

POSTCARDS FROM THE PAST

When I began researching my French Canadian family roots many years ago, I became the default historian for both my maternal and paternal families. Over the years, my aunts and uncles have generously passed down to me a number of family heirlooms – old photos, my paternal grandparents' wedding portrait, hand-made quilts, wedding china. A few years ago, my maternal aunt, Aunt Jeannette, gave me a box containing photos and a small scrapbook with an embossed cover that read *Post-Cards*.

What a treasure this scrapbook has proven to be! It contains approximately 40 post cards from the early twentieth century. Some are picture post cards of various buildings in the Montreal area, from where my maternal grandparents immigrated to the United States. On the face of others are embossed floral arrangements with standardized written greetings, such as *Happy Birthday* and *Congratulations* in either English or French. Still others are beautiful Victorian decoupage designs.

Almost all are addressed to my maternal grandfather, Alcide Lariviere, in the town of Magenta, Quebec. It is interesting that most of the cards do not bear stamps or postmarks. It is my understanding that it was customary during the early 1900s to use these fancy postcards as we would currently use a bi-fold greeting card, and enclose them in a cover envelope for privacy.

Almost all the cards are from the same person and written in French. A few have dates from the year 1911. The delicate handwriting is obviously that of a woman. Moreover, the sentiments expressed are flowery and romantic. Alas, these are love letters!

What an adventure it has been to read these bits of history. (And what a challenge it has been to resurrect my knowledge of French for the translation). They all begin with the same type of greeting- *Bien Cher Amie*, which translates to *My Dear Friend*, or *Cher Coeur*, which means *Dear Heart*. Some of the cards contain more “newsy” and generic language, which I assume would be those sent first. But then the prose becomes more flowery as this woman opens up her heart. In one card she writes- “...you occupy my thoughts and could possess my heart”. Another card reads – “If ever you find yourself without happiness and hope, think of me. You will

find in me neither beauty nor riches, but you will find a heart that will never forget you".

As I read through the postcards, I thought to myself - *How romantic my grandmother was!* However, one thing was very puzzling about these intimate pieces of correspondence. They were all signed *GL*, and my grandmother's initials were *OB* for Olivine Bessette! When I approached Aunt Jeannette about this mystery, she confirmed that these wonderful love letters were not written by my grandmother, but rather by a woman named Geneva Leduc, who was obviously very smitten with my grandfather. It appears that most were written in 1911, probably before my grandparents met and long before their 1914 marriage.

The more amazing thing is that my grandmother allowed my grandfather to keep these mementos for all 43 years of their marriage. Aunt Jeannette tells me that she and her siblings would tease my grandfather about the letters. He would just smile and say, "She was nice." Olivine was obviously confident in the love she and Alcide shared and was not threatened by his past. I am very grateful to her for that, as now I am able to learn about the "other woman" in my grandfather's past.

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