

Postcards

Real photo and regular post cards hold value for genealogists.

By James R. Miller

Many genealogists enjoy seeing picture postcards of locations where their ancestors lived. In addition to photographs of cities and towns, postcards can be a source of genealogical information. This paper presents six old postcards from Kansas with key genealogical data on the sender and/or recipient (when available) to introduce the Philatelic Genealogy website and database (*Philgen.org*, at <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.¹ The site has grown to more than 1,250 envelopes and postcards. Every item includes a photo (used with the owner's permission) and U.S. census or similar details on the sender and/or recipient. The website at present has 35 envelopes and postcards sent to or from Kansas.

Real photo postcards (RPPCs) were produced singly or in limited quantities by amateur and local commercial photographers and were especially popular 1910-1920.² The picture on a RPPC may be the sender or someone in the sender's family. Miss Ida Warren of Minneapolis, Kansas received a RPPC with a man's photo from Saint Louis, Missouri in 1912. [Figures 1A and 1B] The text states: "As I look on my way home" and is signed "Ed." An Ida Warren, single, is in Minneapolis in the 1910 U.S. census.³ An online family group sheet for an Ida Lenora Warren of Minneapolis shows that she married an Edward William Lenander in 1913.⁴ The family group sheet includes a photo of Edward Lenander that closely matches the man shown on the postcard. This RPPC has a photo of the recipient's soon-to-be husband. As with any source of genealogical information, postcards must be used in combination with other sources before reaching a conclusion. Figures 1-3 were purchased from an antique and collectible postcard vendor for \$4 or \$5 each.⁵

Mrs. Lydia Kolbus Nelson of Dodge City, Kansas received a RPPC with a woman's photo from Denver, Colorado circa 1915. [Figures 2A and 2B] The postcard does not have a postmark and was probably sent inside an envelope. The text includes the sender's name, Laura Kolbus Dunklee, her address in Denver, and is signed "Your sister." A Lydia (Mrs. Arthur) Nelson, born in Missouri, is in Dodge City in the 1910 U.S. census⁶ and a Laura (Mrs. Allen) Dunklee is in Denver in the 1910 U.S. census.⁷ A Melinda, born in Missouri, and Laura Kolbus, apparently sisters, are in Pleasant Valley, Kansas in the 1905 Kansas census.⁸ This RPPC has a photo and the address of the recipient's sister.

Mr. Pate Owsley of "Verminion" (Vermillion), Kansas received a RPPC with a photo of four adults from Jeffersonville, Illinois in 1910. [Figures 3A and 3B] A Jarvis P. Owsley is in Vermillion in the 1910 U.S. census.⁹ The postcard text begins "Hello Cousin" and appears to identify the adults in the photo as the writer's brother, his wife, Jim, and the writer, Agness Wilson. The writer refers to Jeffersonville as "home," where she was visiting. An Agness M. Wilson, with a brother James, is in Arrington Township (centered 10 miles southwest of Jeffersonville) in the 1900 U.S. census.¹⁰ A Jarvis Payton Owsley registered with Selective Service in 1918¹¹, and his middle name may explain why the postcard was sent to "Pate." I have not yet determined the details of how Pate Owsley and Agnes W. Wilson are related as cousins. This RPPC has apparent photos of two of the recipient's cousins (the writer and her brother) and two other related people. Because of their photos, RPPCs are exceptional sources of family history information.

The text on a 'regular' postcard (non-RPPC) can reveal a family relationship between people living far apart within the U.S. Reva Menefee of Mulvane, Kansas received a postcard from Homestead, Oklahoma in 1916. [Figure 4] A Reva N. Menefee is in Belle Plaine, Kansas (about 5 miles south of Mulvane) in the 1920 U.S. census.¹² The postcard text begins "Dear Grand daughter" and is signed "Grand ma." This postcard was sent by a grandmother to her grandchild living 150 miles away. Figures 4-6 are from an online postal history vendor who has given permission to

Philgen.org to use pictures from his website where there are currently more than 800 postcards and envelopes from Kansas for sale.¹³

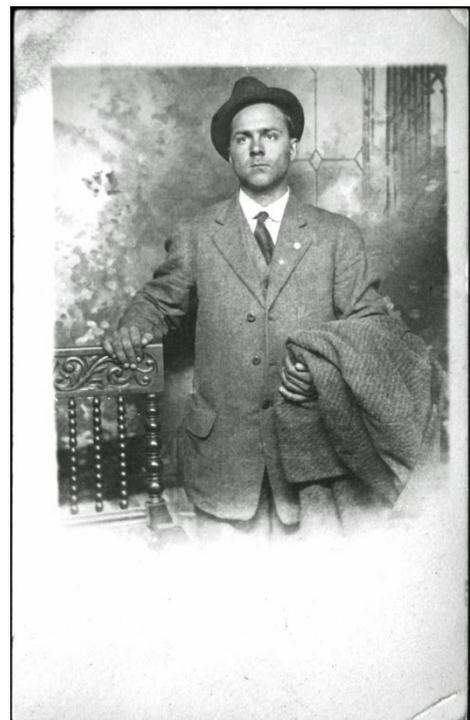
Herman Kuhnle of Dorrance, Kansas received a postcard from Denver, Colorado in 1925.[Figure 5] The text begins "Hello Emma" and is signed "Aunt May." A Herman and Emma Kuhnle are in Center Township, Kansas (centered 7 miles west of Dorrance) in the 1920 U.S. census.¹⁴ The postcard text speaks of working the harvest and heading to California. The postcard was sent to a niece and nephew by their aunt who had already traveled 380 miles west.

Mrs. Kristine Flohr of Lindsborg, Kansas received a postcard from Minneapolis, Minnesota in 1929. [Figure 6] The postcard begins "Dear Aunt and Emil." A Christine and John E. Flohr, mother and son, are in Lindsborg in the 1930 U.S. census on a street that matches the postcard's address.¹⁵ A John Emil Flohr of Lindsborg registered with Selective Service in 1918.¹⁶ The postcard, signed "Ethel," speaks of other family members and appears to have been sent by a niece to her aunt and cousin living 630 miles away.

This article has shown that old postcards let us glimpse our ancestors' activities, locate extended family members in other states, and may even show us their photos.¹⁷ Many more envelope and postcard photos involving Kansas residents are available. Postal history vendors have given *Philgen.org* permission to use thousands of photos from their websites and archived philatelic auction catalogs and most have not yet been placed on *Philgen.org*. More than 1300 involve Kansas, and these sources are a fraction of available postal history items. The purpose of *Philgen.org* is to classify envelope and postcard photos by who wrote and received each one to make them accessible to genealogists. Anyone interested in helping to add Kansas envelopes and postcards to the website is invited to contact the author. Photos and data posted for each item will be credited to the person and/or their genealogical or philatelic association.

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Figures 1A and 1B

1912 real photo postcard from St. Louis, Missouri to Minneapolis, Kansas with partial signature and photo of recipient's husband-to-be, back and front (Postcard purchased from Mary L Martin Postcards)

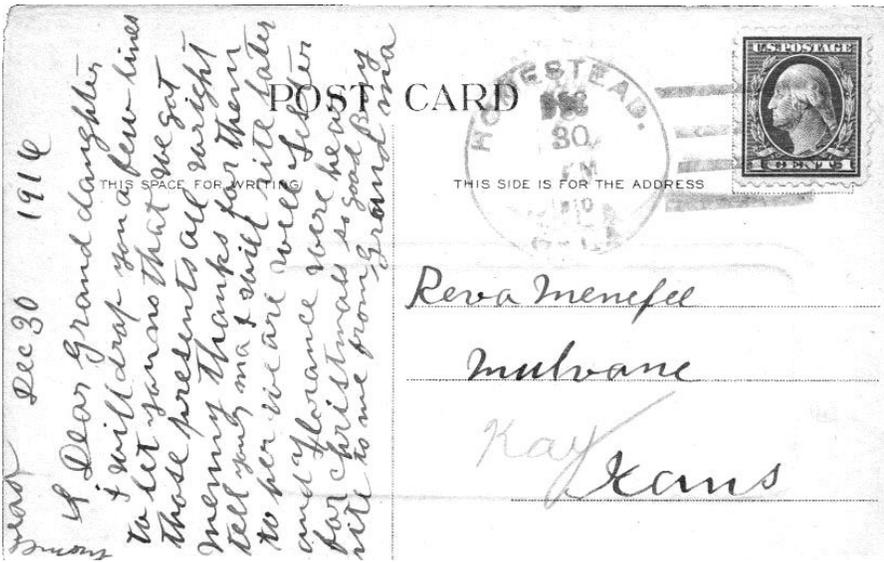


Figure 4
1909 postcard from Homestead, Oklahoma to Mulvane, Kansas that begins: "Dear Grand daughter" (Photo courtesy of Jim Forte Postal History)

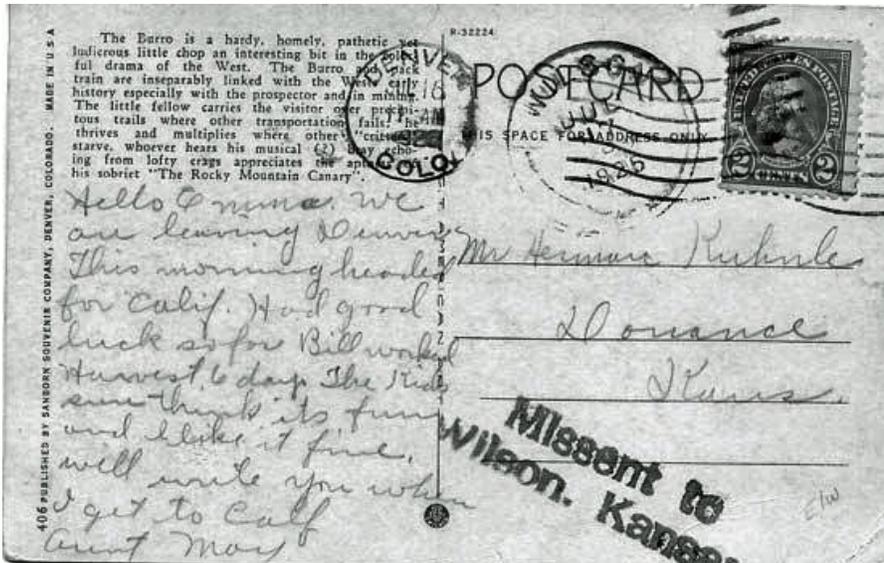


Figure 5
1925 postcard from Denver, Colorado to Dorrance, Kansas signed "Aunt May" (Photo courtesy of Jim Forte Postal History)

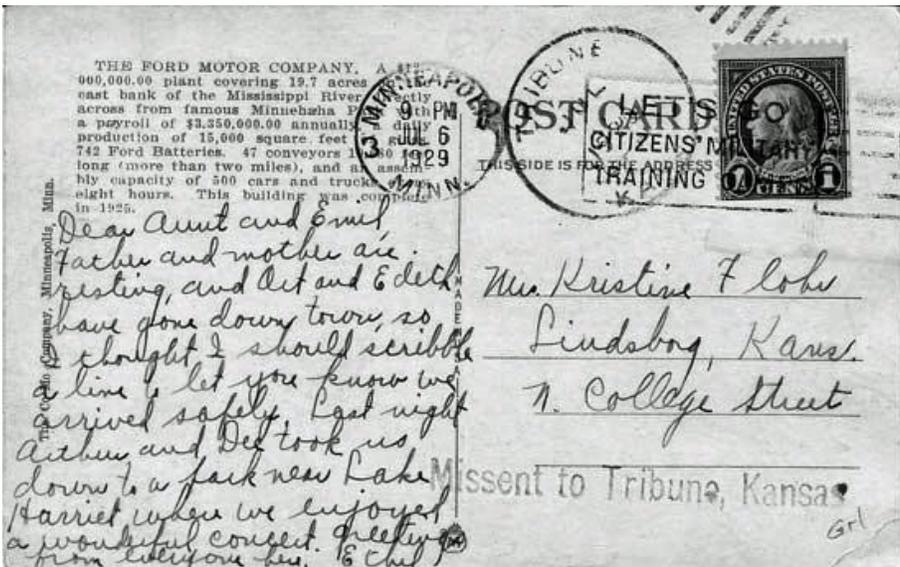


Figure 6
1929 postcard from Minneapolis, Minnesota to Lindsborg, Kansas that begins "Dear Aunt and Emil" (Photo courtesy of Jim Forte Postal History)

Acknowledgments:

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- 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 or on American Ancestors in the Main Menu].
 - ² Robert Bogdan and Todd Weseloh, *Real Photo Postcard Guide, The People's Photography* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2006), pp. 10-11, 19.
 - ³ 1910 U.S. census, Minneapolis, Ottawa County, Kansas, ED 90, p. 3B (written), p. 105 (stamped, verso), NARA series T624, roll 452. Viewed on Ancestry.com.
 - ⁴ "Herren Family Tree," owner: lindsborglibrary; primary source citation not shown for marriage. Viewed on Ancestry.com.
 - ⁵ Mary L. Martin Postcards (<http://www.marylmartin.com/>, accessed 14 May 2010).
 - ⁶ 1910 U.S. census, Dodge City Ward 3, Ford County, Kansas, ED 46, p. 8A (written), NARA series T624, roll 439. Viewed on Ancestry.com.
 - ⁷ 1910 U.S. census, Denver Ward 12, Denver County, Colorado, ED 153, p. 4B (written), NARA series T624, roll 116. Viewed on Ancestry.com.
 - ⁸ 1905 Kansas State Census, Pleasant Valley Township, Finney County, pp. 9-10, roll 52. Viewed on Ancestry.com.
 - ⁹ 1910 U.S. census, Vermillion, Noble Township, Marshall County, Kansas, ED 75, p. 2A (written), NARA series T624, roll 447. Viewed on Ancestry.com.
 - ¹⁰ 1900 U.S. census, Arrington Township, Wayne County, Illinois, ED 92, p. 5B (written), NARA series T623, roll 350. Viewed on Ancestry.com.
 - ¹¹ U.S. Selective Service System, World War I Draft Registration Cards, 1917-1918, Jarvis Payton Owsley, Republic County, Kansas, NARA series M1509. Viewed on Ancestry.com.
 - ¹² 1920 U.S. census, Belle Plaine Township, Sumner County, Kansas, ED 164, p. 13B (written), NARA series T625, roll 553. Viewed on Ancestry.com.
 - ¹³ Jim Forte Postal History (<http://postalhistory.com>, go to "U.S. by State," click on Kansas).
 - ¹⁴ 1920 U.S. census, Center Township, Russell County, Kansas, ED 57-16, p. 3B (written), NARA series T626, roll 547. Viewed on Ancestry.com.
 - ¹⁵ 1930 U.S. census, Lindsborg, Smoky Hill Township, McPherson County, Kansas, ED 31, p. 4B (written), NARA series T625, roll 709. Viewed on Ancestry.com.
 - ¹⁶ U.S. Selective Service System, World War I Draft Registration Cards, 1917-1918, John Emil Flohr, McPherson County, Kansas, NARA series M1509. Viewed on Ancestry.com.
 - 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 (Number 1, 2010): cover, 7-14; James R. Miller, "Philatelic Genealogy in Ohio: An Introduction," *Ohio Genealogy News*, Vol. 41 (Spring 2010): cover, 6-9; and James R. Miller, "Philatelic Genealogy in Minnesota: An Introduction," *Minnesota Genealogist*, Vol. 40 (No. 4): 9-14 [all viewable at <http://philgen.org>, click on Iowa, Minnesota, or Ohio in the Main Menu].