

So, It Is

May 14, 2022
Rodman, Iowa



"Dear Little Florence" - Her mother's name was also Florence, so "little" would clarify who this card was intended for.

A Message Through the Ages - "How are you and how do you like this snow? Do you go out and play in it? Old Santa can bring his sleigh, can't he?"

This 1911 Christmas postcard addressed to "Florence Bekker, Rodman, Iowa", is the oldest family artefact in existence from our family's time in the American Midwest. The message is brief, but the postcard provides a wealth of insight into the lives of the Bekker family while they lived here.



From your teacher Venita."

Florence Bekker was at a very impressionable age and stage of life when she received this cheerful message from her teacher. She was seven years old, and about to leave the only home she had ever known. Her father had been away the past two years establishing a farm homestead near Gravelbourg, Saskatchewan. Her mother stayed in Iowa, looking after six children all under the age of 12. I imagine that Florence, the middle child, was feeling the effects of thin parental attention in December of 1911, as the family packed up to move to Canada.



This brief personal message, sent by a teacher she adored, at a tumultuous time of Florence's life, affected the course of her life. *Grandma*, as I knew her, treasured the post card, it inspired her to become a teacher in later life.

Grandma Florence kept the card in her possession until she died in 1990. Its short, heartfelt message resonated through the ages.

High School Graduation photo of Florence Bekker, 1924

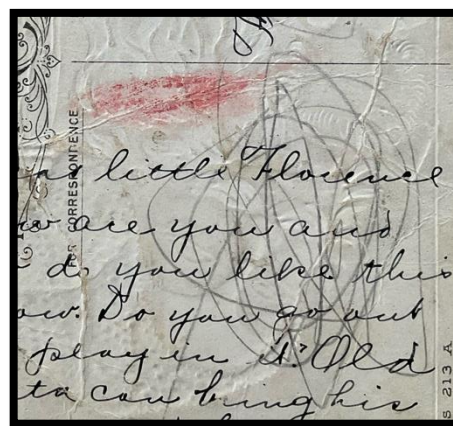
I say that Florence "aspired" to be a teacher. A family of her own, a farm, and the Great Depression got in the way and Florence never completed her childhood dream.

Squirrel Design: When my daughter Riley was very young, she was playing in the garage one day (long before she became a teacher, like her Great, Great Grandma hoped to). Riley scribbled all over a cardboard recycling box with crayons. When I asked her about it, she told me it was a "squirrel design". It struck me as funny then, and it still does.

If you look closely at the back side of the Christmas card, you will notice that there are scribbled crayon and pencil designs on it.

Florence had two younger brothers, Fredrick would have been 4, and Gilbert 2. I am speculating, but it isn't a stretch to think that one of the two *brats* scribbled this *squirrel design* on the card when Florence wasn't looking.

It is also not hard to imagine the screaming and squabbling that might have followed.



A penny saved is a penny earned: In 1911, a postcard required a 1 cent postage stamp. The stamp is missing on this card and appears to have been physically removed. There is a glue stain, which suggests that the stamp had been properly affixed, but a small tear in the paper fabric also implies that someone peeled the stamp from the card.



The postmark does not cover the stamp area, as it should have. Postmarks were intended to “null and void” a stamp so they couldn’t be reused. The postmaster, in his/her haste with Christmas mail, missed the stamp with the postmark hammer.

If you knew my Grandparents, you would have no problem imagining that they would take advantage of a reusable 1 cent stamp.

A small mystery. This is a Christmas Card, so it was probably posted in December, November at the earliest. It is date-stamped the 25th, but the month is illegible. It is hard to believe that the post office would be open and processing mail on Christmas Day, it is also unlikely that a diligent teacher would have posted a card to her student, intended to arrive on time for Christmas, as late as Christmas Eve. The card might have been mailed in November, but that seems early for a local delivery. Either way, the postcard arrived, and Florence treasured it for 79 years.

Henry Droesch used this wagon to haul mail from Rodman Post Office to Route # 1 - Rural



Rural mail delivery started in 1908. Prior to that, rural US residents had to pick up mail from a central post office. After years of complaining that city dwellers received their mail at the door, rural families were afforded the same service.

We had the good fortune to find this US Mail wagon in a museum at West Bend, Iowa. The wagon delivered mail from Rodman Post Office to rural residents during the time the Bekkers lived there. There is a high degree of possibility that Florence’s Christmas card arrived at her home aboard this very wagon.

This isn’t Florence and her sister Carrie gathering the mail in 1911, but you would never know the difference if I said it was ...

... so, it is.



Postscript

This clip, from *The United States Post Office – An American History*, has nothing to do with Florence Bekker (I hope), but I thought it might be of interest...

Mailing Children

Just a few weeks after Parcel Post began, Jesse and Mathilda Beagle “mailed” their 8-month-old son James to his grandmother, who lived a few miles away near Batavia, Ohio. Baby Beagle was just under the initial 11-pound limit for parcels. Rural Carrier Vernon Lytle picked up the baby from his parents’ house and carried him in his mail wagon to his grandmother’s house. The postage was fifteen cents, and the “parcel” was insured for \$50.