

Abstracts for Maine Bicentennial Conference Papers on Panel #5:
The Maine Centennial in 1920: Commemoration and Remembrance through Photography
Saturday, June 1, 2019, 8:30 am – 10:00 am

**A Genuine Look at Maine at Its Centennial:
The Eastern Illustrating & Publishing Company**

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At the time of the Maine Centennial in 1920, the Eastern Illustrating & Publishing Company of Belfast, Maine, had been in business manufacturing “real photo postcards” for a bit more than a decade. At the turn of the 20th century, picture postcards were the absolute rage. An early form of social media, comparable to email, Snapchat, or Instagram, the postcard was a new, informal way of communicating with brief text and an image. And it was the perfect complement to a time when more people were in flux and large numbers of immigrants were entering the country. The invention of the automobile allowed for an increase in tourism and travel.

Eastern’s founder, R. Herman Cassens, was born to German immigrants in Rockland, Maine, in 1875. A businessman through and through, he was known for his “German work ethic.” He learned the publishing trade working with his father-in-law, Edgar Hanson, a newspaper publisher in Belfast. Cassens saw an opportunity in the postcard market by focusing his business on the small towns and rural villages of Maine. The “real photo postcards” made were actual silver gelatin prints that allowed smaller runs of each card to be made compared to most postcards that were machine printed in Germany. This allowed them to satisfy the needs of general stores and other retailers in rural Maine. Eastern played up this aspect and referred to its cards as “genuine.”

This approach required its photographers to travel through every corner of the state, documenting them through their images as well as developing relationships with the citizens of those places. Unlike modern postcards, Eastern’s cards had views of factories and mills, homes, farms, and businesses, often with workers and residents standing proudly out front. Many towns like those in Aroostook and Washington Counties are seen at the peak of their prosperity though often looking very much like the frontier towns that they were. In some cases, these views are the only ones that exist of these places at that time.

The business plan was straightforward and formulaic. Photographers left from Belfast in late spring, when the roads were hard enough to drive on. Upon entering a town, they would usually set up in a boarding house, hotel, or campground. These men (as all the photographers were male) would then set about photographing the major landmarks around town. These landmarks would include any churches, the town hall and library, schools, stores, places of industry, and usually several street scenes. Building a rapport with the people in these communities was also useful in finding the local landmarks as well as the best views of the area.

Eastern became the largest real photo postcard manufacturer in the United States, producing more than a million postcards a year. While Cassens’ intention was the bottom line, the end product of his work was a photographic survey of Maine that depicted a “genuine” look at it when it was a hundred years old.

“The Wabanaki Encampment at the Maine Centennial in 1920: Homeland, Memory, and Ethnohistory”

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From June 28 to July 5, 1920, the State of Maine held its official centennial celebration in downtown Portland. Advertised in newspapers to promote industry and tourism in the post-Great War society, part of the planned activities was a Wabanaki encampment in Deering Oaks Park. Over fifty Wabanaki people, including Passamaquoddy and Penobscot citizens, inhabited the camp, comprised of white military tents from nearby Fort Williams that were dispersed among “The Oaks” and along the shore of the park’s pond. This presentation explores a series of photographs at the Maine Historical Society of the “Indian camp” and close-up images of individual people, several of which were published in Portland’s newspaper. Instead of showing a camp reminiscent of bygone lifestyles like the centennial organizers had planned, the photographs depict a strong human quality and a proud people whose presence revealed that traditional practices were often interwoven with new opportunities.

Centennial events evoke reflections about the past, and the Wabanaki participants possessed their own memory and meaning of the historical event. In contrast to the Penobscots, the State of Maine was slow to extend its bureaucracy over the Passamaquoddy Tribe, and statehood was less important than the actual site on which tribal people camped. Passamaquoddy chief William Neptune recalled that the park was a seventeenth-century battle ground where his ancestors defeated Colonel Benjamin Church and his British militia. Returning to the site not only paid respect to the Wabanaki warriors and recognized their victory, but also presented an opportunity to return to a place in their greater homeland and interact with their past in powerful ways. Wabanaki families brought antique “relics” with them to show visitors, including a string of wampum from the late seventeenth century. The Wabanakis in Portland shared their own memory and connections with the past, extending back in time well before statehood in 1820. Far from being simply “on display” for the public, some of the Wabanaki dances and songs were part of their cultural protocol to be carried out in diplomatic settings, including a canoe paddle around the pond with the top executive official, Maine governor Carl E. Milliken.

Penobscot and Passamaquoddy families in Portland demonstrated the need to remain a strong presence with Maine. The Passamaquoddy Tribe served in both American and Canadian armed services during World War I. Chief William Neptune lost his son, Private Moses Neptune, just before Armistice Day, a sacrifice that created bonds between Chief Neptune and army and navy officers in the celebration. In addition, as series of political issues, including the Native American suffrage movement on the national scene, and Neptune’s protest of unlawful dispossession of 54 land lots on his reservation of Indian Township (Motahkomikuk), threatened to stretch the tribe’s relationship with Maine to a breaking point. In 1921, Neptune brought is formal complaint to Massachusetts governor Channing H. Cox, a jurisdictional strategy to illustrate that Maine had not properly fulfilled its inherited responsibilities with Maine tribes stipulated at separation.

**‘Documents of Truth and Beauty’:
Maine at One Hundred Years through the Real Photo Post Cards of Charles A. Townsend**

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The midpoint of Charles A. Townsend’s career as a real photo post card photographer in Belfast coincided with the 1920 Maine Centennial. Townsend’s cards vividly illustrate post World War I’s new automotive age of coastal tourism along Route 1 through views of overnight cabins and roadside attractions such as Perry’s Nut House. Townsend also created striking images of the recently established Lafayette National Park of 1919 that would become Acadia National Park in 1929. Such seemingly modest artifacts of popular culture provide an important window into Maine life a century ago.

Since the Private Mailing Act of 1898, post cards had grown rapidly in popularity as a convenient means of communication, a souvenir of travel, and an object of collecting. Until World War I broke out in Europe in 1914, most American cards were mass produced color lithographs, many of which were printed in Germany. The curtailment of foreign sources by the war broadened the market for local American makers who often used a photographic process to print each card from a negative.

Given the economic vitality of early-twentieth century Belfast, it is not surprising that the city served as the location for two major producers of real photo post cards, Herman Cassens and Charles A. Townsend. Born in Rutland, Vermont, in 1871, Townsend started his career as an insurance agent. About 1902 he moved to Belfast to work as an agent for the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company. Two years later he began to sell his photographs at the City Drug Store.

From 1905 until his death in 1932, Charles A. Townsend made real photo post cards the focus of his business. In contrast to Herman Cassens, who covered New England and New York, Townsend limited his scope to the Maine coast from York to Mount Desert. Within these geographic parameters, Townsend produced a large quantity of cards that set a dual standard of technical quality and aesthetic excellence. As the Waldo County Herald observed on April 8, 1909, “Mr. Townsend has hundreds of beautiful views that he reproduces on post cards, and for which there is a large sale.”

Charles A. Townsend’s finest body of real photo post cards depicts the Mount Desert communities of Bar Harbor, Northeast Harbor, Seal Harbor, Southwest Harbor, and the natural beauty of the island. Townsend’s earliest views of Mount Desert bear a 1905 copyright date, indicating that the island engaged his interest from the beginning of his photographic career. By 1919, the year in which Lafayette National Park was established as the forerunner of Acadia National Park, he had formed both a business relationship and a personal friendship with Mr. and Mrs. Thomas A. McIntire, the longtime owners of the Jordan Pond House in Seal Harbor. This association provided Townsend with a lucrative outlet for his Mount Desert cards.

Charles A. Townsend remained active as a photographer in Belfast until his death there in 1932 at the age of 61. The Belfast *Republican Journal* eulogized Townsend as having been “known throughout New England for his summer resort photographs.” However, his photographic accomplishments quickly faded from view. Only through the recent recognition of the historical, cultural, and artistic value of Maine real photo post cards has come an appreciation

for Townsend's contribution to the state's early twentieth century photography. In hundreds of fine photographs, he captured the appearance of the Maine coast as it transitioned into the automotive age. In particular, his many images of Mount Desert celebrate the majestic scenery that inspired the formation of Acadia National Park a century ago. The continuing appeal of these pictures is reflected in Ken Burn's choice of a Townsend real photo post card of Jordan Pond to illustrate his PBS series on America's National Parks.