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# Historical Society Of Pottawattamie County

December/January, 1998/1999

## Society Annual Meeting Scheduled for January 24

The annual meeting and dinner of the Historical Society of Pottawattamie County will be held Sunday, January 24, at the Royal Fork Buffet at the Mall of the Bluffs.

Preregistration is required, and members should have received a reservation form in the mail.

In addition to the business meeting Society member Richard Peterson will present a program on the life of Matt Tinley.

### Hotel Manager Saved the Terminal

## *A Private Citizen Put Up Money to Fight the Railroad and Reinstall C.B. as Eastern Terminus*

The easternmost terminal of the Union Pacific railroad is located in Council Bluffs today, and forever, because a civic-minded German immigrant in the city once posted a \$10,000 bond to have the question settled one and for all before the United States Supreme Court.

That man was "Uncle Peter" Bechtele, proprietor of the "European Hotel", located at 336-38 West Broadway. At one time one of the wealthiest men in the city, he lost all his money and properties and died at the age of 80, after spending the last ten years as a blind man.

*(Continued next page)*

### Genealogy Research Hints...

## *Historical Potential of Newspaper Research*

Many sources of genealogical information are available to us. One source may be overlooked because it is most often considered a secondary source. That is the newspapers.

Most information can probably be found more quickly by using other records. However by using the local newspapers one can get a better understanding of the community and the time period in which your ancestors lived. The newspapers may give a record of the important event in their lives. But one must remember- just because you read it in the paper does not necessarily make it true. The person submitting the information may have made a mistake and the newspaper itself may have made mistakes. So items should be checked out if possible.

Genealogical information available in newspapers include (1) Obituaries, (2) Vital statistics such as births, marriages, and divorces, (3) Legal notices, (4) Personals, (5) Advertisements.

*(Continued next page)*



Pottawattamie  
County Trivia

Answer is on page 5

**What American artist painted a mural  
for the old Chieftain hotel?**

*("Hotel Manager Saves Terminal", continued from page 1)*

It all happened back in 1876, when rivalry between Omaha and Council Bluffs probably reached an all-time peak. Council Bluffs claimed the interests of the railroad centered solely in Omaha- despite Abraham Lincoln's order that the eastern terminus should be in Iowa, as specified in the charter.

The railroad managers of that day declined to listen to the pleadings of Council Bluffs. Nothing was done in Council Bluffs while extensive expansion was taking place in Omaha. Council Bluffs appealed to its Washington delegation, but nothing happened.

### City Sues In Court

The city council then instructed its attorneys to bring suit in federal court. The suit was taken before Judge Dillon, and Council Bluffs was awarded a verdict. The railroad appealed to the supreme court.

In the course of time, the highest tribunal affirmed the lower court's decision, but railroad attorneys began immediately a course of obstructive tactics. Applications were prepared for new hearings, and it was apparent a long court battle was in session. The city feared it could not meet the ever-mounting costs.

A shrewd lawyer pointed out a quick means of action in the form of a mandamus suit in the supreme court in which a citizen could become the plaintiff by alleging injury. The plaintiff was found in the persons of Hall and Company, a modest retail grocery firm. When it came time to file suit, a \$10,000 indemnifying bond was required.

If the case was lost, it was evident the railroad could collect damages up to the amount of the bond. It was a risky venture. Businessmen were not only afraid to sign it from fear of direct loss, but hesitated to incur the enmity of a great railroad corporation at a time when it was punishing its enemies. For days it was found impossible to obtain a bond.

### Best Hotel.

Peter Bechtele was running the most profitable hotel in town and living in a \$20,000 residence on

Washington Avenue when he heard of the need for the bond. Of all businesses in the city, he could be hurt most by a great railroad, but when he found that the caution of his fellow citizens would not permit their names to appear on the bond, he boldly signed it alone, qualifying more than twice the amount.

The case was won, and the immediate fruits of victory were the erection of a \$200,000 union depot, and the establishment of the terminal- in compliance with the charter.

Old records point out "that fortune soon turned Turk on Uncle Peter" and he was forced to sell his family dwelling and lost his hotel on mortgage foreclosures to eastern financiers.

*(From the Daily Nonpareil, April 29, 1939; contributed by Marcia Hastings)*

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*("Genealogy Newspaper Research", continued from page 1)*

Obituaries may give the birth and death dates as well as marriage dates. The place these events took place may be reported, names of parents, children, brothers and sisters may be given. Often also given is where the person worked and the organizations to which they belonged.

Some obituaries in the past years were often quite detailed and almost always gave a life story of the person. But remember, all the details may not be completely correct.

Many court house records in our area do not go back very far. To begin with they were not very complete. If you cannot find your ancestor in the marriage and death records of the county, perhaps you may find an item in regards to the event in the local newspaper. It will take time to search them out but often one is rewarded. This may be the only record one might find for that ancestor.

The local notices might include land sales for unpaid taxes, estate settlements, divorces, marriage, and so forth. Naturalizations were sometimes listed as well. Did you ancestor have a business? Perhaps you may find his advertisement. More that likely if your ancestors were one of the "little people" they probably did not make the headlines. But if you take the time

*(Continued page 5)*

## Early History of the County

### Rev. Father Kempker Relates The Catholic Records...

## One Hundred Years Ago Lewis and Clark Held Council With Indians On Bluffs of This City

*"The Catholic Church in Council Bluffs" was the subject of a lecture delivered at St. Francis' Church by Rev. Father John F. Kempker in 1904, and according to the Nonpareil on April 3, 1904 it was one of the most interesting historical sketches ever heard in the city. Father Kempker dealt with the Indian history in Pottawattamie County in a thoroughly familiar manner, and threw much light on many other phases of the county's early happenings. The following excerpts from Rev. Father Kempker's presentations from the 1904 article.*

The landscapes along the Missouri River in this vicinity are beautiful and picturesque, but no less attractive is the history of early expeditions. Lewis and Clark, in ascending the river, delayed several days in this region, and on August 2 & 3, 1804, held council with the Indians on the bluffs at or near the present city of this name. The report of their expedition upon their return to St. Louis in the following year had as a result especially a number of excursions of traders into the regions described. Thus, as early as 1824, Hart started a trading settlement at the foot of the bluffs, becoming known as Cote de Hart, later named Mynster Springs; Sarpy had a settlement farther south, known as Traders' Point, and later laid out a town, St. Mary's, a few miles farther south, both these points being covered by the Missouri River through a change in the current. The present Manawa Lake holds the site of the old Traders' Point.

In 1827 Francis Guittar had a trading house on the present Main Street, near Broadway. Many of these early traders were descendants of the French and were either Catholics or maintained the Catholic tradition.

### Fort Built Here

The United States built a fort here and tradition relates that this was built on the very site where Lewis and Clark held a council with the Indians. The exact spot was a beautiful spur of bluff, at the foot of which a strong spring of water gushed forth and would now be marked by the junction of Franklin Avenue with Pierce Street; General William Harney was here in 1825. The fort was soon abandoned. Amongst other Indians the Pottawattamies had been assigned this region as their reservation. The zealous Jesuit missionaries from St. Louis established a mission among them. They arrived on May 31, 1838, and took possession of the abandoned fort for their residence.

Two numerous bands of the Pottawattamie Indians had been transferred in 1836 from their lands in Indiana to the Missouri and to, Kansas, when, finally, in 1838, the government assigned these tribes a large reservation at Council Bluffs and transported the remainder of them from their Indian village, Chichipe Outipe. This band numbered 800, nearly all Catholics, who were accompanied on their journey by their priest, Father B. Petit. Leaving the village September 4, 1838, they took their way through Quincy, Ill., ascending the east bank of the Mississippi River, which they crossed at Montrose, and continuing westerly through St. Francisville, Mo., arriving at St. Mary's, Kansas. (or Indian Territory) on November 4, Father Petit returned in January, 1839, fell ill and died at St. Louis.

Council Bluffs was in the Dubuque diocese. The Indians of this section were for a long time desirous of

having the Jesuit fathers amongst them, and not satisfied with repeatedly writing to them at St. Louis, they also sent a delegation to petition the government at Washington for the black gowns. Father Verhaegen, the Superior, set out with several hundred priests and made a visit of over 600 miles to open missions amongst them. He returned to St. Louis in 1838 and was glad to learn that Father Verreydt and Smet, who had been sent to another tribe of Pottawattamies at Council Bluffs, had reached their destination in safety, and that the chief and more than a hundred warriors had gone out to meet them.

### Letter of Pioneer Jesuit

Additional light is thrown on this mission by the following passages of a letter of Father DeSmet, S. J.:  
Rev. and Dear Father: I set out from St. Louis on May 10, 1838, accompanied by our Rev. Superior, who intended to visit the Kickapoos, and by Father Helias, who was on his way to found a new mission among the Germans in the environs of Jefferson. I made the entire journey on a steamboat and arrived amongst the Pottawattamies on the thirty-first day of the same month. I remained three days in our residence among the Kickapoos, awaiting the arrival of Father Verreydt and Brother Mazzelli, with whom I was to continue the journey. The Sac Indians, who were two days journey to the north, were on the banks of the river to see us pass; the chiefs who had seen us at our residence, recognized us and saluted us with a shout of joy, wishing us a happy journey.

The Aouas (Iowas), whom we visited on our way, seemed also well disposed, and wished to keep us amongst them; their chief, the White Cloud, had been my disciple at St. Ferdinand twelve years before. Before we reached our destination, we passed through the village of Ottoes. Their houses are built in the forms of little hillocks and are covered with green sods; those huts are so large that a hundred and fifty persons might easily lodge in each.

One day that the boat stopped for the purpose of taking on a supply of wood, I went to a considerable distance from the bank. I met an old man 90 years of age, who, at my approach, stopped short and looked at me, with an expression of astonishment mixed with joy. Judging from my dress that I was a priest. When I confirmed his impressions, he exclaimed: "O, my father, I am a Catholic". It is a great many years since I had the pleasure of seeing a priest. I desired it so ardently before dying. I hastened to satisfy his desire and we both shed tears in abundance.

### Pottawattamie Indians

The Pottawattamie are divided into two tribes; those of the forest, amongst whom many are Catholics; and those of the prairies, who never had any priests amongst them. The latter formed a mixed station, composed of Pottawattamies, Winnebagoes, Chippewas, Sacs, Foxes, Ottawas, Menomanees and Kickapoos; they amount to more than 3,000; it is amongst them that we have opened our mission. At the commencement of the war of independence, they separated from their brethren of the forest, some taking part with the English and others fighting for the republic. The Pottawattamies having sold their lands in Illinois and Indiana in 1836, received in exchange from the government 5,000,000 acres on the Missouri. The Pottawattamies are of a gentle and tractable disposition, and are deficient neither in courage nor understanding, years frequently passing without a quarrel amongst them; but when intoxicated (and at this moment a considerable quantity of spirits is brought amongst them), all their good qualities disappear and they preserve no longer the semblance of men.

They receive annually \$10,000,000 as an indemnity for lands ceded by them to the United States; they have just been paid two years' indemnity, yet all the money which might be profitably employed will be squandered in ardent spirits.

*(Continued next page)*



# Notes From The Jail...

We had a good year at the jail, with bus tours, school group tours, scout groups, vacationers and our local people visiting.

I would like to extend a big "Thank You" to all the "Ladies of the jail" who, when I made that telephone call that a tour was coming, graciously gave of their time and energy. They are Alice Bontz, Joyce Glesmann, Margie Giles, Ione Turner, Jo Weis, Darlene Vergamini, and Cathy Danielson. Also a special "Thank You" to Pat and Vanessa Vergamini for all the time spent caring for the yard and helping wherever else needed and to Marv Lausen for making repairs needed at the Jail.

We will be taking part in "Winterfest Council Bluffs" by being open for tours on "Cultural Fest Weekend", Saturday, January 16, 1999 12:00 Noon to 6:00 P.M. Sunday January 17, 1999 1:00 P.M. to 6:00 P.M.

We hope this will become an annual event. If you missed us this year come and see us during "Cultural Fest Weekend".

We have already received some reservations for bus tours for the 1999 season.

Over the winter we will be changing displays and getting ready for next year.

Have a Happy Holiday Season!

-- Dennis Danielson Chairman, Jail Committee

## ("Genealogy Newspaper Research", continued from page 2)

to scan the newspapers perhaps you will find some item of news of the town of community they lived in. If you can determine the time and location they lived it could save you time.

A victim of an accident or crime usually received much publicity and often in great detail. I have read the account of quite a few

railroad accidents in our local paper in which they give so much detail of the injuries that sometimes it almost make you feel sick to read it.

Schools were important in the new settlements and often the paper gave the names of the teachers and even the names of the stu-

(Continued next page)

## ("Early History" Continued from page 4)

### Old Catholic Cemetery

In 1838 the Jesuit fathers opened a Catholic Cemetery due south of the chapel, where many Catholics were buried. The location of this was the present Franklin Avenue, due west of the Pierce Street School, and at the time of excavating for grading the avenue and school ground, skeletons and tombs were found.

A meeting of the German Catholics of Council Bluffs was called and assembled May 9, 1886, and it was decided to erect a German Catholic Church. A second meeting was held at the close of the month and a board of trustees appointed. April 24, Rt. Rev. Bishop Cosgrove published the separation of the German Catholics from affiliation with St. Francis Xavier's congregation and announced that from the \$25,000 on hand \$5,000 should be set aside and paid over to the new congregation, provided its members should raise a like amount. The condition was met, and the subscription list, which was soon submitted, was approved. The church was begun at once and finished in 1887. Fathers Adolph, Mengwasser, Burke and Hermann have been its pastors.

Source: *Nonpareil*, April 3, 1904  
Contributed By: Cathy Danielson

### Trivia Question Answer - - -

Grant Wood created the painting for the old Chieftain Hotel

### Complications of a Family Tree - - -

Genealogy is a hobby which can really become addictive. Many people are searching out their ancestors and related lines. It can at times be easy but it can get very complicated and trying to sort out the relationship can be difficult.

One example of the difficulty is illustrated by a letter which appeared in the Ann Landers column of the Omaha World Herald of September 22, 1991:

*Dear Ann Landers,*

*I am writing to you with a simple yet confusing question. Please bear with me.*

*My parents divorced years ago. The divorce was final May 30 and my father remarried June 5 of the same year. It was some time before I accepted his new wife, Donna.*

*After they had been married for about two years, I was asked if I would mind sharing my birthday party dinner with Donna's brother, Ron. I said it would be fine. We had a joint birthday dinner December 13 and had a super time. Ron and I went together to my father's New Year's Eve party. By March we were madly in love. We married July 23. Ron is 10 years older than I, and Donna is about 10 years younger than my father.*

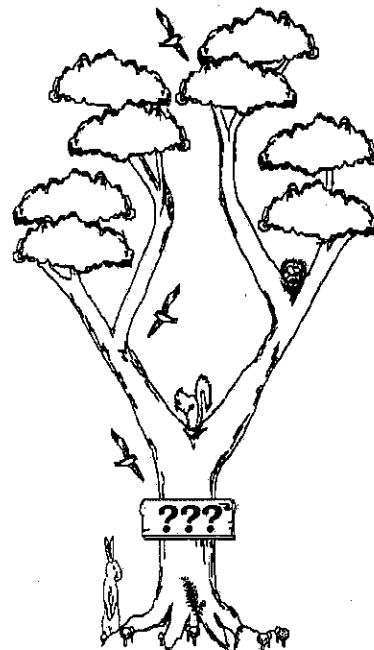
*Two years later, Ron and I decided to have a baby. Now comes the tricky part. What is the relation between our new baby girl and Donna. Is she her grandma or her aunt? Donna prefers to be her aunt. What relation is my father to our child? Is he her grandpa or her uncle? Is my father still my father or is he my brother-in-law? Is Donna still Ron's sister or is she his mother-in-law?*

*My father and I have the same in-laws. The only thing that seems quite clear is that my in-laws are the baby's grandparents any way you look at it. However, since they are also my father's wife's parents, doesn't that make them the baby's great grandparents?*

*Daughter or Sister-in-law, Columbus, Ohio*

How would you decide on this relationship?

-- Submitted by Alice Bontz, Genealogy Chairman



("Genealogy Newspaper Research",  
continued from page 5)

dents. Graduation programs gave the names of those who graduated and very often gave the names of those who graduated and very often others who took part in the programs even though they were not in the graduating class.

Where did you ancestor live before coming to this area? Often the newspaper gives an item of so and so going to visit in their old home; or Mrs. So and So went to visit her parents thus giving you her maiden name. Maybe they visited a sister here or a brother there. And often this is the information needed

to build those evasive families.

*Some portions of this article were taken from the Coles County Genealogical Society Newsletter, July/August 1996.*

-- Submitted by Alice Bontz,  
Genealogy Chairman

Advertisement from the "Frontier Guardian". Feb. 1850:

**Nearest, Best and Healthiest Route to the Salt Lake and California.**

**The  
OLD ORIGINAL MORMON CROSSING AT KANESVILLE,  
COUNCIL BLUFFS, MISSOURI RIVER,  
*Twenty-five miles above the Mouth of the*  
**PLATTE RIVER****

It has been proven beyond question that the NORTHERN ROUTE, crossing the Missouri River at Kanessville, 25 miles above the mouth of the Platte River, is the NEAREST, BEST & HEALTHIEST ROAD TO SALT LAKE AND CALIFORNIA.

The difficulties of crossing the Horn and Loup Fork of the Platte, have been entirely removed by the subscribers placing upon each of those streams large and substantial flat boats.

Heretofore emigrants have had to lose several days in constructing rafts, which at last made it rather a hazardous undertaking. Besides these considerations it is an undeniable fact that hundreds of persons who went up on the South side of the Platte fell victims to the dreadful pestilence while nearly all those who took the North side escaped unharmed. This is the Morman Trail and it is a subject of remark that so few of those people have suffered from disease while on the route. Another thing the emigrant must have in view, and that is their feed and camping places; the routes from Independence, Kansas, Weston, St. Joseph, and all other places below the Platte before going one hundred and fifty miles emerge into one road consequently when there is such an immense amount of travel, grass and wood become scarce. This too is the very end of the road where it is most needed, because emigrants expect to leave early and it is necessary that both "man and beast" should fare well in the beginning. The above is a very important advantage to those who take the North side and is a consideration compared with which all others sink into insignificance for grass is the only subsistence for stock on the plains.

In addition to these facts emigrants will avoid crossing the dangerous streams of the Saline, the South Fork of the Great Platte, and the Great Platte itself.

To sum up the whole in a very few words, the subscribers would respectfully say to the public generally, and all those who contemplate taking this route, particularly, that at the Kanessville Ferry on the Missouri River, they will find two good boats, each capable of crossing one wagon and team.

At the Ferry on the Horn they have one large and substantial boat capable of crossing a wagon and team every five minutes.

At the Ferry on the Loup Fork of the Platte we will have one excellent boat, which, with the men we will have in charge, will ensure to all a safe and speedy crossing.

Emigrants who wish plenty of grass for their stock, and camping places for themselves, besides the best chance of escaping all epidemics will find this route far preferable over all others.

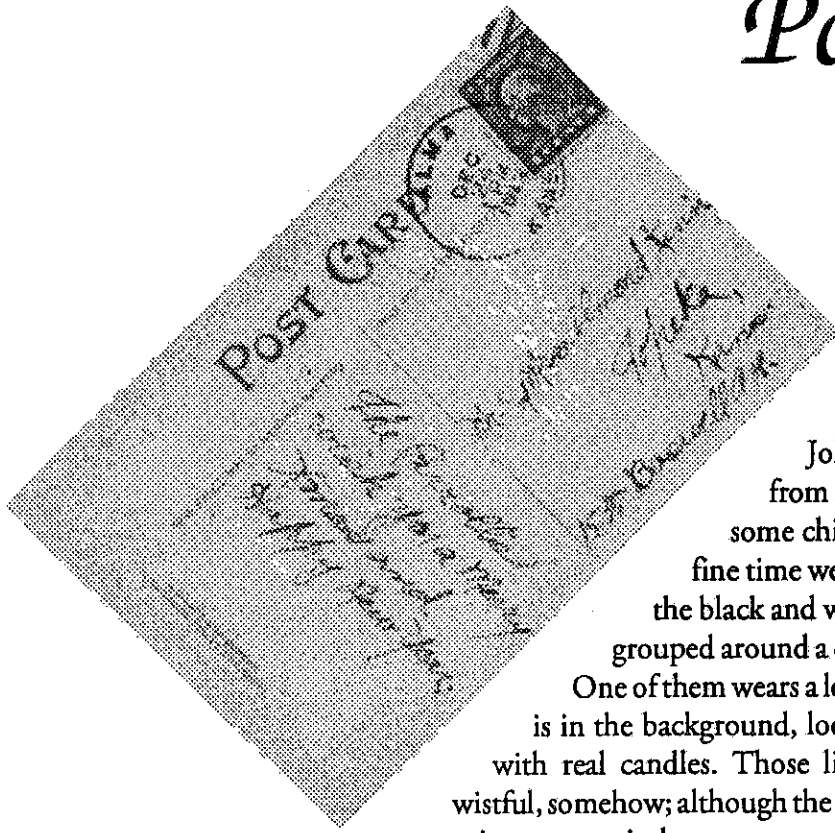
Our boats with competent hands will be at their places on the 1st of April; and all may rest assured that what we have said may be relied on with the utmost confidence.

In the Kanessville Market, emigrants will find every thing necessary for their outfits at as reasonable rates as can be procured in the Western country.

SARPY, MARTIN & GINGRY.

*(With the celebration of the Gold Rush Days drawing near, I couldn't resist the above advertisement that was in the "Frontier Guardian, February 20, 1850... Cathy Danielson)*

# Postcards from Holidays Past



Around the turn of the century, when the mail was delivered at least twice a day, when trolleys were more common than a family car, and the phone, if you had one, was for emergencies, Mrs. Johnson in Portland, Oregon, got a penny postcard from Mrs. Cusiter in Silverton. "This card will show you some children that I gave a Xmas tree for Xmas night & a fine time we had too," she wrote. On the front of the postcard the black and white photograph of fourteen children shows them grouped around a dining room table, looking seriously at the camera. One of them wears a long dark coat and a Santa mask. The decorated tree is in the background, looped with what appears to be popcorn and alight with real candles. Those little faces—different ages, boys and girls—look wistful, somehow; although the scene is homey and festive, orphans is the word that pops into your mind.

Jim Morrison, a Christmas postcard collector, from Georgetown, Maryland, took this card out of a long file box full of what he calls real photocard, photographs printed on postcard backs. Many of them were taken with the Kodak "Autograph" camera, which came out around 1908 and was designed to take a photograph the size of a standard postcard. He has hundreds of them; one showing the front of the Cherokee Bargain Store ("The Most Popular Store in Vinita, Okla. Everything in Holiday Goods 25¢ buys anything in the store"), all decorated for Christmas, makes you want to press your nose against the window to get a better look inside. In another, Santa

holds the reins of a sleigh drawn by a team of oxen, surrounded by the citizens of Kaneville, Illinois. There are Sunday school classes assembled around their decorated trees, the school Christmas pageant, and scenes at home with the tree and the family. Jim regards this boxful as a kind of American family album, a comprehensive record of a lost America at Christmastime.



It was at the Centennial in Philadelphia, when a group of illustrated souvenir cards sold out, that they were first seen as money-makers. At the Columbian Exposition, in 1893, chromolithograph images were printed on U.S. postal cards; the Government made a penny on each one. Wrapped sets of ten and twelve were enormously popular (often taken home and never mailed, they may have given the United States Post Office the idea for commemoratives). Those printed before 1907 had undivided backs for just the address and the stamp, no message. After that date, the divided back with room for a message was standard. Photograph postcards were a craze until the





end of World War I. Old photograph postcards have, as a rule, greater value than other kinds of postcards because they are so limited. Most of the pictures were shot for a small circle of people—just a moment in time captured for a few.

Not so with the rest of Morrison's holiday postcard collection. Imported by the millions to other countries, color lithographs with variations (some are three-dimensional, others beaded, or surfaced with silk thread, or interior die cuts that you hold to the light to see a different picture), they evoke

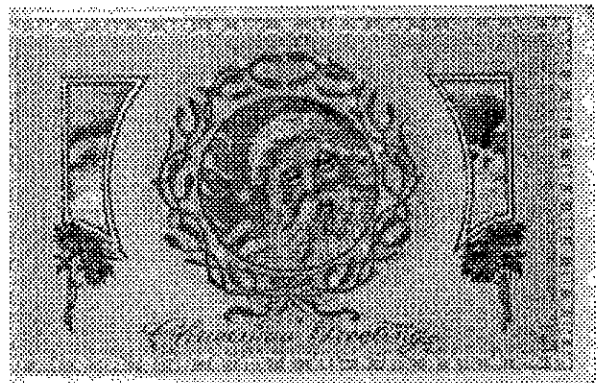
another lost world at Christmas, a European one. Morrison estimates ninety-five percent of them were printed in Germany, on what was called a universal back that said "postcard" in twelve languages. German printers were masters of the art. When the standard was up to twenty different stones colored inks to produce an image, some of these German factories, obliterated in the first war, used as many as forty.



For eyes accustomed only to the contemporary American Christmas, these vintage postcards are a revelation. Odd in their images, obscure in their allusions, they have a breadth of fantasy and depth of information that is delightful. They are also surpassingly beautiful in their artistic conceptions. Some were done by the same artists who illustrated children's books (between the turn of the century and World War I, what's known as the Age of Illustration was in full bloom). Some show a signature and most show the influence of European art, from Renaissance to Art Nouveau. Hungarian and Czechoslovakian cards have a richness of ornament that is different from others; German forests with the *Kristkindl* are the dark

mysteries of the Brothers Grimm.

Morrison has been collecting Christmas postcards for more than thirty years. To look at them is to understand the richness of this imagery, of customs we don't know about any longer. And, since it is so comprehensive a collection, there are some that might have seemed a good idea to a European designer but missed their mark entirely, like the notion that a card with Uncle Sam impersonating Santa Claus would be a big seller in the American market. That's worth quite a bit if you can find one. Generally, the price range of the old Christmas penny postcards can be anywhere from one dollar to hundreds depending on condition, artistic complexity, rarity, or just luck (it's possible to find them in places where their value isn't known). Their range of location can be anywhere from a garage sale to a very specialized, sa w y ephemera show. Their range of ways to celebrate Christmas, however, is simply uncountable.



-- Contributed by Darlene Vergamini; cards from Society archives

**Historical Society of Pottawattamie  
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*The Historical Society of Pottawattamie County is dedicated to the preservation of books, letters, sites, records, artifacts and buildings of historical significance in the county. The Society operates and is restoring the Historic Squirrel Cage Jail, Rock Island Depot, and Carstens Memorial Farm, and is actively involved in the efforts to create a local museum.*

*Requests for information about Society projects, membership, and volunteer work are welcomed. Write the Historical Society of Pottawattamie County, Post Office Box 2, Council Bluffs, IA, 51502.*

*The Historical Society of Pottawattamie County Member Newsletter is printed eleven times a year and mailed to all members. The membership mailing list is maintained by the Society Secretary, Robert Hastings. Please direct any address corrections to Mr. Hastings at 322-0612 or to the Society post office box listed above.*

**Historical  
Society**  
Of Pottawattamie County  
Post Office Box 2  
Council Bluffs, IA 51502

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