

# Past Posts

HOW DID PEOPLE "REACH  
OUT AND TOUCH SOMEONE"

BEFORE TELEPHONES?

THEY SENT NOTES ON POSTCARDS.

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THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS-EL PASO STANDS IN A DALLAS convention center—and rummages through a table full of boxes. It's the spring of 1987. President Haskell Monroe will soon become chancellor at the University of Missouri-Columbia, and he still needs some items before the big move. So, he's at a weekend postcard show, sifting through shoeboxes crammed with thousands of the old images. Some are actual black-and-white photographs. Some are printed in color. Some bear a stranger's scribbles on the back. Monroe snatches up any he finds that portray his two new homes, Mizzou and Columbia. It's what he has done for all the places he has lived. It's one of his cherished hobbies.

In September 1999, more than 12 years and 1,800 postcards later, Monroe handed over his collection to the Boone County Historical Society. Some are views from the edge of town, with a beautiful, white dome rising out of a tree-topped horizon. And then there are hundreds from campus, with girls in pretty dresses at May Day on the Quad. Such events—along with Ag Day, Law Day, Engineering's St. Pat's Day and Hobo Day—distinguish MU from the half dozen other places for which Monroe collects.



*Before students commonly had cars on campus, they retreated to quiet enclaves like the Hinkson Creek, left. For generations, it served as a picnic spot, romantic rendezvous and party destination. (card circa 1909)*

*The Department of Dairy Husbandry was brand new when it gained worldwide fame via the cow Old Jo, not shown, which captured in 1910 the world's record for 30-, 60- and 90-day milk production. She placed second for yearly production, with 26,861.5 pounds. (card circa 1912)*

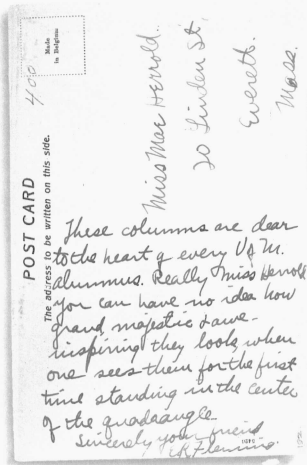


*Although the Columns, left facing page, long have been the University's spiritual center, that wasn't the case after the infamous 1892 fire destroyed Academic Hall. Many thought the Columns a dangerous eyesore that should be razed. After a heated exchange of words—and fists—they were declared structurally sound and spared demolition. (card circa 1909)*

*Switzler Hall, lower left in aerial photograph, is the oldest surviving academic building on campus. Built in 1871, it originally housed laboratories for the College of Agriculture. (card circa 1920s)*

*Postcards, shown at 85 percent actual size, are courtesy of the Boone County Historical Society. Caption information provided by University Archives.*





As delightful as these campus scenes are, Monroe gets as big a kick from the guys behind the postcards. In the early 20th century, Monroe says, four students—Siegel Mayer, BJ '13; Volney McFadden, AB '13; Arnot Finley, EE '16; and Ervin Ocker, BS Engr '20—dubbed themselves “University Photographers” and zipped around documenting football games, fraternity parties and festivities on the Quad. He knows of no others like them on other campuses. “With their huge Kodak box cameras,” Monroe says, “they would go to all kinds of campus events and take pictures, then come back a day or so later with the negatives and ask, ‘Would you like to buy some pictures to send home?’”

It was a system that made for few-of-a-kind images that, decades later, would make the postcards a dream collectible: You never know if you’ve got them all, and chances are you don’t. That’s what keeps collectors like Trenton Boyd, BS Ag '66, MA '68, driving to postcard shows around the Midwest, 25 years after he began. Boyd, a librarian at the College of Veterinary Medicine, has nearly 40,000 postcards tied to Missouri, which is the largest one-state collection he knows of. And still he keeps rummaging: “No one knows what’s out there. I mean, there’s absolutely no kind of guidebook, like in so many other hobbies,” he says. “Like my hometown is Sikeston, Mo., and I keep thinking, ‘Oh, I have all the Sikeston cards,’ but at the Collinsville (Ill.) show this fall, I found four new ones.”

For Monroe, who taught at least one history class every semester he was an administrator at MU and who now leads the Heritage Preservation Program at Texas A&M, the images—and what’s left out



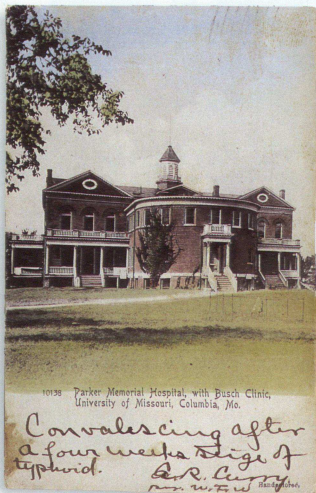
Mizzou engineering students were the first in the world to “discover” that Ireland’s patron saint, Patrick, was an engineer. Since 1903, the Engineering Club has celebrated Paddy’s holiday with a parade, dance and knighting ceremony for the next generation of engineers. (card circa 1910)



Balance Rock, above, which teetered above Hinkson Creek, was a popular climbing spot until it was pushed down in mid-1900s. It was near another favorite outlook, Lover's Leap. (card circa 1910)

On Oct. 10, 1914, MU trounced William Jewell College on its way to a 5-3 record, above right. The schools played each other only four times, with Mizzou winning all the contests.

At least 60 Columbians contracted typhoid fever in 1905, right, which prompted the University to investigate milk and water sources. Matters were far worse in 1918, when a worldwide flu epidemic hit campus, afflicting more than 1,000 of the roughly 3,000 students. (card circa 1906)







of them—suggest who we were. “To me the collection was fun because it was history. It reflects growth and development of the true University community,” he says. “You could look at photographs of Broadway down through the years and show the difference in the buildings, the automobiles, the inside of stores. The messages written on the cards are splendid cameos of that era.”

Changes in University culture become clear, too. In the postcard glory days—before world wars and telephones—there was a campus united, if only for a lack of other options. In romantic shots of the Farmer’s Fair and St. Pat’s Day, students came together, and rivals sometimes converged to spoil the fun.

Not long after postcards faded, so did many of the events they used to capture. Sure, Ag Day is still around. But not with the same furor. Monroe knows why. “Because now you can get in your car and have your own private fun,” he says. “It doesn’t have to be organized. ‘We don’t need to put up with these guys—let’s head to the sports bar.’”

So when the car and the telephone came along, campuswide revelry became more rare, and the people who captured it hit the road. Nothing more to write home about.

Luckily, these “picture postcards” leave a unique legacy of some very special decades in MU’s history. ☼





Each spring from 1902 into the 1930s, Hobo Day, above, attracted as many as 400 wannabe bums dressed in torn, worn, too-big or otherwise distressed clothing. MU students caught the train at Wabash railroad station just north of campus and rode in boxcars toward Mexico, Mo., then jumped the tracks and walked back to town. (card, produced by Siegal Mayer, BJ '13, circa early 1910s)

From 1910 into the 1920s, MU's female students celebrated May Day, right, in virtually the only event promoted as a holiday specifically for women. Students from each of the class years gathered on the Quad to crown the May Queen and dance around the Maypole. (card circa 1912)



The Journalism Bridge, facing page at top, torn down in 1961 to accommodate the Neff Hall Annex, was dubbed the kissing bridge in honor of the local legend that a kiss on the bridge is essential to a successful journalism career. (card circa 1909)

These women, facing page at bottom, may have been attending the MU Agriculture Club's Farmer's Fair, an annual early May event from 1905 until the late 1950s. (card circa 1910s, produced by Volney McPadden, AB '13)