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COLORFUL GREETINGS

by

L. Edward Purcell

Want to tell your sweetheart you miss her? Inform your friends about the latest Chautauqua? Iowans at the turn of the century often mailed such messages on picture post cards.

Post cards were a handy and colorful way to send greetings, and between 1898 and the early 1920s, picture postals were a fad. Happily, a number of vintage cards have found their way into the collection of the Society. They show the range of emotion and sentiment of those who purchased and sent them. Local boosterism, love, motherhood, humor, and more than a little titillation are displayed in the cards.

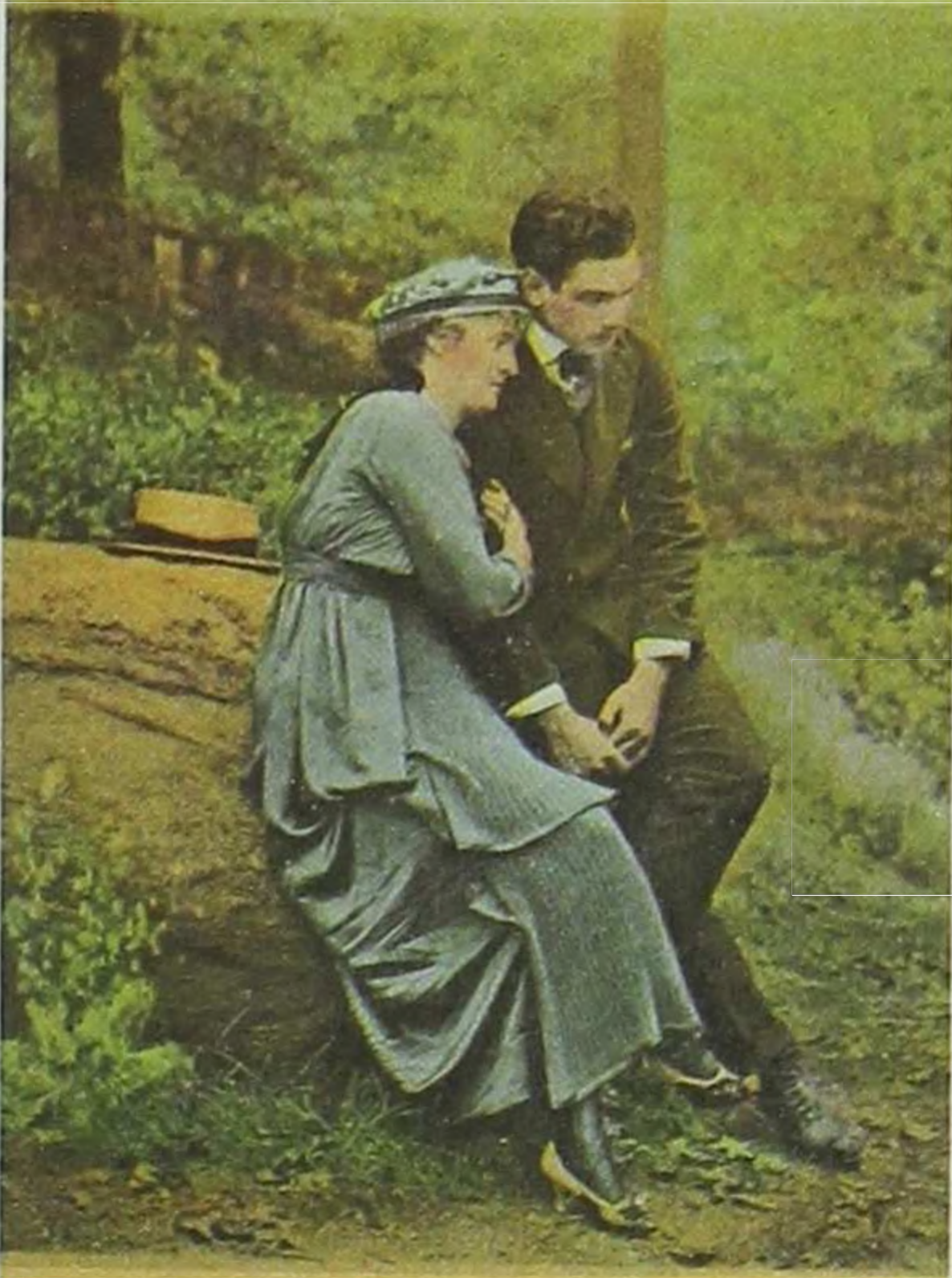
The first picture cards were probably produced in Europe. Shortly after 1840, the new art of photography was combined with the form of printing known as stone lithography to produce picture cards. It was not until 1861, however, that an American, John P. Carlton of Philadelphia, copyrighted a postal card. Postals received official sanction in Europe in the late 1860s, and the U.S. Congress passed a law in 1872 officially allowing post cards in the mail. A boom in the use of cards began after 1898 when the rate on them

was reduced.

Many of the cards mailed in the United States—probably the best quality ones—were printed in Germany or England. The Europeans were able to produce the cards cheaper and with higher printing quality than most American firms. Some American printers, such as Louis Prang of Boston, could rival the Europeans in the fancy holiday greeting cards, but the everyday card, at least those in color, usually came from across the Atlantic. The advent of World War I ended the large-scale importation of cards.

Perhaps the most interesting, although not the finest in quality, were the localized cards. Often printed in England, these cards were produced in mass, and then overprinted with the name of an Iowa town. Following are a few examples of such post cards from the collection of the State Historical Society. Also included are several examples of the turn of the century post card view of women. □

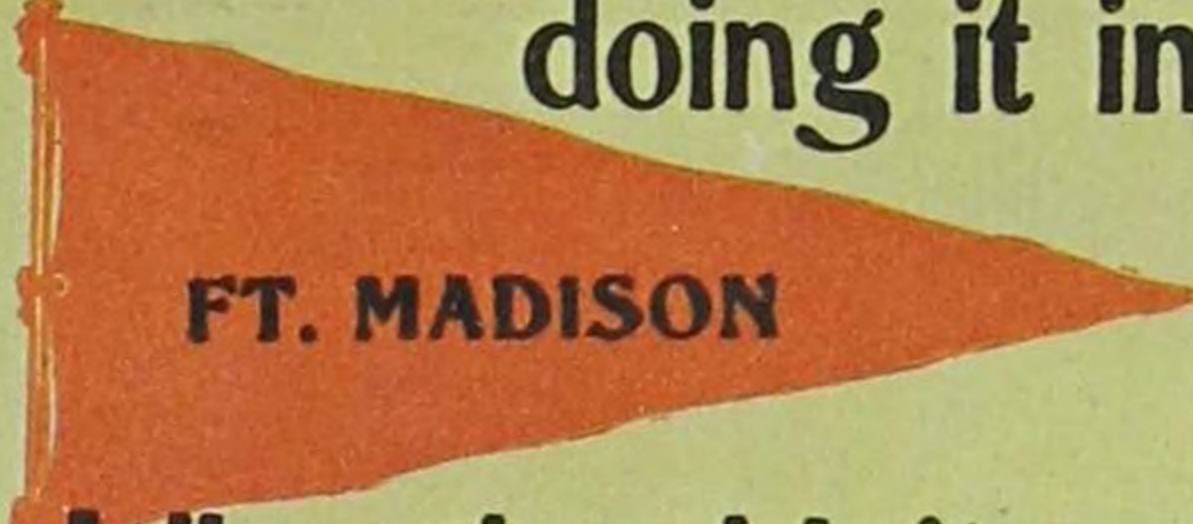
THINKING OF THE TIME WE PARTED



IN FT MADISON, IOWA.

A more ambitious card, printed in Holmfirth, England by the Balmforth Company. Sent in 1917, this card does not use the stone lithograph method which was still common for post card printing. The manufacturer had adopted a more modern, cheaper method of color printing, similar to that used in The Palimpsest.

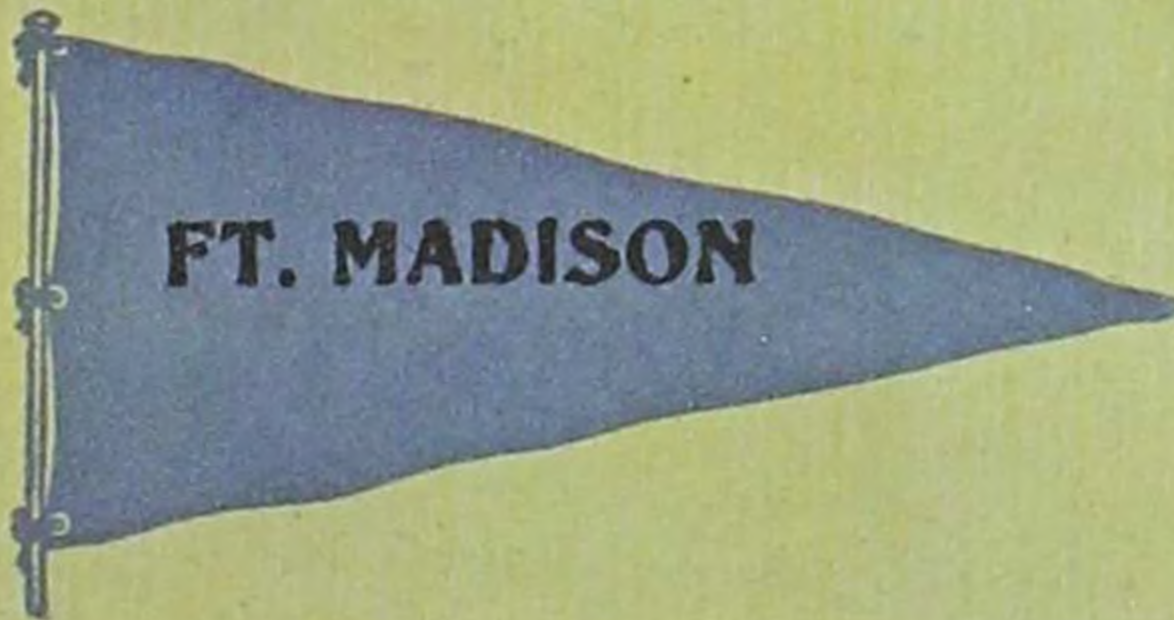
Everybody is
doing it in



Why shouldn't
we do it?



They hate to see you
go away from



Guess why?



Greetings from Ft. Madison (here and above) mailed in 1913 show a standard design which was adapted to individual towns. The name was applied by silk screen.



Cards ranged widely, from the tender sentiment of the Ft. Madison card (p. 79) to this attempt at country humor. A 1914 card, it was printed in the United States, and adapted by the sender from Tama to Davenport.



A 1914 card, tailored for residents of West Point, Iowa. Made in the United States, the printing is a combination of wood or stone tinting and the modern process. The printed message may have been a clever phrase of the day, but has lost most of its impact over the years.



A more elaborate card, again from England, this is a black and white printed picture which has been colored by hand. Since it was a mass produced card, the coloring is haphazard.

SWEETHEART



Three cards from the Balmforth Company of England; printed by color process and enhanced by hand tinting (courtesy of Loren N. Horton).



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Three cards from the Balmyorth Company of England; printed by color process and enhanced by hand tinting (courtesy of Loren N. Horton).



In an abrupt departure from the themes of motherhood or wistful beauty, this German card was mailed from "Mable" to a masculine friend in 1913.



A very delicate portrait, hand-tinted in Chicago in 1911.



One of several intriguing post card studies of women, this 1911 card was printed in this country by stone litho.



A hand-colored American card from 1917.

A beautiful
appearance
quality
contrast



A beautifully printed card from Germany, undated and apparently never mailed. This is a good example of the quality of German lithography before World War I and contrasts sharply with the cheaper, mass produced cards.



A monochrome version of the Gibson girl (although not by Charles Dana Gibson in this case) adorned this 1910 card.



A very delicate hand-tinted photography card from Germany; dated 1907.