

Uncovering the Philatelic Genealogy of a Massachusetts Family: Pease

By Shawn Pease

Old envelopes and postcards from attics and scrap-books often provide wonderful genealogical information and an interesting collecting opportunity. As a collecting interest, it can provide a fun pastime that can last a lifetime, and also provide the collector with a measure of pride for preserving family history for generations to come. This article provides an example of one such hobby - based on the author's family tree.

My affliction (aka collecting Pease postal history) started in the late 1990's, after the discovery of a box of World War One USA military medals. My aunt, a teacher, had been holding onto these treasures from her father (my grandfather) and would dutifully bring them out on Veteran's Day (Nov. 11) every year to show to her classroom



Fig. 1 WW1 Victory Medal

She would also sometimes bring his doughboy helmet and other items to discuss with the children. I had not known these medals existed until I was in my 40's and my grandfather had long since past. I expressed an interest in the Victory Medal and other French medals and began researching my grandfather's military records. Along the way, my aunt mentioned that she also had letters sent back from France by my grandfather which his mother (my great-grandmother had saved in a shoe-box).

Once I started reading them, I was interested by both the historical nature of the letters and the content. Much to my surprise, the accumulation of letters contained not only WW1 letters, but letters and postcards from the Mexican Border / Punitive Expedition of 1916 and even earlier family correspondence. I was hooked. I transcribed the Mexican Border letters and produced a family book (*Dear Family, Letters from the Mexican Border and the Great War in France,*

available from Lulu.com). Soon word got out I was interested, more letters and family history arrived. Researching internet sources led me to the hobby of genealogy as a whole, and a new avenue opened up. I began to trace my ancestry back through my grandfather. I was astounded that I even existed. My own father had fought and was wounded in the Korean conflict, his father fought in France in WW1 and was wounded twice and gassed, and his grandfather enlisted in civil war, serving in both the 21st and 58th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry regiments. He was also wounded at the Battle of Spotsylvania Courthouse. He in turn, came from a long line of Sailors and Minutemen from Massachusetts. I learned that I was the *tenth generation* of my family to be born in Massachusetts. Yes, astoundingly, every male of my lineage was born in Massachusetts, within 100 miles of where the first Pease landed in Salem, Massachusetts in 1634.

Of course, there was just so much correspondence available in my direct family, and that trail finally dried out. I've since picked up the trail of other more distant cousins through Postal History collecting, obtaining new items from dealers and the internet. This wider trail led me to uncover stories of "Peases" in the past that made me marvel at the undiscovered history of my family. Certain individuals jump right out, like Valentine Pease, Captain of the whale ship *Acushnet* (and the model for character Captain Ahab in Melville's *Moby Dick*) and Lt. Stephen Pease—who carried the surrender papers from General Lee to U.S. Grant at Appomattox Courthouse to end the Civil War. Along the way, however, a collector can uncover interesting "regular folk" as stagecoach drivers, teachers, farmers, and lighthouse keepers. All of them can turn up as covers in a Postal History dealer's box for a few dollars. All it takes is a few hours of time to look and a passion for research. The end result is hours of fun digging and a collection that is a treasure for future generations!



Fig. 2, Censored soldier's mail, rare "Money Order Branch" postmark from France, Oct. 1917 used to send soldiers pay home.

The author has started posting "Pease" family covers on Philgen.org. He can be contacted via email at darkeldarcaratunk@comcast.net Search for keyword "pease" and check out the covers!