

Drop Me a Card

By Daniel B. Parkinson



Postcards were extremely collectible in 1905–1915. An Ottawa cousin, J. W. Holtby, typed his message on a card, which had a view of the Parliament Building from the river. He was writing to my grandfather, Ed Parkinson, on 13 December 1905. *Coming up at Xmas? I am saving Post Cards so take the hint.*

A typed card was unusual; most people scribbled on the back, or even the front, hastily in pen or with a lead or indelible pencil. In a time before phones were generally available and when we had excellent daily or twice daily mail delivery, they were a quick, efficient way to communicate. The cryptic notes that people message today, on cell phones and by email, are not as ‘cutting edge’ as some might think.

Recently, I began to dismantle some long ago postcard collections that belonged to family members. They were stored in attractive albums but the black paper pages were disintegrating. Some were collected by my father, Elton, and his mother, Jane, and others by his brother Harold and sister Mary. The cards had been written by Daddy’s siblings and their friends and by other family members. As well, there were a couple of albums of cards collected by Aggie Parkinson Morgan who was a first cousin to my Dad but was my mother’s aunt. My parents were cousins.

Aggie loved getting and saving cards and I remember that the stairway from the back shed to the kitchen of her Rawdon house was papered with post cards. I was guilty of trying to peel the postage stamps off for my collection. She was the much loved eldest daughter of James Parkinson and Mary Holtby. Agnes’s siblings were Fred (married to Dora Copping); Hattie, Mrs. Jim Kirkwood; Mabel Mrs. Dick Blaggrave; George (married to Maggie Burns) and Edwin (married to Mary Hamilton Kinsey).

Aggie had married Jim Morgan on 24 May 1900. He was a Rawdon boy with a cartage business with stables and a house at 13 Balmoral Street in Montreal, which will be the site of a new National Film Board of Canada building, Place des Festivals, announced last year; it is near Bleury and de Maisonneuve Streets. Aggie looked after the books for Jim’s business. It seems they commuted back and forth between their Montreal and Rawdon homes. The Morgans built a house in Rawdon in 1913; it burned and was replaced by the red brick house that may be seen at 3393 Lake Morgan Road as you ascend out of the village.

Aggie provided hospitality to nephews and nieces from the Parkinson and Morgan families when they were in Montreal. She was very kind to my paternal grandmother and children when they paused between trains on their way to a new home at Waterville in September 1901. My father was only a few weeks old. My father’s sisters later wrote to Aggie and reported to her on postcards about their father’s illness. I suspect they were recipients of her hospitality when they went to work in the city. Grace, one of my father’s sisters, wrote to ask Aggie to help her brother-in-law Reg Young when he was sent from Winnipeg on business. Aggie was a central depot of information for all her relatives and a courier of goods for her sisters on farms at Rawdon.

The postcards sent were often seasonal — Christmas, New Year’s, and Easter but also for St. Valentine’s, St. Patrick’s, even Halloween and Thanksgiving to my surprise. Birthday cards, sentimental and other special greetings, humorous cards often surprisingly naughty, flowers and scenic cards. Selection of a card from Ottawa or Salt Lake City did not necessarily imply the sender had been there. Random scenic cards seemed to be available for purchase in Montreal. Cards could be quickly printed; my Winnipeg aunt sent her sister a card on January 23, 1911 of a large city building covered in ice after a fire on the 14th of the same month.



Aggie Parkinson Morgan (1874–1975) was the recipient and source of much family correspondence and she saved postcards. Bless her.

Cards permitted quick updates on travel plans, health and other family news:

On an undated card, Maggie wrote, “*Dear Aggie - Just a few lines to ask if you would mind getting me a lb butter print (oblong shape) bring it with you when you come as I can not get one here. This has been a good sap day. Your Father is up boiling all day. Good-bye hoping to see you soon Your loving sister Maggie*”

Hattie wrote to Cecil who was visiting at 23 Balmoral in June 1911 for his 11th birthday, “*Wishing you a happy birthday: I'm a Temperance man/See my ribbon blue/Don't you think it pretty/Why don't you wear one too, Aunt Hattie*



December 15, 1910 :
You will think I am stupid I suppose but I do not understand about the blouse. Is it for me to keep & wear or did you mean it to be my present to your mother. Drop me a line as soon as possible. We had quite a trip up to the shanty yesterday but we all wished you could have been with us. Please write



Dora repeated a request for butter papers that she had made on an Easter card. Her daughter Ena (Rowena) was born in 1901 and would have been ten in 1911.

Aggie

I do not know if you will get this before Ed comes or not but if you do & did not send the butter papers with Jim let him bring them I just have about enough for one churning. We are all fairly well. The babe is fussy enough at times but not too bad. D & M came up last Sunday Fred is all done with his seeding now but it was hot and dry. Ena has just 6 more days at school. Are you coming for the fifth? Send me some pc as I am clean out. Dora



July 1911

Fred's and Dora's children were with Aggie in Montreal while Dora dealt with a new baby, Irene, who was born 6 May 1911, six years after Leslie.
Dear Aggie I got the little folks letters all right I guess they are having the time of their lives If Jim wants to go for his fishing trip up to the dam. Fred is ready to go now & it will be a chance for them [the children] to get home. I think they have had a good visit. It is raining today. We're going down home [to the village] tomorrow if it is fine. The baby is well I think but needs lots of attention. Write Dora



Cecil Parkinson, son of Dora and Fred, wrote to Aggie October date not legible. Dora addressed the card but the message from Cecil is neatly written in an excellent hand.
Dear Auntie Things are not dull here but there are some stupid boys. There are fifteen going here now

[Mount Loyal School]. We have 14 pigs here. Papa is away threshing and does not come [all week was added in Dora's hand] Good bye from Cecil.

Sorting through Aunt Aggie's postcard albums confirmed what I knew about her from my mother. Aggie was the mainstay of family connectedness after the deaths of her parents. Her siblings and their children all received her for support and guidance. She and Jim were childless and bestowed their love on this extended family. More distant relatives all came to Aggie and Jim when they visited Montreal and Rawdon. All were recipients of her kindness and generosity—dresses for little girls, mittens for boys, Bible verses, scotch mints and stories about family. ■



Daniel B. Parkinson was born in the old, Park Street, Sherbrooke Hospital and grew up on his family's Jersey farm at Waterville, Quebec. His parents were born at Rawdon, Quebec where their several families settled from 1824. He is a graduate of Lennoxville High School, Macdonald College and Concordia University. He has been a resident of Toronto since 1972 and a member of the Toronto Mendelssohn Choir for over 40 years. He has published frequently in Connections, OGS Families, Quebec Heritage News and other journals. He has been a member of Quebec Family History Society since 1991.