

Old envelopes and postcards from postal history collections are a source of genealogical information.¹ This paper presents seven old envelopes and postcards from North Dakota 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 22 envelopes and postcards sent to/from North Dakota.

Finding a European immigrant's birthplace can be difficult. An address or a postmark can provide a clue.

Henry Buehner of Bailey, North Dakota sent an envelope to Münster, Westphalia, Germany in 1909 (search on *Philgen.org* for Buehner). A Henry Buehner, from Germany, is in Dunn

County (where Bailey is located) in the 1910 U.S. census² and is shown as being from Westphalia, Germany in the 1920 U.S. census.³ A Henry Buehner appears in an online family tree with the birthplace of his wife and two of their children shown as Munster, Westphalia, Germany.⁴ The envelope, by itself, could have been a starting point to search for the Buehner family

home in Europe. As with any source of genealogical information, an old envelope must be used in combination with other sources before reaching any conclusion. This envelope, for sale for \$25, and the other items discussed in this article, for \$10, \$15 or \$30 each, were found on a postal history vendor website that has given permission to *Philgen.org* to use more than 150 pictures of envelopes and postcards sent to/from North Dakota.⁵

Two other envelopes sent from North Dakota may point to the writer's home before coming to the U.S. An envelope from the office of Leutz & McClure of Taylor, North Dakota was sent to Wilhelm Leutz of Heilbronn, Germany in 1901. See Figure 1. A Herman Leutz, from Germany, is in Taylor in the 1920 U.S. census.⁶ The shared family name of the sender and the recipient in-

creases the possibility of a family connection. Ole Olsen Sand of Kindred, North Dakota wrote to Gerda Nielsen in Eidsvoll, Norway in 1929 (search on *Philgen.org* for Kindred). An Ole Sand, from Norway, is in Davenport Township (where Kindred is located) in the 1930 U.S. census.⁷ These items do not necessarily involve the person's place of origin, but may be worth pursuing if other information is not available.

An envelope sent within the U.S. may provide a clue regarding an earlier place of residence within the country. E. C. Rice of Mandan, North Dakota sent an envelope to Mrs. Eliza Smith in Avoca, New York in 1900 (search *Philgen.org* for Mandan). An Ezekiel Rice, from New York, 60 years old, is in Mandan in the 1900 U.S. census⁸ and an Eliza Smith, 51 years old, a widow, is in Avoca in the 1900 U.S. census.⁹ An Ezekial C. Rice, 19 years old, and an Eliza Rice, 11 years old, are together in Howard, New York (about six miles southeast of Avoca) in the 1860 U.S. census.¹⁰ It appears that Ezekial C. Rice was writing to his sister in 1900 and that he lived in Howard, New York before coming to Mandan.



Figure 1. 1901 envelope from Taylor, North Dakota to Heilbronn, Germany (Photograph courtesy of Jim Forte Postal History)

The text on a postcard sent within the U.S. can clearly indicate a family relationship. Mrs. Frances Hardebeck of Napoleon, Indiana received a postcard from Mrs. T. Mehring postmarked in Edmunds, North Dakota in 1915 (search *Philgen.org* for Hardebeck). A Frances Hardebeck is in Jackson Township, Indiana (which contains Napoleon) in the 1920 U.S. census¹¹ and a Theresia

(Mrs. Frank) Mehring, born in Indiana, is in Walters Township (adjacent to Edmunds) in the 1920 U.S. census.¹² The postcard text begins "Dear Cousin." An online family tree shows that Frances (Herbert) Hardebeck and Theresia (Herbert) Mehring were both granddaughters of Gerhard Henry Herbert and each a daughter of different sons of Gerhard Henry Herbert, and thus first cousins.¹³

Mrs. B. H. Burg of Lawrence, Washington received a postcard postmarked in Flora, North Dakota in 1909 (search *Philgen.org* for Maddock). The postcard text begins "Kjære soster Mari" (Dear Sister Mary, in Norwegian) and it has a return address, difficult to read, of "Mr. O.[?] J. Kopp..dal, Mettock, ND." A Mary (Mrs.

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Ben H.) Burg, 44 years-old (and thus born *circa* 1866), with four children born in North Dakota, is in Whatcom County, Washington (where Lawrence is located) in the 1910 U.S. census,¹⁴ and an Ole J. Kopperdahl is in South Viking Township, North Dakota (near Flora and Maddock) in the 1910 U.S. census.¹⁵ A Ben H. and Mary Berg, with four children, plus a “George Copperdehl,” are in Viking, North Dakota in the 1900 U.S. census.¹⁶ An online family tree shows that Ole J. Kopperdahl had a sister Mari born in 1866.¹⁷ This postcard, which has a photograph of the “Old Settlers Picnic – Viking, N.D.,” appears to have been sent by a brother to his sister who has moved to Washington state.

Miss Ethel Hoffmeister of Wabasha, Minnesota received a postcard from Stone, North Dakota in 1909 (search on *Philgen.org* for Hoffmeister). An Ethel Hoffmeister, single, is in Wabasha in the 1910 U.S. census.¹⁸ The postcard text begins “Dear coz” and is signed Edith. The sender has not yet been identified.

I hope this article has shown you several types of genealogical information available from postal history. In addition to place of origin and family connections within the U.S., other envelopes and postcards show our ancestors' political and social interests, military service, work, and recreation.¹⁹ Many more envelope and postcard photos involving North Dakota 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 interested in helping to add North Dakota 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.

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 1910 U.S. census, Township 146, Dunn County, North Dakota, ED 41, p. 8A (written), NARA series T624, roll 1,140. Viewed on *Ancestry.com*.

³ 1920 U.S. census, Township 146, Dunn County, North Dakota, ED 53, p. 1A (written), NARA series T625, roll 1,333. Viewed on *Ancestry.com*.

⁴ One World Tree, Henry Buehner, viewed on *Ancestry.com*.

⁵ Jim Forte Postal History (<http://postallhistory.com>, go to “U.S. by

State,” click on North Dakota; accessed 5 April 2010).

⁶ 1920 U.S. census, Taylor Ward 1, Stark County, North Dakota, ED 205, p. 1A, NARA series T625, roll 1,339. Viewed on *Ancestry.com*.

⁷ 1920 U.S. census, Davenport Township, Cass County, North Dakota, ED 19, p. 5A (written), NARA series T625, roll 1,733. Viewed on *Ancestry.com*.

⁸ 1900 U.S. census, Mandan Ward 2, Morton County, North Dakota, ED 239, p. 10A (written), NARA series T623, roll 1,230. Viewed on *Ancestry.com*.

⁹ 1900 U.S. census, Avoca, Steuben County, New York, ED 57, p. 8B (written), NARA series T623, roll 1,162. Viewed on *Ancestry.com*.

¹⁰ 1860 U.S. census, Howard, Steuben County, New York, p. 6 (written), NARA series M653, roll 862. Viewed on *Ancestry.com*.

¹¹ 1920 U.S. census, Jackson Township, Ripley County, Indiana, ED 159, p. 4A, NARA series T625, roll 462. Viewed on *Ancestry.com*.

¹² 1920 U.S. census, Walters Township, Stutsman County, North Dakota, ED 234, p. 3B, NARA series T625, roll 1,341. Viewed on *Ancestry.com*.

¹³ “Young, Uphaus, Bower, Taylor, Dunn, Jones Family” tree, published online at *Ancestry.com*, owner wmrobert; census records cited as source for Herbert, Hardebeck, and Mehning births and marriages.

¹⁴ 1910 U.S. census, Licking Precinct, Whatcom County, Washington, ED 348, p. 8B (written), NARA series T624, roll 1,674. Viewed on *Ancestry.com*.

¹⁵ 1910 U.S. census, South Viking Township, Benson County, North Dakota, ED 17, p. 10B (written), NARA series T624, roll 1,138. Viewed on *Ancestry.com*.

¹⁶ 1900 U.S. census, Viking (also shown as Township 151, Range 69), Benson County, North Dakota, ED 12, p. 4B (written), NARA series T623, roll 1,226. Viewed on *Ancestry.com*.

¹⁷ “Skagen and Christensen Family Tree,” owner Olav Skagen; primary source citations not shown. Viewed on *Ancestry.com*.

¹⁸ 1910 U.S. census, Wabasha Ward 2, Wabasha County, Minnesota, ED 157, p. 13A (written), NARA series T624, roll 728. Viewed on *Ancestry.com*.

¹⁹ 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).

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