

Philatelic Genealogy in Oregon: Family Postcards

by James R. Miller

Old envelopes and postcards from postal history collections are a source of genealogical information.[1] This paper presents nineteen old postcards from Oregon 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 37 envelopes and postcards sent to/from Oregon.

A postcard text can clearly show a family relationship and provide a glimpse into people's lives. Howard HUMPHREY of Wendling, Oregon received a postcard from Irving, Oregon in 1916. The card is signed "Your Bro, V T H." A Howard HUMPHREY, born in Missouri in 1896, registered with Selective Service in Wendling in 1917, where he was working in a logging camp.[2] A Vincent T. and his brother Howard HUMPHREY, the latter born in Missouri in 1896, are in Zumwalt, Oregon in the 1900 U.S. census.[3] V T H speaks of being ill with "gripp" and demands for hay in the postcard text, and a Vincent Taylor HUMPHREY stated that he was a farmer in his 1917 Selective Service registration.[4] This postcard appears to have been sent between brothers living in separate locations in Oregon. As with any source of genealogical information, an old postcard must be used in combination with other sources before



1916 postcard from Lacombe, Oregon to Albany, Oregon (Photograph courtesy of Jim Forte Postal History)

reaching any conclusion. This postcard and the others in this article were found for sale for \$10 each (one was \$20) on a postal history vendor website that has given permission to *Philgen.org* to use more than 1,700 pictures of Oregon envelopes and postcards.[5]

Mrs. A. V. MOWE of Gaston, Oregon received a postcard from Chitwood, Oregon in 1908. The postcard text begins “Dear Sister” and is signed “Sister Bertha and Rodney.” A Lillian J. (apparently Mrs. Vernon A.) “MOW” is in Dilley (about three miles north of Gaston) in the 1910 U.S. census.[6] A Lillian J. (Mrs. Adam V.) MOWE and a Bertha E. (Mrs. Rodney L.) WILDMAN, both born in Kansas and with parents born in Ohio and Iowa, are on the same page of the 1920 U.S. census.[7] This postcard appears to have been sent between sisters living apart in 1908 who later lived near one another. The postcard text refers to a favorite song, Thanksgiving at a niece’s house, and gardening.

Mr. R. M. THOMPSON of “Murlen,” Oregon received a postcard from Provolt, Oregon in 1910. The postcard begins “Dear Son Riley” and is signed “R. M. THOMPSON, s[enio]r.” The postcard text refers to a copper plate sent to Grants Pass. A Riley THOMPSON is in Merlin (about ten miles northwest of Grants Pass)[8] and a Riley THOMPSON is in Applegate (about four miles southeast of Provolt) in the 1910 U.S. census.[9] The postcard was sent from a father to his son, and the two appear together in the 1880 U.S. census.[10]

Leland WOOD of Chitwood, Oregon received a postcard from Nashville, Oregon in 1911. The postcard text begins “Dear Bro” and refers to Renas and Beulah. A Leland A. and sister Beulah WOOD, born in Illinois, are in Elk City (about four miles southwest of Chitwood) in the 1910 U.S. census.[11] A Leland A., Beulah M., and Renas A. WOOD are in Illinois in the 1900 U.S. census.[12] The text speaks of Beulah’s dog and “high water.” I have not identified which of Leland’s siblings sent the postcard.

Miss Emma LIEBE of Albany, Oregon received a postcard from “Brother Geo” postmarked in Lacombe, Oregon in 1916.[See the previous page.] A George W. and an Emma M. LIEBE are living together as stepchildren in Lacombe in the 1920 U.S. census.[13] The text has a warm Christmas greeting and appears to speak of an animal brought in from pasture.

Miss Wilma MYERS of Oregon City, Oregon received a postcard from Boyd, Oregon in 1910. The postcard speaks of 9 month-old Milton and closes “your cousin, Addie CAMPBELL.” A Wilma MYERS is in Canemah (a part of Oregon City)[14] and an Addie A. and Milton CAMPBELL are in Boyd in the 1910 U.S. census.[15] I have not determined the exact connection between Wilma MYERS and Addie CAMPBELL.

Other Oregon postcards for which the recipient and sender have apparently been identified in a census or similar document (each viewable on *Philgen.org* by searching on the recipient’s or sender’s family name or city) are a 1911 postcard to Andrew ROY (“Budd”) Cornelius of Gaston, Oregon from his sister “Ollie” CORNELIUS in Hot Lake, Oregon; a 1913 postcard to Harriet W. ELLISON of Irving, Oregon from her daughter Jessie and son-in-law Adolphus (“Dolph”) MILLER of Oswego, Oregon; a 1912 postcard to Ida SCHEITLIN of Portland, Oregon from her niece Adaline HOLCOMB of Orenco, Oregon; a 1911 postcard to Jessie STILES of Starkey, Oregon from his aunt Elva STILES of Hilgard, Oregon; and a 1921 postcard to Nell THIELSEN from her niece Nancy THIELSEN sent from Agate Beach, Oregon.

Additional Oregon postcards for which the recipient has been identified include a 1907 postcard from Hillsdale, Oregon to Emily (“Von”) BERGEN of Portland, Oregon from her cousin Elsie; a 1909 postcard from Yaquina, Oregon to Georgia (Mrs. Isaac) FOGEL of Portland, Oregon from her sister Mattie; a 1910 postcard from Oak Grove, Oregon to Amos HELM of Dufur, Oregon from his “Aunty Warren”; a 1908 postcard from Dothan, Oregon to Etta HOWARD of Riddle, Oregon from her niece Jessie; a 1910 postcard from Waterloo, Oregon to Nettie MICHAEL of Albany, Oregon from her nephew Willie; a 1909 postcard from Corbett, Oregon to Mrs. Edith SEXTON of Hood River, Oregon from her sister Eva; a 1908 postcard to Anna YEZERSKI of Portland, Oregon from her cousin in/near Paradis Bay, Ontario; and a 1908 postcard to Martha (Mrs. G. L.) ZUMWALT of McMinnville, Oregon from son or daughter “BB” from Sodaville, Oregon.

The years 1905-1915 are regarded as the “Golden Age of Postcards.”[16] Most people did not yet have a telephone and a postcard provided a quick way to stay in touch with family. I hope this article has shown you how postal history can reveal details of our ancestors’ lives that may not be available from other sources. In addition to the details of daily family life, other envelopes and postcards show our ancestors’ political and social interests, military service, work, place of origin, and recreation.[17] Many more envelope and postcard photos involving Oregon 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 Oregon 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.

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Biosketch

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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 World War I Selective Service System Draft Registration Cards, 1917-1918, Registration Card for Howard Humphrey, Lane County, Oregon, Lane County Draft Board, NARA series M1509, FHL roll 1,852,059. Viewed on *Ancestry.com*.
- 3 1900 U.S. census, Zumwalt, Lane County, Oregon, ED 109, p. 11B (written), NARA series T623, roll 1,349. Viewed on *Ancestry.com*.
- 4 World War I Selective Service System Draft Registration Cards, 1917-1918, Registration Card for Vincent Taylor Humphrey, Lane County, Oregon, Lane County Draft Board, NARA series M1509, FHL roll 1,852,059. Viewed on *Ancestry.com*.
- 5 Jim Forte Postal History (<http://postalhistory.com>, go to “U.S. by State,” click on Oregon; accessed 3 June 2010).

- 6 1910 U.S. census, Dilley Precinct, Washington County, Oregon, ED 269, p. 1A (written), NARA series T624, roll 1,291. Viewed on *Ancestry.com*.
- 7 1920 U.S. census, Vernonia Precinct, Columbia County, Oregon, ED 104, p. 5A (written), NARA series T625, roll 1,493. Viewed on *Ancestry.com*.
- 8 1910 U.S. census, Merlin Precinct, Josephine County, Oregon, ED 121, p. 8A (written), NARA series T624, roll 1,281. Viewed on *Ancestry.com*.
- 9 1910 U.S. census, Applegate Precinct, Jackson County, Oregon, ED 96, p. 9B (written), NARA series T624, roll 1,281. Viewed on *Ancestry.com*.
- 10 1880 U.S. census, Slate Creek Precinct, Josephine County, Oregon, ED 57, p. 7C (written), NARA series T9, roll 1,081. Viewed on *Ancestry.com*.
- 11 1910 U.S. census, Elk City Precinct, Lincoln County, Oregon, ED 168, p. 16B (written), NARA series T624, roll 1,281. Viewed on *Ancestry.com*.
- 12 1900 U.S. census, Princeville Township, Peoria County, Illinois, ED 121, p. 22A (written), NARA series T623, roll 335. Viewed on *Ancestry.com*.
- 13 1920 U.S. census, Lacombe Precinct, Linn County, Oregon, ED 300, p. 2B (written), NARA series T625, roll 1,496. Viewed on *Ancestry.com*.
- 14 1910 U.S. census, Canemah Precinct, Clackamas County, Oregon, ED 22, p. 7A (written), NARA series T624, roll 1,279. Viewed on *Ancestry.com*.
- 15 1910 U.S. census, Boyd, Wasco County, Oregon, ED 299, p. 1B (written), NARA series T624, roll 1,290. Viewed on *Ancestry.com*.
- 16 Fred Bassett, "Wish You Were Here!: The Story of the Golden Age of Picture Postcards," Postcard Collection Essay, Appendix C, QC16510, Albany, New York: New York State Library, Manuscripts and Special Collections, (<http://www.nysl.nysed.gov/msscfa/pr/qc16510ess.pdf>, accessed 3 June 2010).
- 17 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].