

McLean County Museum of History

**Helen Littleton Burns Postcard Collection**

Processed by

JoAnna Mink

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**Collection Information**

VOLUME OF COLLECTION:	2 Boxes
COLLECTION DATES:	1882-1960, majority 1910-1920
RESTRICTIONS:	None
REPRODUCTION RIGHTS:	Permission to reproduce or publish material in this collection must be obtained in writing from the McLean County Museum of History
ALTERNATIVE FORMATS:	None
OTHER FINDING AIDS:	None
LOCATION:	Archives
NOTES:	See also Greeting Cards Collection

## Brief History

Helen Mae Littleton Burns (1900-1984) lived her entire life in Normal, Illinois. Her parents were Charles Littleton (1864-1931) and Minerva Ellen Bomgardner Littleton (1871-1963). Her siblings were Earl Bomgardner Littleton (1895-1971) and Mildred Littleton VanHoutin (1897-1988).

Helen Littleton married Stanley Matthew Burns (1902-1980), who was born in Lexington, Illinois, but lived most of his life in Normal. For most of their lives, the couple resided at 1001 S. Linden, as does their only child Charlene Burns (1933/34 - ), who donated this collection. At the time of their marriage in 1929, Helen was employed at the Woolen Mill, and Stanley was a linotype operator at the *Pantagraph*, where he worked until his retirement. A homemaker after marriage, Helen was active for several decades in the Normal Community Garden Club and gave a series of talks on the State flower and bird poems, as well as other topics. She was a professional babysitter in the 1940s and 1950s, with a clientele of 15-20 families. In 1970 she was elected to the governing board of Normal's First United Presbyterian Church.

This remarkable collection is comprised of postcards sent to and collected by Helen Littleton Burns, or members of her family, mostly between 1910-1920. She received many as Christmas and birthday greetings during her childhood (Folders 6 and 10). The earliest postcard is dated 1907, the same year that the U.S. Government permitted the familiar back divided into message and address blocks. The reverse side of postcards usually have a vertical line to separate the message block and the address block. Most of the cards were printed in Germany, where printing methods were regarded as the best in the world. The German-printed cards in this collection demonstrate a wide variety of images and techniques. These postcards were popular in the U.S. until anti-German feeling and rising import tariffs immediately before and during World War I made them less so. By the late 19th-century many well-known companies used trade cards to promote their products.

The cards in this collection reflect evolving popular cultural values. Because Helen Littleton received many cards when a child, several provide a historical overview depicting society's perception of children, especially girls (Folders 6 and 10).

## Scope

The bulk of this collection is comprised of postcards. Subsequent additions broaden the collection to include letters and ephemera which Helen's mother Minerva Bomgardner Littleton received from other family members (in Folder 1) and a scrapbook compiled by Helen (Loose).

Postcards in the Helen Littleton Burns Postcard Collection are organized into two main categories: postcards sent as holiday and birthday greetings, and cards sent from travel destinations. Sorting was based on the image or location of individual cards without regard as to who sent the card and their relationship to Helen. Often, there was no message or address. Many of the cards dated 1910-1920 were not sent through the mail, and the greeting could be simply "To Helen from Mama," so apparently was given in person.

Postcards categorized by holiday have common features. Most were printed in Germany; several are embossed. **Christmas** (Folder 5) postcards have early-20th-century images of Santa, angels, and robins. **Christmas - Children** (Folder 6) postcards include many with images of little girls,

appropriate since they were sent when Helen was a child. Designs on the **Birthdays** postcards are of flowers, some embossed.

The second main category - travel destinations - contains some noteworthy images. The Chicago group in **Illinois** (Folder 11), mostly postmarked in the 1940s, include views of well-known buildings: Union Station, Marshall Field & Co, The Stevens Hotel (later the Conrad Hilton Hotel), and Navy Pier (pre-Ferris Wheel). These were sent to Helen from her daughter Charlene. Other places in the Chicago group include the Harris Trust & Savings Bank, Fountain of Time and the Washington Monument in Washington Park, the Tribune Tower, and McKinley statue. Other places in **Illinois** are the Big Four Depot in Bloomington (postmarked 1921), Stein's Grove in Miller Park (1913), Bloomington High School, several of the University of Illinois campus, and views of towns and places in Centralia, Eureka College, Lincoln, Minonk, Amboy, and Litchfield.

**The Midwest** (Box 2, Folder 1) includes several of Kellogg Co. in Battle Creek, Michigan: the cafeteria, nursery-kindergarten, social hall, toasting ovens, and packing room. Other Michigan views include the Battle Creek Sanitarium, the Warren Featherbone Co's factories in Three Oaks, the Grand Traverse County Airport (postmarked 1936), the Sparks Foundation in Jackson (postmarked 1933), and Israelite Colony View in Benton Harbor (1908). Other locations in **The Midwest** are from Wisconsin, Ohio, Missouri, and Indiana and are postmarked 1909-1949.

Postcards in **Other U.S. Regions** (Box 2, Folder 2) are grouped into West & Southwest and East & South. Most are postmarked between 1923 and 1958. The West & Southwest grouping consists of cards from California, Washington, Colorado, Texas, Arizona, Wyoming, and Utah. The East & South grouping contains mostly single cards from Pennsylvania, Maryland, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Virginia, Washington DC, New York, Alabama, and Louisiana.

In **International and Military** (Box 2, Folder 3), most postcards in the first category are views of Luxembourg and were not posted. Those sent through the mail are postmarked 1922-1960. Depicted from other international destinations are the University of Nanking, an earthquake scene in Sicily, and several from Canada, including one of the Dionne Quintuplets. The most interesting postcards in the **Military** collection were sent to Helen Littleton in 1919 from her brother Earl, stationed overseas during World War I (see Folder 1, item 1.5 for summary of his military service). Postcards show views of Luxembourg and Belgium, plus one of the mess kitchen at Camp Logan (Texas). A postal note was sent to Helen from Earl's friend, and one depicting Army humor ("The Hun ain't born yet - that is to get me") is from Earl, as well as a nostalgic image of a soldier remembering his sweetheart. From WWII is an example of Army cartoon humor and a view of the Army Exchange at Camp Atterbury, Indiana.

**Commercial Postcards** (Box 2, Folder 4) were a cost-effective way for businesses to advertise their products. Three cards in this collection are for Van Houten's Cocoa. Others advertise Darby of Baltimore chocolates; Williams photography in Bloomington, Illinois (postmarked 1911); Joe Solomito Stone Co. in Bloomington, Indiana; and an unidentified fortuneteller. Although not a postcard, included in Folder 15 is an advertisement (7 x 9") for 666 Liquid, Tablets, Salve; the reverse is an illustration "The 666 Clinic" of three children who apparently have doctored their puppy with 666. George Washington and Abraham Lincoln are represented in the **Presidents** group.

## Box and Folder Inventory

### Box 1

#### Folder 1: Biographical and Family

- 1.1.1 Helen M. Littleton Burns, <findagrave.com> listing.
- 1.1.2 Helen M. Burns obituary, *Pantagraph*, May 17, 1984: 39.
- 1.1.3 Stanley Burns obituary, *Pantagraph*, July 15, 1980: 14.
- 1.1.4 "To Mark Silver Wedding," *Pantagraph*, July 21, 1954: 10, with photo.
- 1.1.5 Minerva (Minnie) Ellen Bomgardner Littleton (Helen Burns' mother), <findagrave.com> listing with family relationships.
- 1.1.6 Charles Grant Littleton (Helen Burns' father) <findagrave.com> listing.
- 1.1.7 Earl Bomgardner Littleton (Helen Burns' brother), <findagrave.com> listing. Includes complete list of members of his household in 1920. 2pp.
- 1.1.8 Certificate of Vaccination card for small pox for Helen Littleton, April 9, 1907.
- 1.1.9 Remembrance card for Mrs. S[arah] J. Littleton (Helen Burns' paternal grandmother).
- 1.1.10 Certificate of Membership for Stanley Burns from the United States Citizens Defense Corps of Normal, Illinois, March 9, 1943.
- 1.1.11 Membership card for the above. Note: Air Raid Warden sign for Illinois State Council of Defense is located in Oversized.
- 1.1.12 Program for First Pupils' Recital of the Wesleyan College of Music, November 18, 1890. Minnie Bomgardner is listed last.
- 1.1.13 Four calling cards - Minnie Bomgardner, E. L. Bomgardner, and Mrs. J. W. Bowen, plus Merry Xmas.
- 1.1.14 Letter to H. G. Bomgardner from J. L. Spears, August 14, 1891, 3pp.
- 1.1.15 Letter to H. G. Bomgardner from J. L. Spears, September 1, 1891.
- 1.1.16 Letter to Harry L. Bomgardner from J. L. Spears, September 20, 1903.
- 1.1.17 Wedding invitation for Dora Barclay to Grant Piper, February 18, 1892, in envelope.
- 1.1.18 Wedding announcement for Carolyn Lewis and Harry Rogers, January 4, 1911, in envelope.
- 1.1.19 Wedding invitation for Lucy May Sprague and Harry Bomgardner, November 11, 1903, with envelope.
- 1.1.20 Letter to Mrs. Charles Littleton from her cousin Elias, August 5, 1925, with envelope.
- 1.1.21 Wedding invitation for Alice Bomgardner and George Piper, January 19, 1882, with envelope.
- 1.1.22 Invitation to Olney High School commencement exercises, May 30, 1907, cards for Harry Rogers and Thomas Rogers enclosed in envelopes.
- 1.1.23 Happy New Year greetings from Pastor S. A. D. Rogers, photo on front, church and date unknown.
- 1.1.24 Typed lyrics to "A Spanish Cavalier."
- 1.1.25 Envelope addressed to Harry L. Bomgardner, postmarked September 23, 1903.
- 1.1.26 Small pamphlet with story "The Christmas Rose" and poems "To You" and "Gifts." Light blue cover tied with blue yarn.
- 1.1.27 Note, handwritten in pencil, to Ma from Deb, April 14, no year. Family relationship unknown.
- 1.1.28 Card acknowledging sympathy from Roy M. Rust, family relationship unknown.

#### Folder 2: Valentine's Day

#### Folder 3: Easter and All Occasion

#### Folder 4: Halloween, Thanksgiving and New Year's

- Folder 5: Christmas**
- Folder 6: Christmas – Children**
- Folder 7: Birthday I**
- Folder 8: Birthday II**
- Folder 9: Birthday III**
- Folder 10: Birthday - Children**
- Folder 11: Illinois**

## **Box 2**

- Folder 1: The Midwest**
- Folder 2: Other U.S. Regions**
- Folder 3: International and Military**
- Folder 4: Commercial and Presidents**

## **Loose**

Scrapbook "Property of Miss Helen Littleton" written on front cover. Bound brown composition book, 8 x 10.5". Pages are filled with magazine clippings of short stories, cartoons, and poems.

"Your Diploma" scroll: "This is to certify that the bearer has completed the work, or worked one who has, and is entitled to be present tonight." Includes dinner menu. Year not given, though on the program section the Response to the Address of Welcome is given by the President of the Class of 1925, which is the most recent year indicated for people on the program. None of the names listed are familiar with the Bomgardner/Littleton/Burns family research. 6 x 10"

Paper tube marked "Class '17" in which the diploma scroll was placed.