

Garland Family Postcards by Kurt Meyer

"Having a great time. Wish you were here." ...The primary message of many a treasured postcard.

I am NOT a deltiologist. I was unfamiliar with the word until gathering this background information. If you collect postcards, you're a deltiologist. My interest in postcards is largely historic. Methinks postcards -- the kind you send to dear ones while traveling -- are headed the way of the buggy whip. I mean, why send postal mail when you can snap a photo and transmit instantly via text or email? Easy. Quick. And simple. Technology is in the process of making postcards obsolete... at least their buying and sending, although deltiologists are unlikely to disappear. Collecting these nostalgic souvenirs might even increase as modern circulation diminishes.

An email from last summer triggered my postcard interest. A woman in South Carolina found me via this Hamlin Garland Society website, which lists me as contact should someone wish to reach out. Debbie did by sending me an email: *"Many years ago, I was given a small collection of postcards written to Hamlin Garland's wife and family mostly from Europe in the early years of the last century, from 1908 to 1914*. With one exception, they are not written to Garland himself... but I wonder if the Society might want them. They are hard to decipher, but many are signed F.K.H. ... I would be happy to give them a new home."* -- Debbie, Greenville, SC, but formerly of Trempealeau, WI

As readers know, the Garland Society is basically an online organization, without storage or display capacity. However, the historical museum in Osage, Iowa, where Garland spent his formative boyhood years, has both. Yes, they'd accept this gift and a transaction soon came to pass.

Debbie went on to explain: *"There are about 40 (postcards) in all, given to me when I was reading the Middle Border books as a young adult by Eli Motschenbacher, a railroad man who rode all over the Plains and the Upper Midwest in the mid 1900s. Where he got them, I have no idea. He was a wonderful, colorful friend of my father's, and had numerous collections from his travels. He'd be as happy as I am to know someone might want them."*

So, I did a bit of research. According to the La Crosse Tribune, *"Eli Motschenbacher, 74, of Trempealeau died Wednesday, December 16 (1970). He was born March, 1896... a North Western depot agent and telegrapher in Trempealeau and Onalaska until he retired in 1961."* (A few words of explanation: Trempealeau, where Debbie and Eli once lived, is a town of almost 2,000 residents 25 miles from West Salem, Garland's Wisconsin "hometown," of 5,200 residents. "North Western" is the Chicago and North Western Transportation Company, once among the country's longest railroads. And presumably, we all know what happened to the telegraph... and telegraphers. Wait a minute! Upon checking, 12.5 million telegrams are sent annually, more than twice the approximately 5 million postcards that are mailed, all of which was news to me.)

So, back to the Garland postcards. Garland's daughters, Constance and Mary Isabel, received most of these greetings, although some were sent to Zulime, others to "the Garland family". Many originated from exotic

ports of call: Avignon, Munich, Budapest, Stockholm, Dresden. The Dresden card was addressed to our author: *“Aug, 16, -12, Dear Hamlin, I am finding German cities quite as interesting as I expected. Much beautiful work going on here and some not as gratifying. There is evolution in it all. Some good friends have kept us well informed on home topics, for which we are grateful. I long to be at work again. --L.”* Based on the handwriting, it’s highly likely this postcard is from Lorado Taft, prominent sculptor, Hamlin’s friend before he met and married Lorado’s sister, Zulime. (I don’t know who F.K.H. is; I welcome your guesses.)

“There is evolution in it all.” Indeed, postcards and telegrams have largely become selfies and texts. Change abounds, yet a timeless if unstated message is even more beautiful than the accompanying photo: *“All is well. Thinking of you. Sending love.”*

* -- Deltiologists call 1905 - 1915 the “Golden Age of Postcards”. Figures for the year ending June 30, 1908, indicate 700-million postcards were mailed in the U.S.; by 1913, it was >900-million, when it began to decline. Imagine, more than 900-million! These figures put today’s postcard tally -- about five million -- in perspective.