

4. Postcards from the Turn of the 19th Century

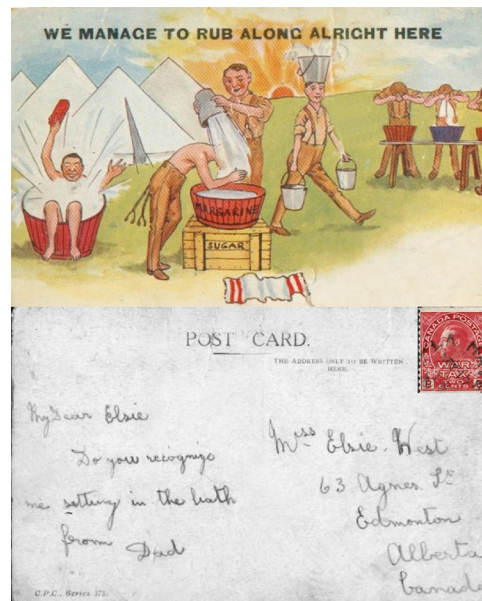
The first postcards appeared after 1860. Along with the “letter sheet” or aerogram, they provided a lightweight and therefore inexpensive way of mailing messages. By the turn of the century, odd variations on the postcard emerged, and our ancestors apparently took full advantage of them. The strangest of these (in my opinion) was the leather postcard. I have two of these, both from Canada, and both to sister Ruth Naomi. Judging from the stamp, they were sent between the years 1903 and 1908. One is from Grampa (although the time frame



makes little sense, unless he sent it from the Shanghaied ship). The other is from Heber to Ruth ca. 1906, probably sent from Edmonton. Both have colour cartoons, probably part of the original postcard, not the message. The cartoon postcard was common during the war, sent home from soldiers to their families. They frequently used a comment pertaining to the war, as this paper example from

Grampa to my mom illustrates. It was probably sent in 1915, during the three months his unit spent in the camp at Folkstone, England. The picture-postcard was growing in use in these years also. Two years later, Grampa sent a foldout postcard with several photos of the Epsom Hospital, where he spent the first 3 months of his 10 months recovery in England (see photo on page 43).

During WWI, silk postcards were bought as souvenirs by soldiers who were serving on the Western Front. Local French and Belgian women embroidered different motifs onto strips of silk mesh which were sent to factories for cutting and mounting on postcards. It is an example of an in-



dustry which appeared as a result of war and must have been a useful source of income for families in France and Belgium. The embroidered postcards were very popular with soldiers, who often sent them home. They were sold in thin paper envelopes but were seldom sent through the post in them. The envelopes were too fragile and, more particularly, the cards were not cheap souvenirs; usually they were mailed with letters. For this reason, the cards are often unwritten, with no marks on the back, any message having been sent in an accompanying letter. Like the papier mâché postcard following, these more elaborate postcards were included in the artifacts that Mary Irish gave to me. They probably originally belonged to one or another of the aunts. The ceramic-looking one has a New Year’s message in it, making it more a greeting card than a postcard.

