

1912 St. Joseph Cyclone
Postcard from Ora S. Morgan to Minnie Nadine Holwell Moore
by
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Talk about one thing leading to another..... Coming across this postcard opened several doors, which is what so often happens as I work through my family documents.



This started off sad enough, seeing the results of a cyclone photo made into a postcard. What a historic item to come across, pertaining to my Holwell roots in Bates County, Missouri. Here are seven men gathered around what just the day or so before was the home of Mr. Howe. Mr. Howe is not among them. Two horses on the left must have endured their own traumas, but are now peacefully grazing away amid the nearby ruins. The men may have ridden their own horses in order to view this devastation. There appears to be a house still standing in the upper right.



The lower left corner reads, "Pub by M S Porter Holden Mo." Wikipedia states, "Holden is a village in Johnson County," which is adjacent to Bates County.

The right side reads, "H. S. Howe residence destroyed by cyclone June 15 (19)12 Adrian Mo."

The back of this postcard is addressed to my maternal grandmother, "Miss Minnie Holwell." The address is S. McGuire St. Warrensburg Missouri. S. McGuire St. is now also called Route 13. Note there is no numeric address, but the post office obviously found Minnie, as here is the postcard.

*sisters. Minnie Nadine Holwell Moore and Sallie Marie Holwell Moore
Warrensburg 1912*

Following is the text. The first sentence is written sideways along the edge. So, who was "Chas.???" When did Minnie start seeing Percy (my grandfather)? I can see that Ora knew Minnie better than I did (which I didn't at all), as some of her stern, regal photos look nothing like a person I would address as "Dear Girlie." This was nice, as it put Minnie in a different light for me.



Miss Minnie Holwell
S, McGuire St.
Warrensburg,
Missouri

Chas. said he would write soon.

Dear Girlie: How are you? I do not remember whose time it is to write, but will write anyway. -How does this picture look to you? Have you seen any of the other pictures? Are you looking forward to those final exams? Be ready to tell me all when you get home. There are no news up in here, so bye Bye.

Ans. as ever Ora S. Morgan

Minnie Nadine Holwell Moore

It is interesting that "Morgan" was not written by Ora, but was added by Grandma. It is in a different ink and in what I recognize as Grandma's handwriting. So, who was "Grandma" where I just stated that I did not know Minnie, my birth grandmother? To shorten a long story, after Minnie died of tuberculosis in March 1926, Percy married Minnie's sister, Sallie Marie Holwell (Moore) in 1929. So, Sallie is the woman Linda and I grew up with as "Grandma." I am not even sure what is between "Ora" and "Morgan," but identified it as an "S."



Going back to my computer files of documents processed over the years brought forth Ora's name. It surfaced in a letter from Minnie to her parents back on the Holwell farm outside Adrian, Missouri written February 15, 1926. Minnie, Percy, and their only child, Laura Louise (my mother), had to move to Colorado Springs due to Minnie's tuberculosis. She wrote regularly to her parents (Robert Emmet Holwell and Mary Louisa Desdemona Holwell Holwell), this letter being about 5 weeks before her passing. "Journal" was the *Adrian Journal*, to which the Moore family maintained a subscription. Ties to "back home" remained close, with Linda and me growing up "knowing" the people and area well from stories told by Mother and Grandma. Minnie's birthday was February 14.

"We recd Journal and a beautiful dresser scarf from Ora Morgan this A.M. for my birthday. I certainly am proud of it- & prouder still after all these years she even remembered when my birthday is. Was sure thotful and kind of her. I will write her soon & thank her. You might call Mrs. Morgan & tell her first time she writes Ora tell her I recd it & will write Ora soon. It is a beautiful piece worked in colors. We needed it as only had one nice one & that is one Lulu Floyd sent me Christmas . the others are ones I had when I kept house & look worse of the wear."

Wouldn't Ora be amazed that her postcard and dresser scarf are being written about these many years later--and not only with the postcard being saved, but I am now going to send it back to its roots....to the Bates County Museum, along with this story.

"Porter Carter" is written near the top of the postcard. While M.S. Porter produced the card, I do not know the reference to Carter, nor do I recognize the handwriting.

The postcard took a one-cent stamp with the image of George Washington. What one learns from this genealogy hobby! Here is what I now know about the stamp, seen so often. I also had never thought to count the perforations on the side of each stamp and now know there are TWELVE! Sure enough, there were.

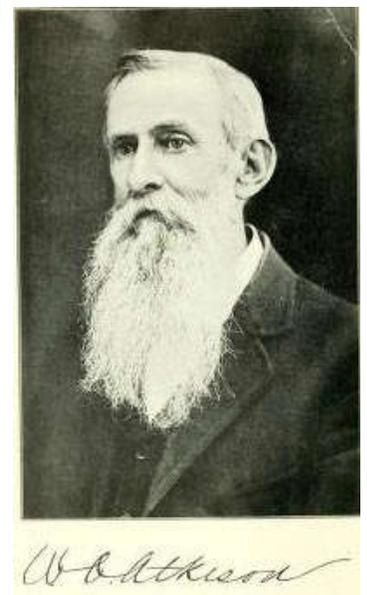
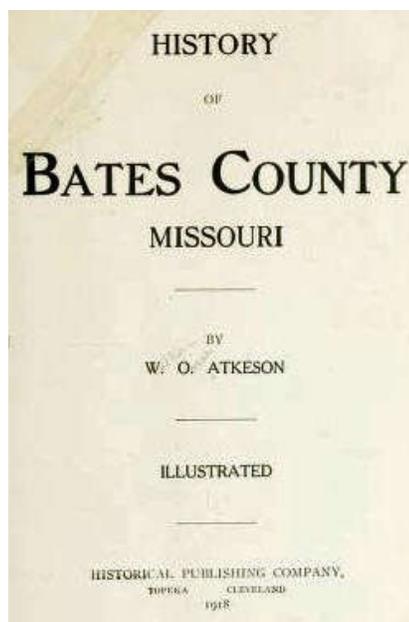
"1912-14 Washington-Franklin Single Line Watermark Perforated 12

"The 1912-14 series saw several changes to the Washington-Franklin configuration. The George Washington vignette replaced Ben Franklin on the one cent stamp. Also, the one and two cent stamps were redesigned so that the denominations were presented using numerals. On prior issues, the denominations on the lower values were spelled out. In other words, the design changed from 'ONE CENT' to '1 CENT 1.'"

The card was not postmarked, but has a pencil line drawn through the stamp. I have never observed this before and could find no information online for this practice.

Now, back to the sad cyclone.... I am so glad I did not process all my family history documents before the Internet, or I would have missed out on so much. Here is what I learned along this little journey.

First, poor Mr. Howe was not the only one to go down in Bates County history with the 1912 cyclone story. There is also the tale of Mr. Wright on page 347 of *History of Bates County, Missouri* by William Oscar Atkeson.



"During his entire life, Mr. Wright has lived in Bates County and has followed the traditional vocation of his fathers, becoming a successful agriculturist. He improved his present splendid farm in 1910. After he had placed the finishing touches upon the buildings and was looking forward to years of undisturbed prosperity in his newly-completed home, there came the cyclone of June 15, 1912, and in the twinkling of an eye, the results of his handiwork and preparation for comfortable living were wiped out of existence and dispersed to the four points of the compass by the power of the strong wind which tore down fences, razed buildings, and scattered the lumber far and near. All the family heirlooms, which had been gathered during a lifetime, were gone forever. Mr. Wright later found the covers of the old family photograph album at some distance from the site of the home. A fine orchard of fifty trees was utterly destroyed. The first warning which the family had of the approaching tornado was the appearance of a black, angry-looking, twisting cloud, which was sweeping down upon them from the west, leaving death and destruction in its wake and destroying everything in its path. The Wrights took immediate warning and Mr. and Mrs. Wright hurried to the storm cave, as they heard the roaring and crashing which accompanied the cyclone. Within five minutes' time, the storm had passed and had done its fearful work. Livestock were carried some distance away, the tornado wiping out every vestige of a once-comfortable home. Mr. Wright has since rebuilt and replaced the farm buildings at considerable expense."

Back to this "storm cave" term later.... I must first take us to why I know Mr. Howe was not one of the gazing men on the postcard.

Where the card states "Adrian," I wondered if any of the seven were members of our family---or at least surely ones our family knew. This could be from either the Holwell side or from Grandpa's Moore line on the family farm outside Butler.

But, no, the former home was a bit farther away than the label indicates. When I looked up H. S. Howe, I learned the sad news that Mr. Howe was not one of the men surveying the damage. He was lost in the storm.

The site, <http://bates.mogenweb.org/Obituary/hobit.html>, provided his obituary, which states that his once-home was in nearby Altona~~~

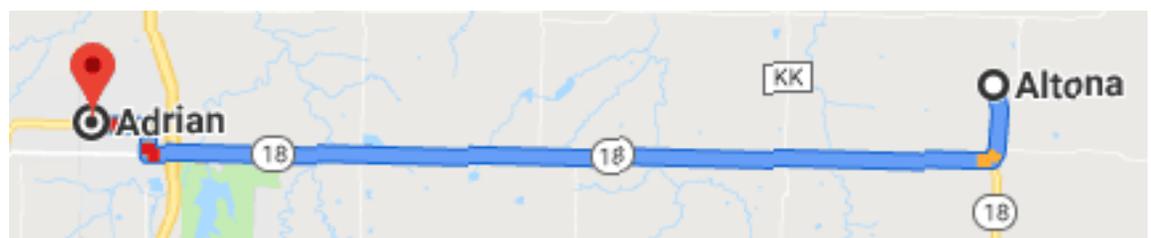
HOWE, Henry S. 1851-1912

Altona Cemetery, Altona, Grand River Twp, Bates Co, MO

Adrian Journal, Adrian, MO, Thursday, June 20, 1912

H.S. HOWE KILLED BY STORM - H. S. Howe was born October 24th, 1851, at Tumbidge, Vermont. He was a victim of the cyclone which swept away his home, near Altona, June 15th, 1912. Mr. Howe was married about thirty years ago to Miss Mollie George, who died some years ago. Three children survive him, viz: Mrs. Bennie McLay, Hugh and Kim Howe. Mr. Howe was an excellent citizen. Funeral services were held Wednesday. Burial in Altona cemetery. We have been unable to get facts sufficient for an obituary in the case of Mr. Howe.

This map shows the relationship of my Holwell town of Adrian to Altona, which are 7 miles apart.



So, the men in the photo were likely from Altona and perhaps none connected to our family. So, what happened to our family---possibly nothing, as I have no records, nor any memory of hearing about this event.

Grandma had graduated from Adrian High School the year before in 1911. I would have thought she (Sallie) was the one attending Warrensburg at that time and that Minnie was well into her teaching career in Bates County. I assumed the boarding house shown on page one was where Sallie was living, so am puzzled by the card being addressed to Minnie. This is more of a mystery than I can sort out at this time, just being immersed in the finding of this postcard.

Now, to more about the cyclone.... It may have been the St. Joseph Cyclone of 1912. Apparently, it was common to take pictures so as to produce postcards of the damage done by these terrors. Mr. Porter has other postcards from this same storm, one showing four men and six women standing in front of the same sort of pile of boards scattered about. That is from Golden City, Missouri, though it states that the cyclone passed through the day before, on June 14. Golden City is 83 miles from Adrian. Several other postcards of this type represent a cyclone two months earlier in Chatsworth, Illinois, so, again, a popular theme to memorialize a life-changing event.

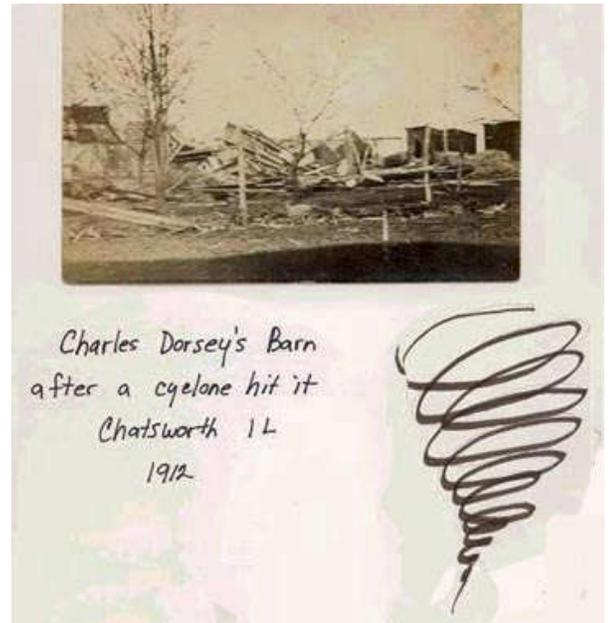
While there is nothing amusing about such cataclysm, I must admit to a tiny smile when I saw this one of the Chatsworth cyclone. It shows the same horrific scene, with the usual sort of caption, "Charles Dorsey's barn after a cyclone hit it Chatsworth, Il. 1912." So, OK, but in case one missed the point, the writer added his or her own vivid touch of a drawing of what passed through this community.

And, finally, "storm cave"----a term new to me and an ending to this cyclone postcard story... We are all familiar with other such names for where one hunkers down when alerted to an impending hurricane, tornado or cyclone.

Even though the meaning was clear, I still turned to the Internet and found a discussion on oklahoman.com from May 2012:

"Tornado season is upon us, and already we've had two bouts with them, resulting in deaths, injuries and destruction. Weather experts tell us to take cover in our 'storm caves' when a dark cloud appears on the horizon. Storm cave is a term for tornado shelters that has been used every decade from 1901 to 2008 in *The Oklahoman*. Not being familiar with storm caves, I have heard the tornado shelter called a cellar, a storm cellar, a storm shelter, a fallout shelter and, of course, my favorite, the 'fraidy hole.' Storm caves were most often mentioned in *The Oklahoman's* classifieds as a selling point for houses and land, but this editorial published June 3, 1947, gives some history. *'Some years ago when the pioneers were moving out into the prairie country in quest of permanent homes, a great many were careful to dig storm caves even before they began to build their houses. One reason was there was abundant space for cave digging, and the only cost entailed was the labor of the digger, while the material required for house building was back on the nearest railway, sometimes several days' journey away. Many of the pioneers lived in their primitive dugouts for several years. But there was another reason for that pioneer day digging-in operation. The first settlers were well aware of the possibility of an unexpected visit from a spiraling storm cloud.'*"

"This is an old-fashioned, but trustworthy, Oklahoma tornado cellar, or, as it has been called, a storm cave. Photo from the oklahoman archives."



As so ends an account of a postcard mailed 107 years ago about an event that continues with the same stories of destruction and tragedies that we watch today with incredibly increased technology, often in real time. Ora's postcard was one way in which this information was shared back in 1912.

Strangers in a Box

*Come, look with me inside this drawer,
In a box, I have often seen,
At photos faded, black and white,
Faces proud, still and serene.*

*I wish I knew these people,
The strangers in the box,
Their names and all their memories
Are lost in with my socks.*

*I wonder what their lives were like.
How did they spend their days?
Their happy, sad and special times.
I will never know their ways.*

*If only they had taken the time
To tell who, what, where, and when,
These faces in my heritage
Would come to life again.*

*Could this become the fate
Of photos made today?
The faces and the memories
Someday just tossed away?*

*Make time to save your photos.
Seize the opportunity when it knocks,
Or someday you and yours could be
The strangers in the box.*



~~ Pam Harazin

