

Envelopes of Treasure

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Wonderful stuff keeps trickling in, both in the form of stories and of memorabilia. On Friday my sister Charlie and I borrowed another boxful of printed materials from a collector in N.E. Portland who has been lending – and giving – us treasures for the last couple of years. Barry Cardonick is extremely generous with his finds, as well as extremely patient with the time it takes us to copy the brochures and programs and get them scanned into our computer system.

Being something of a history buff, my imagination is continually sparked by words and images from early Rose Festivals.

This morning I opened an envelope mailed to us from Everett, Washington that held three post cards. One of them was mailed to Mrs. John Ross in Helena, Montana on February 28, 1910. It said, "If you are interested in our magnificent June Spectacle, detach and mail the accompanying postal and you will receive a facsimile of the artistic Rose Festival poster, together with railroad excursion rates from all parts of the country, and other data of the Festival." It was mailed "with love" from Alice, who promises she "will write soon."

I can't help picturing Alice sitting at her desk and writing this card to her friend in Montana on that late winter day nearly a hundred years ago. It cost her a penny to mail. Mrs. John Ross in Helena must have decided to mail in for the additional information, because that part of the card is detached.

I wonder if Mrs. Ross visited Portland between June 6 and 11 that year for the festival. Did she stand with her friend (or relative) Alice in the crowd lining downtown streets to watch the parade? Did she see Rex Oregonus arrive at the waterfront in his royal barge?

The postcard itself has the traditional Rose Festival colors of green and pink and pictures a big tea rose. In a fancy font and fancy language, it refers to February 22, 1910 as the annual 'Day of Roseplanting':

"On the green sward of the city parks, along the public highways, in gardens of palatial homes and humble cottage door yards, our citizens in gala summer attire are busy planting roses for the great annual Rose Festival to be held in this most beautiful of cities next June."

This year the month of February is once again an important time for rose plantings! On Thursday, February 8 (the City of Portland's birthday, by the way), our own living history version of Mayor Harry Lane will join Mayor Potter at City Hall for a rose planting by Portland's official greeters, the Royal Rosarians. This will be the first public appearance of Mayor Harry, the man sometimes called the 'father of the Rose Festival.' Like Rex Oregonus, we're excited to be bringing Harry back to enhance the celebration he helped start more than 100 years ago. It will be a thrill to see him at City Hall at noon on February 8 in all his glory (with his distinctive gravity-defying hairdo).

The Royal Rosarian's electronic newsletter refers to Lane and Potter as "two Portland mayors separated by a century but united by the Rose Festival." Perfect!

Then on Valentine's Day, it will be Georgiana Pittcock's turn to make her first official appearance. Our living history version of Mrs. Henry Pittcock will host a rose planting on February 14 to introduce the official Centennial rose, 'Falling in Love.' The 'mother of the Rose Society' will be joined by

Royal Rosarians, Rose Festival officials and Centennial sponsors at a very important place -- her own 'home,' the Pittock Mansion.

And what will she serve? Rose tea, of course.

The real Georgiana Pittock only got to live a few years in the mansion. It took five years to build and was completed in 1914, tricked out with every possible convenience for the time, including an elevator, a walk-in refrigerator and a central vacuum system. The elevator was installed because Georgiana had suffered a stroke just prior to the completion of the house, and she passed away peacefully at the mansion in June of 1918. Of course today the Pittock Mansion is one of Portland's beloved landmarks and popular attractions.

(Check the website for photographs of Harry and Georgie, as we fondly refer to them -- both the vintage and the contemporary versions.)

Harry Lane and Georgiana Pittock were living in 1910 when the postcard I received today made its way to Helena, Montana. I wonder if Mrs. Pittock was involved in the 'Day of Roseplanting' on February 22 . . . I can't imagine such a famous gardener and proponent of the rose not being directly involved in such an important event.

The card goes on to say, "We want you to visit us in Portland, the summer capital of America, and enjoy the feast of Roses we are preparing for you and for all the world from June 6 to 11, 1910."

(Imagine a 'feast' of roses. Maybe they were brewing rose tea back then, too!)

The reference to Portland as 'the summer capital of America' was common on early Rose Festival materials. Obviously those festival leaders wanted to achieve Mayor Lane's vision of Portland as a major vacation destination, and there's nothing like an ambitious self-fulfilling prophecy to galvanize a community.

As we certainly know here at the festival office, it's not by accident that being optimistic is sometimes referred to as 'wearing rose-colored glasses'!