

Uncovering the Past in Rushville, Nebraska

THIS PICTURE POSTCARD, shown below of Main Street, in Rushville, Nebraska was featured as a photo quiz on our Forensic Genealogy website, www.forensicgenealogy.info. The owner of the postcard, Gwen Upton, bought it from an antique store. We challenged our readers to tell us the latest date the photo could have been taken, and the earliest date it could have been mailed, based on clues found on the card. We posted both the front and the back of the postcard for the quiz, but we covered the date of the postmark so that our readers would have to do a little research to get the answer. The card was sent by someone with the initials C.E., presumably living

in Rushville, to a Miss Bess Anthony in Gordon, Nebraska, just a few miles to the east in the extreme northwest corner of the state.

First, let's see if we can date the photograph on the front of the card.

The postcard depicts a beautifully detailed scene of Rushville around the turn of the 20th century. It appears as if a moment in the life of the town were frozen in time by the camera. The street is crowded. A small audience of men under a tent

appear to be listening intently to a speech while a group of women chat on the sidewalk behind it. A couple of Indians sit crouched between two buildings.

The picture is rich in details that can be mined for clues about when it was taken. Several of these items relate to the carnival that was going on at the time.

There is a man standing at



This photograph depicts Rushville, Nebraska's bustling Main Street around the turn of the 20th century. But when exactly was the photo taken? Inset; the back of the postcard.



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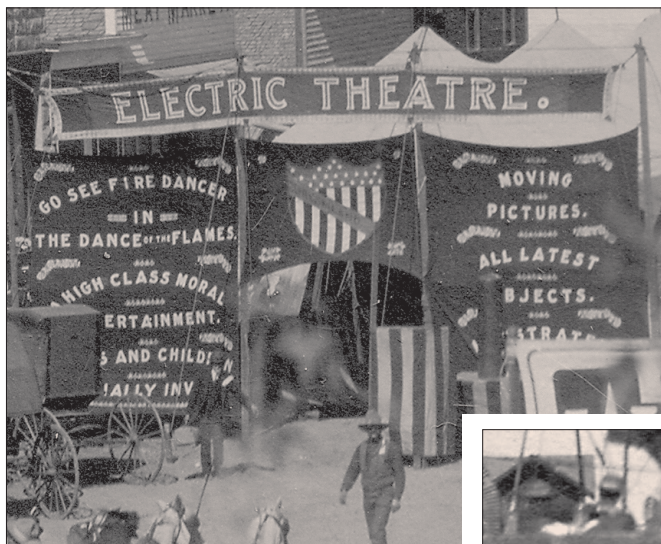
a podium to the far left selling tickets (to a show? to a ride?) In the center of the picture is the Electric Theatre, a traveling movie house, advertising "Go See Fire Dancer in the Dance of the Flames, High Class Moral Entertainment, --s and Children, -ally Inv---" and "Moving Pictures, All Latest --bjects, --strat--."

Another bark-er wearing a bow tie stands at a podium to the far right, advertising "Wild Girl, Nora Phillipino, Alive Alive Alive". Many of the pas-sengers of the Ferris wheel to the far right, behind the power pole, can be seen riding in one of its cars, including three men wear-ing hats who are visible just above and to the right of the word Phillipino.

These clues were the first ones that we investigated. The Electric Theatre refers to a primitive type of portable movie theater. Electric Theatres like the one in the photo-graph toured the Midwest in the late 1890s and early 1900s. They were not always regarded as a moral form of entertainment, hence the reference to "High Class Moral Entertainment", with the next words presumably "Ladies and Children, Cordially Invited". A search on Google using the term "Electric Theatre" yielded too many unrelated hits, so we were not able to find further informa-tion on this type of portable enter-tainment that could help us.

A Google search on Nora Phillipino did not contribute any information. The only related hits we came up with were links to Nora Phillipino, a current adult movie star. Searching for informa-tion on the Ferris wheel did not produce much either. Although

the first Ferris wheel was intro-duced by George Washington Ferris in 1893 at the Chicago World's Fair, the patent, (#1262687) was not issued until 16 April 1918. (Visit



Above: Close-up of the advertising for the Electric Theatre, a traveling movie house. Right: Rushville's electric plant was built in 1910, so this power pole could help to date the photo. However, it has been noted that power poles appeared as early as 1908.

<http://patft.uspto.gov> for more informa-tion). Portable Ferris wheels, like Electric Theatres, toured the Midwest during the early 1900s. (For more informa-tion visit <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~CAP/PALACE/early.html>).

There are a few less obvious clues relating to the appearance of the town that were more helpful in dating the photo. The streets in the picture are not paved. There is an electric power pole to the far right. There are many horses and bug-gies in the street, but no cars. There is a shoe store with a "Bryan Head Quarters" banner displayed across the front. Farther down the

street there is a meat market. These and several other buildings can be used to compare our picture to other photographs of the town taken at different times over the years.

A search on Google produces the website www1.cedarrapids.net/hindman/RUSHVILL.htm that contains several pictures of Rushville taken at various times.

According to Evan Hindman, the webmaster for this site, "The building to the right with the pointed top was the Pudelko Store. To the left are the mercantile and shoe stores that are also seen in the quiz picture. The electric plant was built in 1910 and tele-phone service started in 1913, so the photo would date from around

that time.

However, I have seen pho-tos from 1908 that show power poles as well, so the poles might date to a few years before that."

Comparing the picture from Evan's website to the photo from the quiz gives us an approximate date for the photo of 1910.

Can we get a more accurate date for the pic-ture?

Fortunately there is one item in the pho-tograph that did not exist before a certain date, and that was not widely used after a cer-tain later date.

Before reading further, can you identify it? Hint: The banner read-ing "Bryan's Head Quarters" that hangs in the window of the store-front appears to indicate that the property is being used as the headquarters for a political cam-



paign for someone named Bryan.

An investigation into Nebraska history produces two possibilities for the identity of the candidate. The banner could refer to Charles Waylan Bryan, who served as mayor of Lincoln, Nebraska from 1915 to 1917 and again from 1935 to 1937. Charles also ran (both successfully and

and the *Encyclopedia Britannica* indicate that they are comparable in accuracy.

The Wikipedia article about Charles Waylan Bryan is rather brief, but the article about Bryan offers a detailed biography, accompanied by pictures taken at different times in his career. The Wikipedia image of Bryan taken in

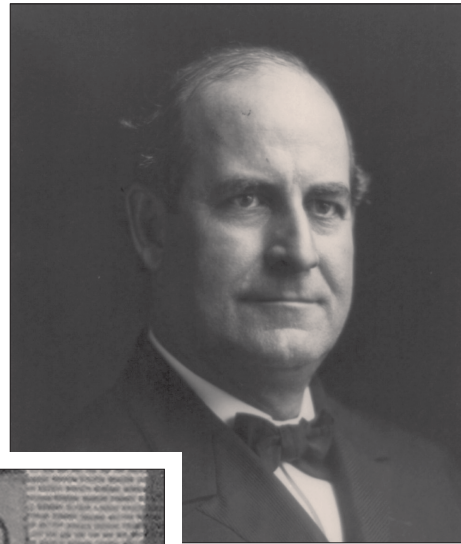
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have a closer look to see if we can distinguish ~~if it depicts~~ one of the Bryan brothers.

When the image of the front of the store is enlarged, there are many similarities that appear between the Wikipedia photo of William Jennings Bryan and the image in the campaign poster. Both show what appears to be a



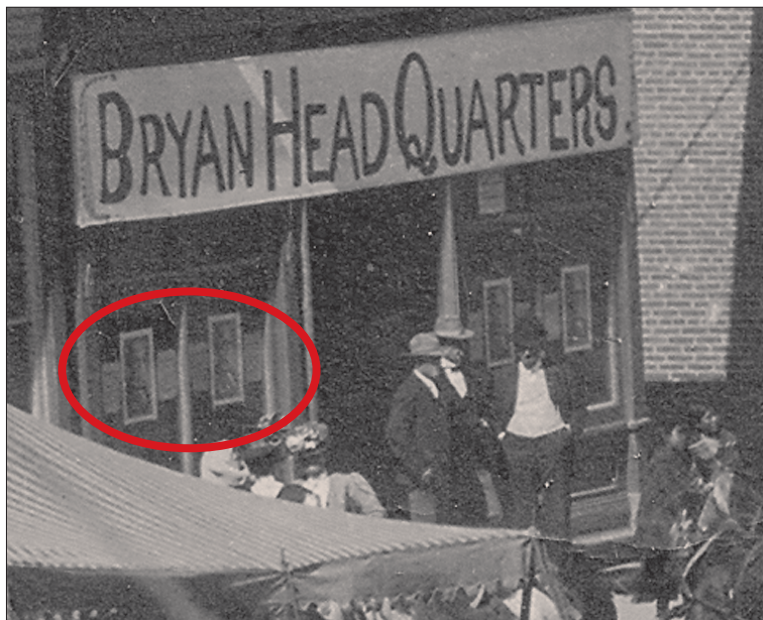
Left: A close-up of the campaign posters hanging in the windows of the Bryan Head Quarters, circled in red below. There are many similarities between the portrait of William Jennings Bryan, shown right and the image in the campaign posters such as the angle of the pose and what appears to be a white shirt and black bow tie. Was this the local office for Bryan's third and last unsuccessful run for the Presidency in 1908? If so, this would help date the photo.



unsuccessfully) for Governor of Nebraska several times during the 1920s and 1930s.

A second possibility is that the banner refers to Charles' more famous older brother, American statesman and politician William Jennings Bryan, who is most well known as Clarence Darrow's opponent in the infamous Scopes Monkey Trial of 1925. Bryan ran unsuccessfully three times for President of the United States in 1896, 1900 and finally, in 1908. Perhaps the store was the Rushville headquarters for one of William Jennings Bryan's runs for the presidency.

Wikipedia, www.wikipedia.org, is an online encyclopedia that is constantly being updated by its readers. Although anyone can add a new article or can edit an already-existing article, recent comparisons between Wikipedia



1907 during his last bid for the presidency is shown ~~below~~. (For more information on Bryan, visit http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Jennings_Bryan#1900-1912:_on_the_Chautauqua_circuit.) Is there a way we can compare this picture to that of the man whose headquarters is in the shoe store?

Yes there is! The front of the store reveals several copies of a campaign poster that feature a photograph of the candidate. Let's

balding man with a high forehead wearing a white shirt and a black bow tie. Both show the individual facing the same direction in the same pose. Therefore, we can conclude that the photograph used in the poster is the same as the one from 1907 used in the Wikipedia article. The store must have been the local headquarters for William Jennings Bryan's third and last unsuccessful run for

the Presidency in 1908 when he was defeated by William Howard Taft.

The latest date the picture on the card could have been taken was shortly after Election Day, which was 3 November 1908. Presumably, the headquarters would've been dismantled in the days following Bryan's defeat, with the building reverting to its previous incarnation. Note that this also gives us an earliest date

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for the photo of 1907, when the campaign picture of William Jennings Bryan was produced.

Now what about the earliest date the postcard could have been mailed?

There are several clues offered by the back of the card that can be used to obtain an approximate date for when it was mailed. We already know that the card could not have been sent prior to 1907 when the picture of William Jennings Bryan was taken. The style of the card more specifically indicates it could not have been mailed before 1 March 1907, since this is the date that picture postcards with divided backs were first printed. (For more information visit, www.ourworld.computer/serve.com/homepages/1cseiler/faqsec1.html.) After this date the space on the right was reserved for the address, while the left side was for writing messages.

Another clue is given by the stamp in the upper right hand corner. According to the chart on the website, www.1847.usa.com/washfrank/1cFranklinQuickChart.html, the stamp can be identified as a Franklin Head One Cent Stamp, Scott #331 or Scott #331a, by its various shades of green and by the 12 perforations that appear along each side. Without being able to compare the colors and watermark



Franklin Head One Cent Stamp, Scott #331 or #331a, first issued on 1 December 1908.

of the original stamp with those of the Scott #331 and the Scott #331a, it is impossible to tell which one it is. It makes no difference since both types of Franklin Head One Cent Stamp were first issued on 1 December 1908.

There is an additional clue that is not as obvious as these two. The message on the back of the postcard reads: "Does this remind you of your infantry days. The rain ruined all my hay on Rush creek. May ship 'Tewsday'. C.E."

The reference to the writer's hay crop being destroyed is important. Hay is harvested in the early spring through the middle of summer. In fact, this is why schools began to have vacation during the summer months, so that students could help with the harvest. The earliest date the card could have been mailed was the spring or summer after the writer lost his crop in 1909.

The image to the left shows the upper right hand corner of the back of the card with the postmark revealed. The stamp was canceled when the card was mailed on 14 August 1909.

There are always interesting details that emerge during our photo quizzes that do not relate directly to the answer, but which are nevertheless important in providing an historic backdrop to the picture. One of our readers provided extra insight into the history of Rushville that is worth mentioning.

Mary Fraser, one of our top quizmasters, wrote that, "Buffalo Bill Cody headquartered in Rushville when he was hiring talent on the reservation for his wild west shows. Cody paid

the Indians in script that was redeemable only at the Asay Store while the performers were in Rushville. Cody always stayed

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with the Asay family when in Rushville. (It has been said that Cody entertained Mrs. Asay on picnics on the Niobrara River while Mr. Asay tended the store.) In later years, Cody returned to Rushville to film a re-enactment of the "Battle of Wounded Knee". The Pine Ridge Indian Reservation continues to be a major part of the Rushville economy."

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Andrew Yeiser is co-author of *DNA & Genealogy*. He worked for the United Nations as an engineering management consultant in such diverse countries as Turkey, Nigeran and Malaysia and regards his tenure with the UN as 30 years of paid vacations. Andrew is presently a consultant in engineering and business management. He traces his family to eight signators of the Magna Carta.



The postmark on the postcard reveals that the card was mailed in August 1909, which means the photograph on the front was taken sometime before then.