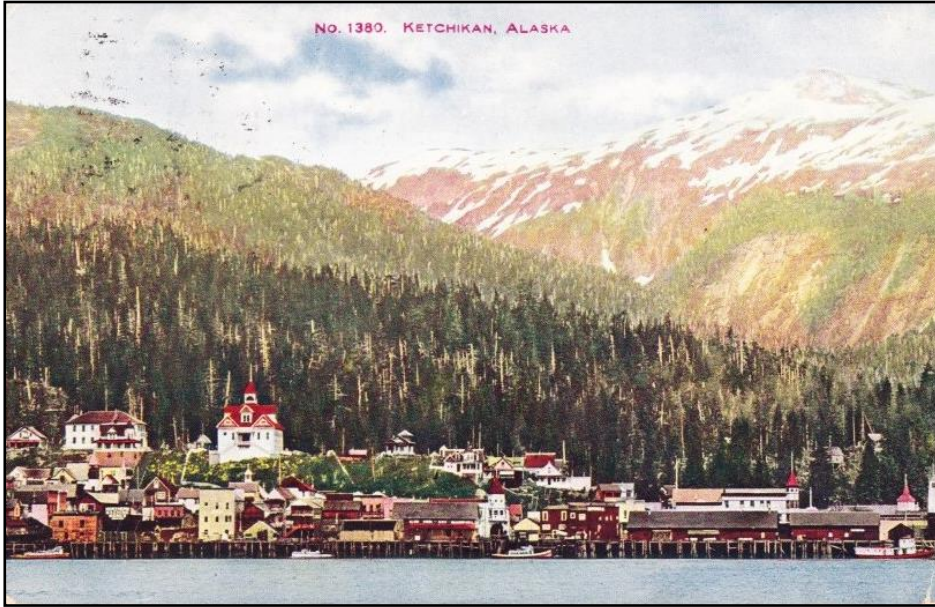


Two Bits of Alaskan History By Patrick Crosby

The postcard view shown below of a tranquil Ketchikan, Alaska in 1909 has a strong duplex handstamp territorial cancel. Although U.S. territorial cancels are sought after, Ketchikan cancels seem to be easy enough to find and the three cards featured in this article cost between \$3 and \$8. Two of the cards are from the same correspondence and speak of a not-so-tranquil time in Ketchikan.

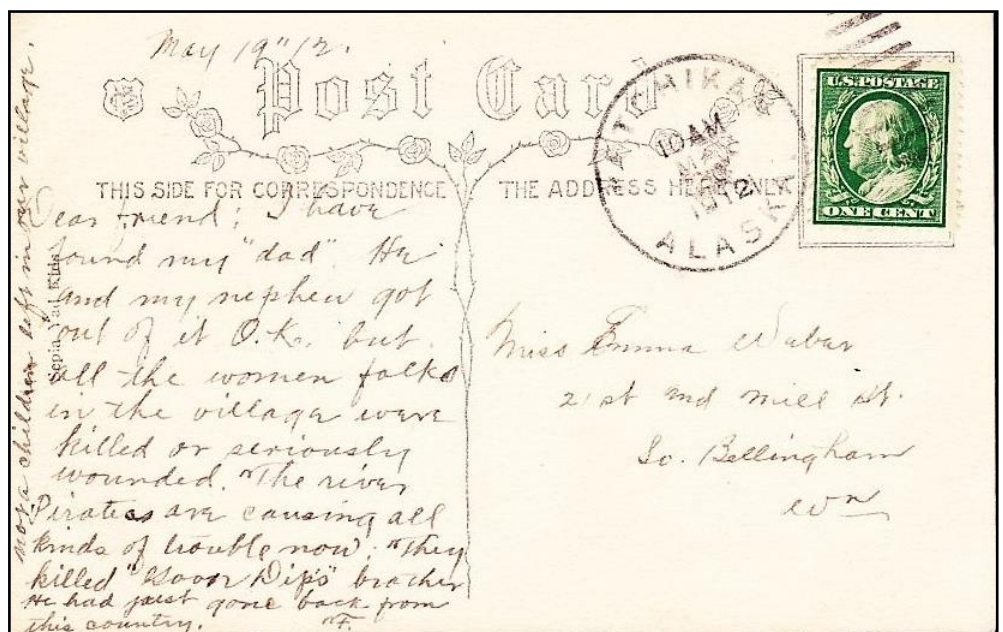


Other postcards from the same correspondence sent from "F" in Alaska to Miss Emma Weber in Washington during the 1912 fishing season are just friend to friend messages, like "Babe" is getting married and "Who's next?" The two cards with historical interest in this article show on their view sides "Best Wishes" with lilies and a comic boy and girl kissing inside her oversized bonnet. These belie the seriousness of the messages.

River Pirates? In the **card shown on the right** postmarked May 20, 1912 "F" nervously writes: *Dear friend: I have found my "dad". He and my nephew got out of it O.K. but all the women folks in the village were killed or seriously wounded. The river Pirates are causing all kinds of trouble now. They killed "Goon(?) Dip's" brother He had just gone back from this country. not a child left in our village.*

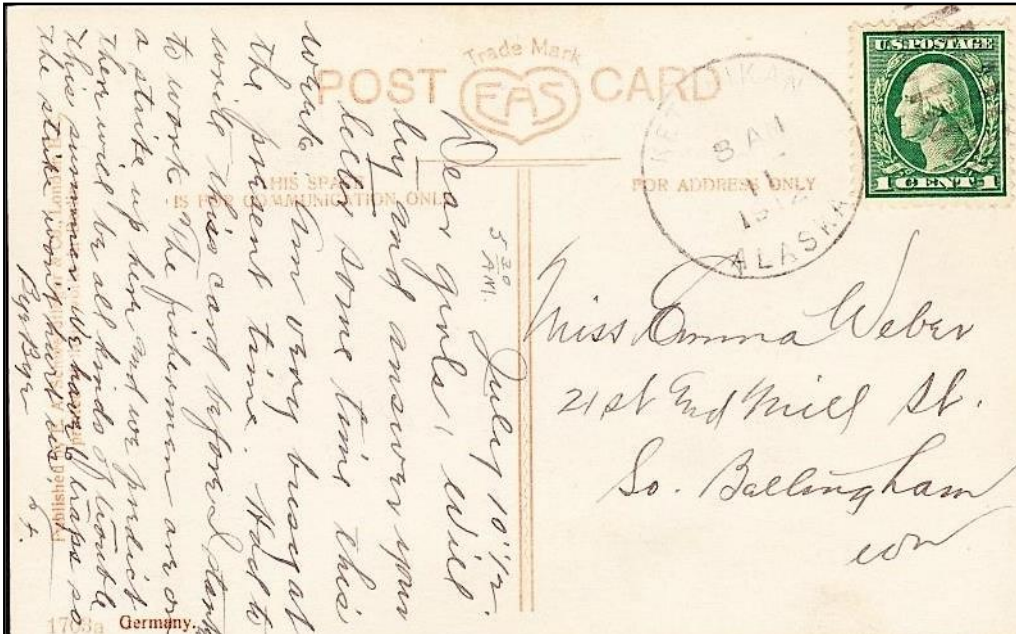
I could find very little about river pirates in the newspapers of the time, and nothing of this incident. On May 22, 1912, The Valdez Daily Prospector had a headline "Pirates Loot Mining Camp" reporting it was done by "coast pirates" and stolen were all

valuables and portable property. Houses were broken into, the windows broken and the doors smashed in.



The only other reference I found was also from The Valdez Daily Prospector, September 21, 1912, and datelined Vancouver, British Columbia: "Carried Off by Pirates" ... a powerful band of Chinese pirates yesterday carried off the master and chief engineer of a river tug and are holding them for ransom. They demand \$20,000. ...they boarded the tug, towing her and seized the entire crew, but afterward released all except the two officers.

There was much more in the newspapers about the message on the **card shown below** postmarked July 11, 1912. "F" writes to Emma: *The fishermen are on strike up here and we predict there will be all kinds of trouble this summer. We have traps, so the strike won't hurt us.*



The Daily Alaskan of April 10, 1912 sets the stage with the article "Canneries Crowd Alaskan Waters". There were already about 12 established canneries in the Southeastern Alaskan waters, and 28 new ones were built in the spring of 1912, with 8 of the new ones in Ketchikan. The existing canneries faced extreme competition from the new canneries which were bringing in expensive new fishing methods and cannery tenders that dwarfed those of the

existing canneries. Where the old-timers had been fishing for years with the unwritten law applying to the salmon streams of Alaska, "It's mine - I saw it first", the new canneries wouldn't abide. With the demand for salmon about to explode the fishermen, who the canneries relied upon for their supply, decided to strike.

It was reported in The Valdez Daily Prospector of June 29, 1912, that fishermen were receiving 22 to 24 cents for the number of fish needed to make a case of salmon, while the canneries were selling a case for \$5. So the fishermen wanted double the previous year's prices. Both sides were now organized.

By July 4th all 2,500 fishermen of the Fishermen's Union refused to go to work at the old prices. The canneries threatened that they were bringing in new fishermen from Seattle, but this wasn't true. However, there had been no disorders. The strike was settled July 25th in a compromise, as reported in The Valdez Daily Prospector of August 16, 1912. For almost three weeks no fish had been packed. Where 30,000 cases per day should have been packed, only a small quantity from fish traps were packed. It was speculated that the fishermen got what they demanded.

"F" in his postcard message said, "We have traps so the strike won't hurt us." But they were undoubtedly looked upon as strikebreakers. The Douglas Island News on August 14, 1912 stated: *The fishermen at Ketchikan and vicinity, no longer on strike, have taken up arms - or rather pens - against the fish trap, which they say is a curse and a blight wherever it has been used.* They wanted fish traps abolished to return "God given rights" to both native and white Alaskans.

What happened to "F" and Emma, who worked in a cannery? I like to think that homesick "F" went home to Washington after the fishing season, married Emma on Valentine's Day, 1913, and they never ate fish again. A happy ending.

Patrick Crosby is a member of the Nevada Stamp Study Society and collects U.S. postal cards, especially used, including first days; the 1886 Grant Letter Card (or Sheet); UC16, the first U.S. aerogram; and postal history on business or picture post cards.