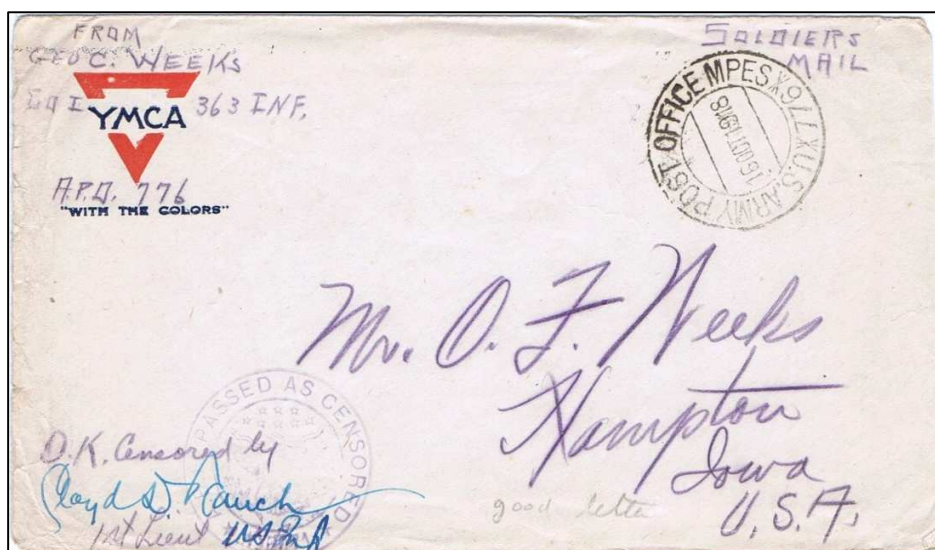


## Philatelic Genealogy Follow-up: Writing Home to Iowa during World War I

About two million American soldiers, sailors, and Marines served in Europe from 1917 to 1919 in the American Expeditionary Forces (A.E.F.) during and just after World War I.<sup>132</sup> Surviving postcards and envelopes document their service. This paper presents two postcards and three envelopes (two with letters) sent to Iowa by soldiers during their military service, with basic genealogical data on the sender and recipient. As with any source of genealogical information, old envelopes and postcards must be used in combination with other sources before reaching any conclusion.



**Figure 1.** 1918 envelope from Army Post Office 776 to Hampton, Iowa with sender's name and military unit, censor's stamp and signature, Soldier's Mail, and YMCA logo (Author's collection)

Mr. O.F. Weeks of Hampton, Iowa received an envelope from “G eo[rge] C. Weeks, Co[mpany] I, 363 Inf[antry], A.P.O. [Army Post Office] 776” postmarked in October 1918.[Figure 1] An Oliver F. and George C. Weeks, father and son, are in Hampton in the 1910 U.S. census.<sup>133</sup> The envelope has a censor's stamp, applied after an officer read the letter to assure it did not indicate the soldier's exact location, his unit's morale, anticipated troop movement, or other information that could be useful to the German army if the envelope or postcard fell into their hands.<sup>134</sup> The

enclosed letter, accordingly, begins “ Somewhere inFrance.” The envelope was provided by the YMCA (Young Men's Christian Association).<sup>135</sup> “S oldier's Mail,” written in the upper right, was accepted in place of a stamp from 1917 to 1920 on mail sent by military personnel from overseas.<sup>136</sup> A.P.O. 776 corresponds to the 91<sup>st</sup> Division.<sup>137</sup> The letter states “ Have been up where the Huns shoot at a Yankee with all kinds of guns and munitions of war.” This envelope and letter were purchased on eBay® for \$7.50.

Mrs. H.E. Miller of Olin, Iowa received a postcard from “ Pvt [Private] Harlen L. Miller, Co[mpany] D 33 Eng[ineers], Am[erican] Ex[peditionary] F[orces], France” in December 1918.[Figure 2] A Luella (Mrs. Howard E.) Miller and her son “ Harlan” are in Olin in the 1920 U.S. census.<sup>138</sup> The postcard text speaks of

<sup>132</sup> American Expeditionary Forces ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American\\_Expeditionary\\_Forces](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_Expeditionary_Forces), accessed 27 September 2010).

<sup>133</sup> 1910 U.S. census, Hampton Ward 2, Franklin County, Iowa, Enumeration District [hereafter ED] 164, p. 14A (written), National Archives and Records Administration [hereafter NARA] series T624, roll 403. Viewed on *Ancestry.com*.

<sup>134</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 7 September 2010).

<sup>135</sup> William Howard Taft and Frederick Harris, *Service With Fighting Men*, Part 1 (Ohio: Association Press, 1922), p. 284.

<sup>136</sup> Theo. Van Dam, editor, and War Cover Club, *The Postal History of the AEF, 1917-1923* [hereafter *Postal History of the AEF*], (State College, Pennsylvania: American Philatelic Society, 1980), pp. 13-14.

<sup>137</sup> Theo. Van Dam, *The Postal History of the AEF*, p. 85.

<sup>138</sup> 1920 U.S. census, Olin, Jones County, Iowa, ED 77, p. 15A (written), NARA series T625, roll 495. Viewed on *Ancestry.com*.

making a stove to cook hot cakes. This postcard, which has a censor's stamp and signature and "Soldiers Mail," was on sale on eBay® by a vendor who permits *Philgen.org* to use his photographs.<sup>139</sup>



Figure 2. 1918 postcard from France to Olin, Iowa with sender's name and military unit, censor's stamp and signature, and Soldier's Mail (Photograph courtesy of philadoc, an eBay® vendor)

Mrs. George E. Dourte of Iowa Falls, Iowa received a postcard from "Pvt [Private] G.E. Dourte, U.S. Inf[antry], A.E.F." in January 1919.[Figure 3] The postcard text begins "My dear Jess!" An "Earl G. Dourty" and his wife Jessie A. are in Iowa Falls in the 1920 U.S. census at the street address written on the postcard.<sup>140</sup> George E. and Jessie "Dourty" are in the 1930 U.S. census,<sup>141</sup> and his 1917 Selective Service registration card is signed "George Earl Dourte."<sup>142</sup> Following the November 1918 armistice, U.S. military forces occupied the Mosel River valley in Germany.<sup>143</sup> This postcard was sent from Losnich, Germany, which is located on the Mosel River, and the A.P.O. number "770" in the postmark corresponds to the 90<sup>th</sup> Division, Army of Occupation.<sup>144</sup> The text states that he is well and hopes to be home soon. The postcard has a censor's stamp and signature and "Soldiers Mail." This postcard was purchased on eBay® for \$7.50.

<sup>139</sup> philadoc (an eBay® vendor).

<sup>140</sup> 1920 U.S. census, Iowa Falls Ward 1, Hardin County, Iowa, ED 190, p. 7A (written), NARA series T625, roll 492. Viewed on *Ancestry.com*.

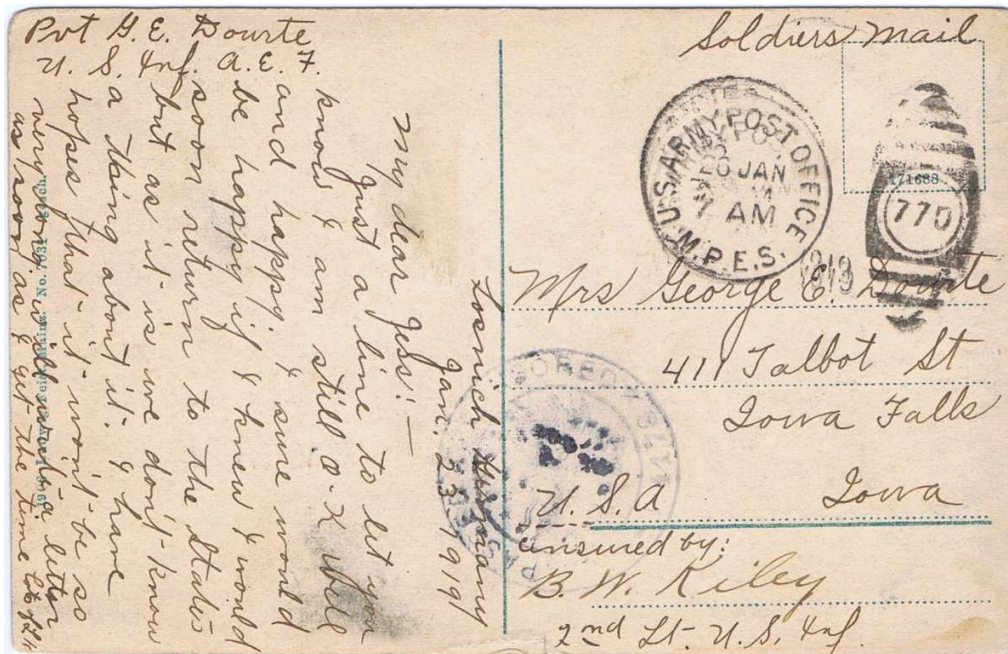
<sup>141</sup> 1930 U.S. census, Iowa Falls Ward 1, Hardin County, Iowa, ED 42-16, p. 7A (written), NARA series T626, roll 658. Viewed on *Ancestry.com*.

<sup>142</sup> World War I Draft Registration Cards, 1917-1918, Registration Card for George Earl Dourte, Precinct 1, Iowa Falls, Iowa Draft Board. Viewed on *Ancestry.com*.

<sup>143</sup> Theo. Van Dam, *The Postal History of the AEF*, p. 151.

<sup>144</sup> Theo. Van Dam, *The Postal History of the AEF*, p. 85.





**Figure 3. 1919 postcard from Losnich, Germany and Army Post Office 770 to Iowa Falls, Iowa with sender's name, censor's stamp and signature, and Soldier's Mail (Author's collection)**

Mrs. E. D. Tompkins of Clarion, Iowa received an envelope from "Capt[ain] E. D. Tompkins, U.S. Army" postmarked in January 1919.[Figure 4] An Erle D. Tompkins, a physician, and his wife May J. Tompkins are in Clarion in the 1930 U.S. census.<sup>145</sup> The envelope, which was provided by the American Red Cross (A.R.C.) and includes the Red Cross symbol,<sup>146</sup> may indicate that Dr. Tompkins worked at an A.R.C.-equipped hospital staffed by U.S. Army personnel.<sup>147</sup> A.P.O. 918 corresponds to 2<sup>nd</sup> Army Headquarters.<sup>148</sup> The envelope has a censor's stamp and was signed by the sender, as officers were allowed to censor their own mail.<sup>149</sup>



**Figure 4. 1919 envelope from Army Post Office 918 to Clarion, Iowa with sender's name and branch of service and American Red Cross logo (Author's collection)**

<sup>145</sup> 1930 U.S. census, Clarion Ward 1, Wright County, Iowa, ED 99-30, p. 6B (written), NARA series T626, roll 691. Viewed on *Ancestry.com*.

<sup>146</sup> Theo. Van Dam, *The Postal History of the AEF*, p. 17.

<sup>147</sup> James Felton, "American Red Cross in World War I and Army Medical Department Overseas," Chapter 7 in Theo. Van Dam, editor, and War Cover Club, *The Postal History of the AEF, 1917-1923*, Second Edition, (War Cover Club, 1990), p. 127.

<sup>148</sup> Theo. Van Dam, *The Postal History of the AEF*, p. 86.

<sup>149</sup> "War Letter, Censorship!" see note 3 for details.

Mr. Amos Short of Bassett, Iowa received an envelope and letter from “Pvt [Private] W. L. Short, 32<sup>nd</sup> Eng[inee]rs, Hdq. [Headquarters] Company, A.F.F. France” postmarked in April 1919.[Figures 5A and 5B] An Amos and Walter L. Short, father and son, are in Chickasaw Township (which surrounds Bassett) in the 1920 U.S. census.<sup>150</sup> The letter, written on Salvation Army stationery,<sup>151</sup> begins “Embarkation Camp,” indicating that he was near to returning to the U.S. His letter asks if the newspapers speak of peace terms being signed, and he writes that “maybe I'll get home in time to help make hay.” The envelope has a censor's stamp and signature. This envelope and letter were purchased on eBay® for \$4.25.



**Figure 5A and 5B. 1919 envelope and signature from France to Bassett, Iowa with sender's name, rank, and military unit, censor's stamp and signature (Author's collection)**

This article shows how old postcards and envelopes document and let us glimpse our ancestor's wartime experience. The military branch, rank, and unit numbers and locations written on these postcards and envelopes may help in finding additional information on their military service, and help fill gaps in World War I records due to the 1973 fire at the National Personnel Records Center.<sup>152</sup>

Many more envelope and postcard photographs involving Iowa residents are available. Other postcards and envelopes illustrate our ancestors' political and social interests, work, recreation, immigrant origins, and family living elsewhere in the U.S.<sup>153</sup> Postal history vendors have given *Philgen.org* permission to use thousands of photographs from their websites and archived philatelic auction catalogs and most have not yet been placed on *Philgen.org*. At present, genealogists cannot easily locate an envelope or postcard sent or received by their ancestors. Envelopes and postcards in postal history collections and for sale are largely classified by stamps, cancellations, and other postal markings. The purpose of *Philgen.org* is to present envelope and postcard photographs with details on who wrote and received each item to make postal history

<sup>150</sup> 1920 U.S. census, Chickasaw, Chickasaw County, Iowa, ED 48, p. 6B (written), NARA series T625, roll 482. Viewed on *Ancestry.com*.

<sup>151</sup> Theo. Van Dam, *The Postal History of the AEF*, p. 18.

<sup>152</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 27 September 2010).

<sup>153</sup> For examples of other types of information available from postal history, please visit <http://philgen.org>, and click on NEA, American Ancestors, or a state name in the Main Menu.

accessible to genealogists. Anyone may place a photograph of an envelope or postcard from their family and/or help add Iowa envelope and postcard photos to *Philgen.org* by contacting Barbara Hug ([barbhug3@gmail.com](mailto:barbhug3@gmail.com)) or the author. Photographs and data posted for each item will be credited to the person and/or their genealogical and/or philatelic association(s).

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### **Biosketch**

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