



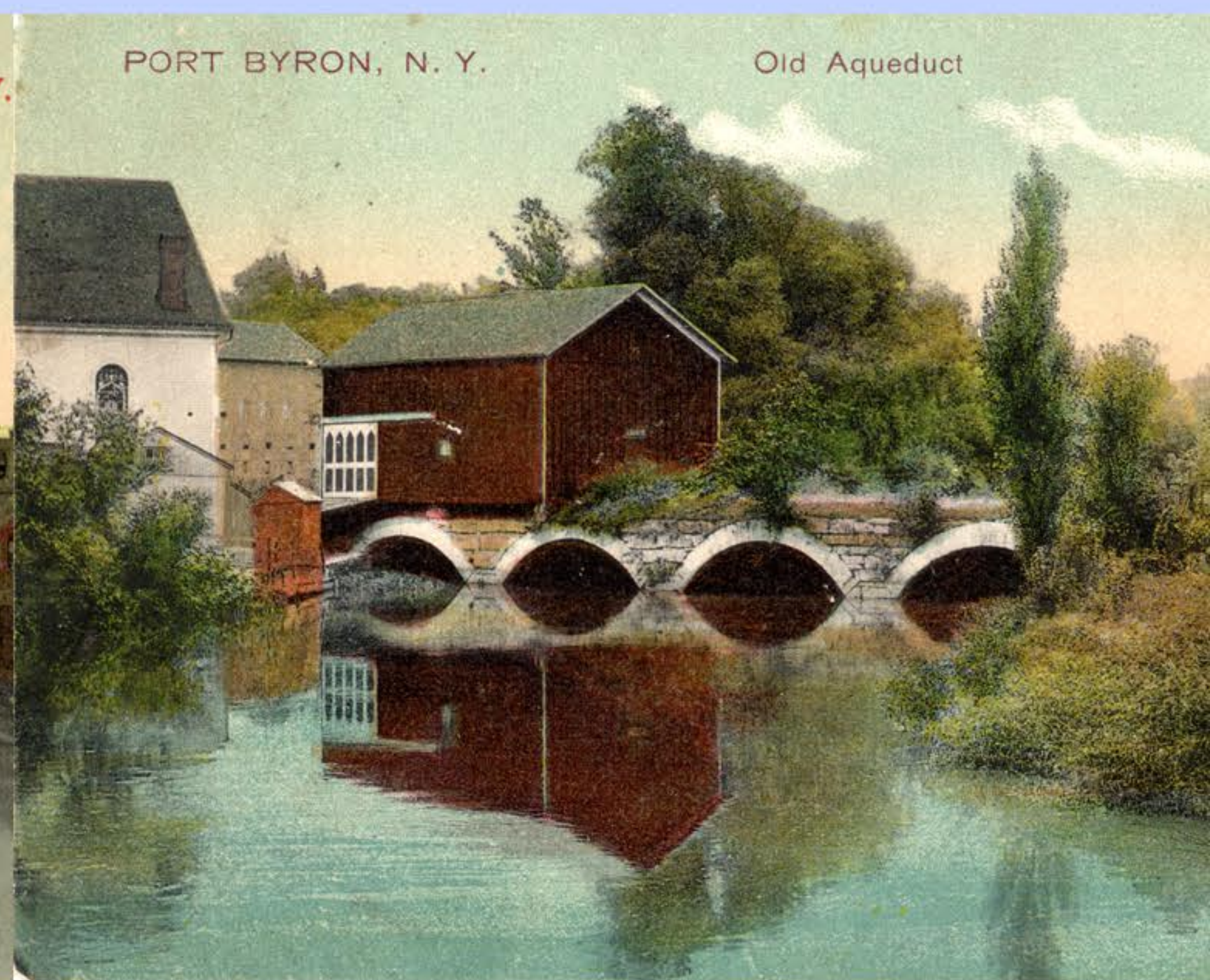
Why don't you write? Elin  
**Wish You Were Here!**

# **ERIE CANAL POSTCARDS**

*On the Tow Path, Erie Canal and Mohawk River Amsterdam in distance.*

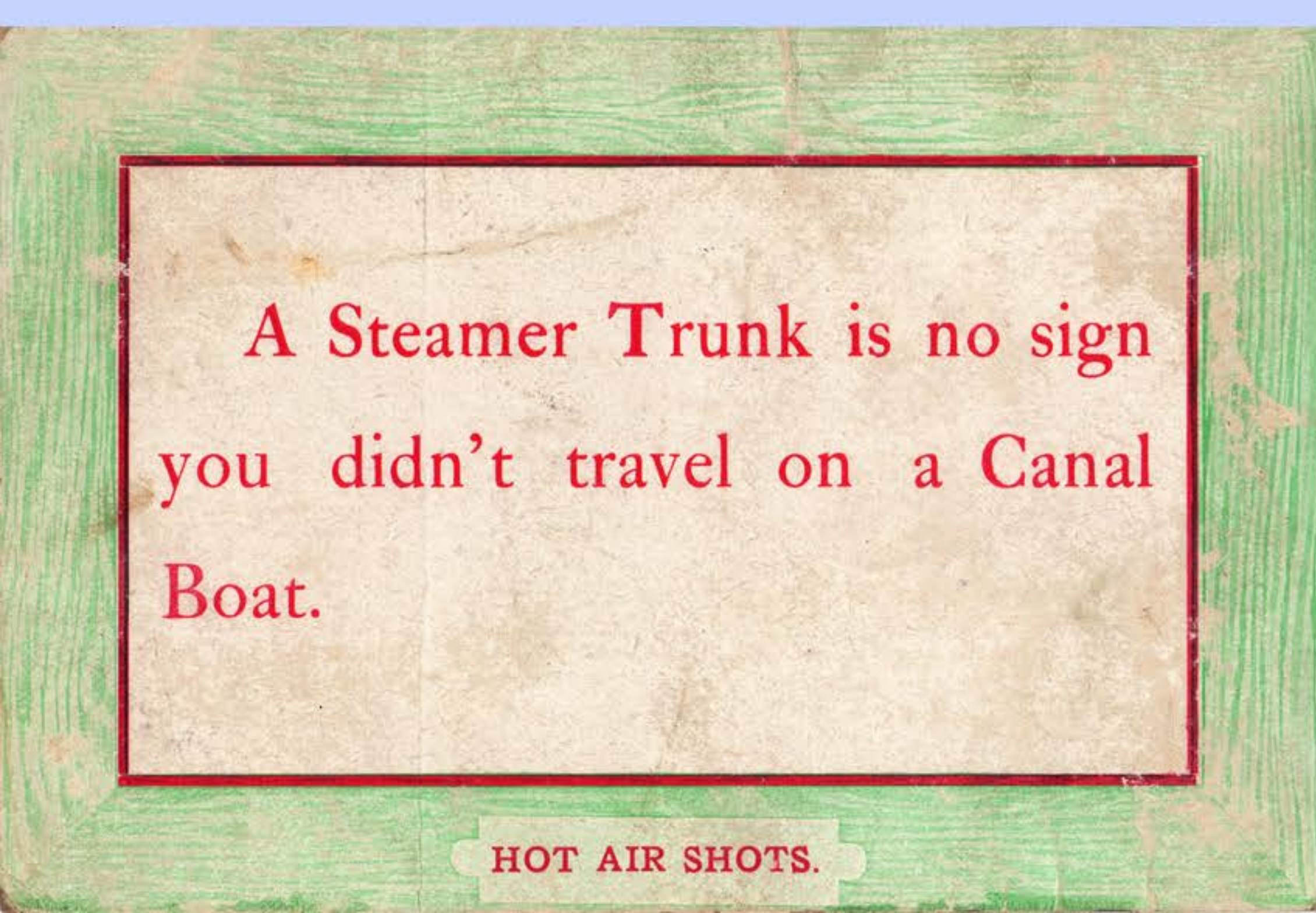


# American Postcards: A Brief History

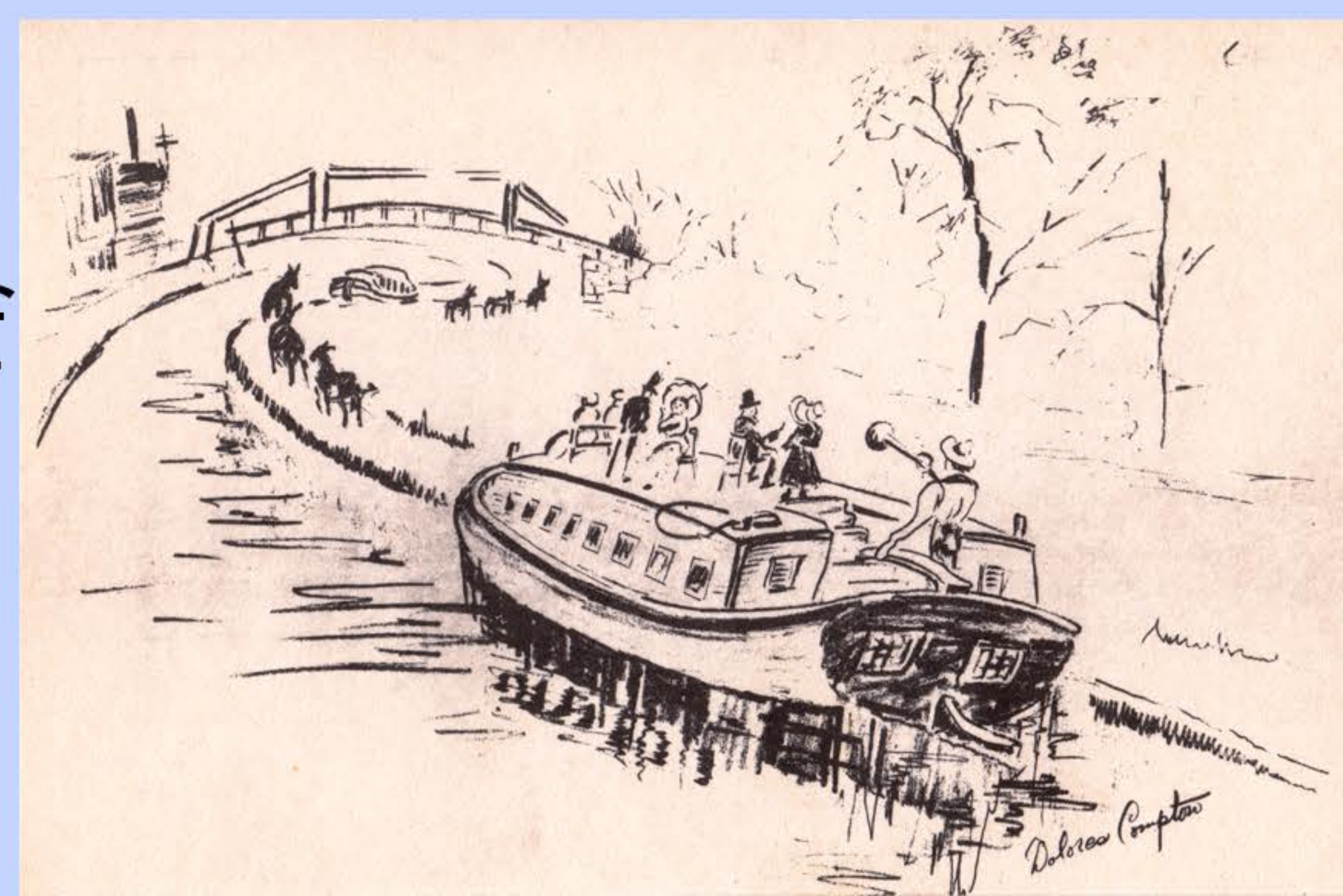


The first American postcard was created in 1873 by the Morgan Envelope Factory, of Springfield, MA. 1873 is also the year of the first pre-stamped "postal cards," which are sometimes called "penny postcards." Only the U.S. Postal Service was allowed to print them until May 19, 1898, with the passage of the Private Mailing Card Act. This allowed private companies to create postcards, which by law had to be called "souvenir cards" (the USPS held onto the term "postcards" until December 24, 1901).

Early postcards were not allowed to have a divided back and only the address was permitted on the back, with any written message confined to the image side of the card. On March 1, 1907, this changed, and postcards could have divided backs. This started the Golden Age of American Postcards, from 1907 to 1915. Postcards were a genuine phenomenon, and color-printed German postcards exploded in popularity. The craze ended when World War I disrupted the production and importation of these cards.



deltiology:  
the hobby of  
collecting  
postcards

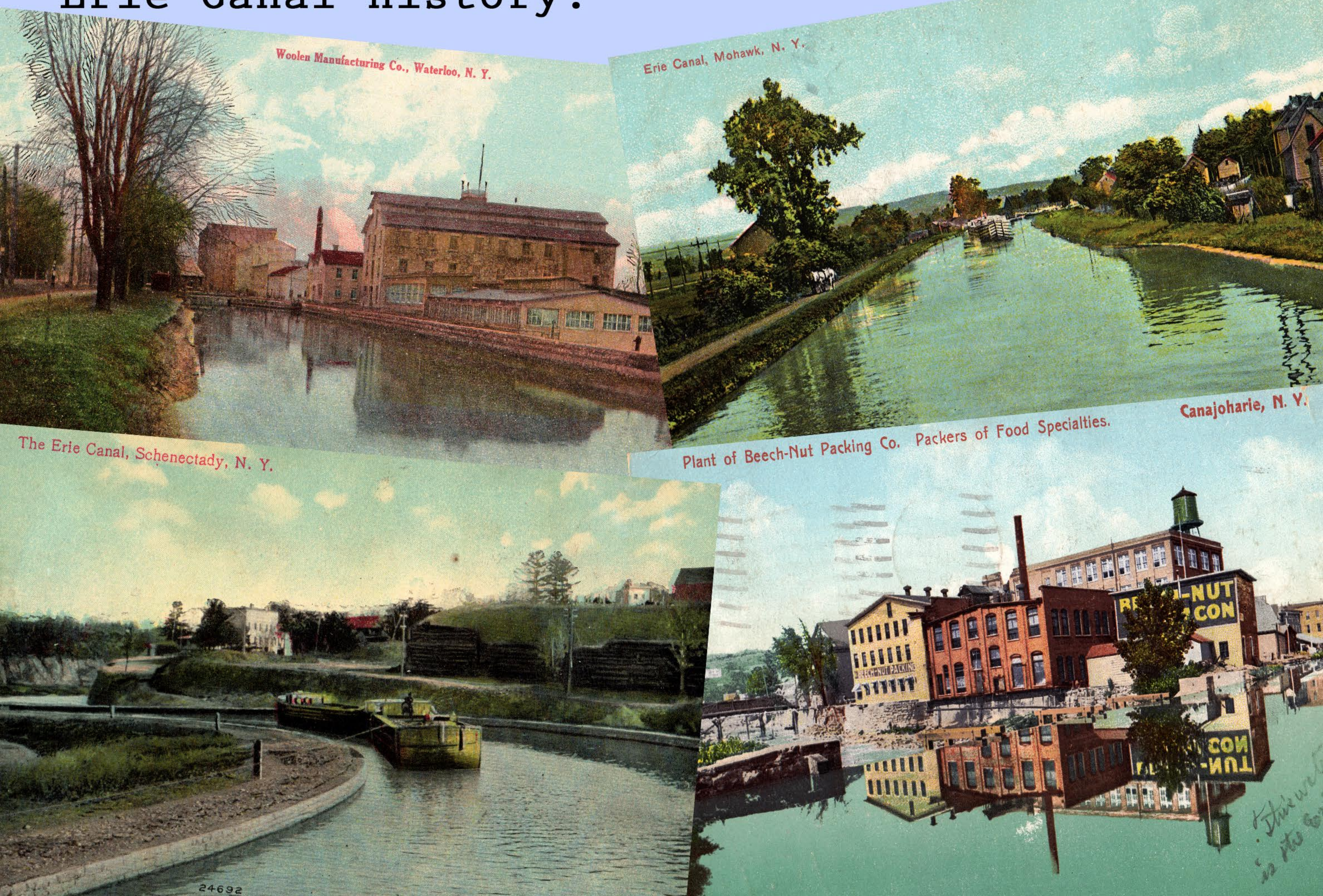




# Why Erie Canal Postcards?

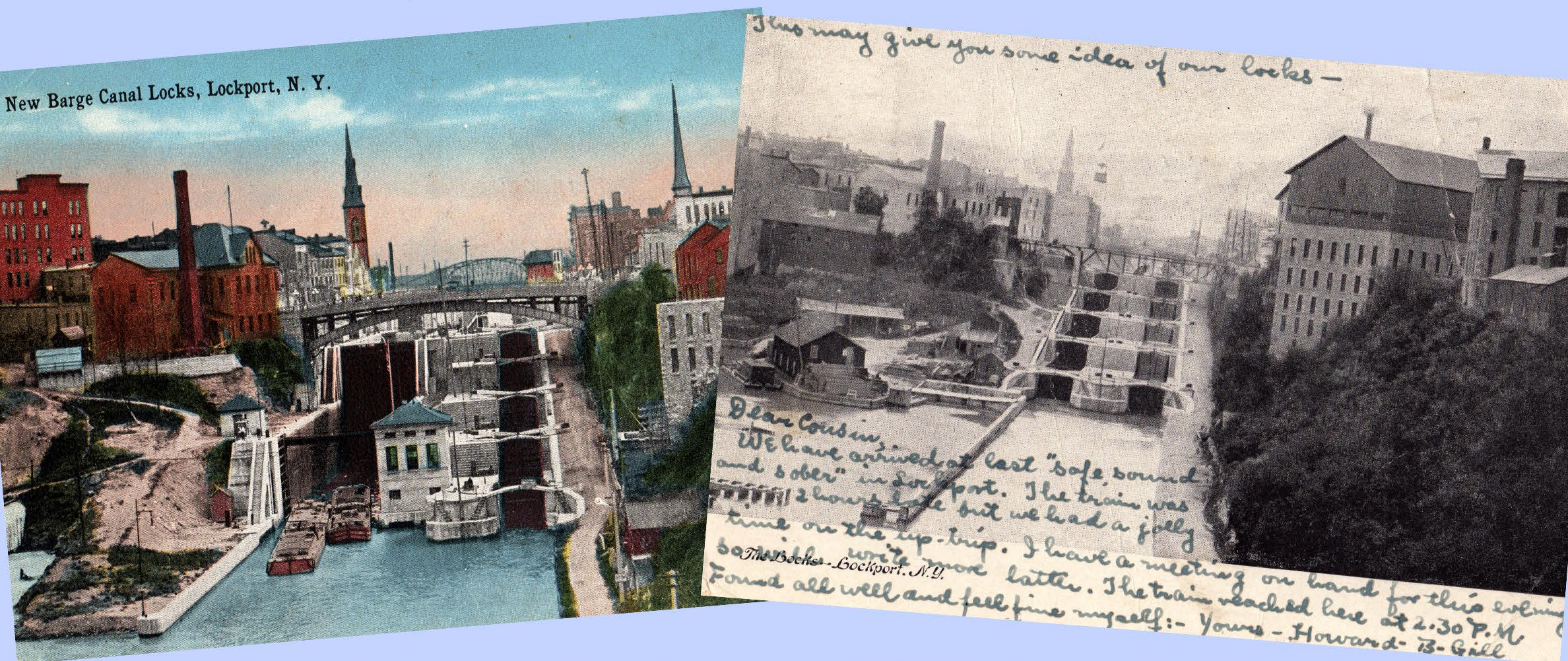
During the Golden Age of Postcards, they became a genuine national phenomenon. However, they were especially popular among women in the small towns and rural areas of Northern states, so postcards featuring Erie Canal scenes were in vogue!

The Erie Canal Museum has a vast collection of postcards depicting New York canals, as well as canals and waterways in other states and countries. In this exhibit, we are spotlighting some of our favorite postcards in hopes that you will marvel over these little pieces of New York and Erie Canal history.





# Only on the Canal



The famous Lockport “Flight of Five” locks was a spectacular postcard subject.



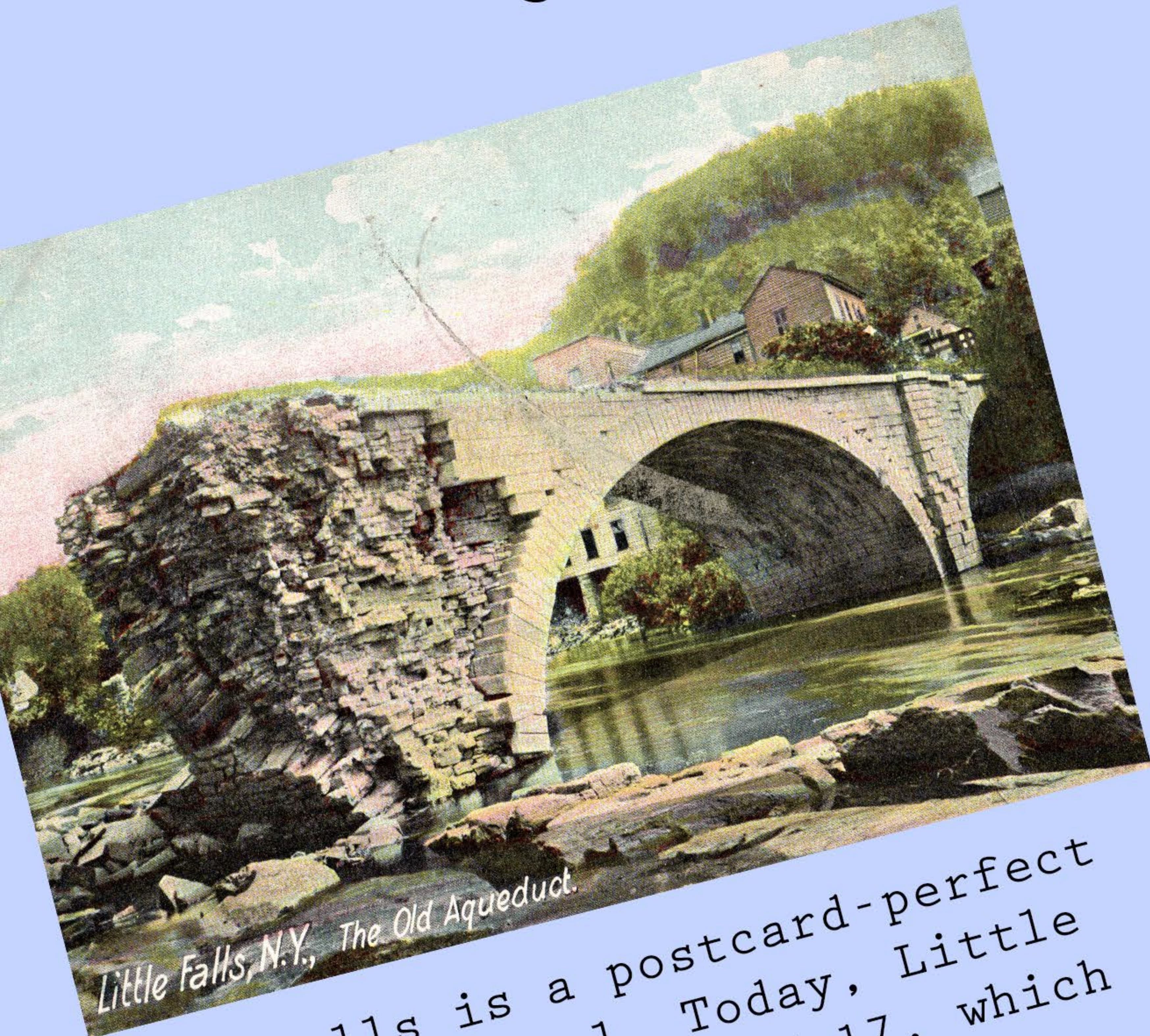
The Canal system had seven weighlocks, located in Rochester, Oswego, Syracuse, Utica, Albany, West Troy, and Waterford. Today, only the Syracuse Weighlock (you are there!) survives, but images of these lost canal buildings can be found on postcards such as the one to the left.

Lock 52 on the Enlarged Erie Canal was located in Port Byron, 30 miles west of Syracuse. The Canal was closed and filled in this area, but in 2016, the Lock 52 site (which includes the Erie House tavern, a blacksmith shop, and a mule barn) was opened as a historic site accessible from the New York State Thruway.





# Only on the Canal



Little Falls is a postcard-perfect part of the Canal. Today, Little Falls is home to Lock E-17, which has the highest elevation change, at 40.5 feet.



*Copyright 1905 by the Rotograph Co.  
H 4364 Profile Rock, Little Falls, N. Y. N. G. L.  
I have seen this myself and it looks very natural. It is down the river from Little F. This is canal toe path at its base.*



"Lock 55 Erie Canal", Lyons, N. Y.

"No doubt this is somewhat interesting to you."



MOUTH OF WOOD RIVER, WHERE BARGE CANAL ENTERS ONEIDA LAKE, SYLVAN BEACH, N. Y.

*No doubt this is somewhat interesting to you. J.B.*



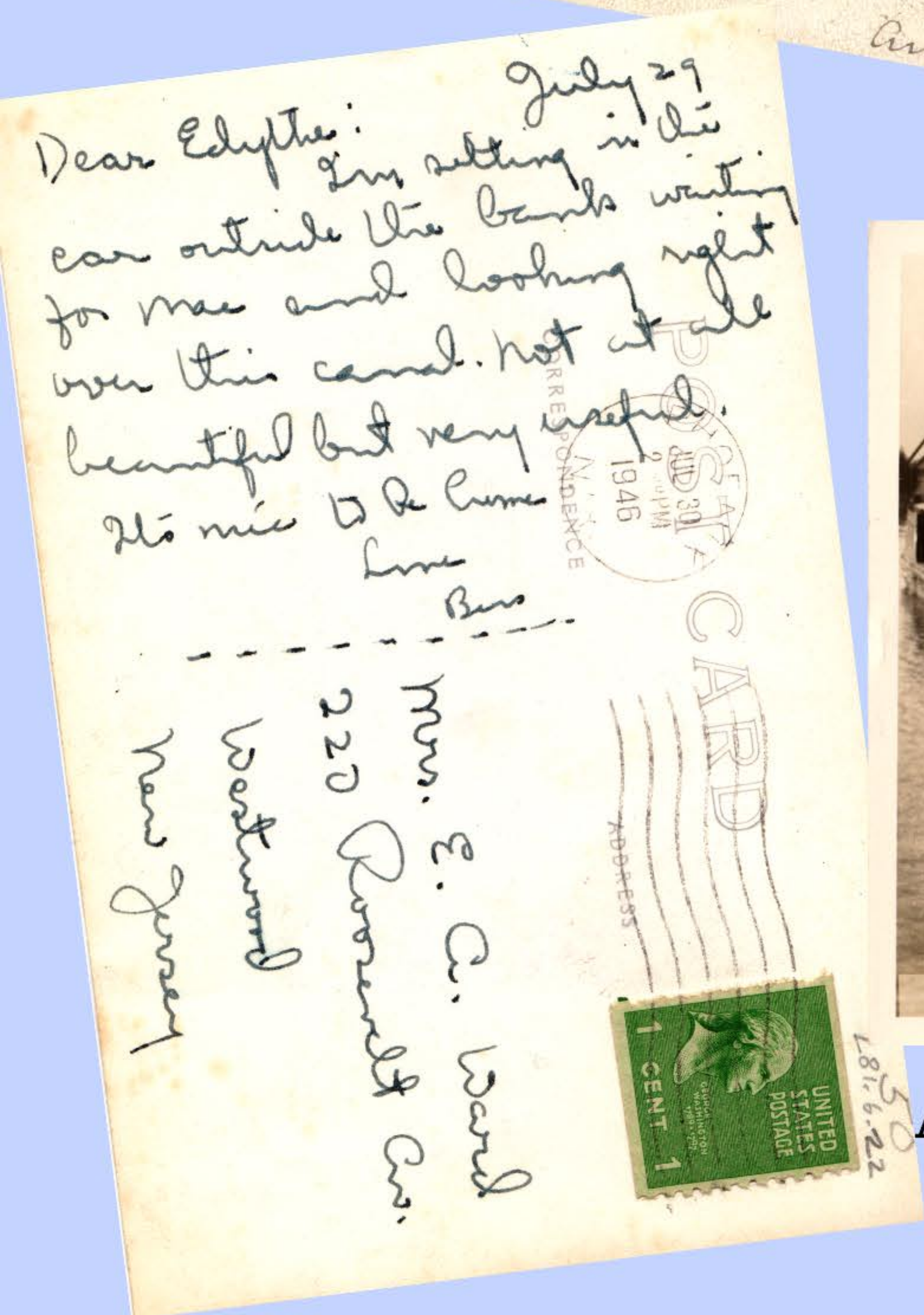
# Writing About the Canal

Contemporary opinions of the Canal varied!



"How would you like to be there?"

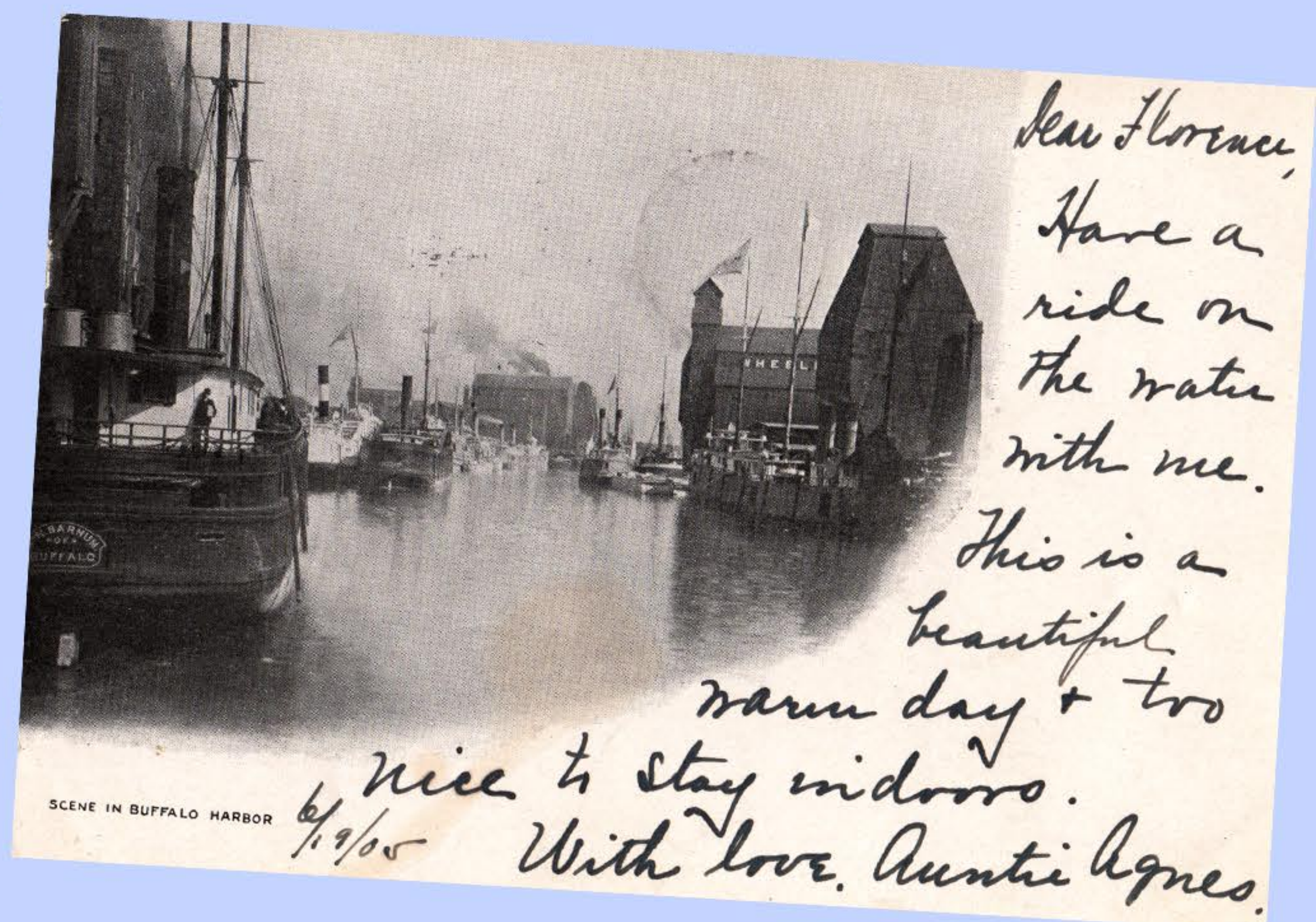
"Am up here for a week having a big time. The Barge runs through the Seneca River for quite a distance and I have seen quite some engineering. The river is very pretty and between the Canal and motor boat I am having some great trips."



A newer postcard, from 1946.

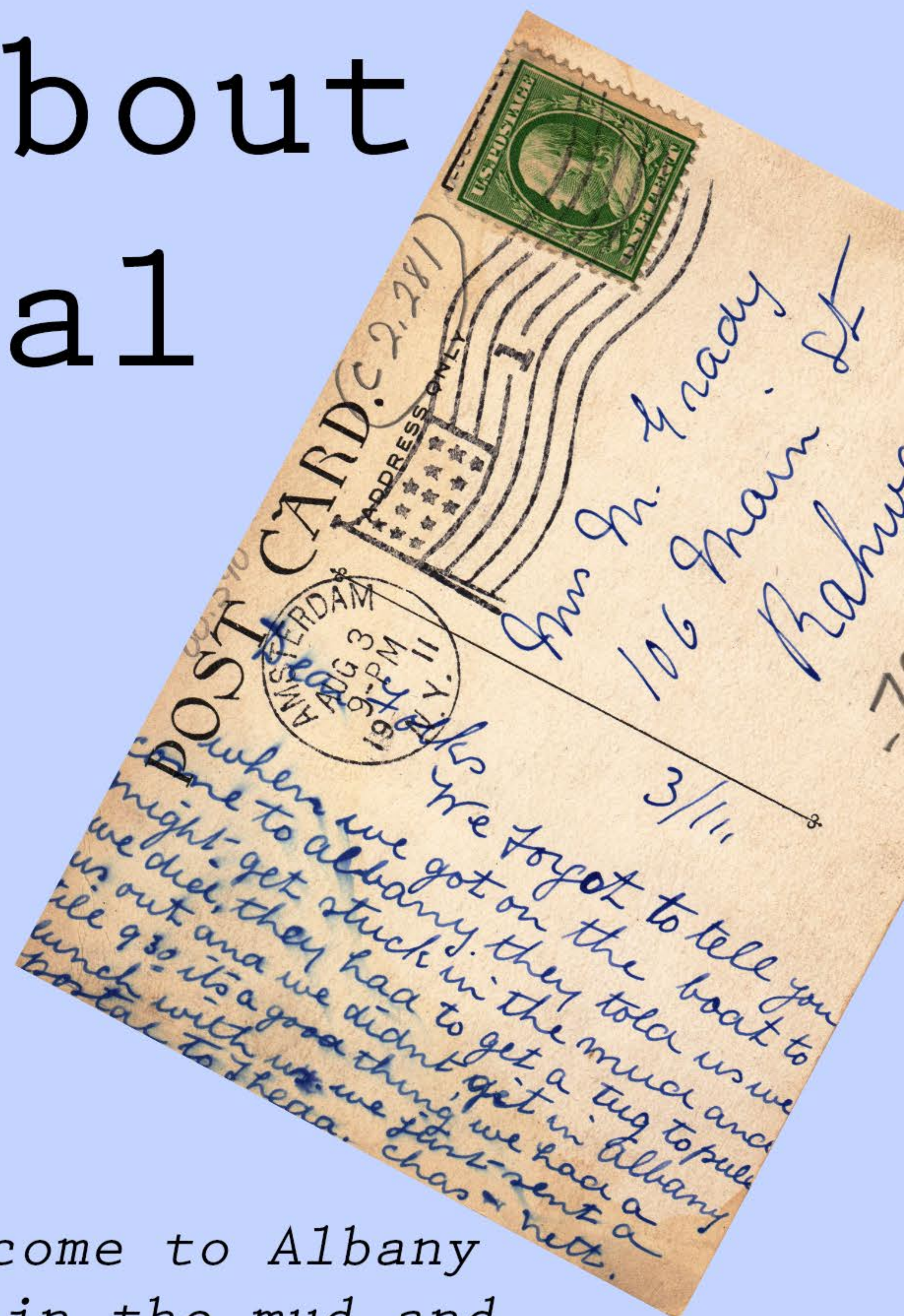
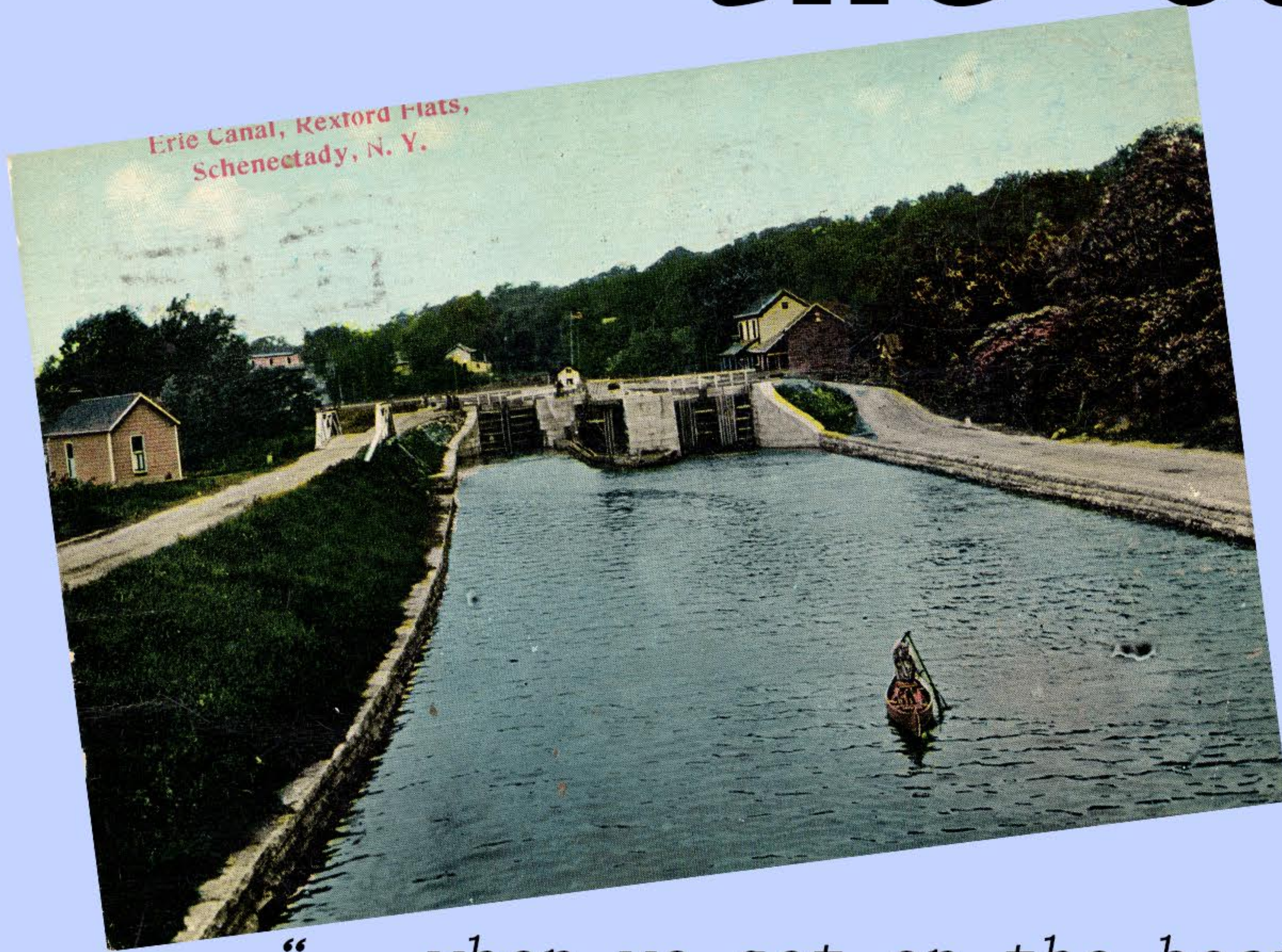
"I'm sitting in the car outside the bank waiting for Mae and looking right over this canal. Not at all beautiful but very useful. It's nice to be home."

"Have a ride on the water with me. This is a beautiful warm day + too nice to stay indoors."

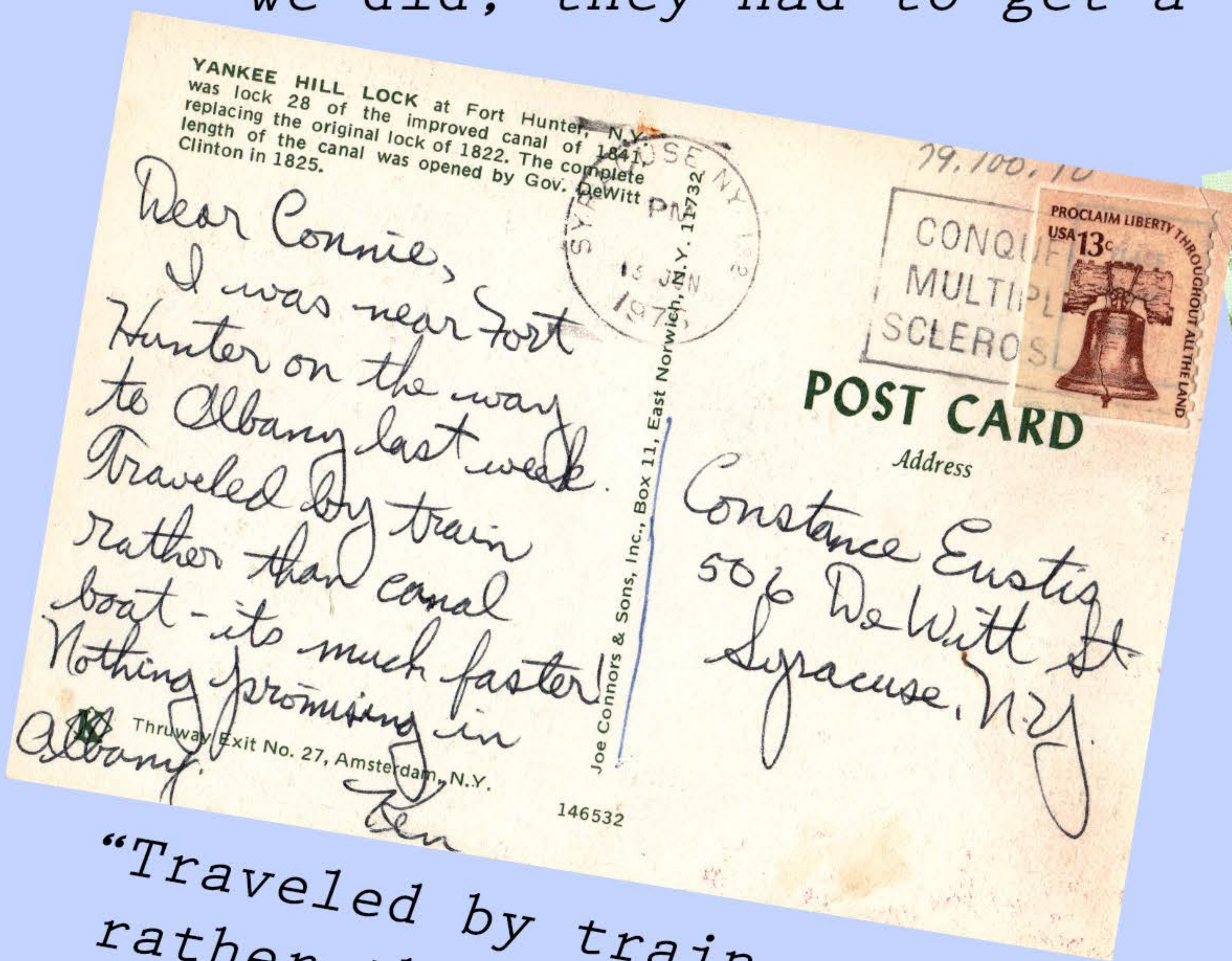




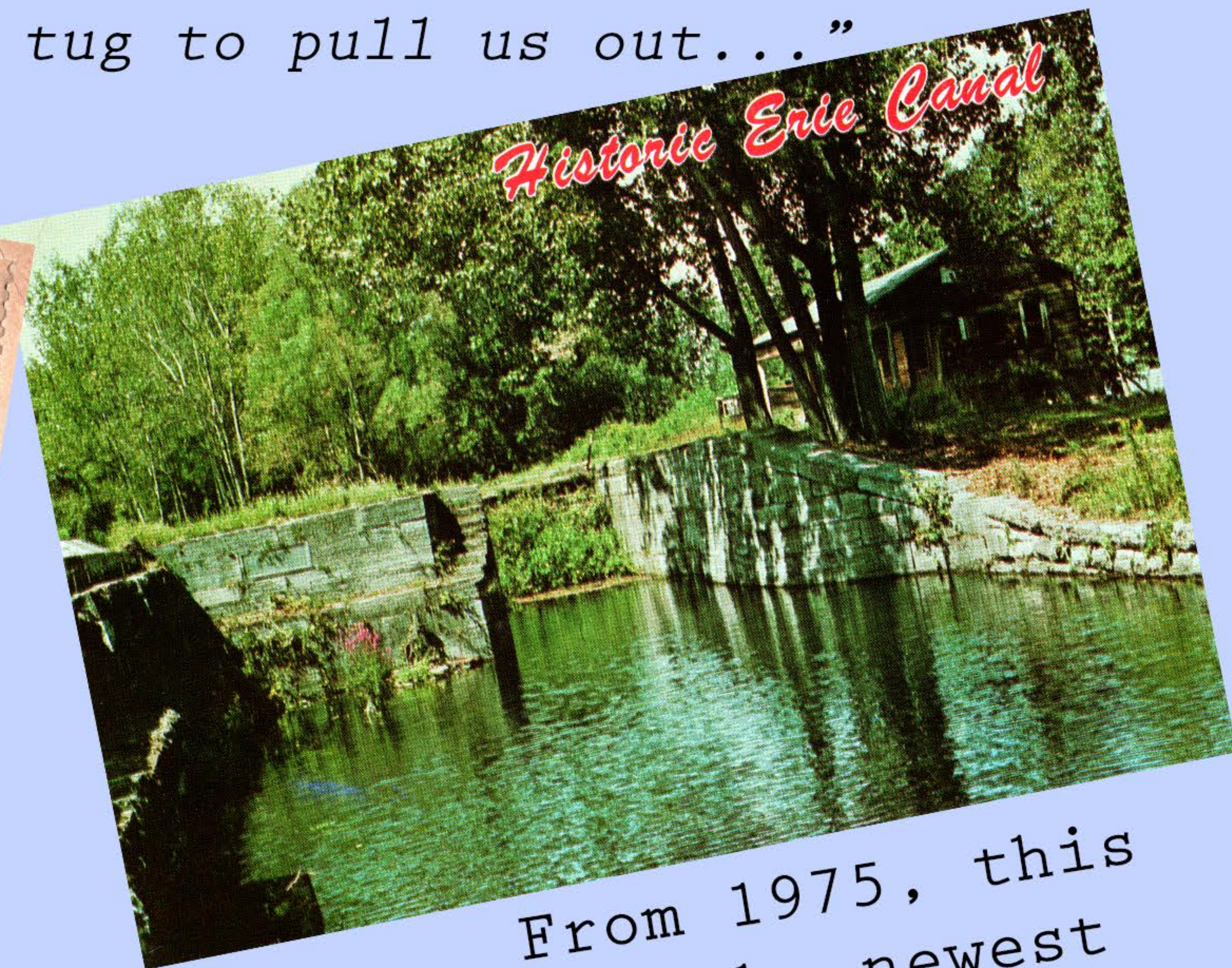
# Writing About the Canal



"...when we got on the boat to come to Albany they told us we might get stuck in the mud and we did, they had to get a tug to pull us out..."



"Traveled by train rather than canal boat - its [sic] much faster!"



From 1975, this is the newest postcard in the exhibit!



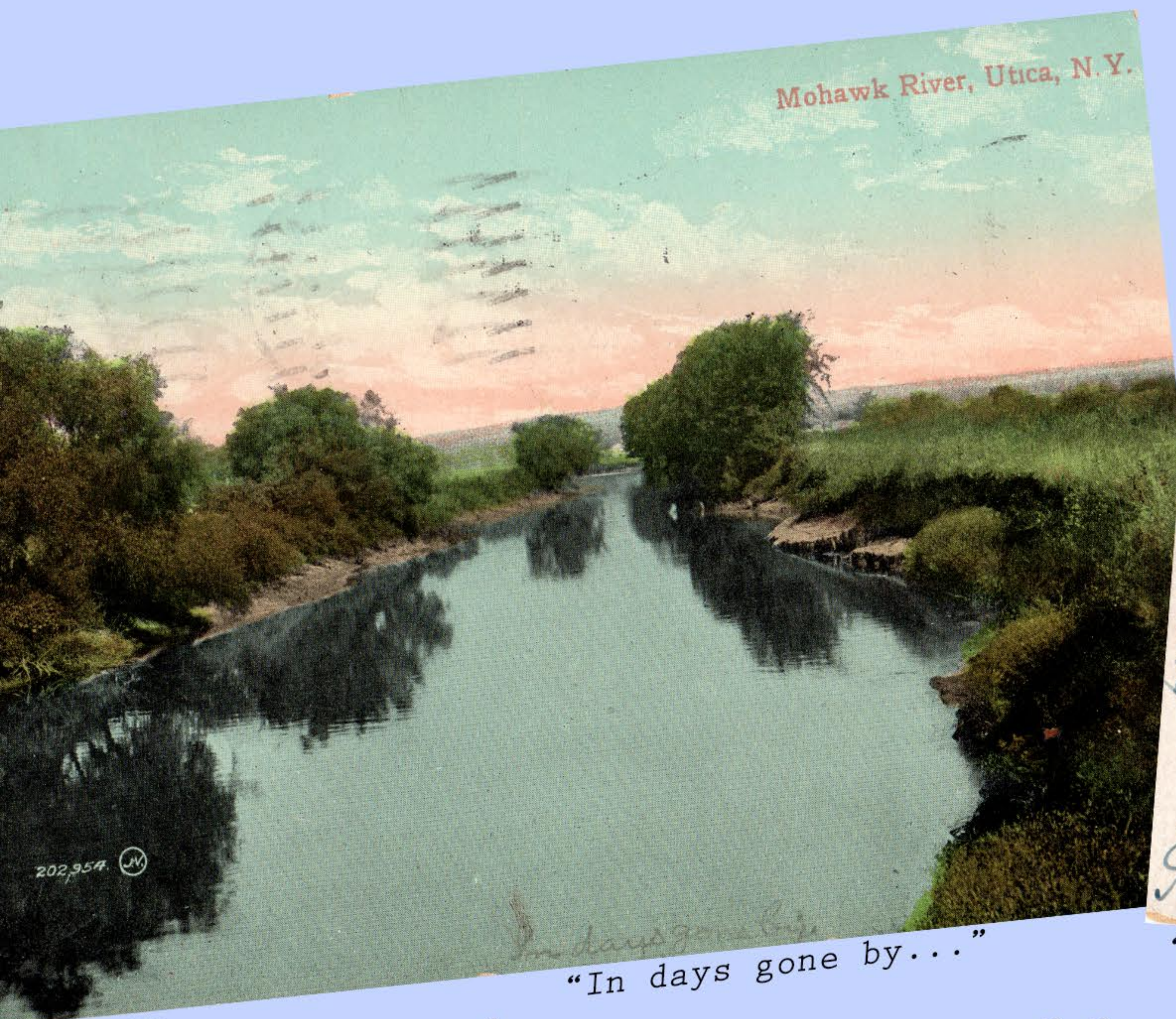
"Mabel 'They Came By Boat'"



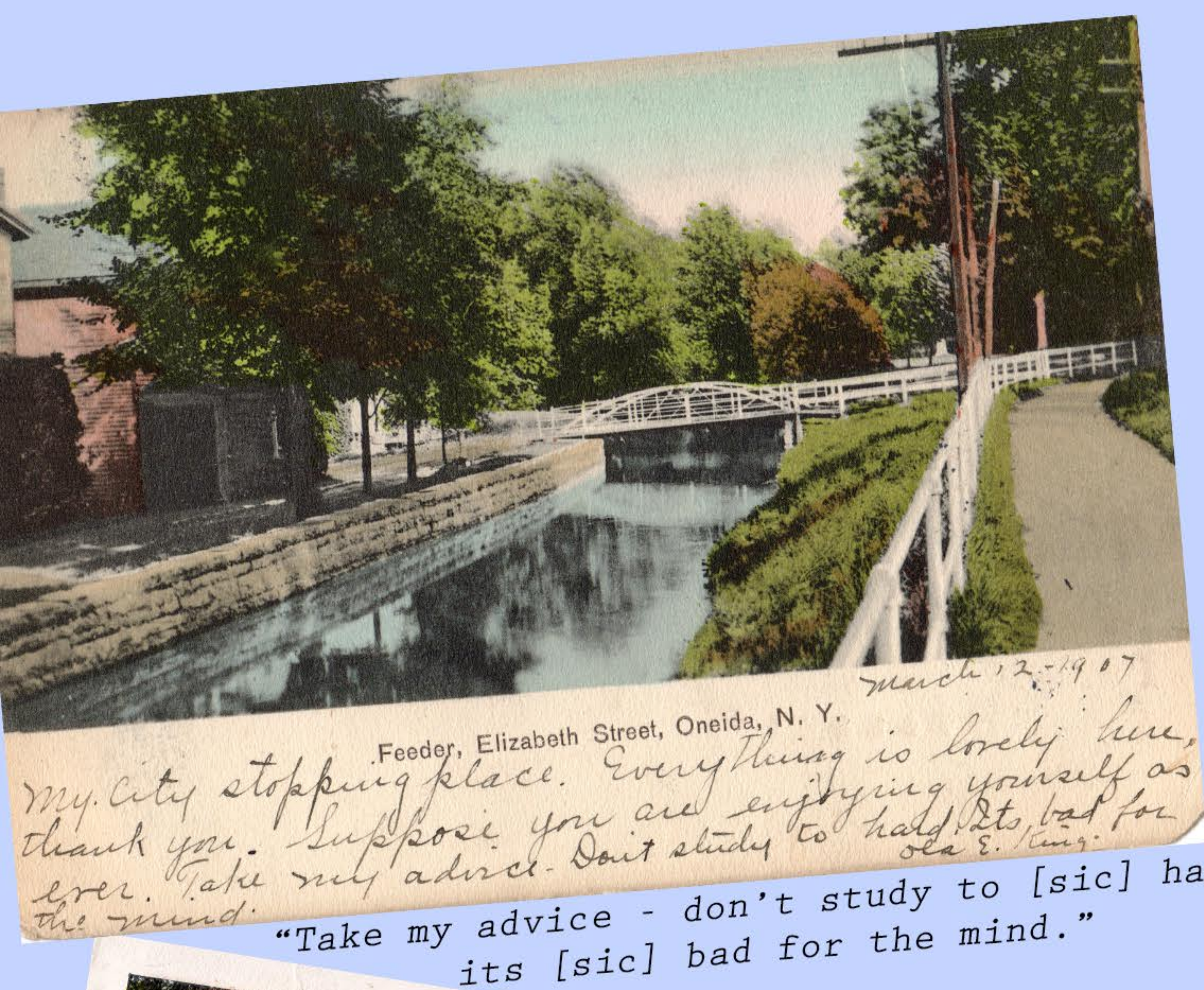
"Get on your bathing suit and come on!"



# Postcard Stories



Postcards are a small glimpse into the daily lives of the people who wrote them. The kind of information that might today be put into an email, a text message, or a brief phone call, was once written on postcards.



"I believe I am losing my mind or maybe I never had any to lose."



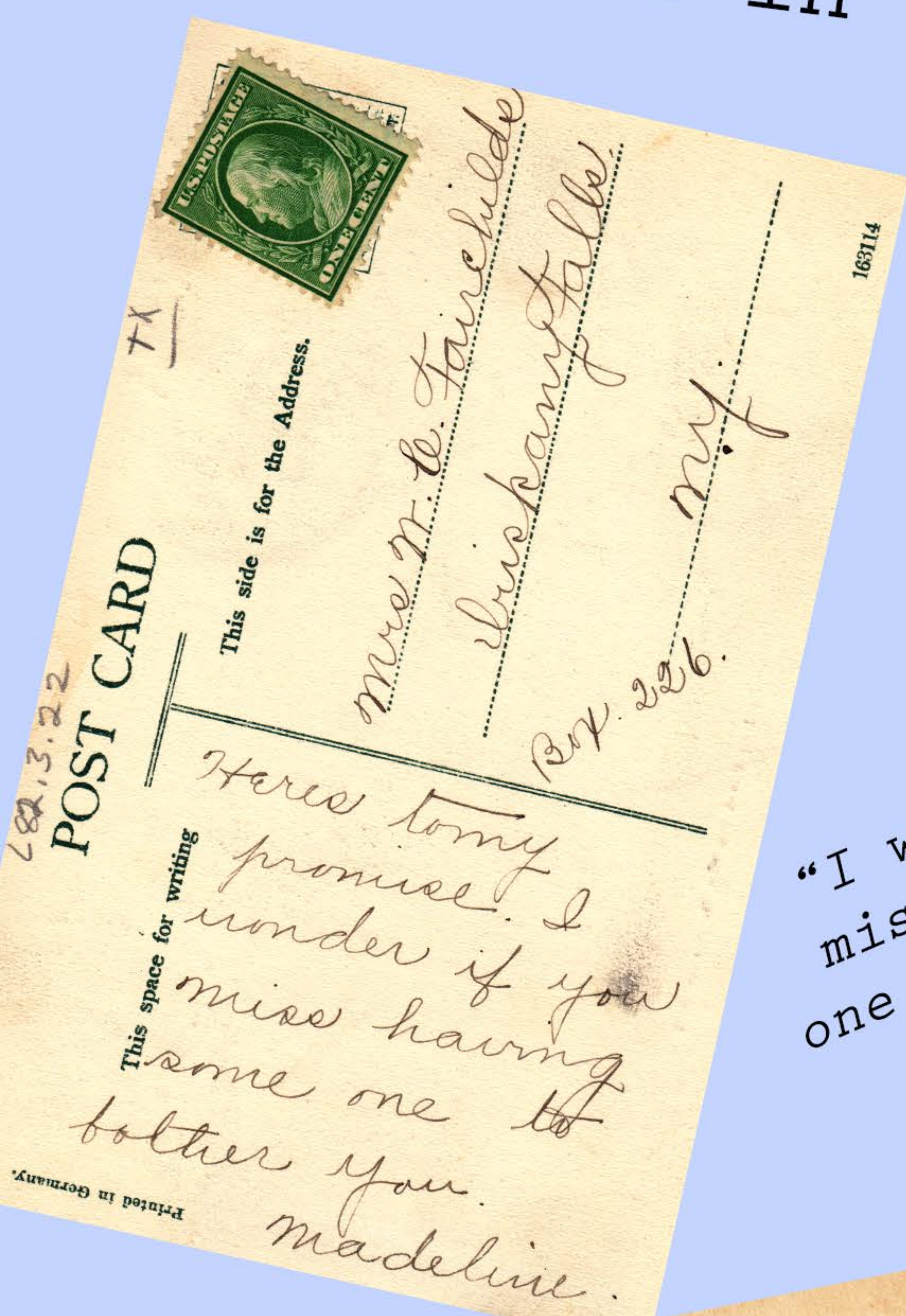


# Postcard Stories



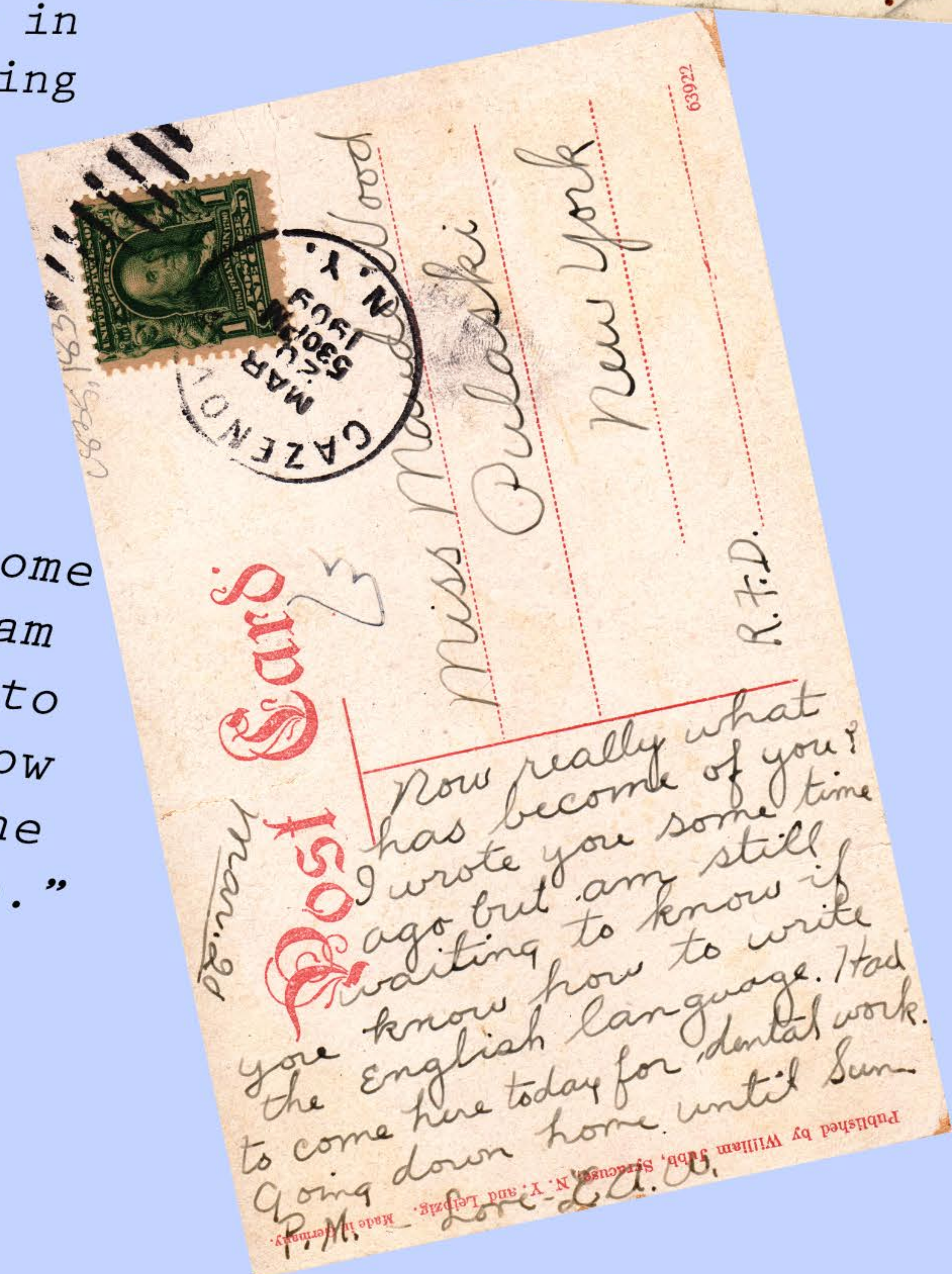
"Scotty and I are now in this busy street dodging the crowd."

There is a lot of humor to be found in postcards!

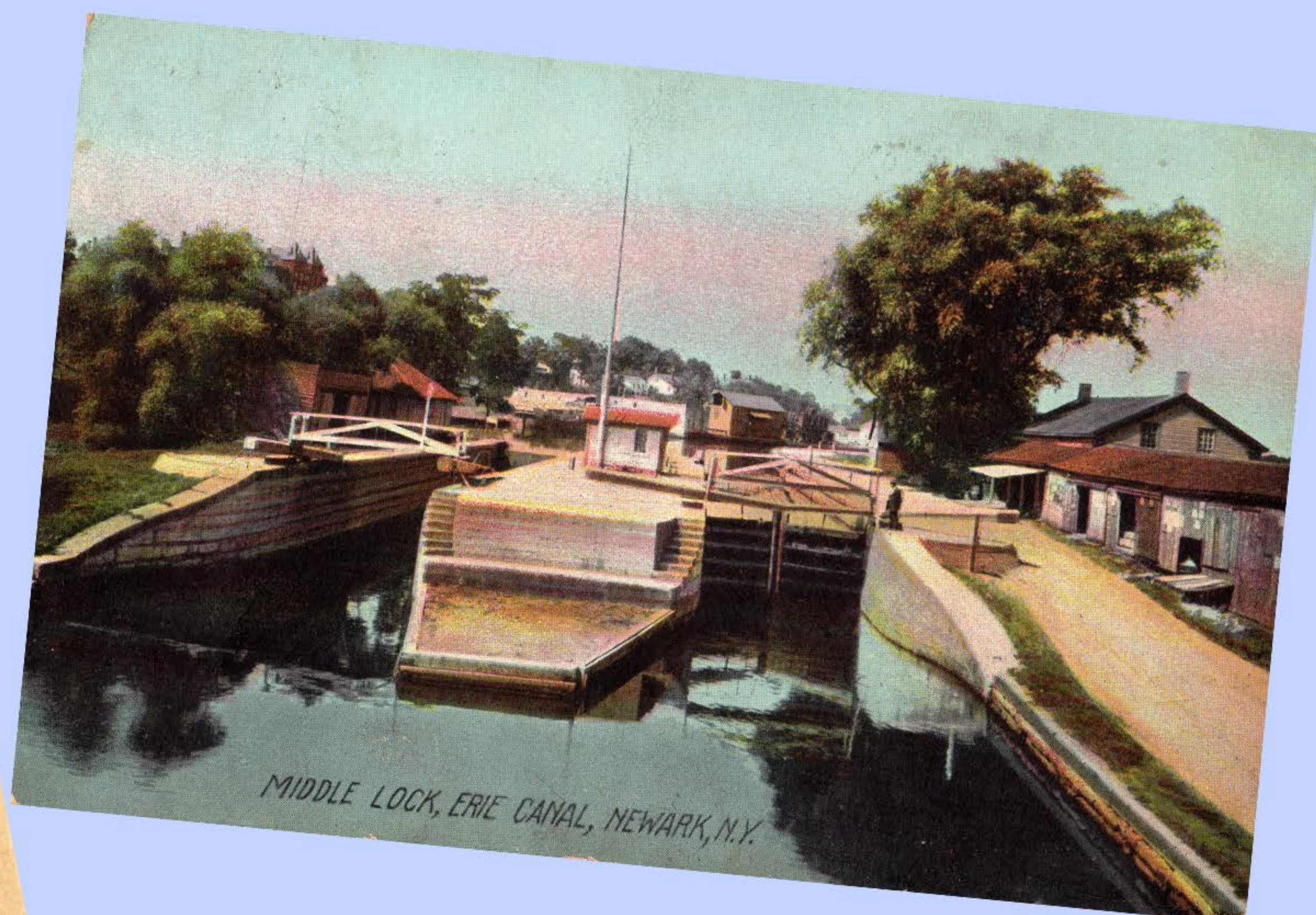


"I wrote you some time ago but am still waiting to know if you know how to write the English language."

"I wonder if you miss having some one to bother you."

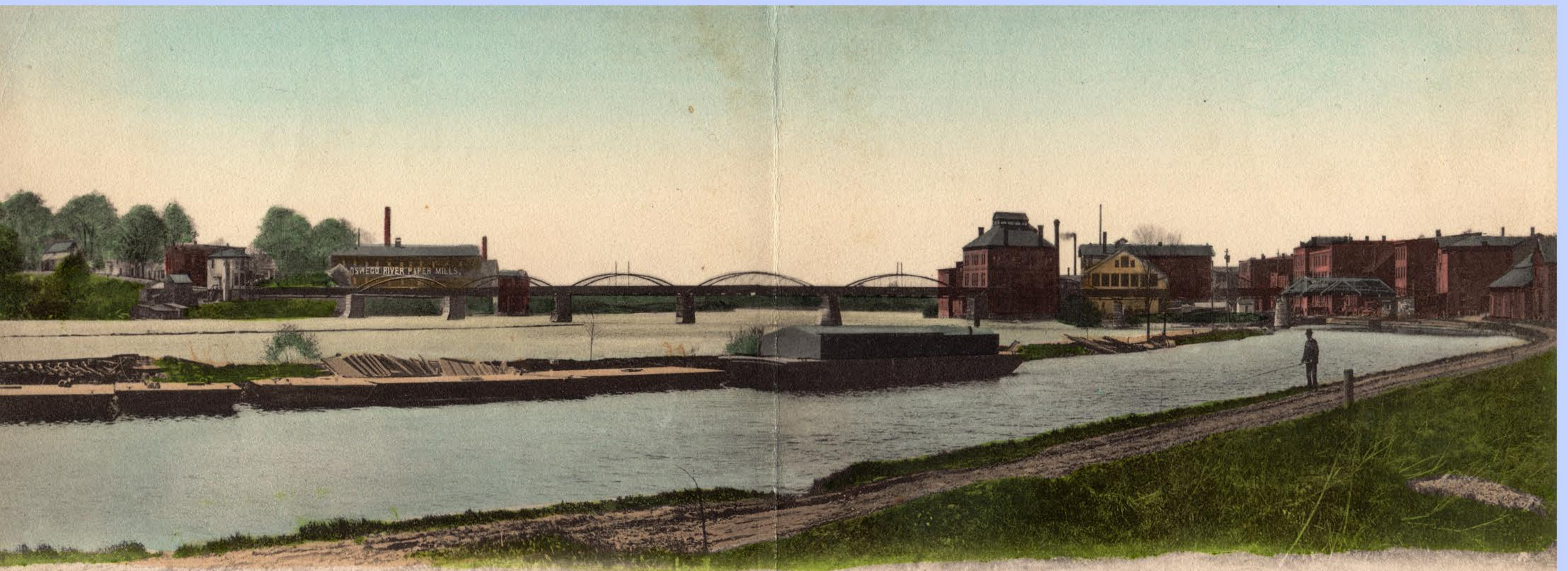


"Just a line to let you know I am not dead but sleeping."





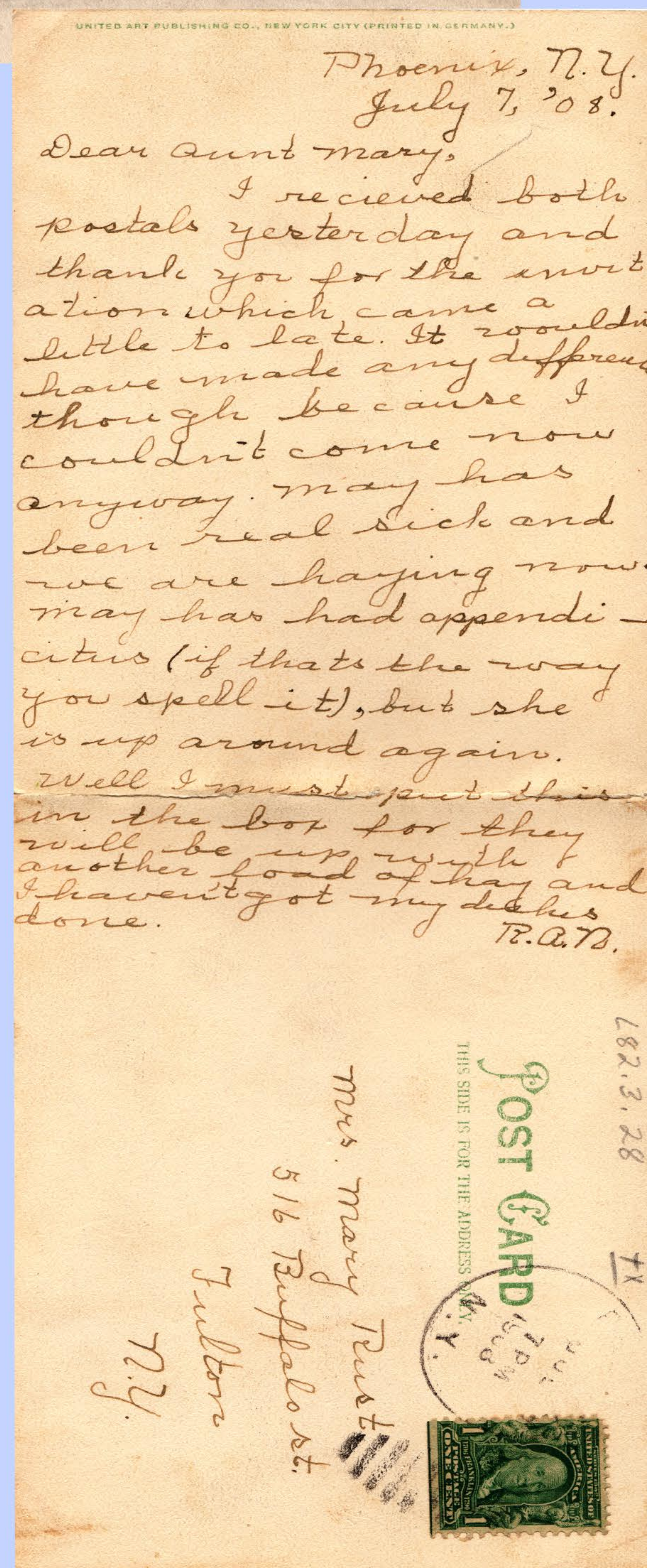
# Postcard Stories



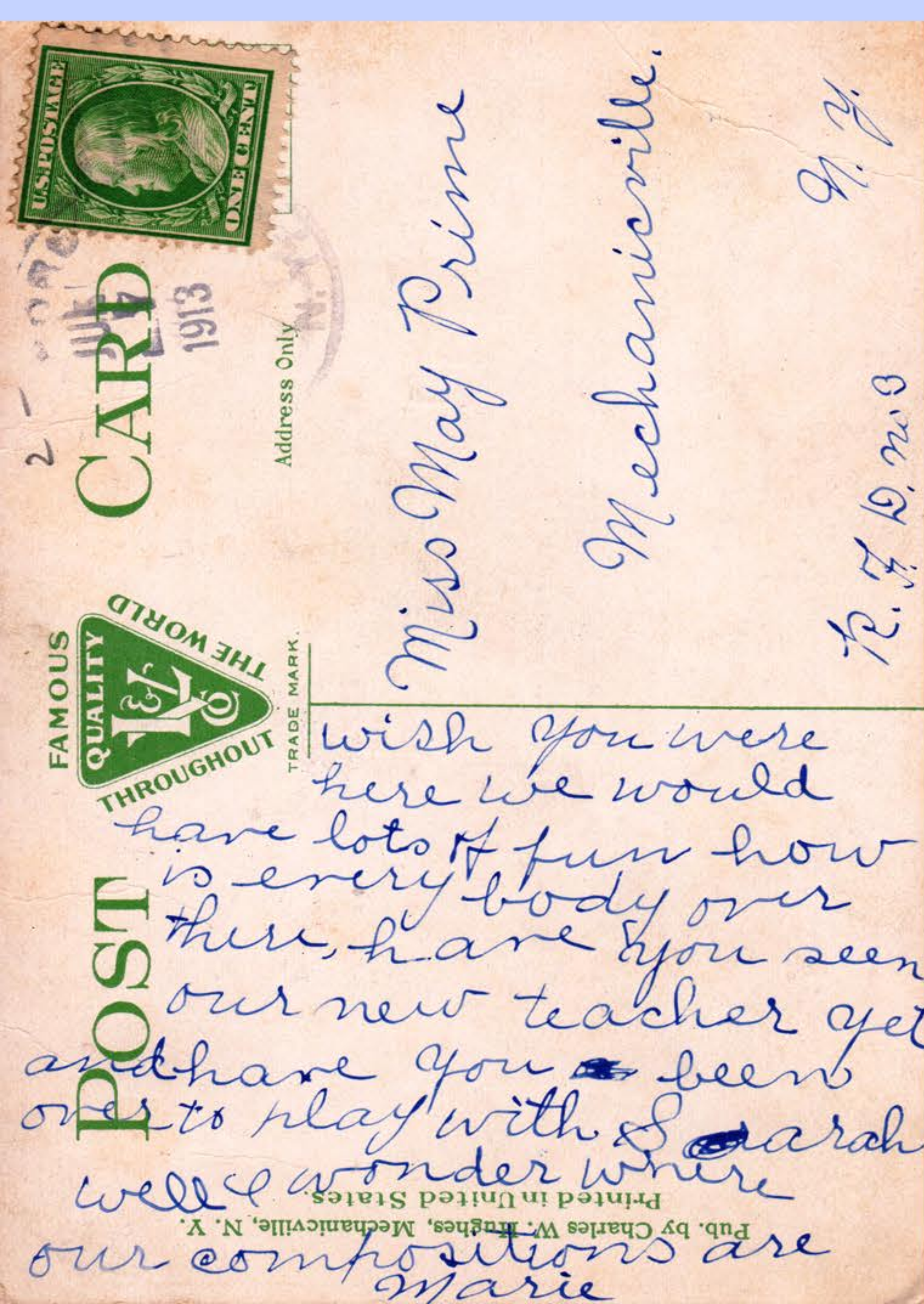
View from Henley's Point, Phoenix, N. Y.

Here's an interesting story from Phoenix, NY. This type of postcard was folded in half for mailing.

"I recieved [sic] both postals yesterday and thank you for the invitation which came a little to [sic] late. It wouldn't have made any difference though because I couldn't come now anyway. May has been real sick and we are haying now. May has had appendicitus [sic] (if that's the way you spell it), but she is up around again. Well I must put this in the box for they will be up with another load of hay and I haven't got my dishes done."



postal: another term for postcard



Mechanicville, NY:

"Wish you were here we would have lots of fun how is every body over there, have you seen our new teacher yet and have you been over to play with Sarah well I wonder where our compositions are. Marie"



# Postcard Syracuse



“This is a grand place I wish you were here.”

The city of Syracuse grew up on the Erie Canal, going from 250 residents in 1820 to over 22,000 by 1850. Picturesque Clinton Square was the center of downtown in Canal days, and it appears on many early 20th century postcards.

“A nice place for a swim...”





# Canal Catastrophe!

"Have you forgotten your old friends in Syracuse?"



Where the bottom fell out of the Erie canal into Onondaga Creek, Syracuse, N. Y.

— July 30, 1907.

Dear Gullie  
Have you forgotten your old friends in Syracuse?  
Max.



8-13-1907  
Syracuse, N. Y.

Dear Folks—

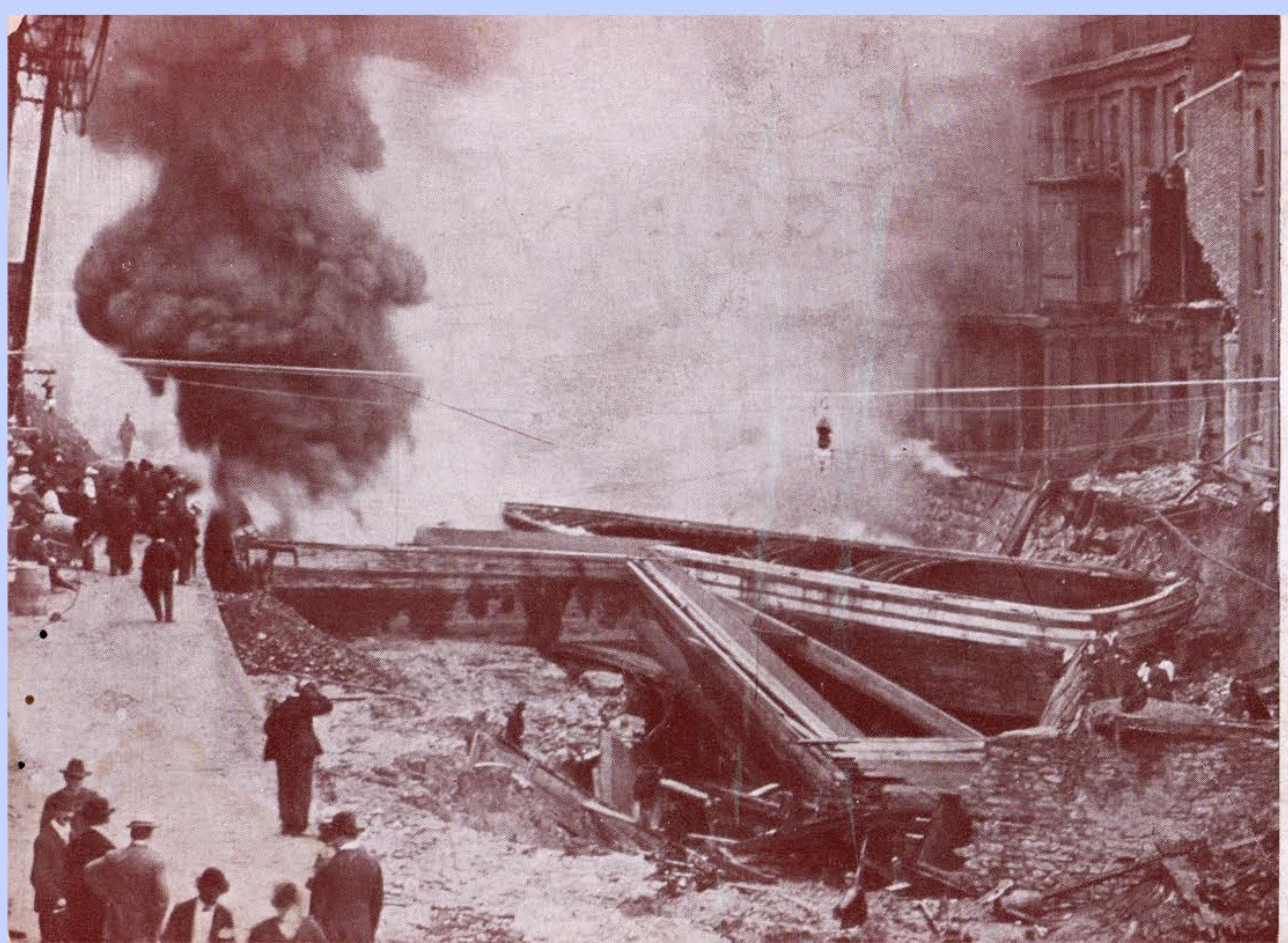
This is a view of the canal before the break & will get some of the others Saturday. Hope you are loved safe and sound at Freeville & be sure to come to the fair.

Cornelia

"This is a view of the Canal before the break..."

On July 30, 1907, the Erie Canal in Syracuse suffered a break when a culvert carrying the Canal over Onondaga Creek collapsed. There were no injuries, but several boats were drawn into the resulting hole, and parts of nearby buildings were also washed away. This may seem to be an odd event to be commemorated by postcard, but it was major news at the time, as the Canal was shut down for repairs.

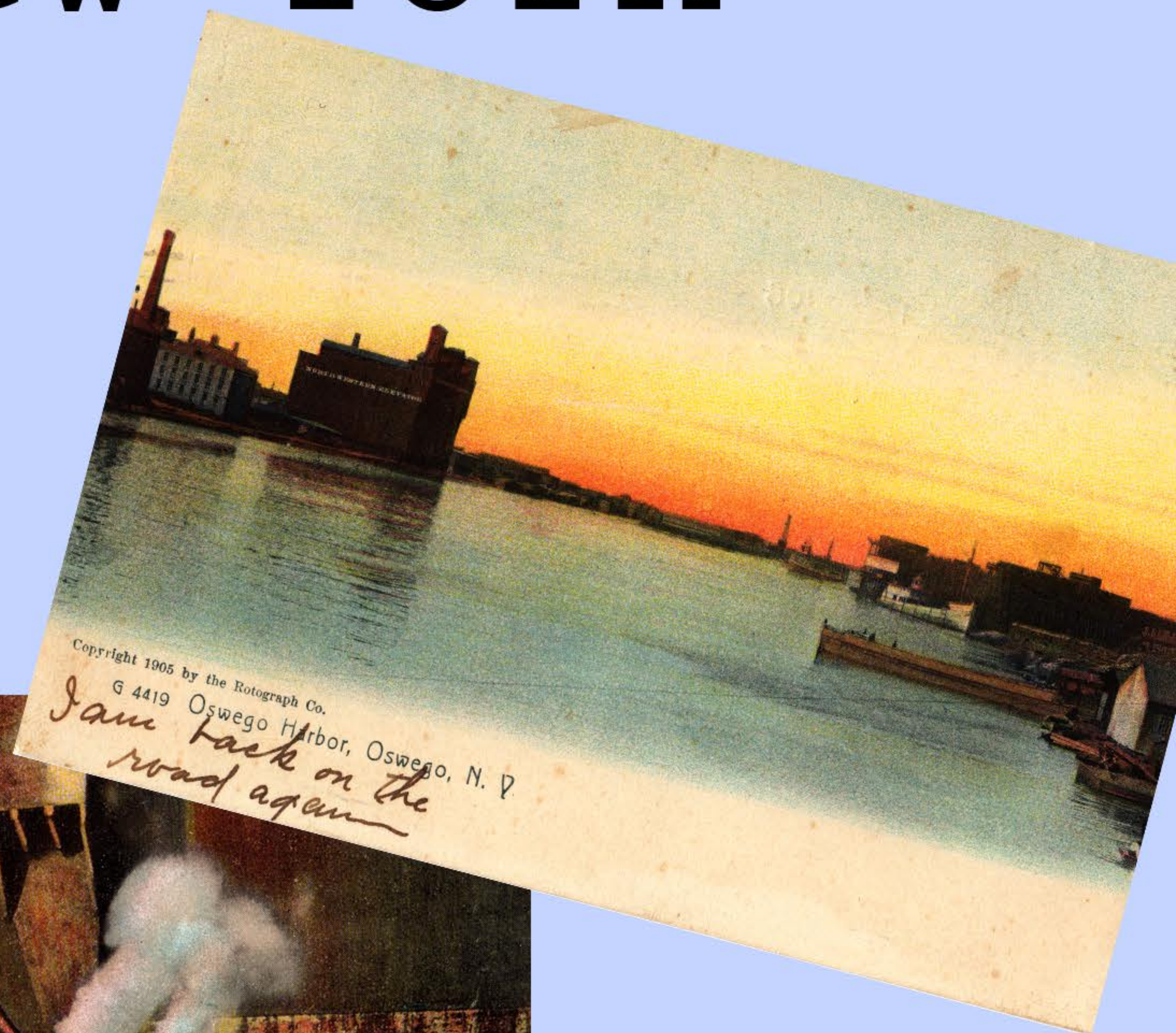
The damaged boats were soaked with oil and then burned, to get rid of the debris.



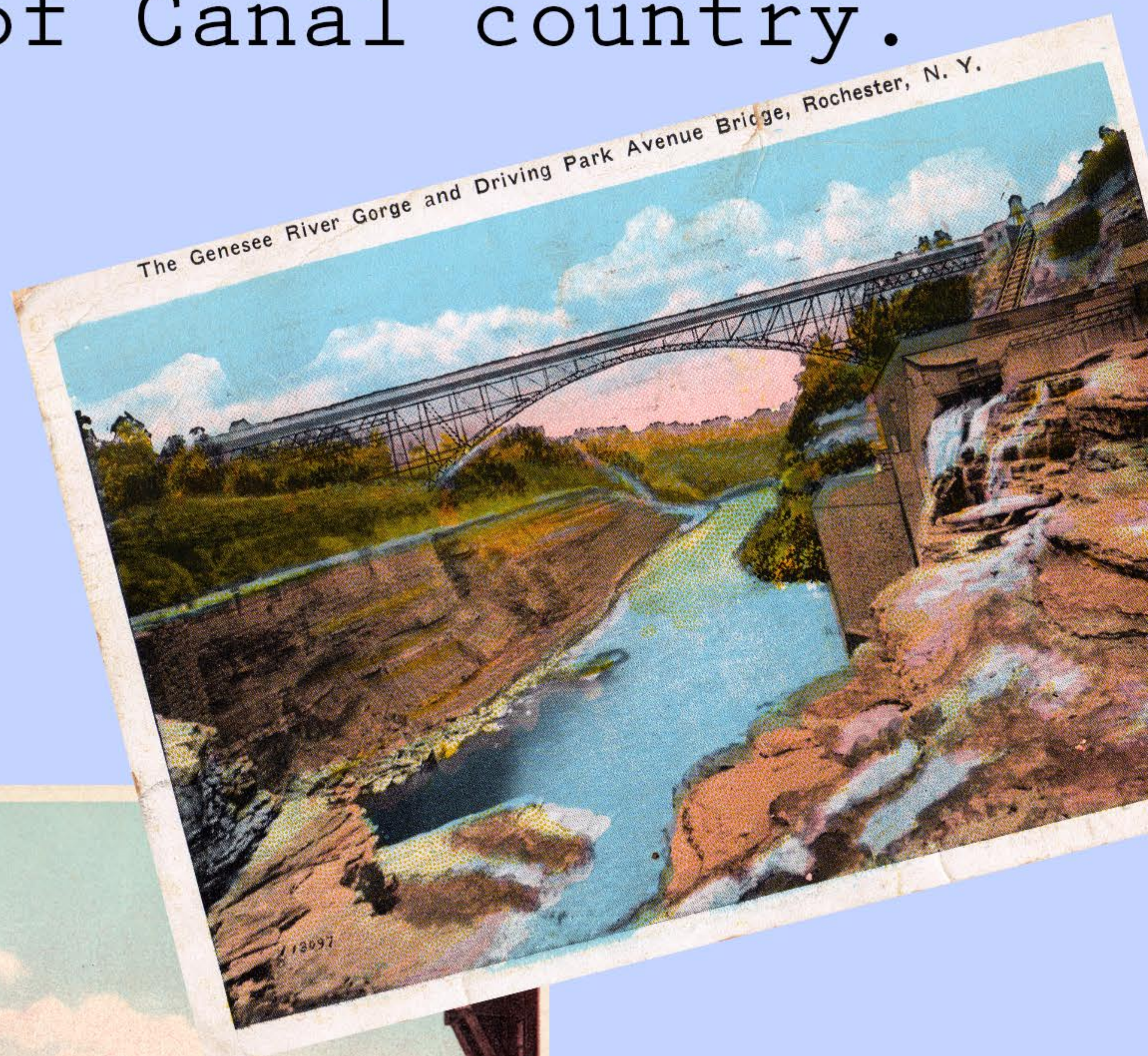
Burning the Canal Boats that were wrecked by break in the Erie Canal on July 30, 1907, Syracuse, N. Y.



# Scenic New York

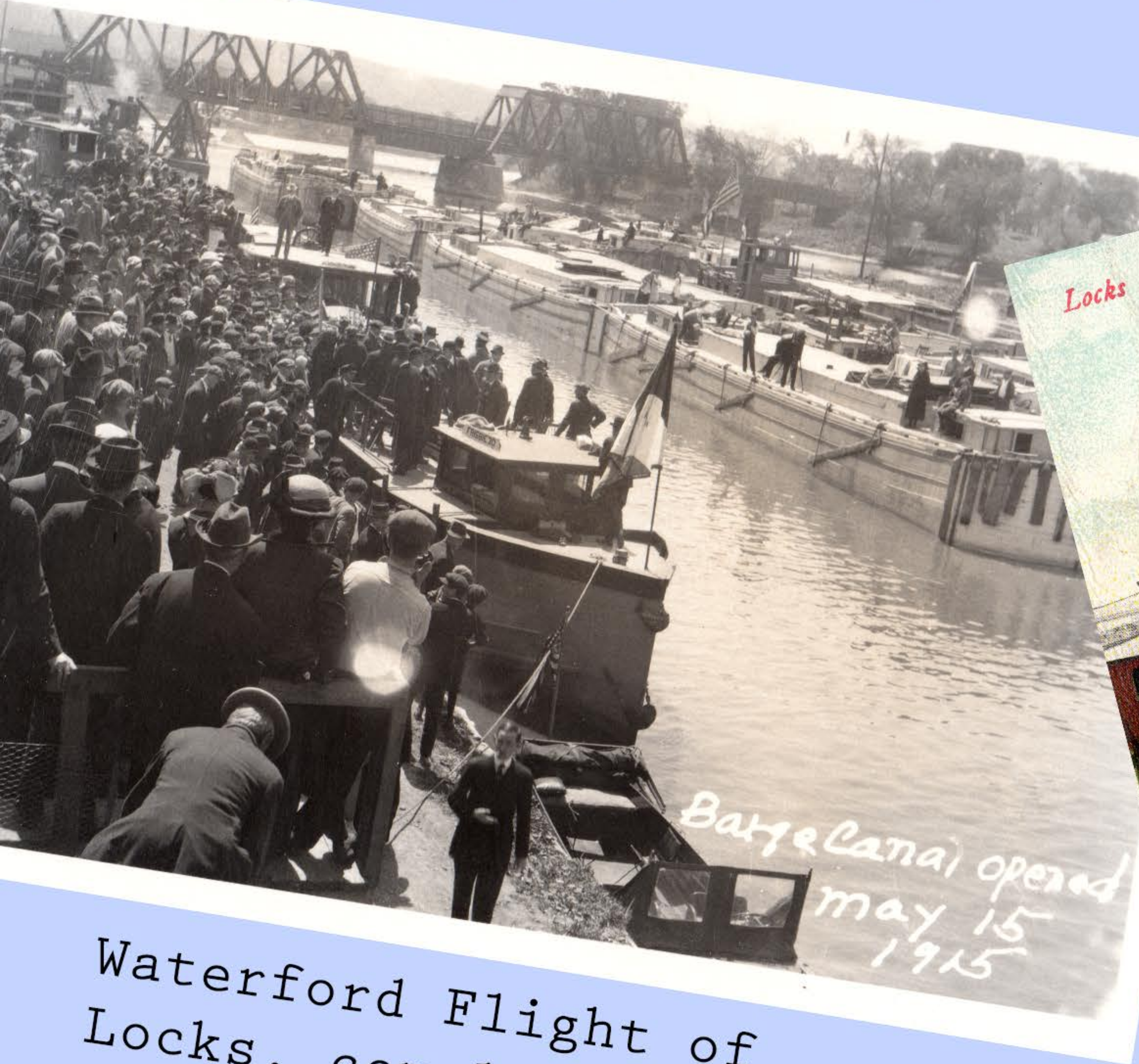


Postcards gave Americans the opportunity to marvel at the unique and often beautiful sights of Canal country.

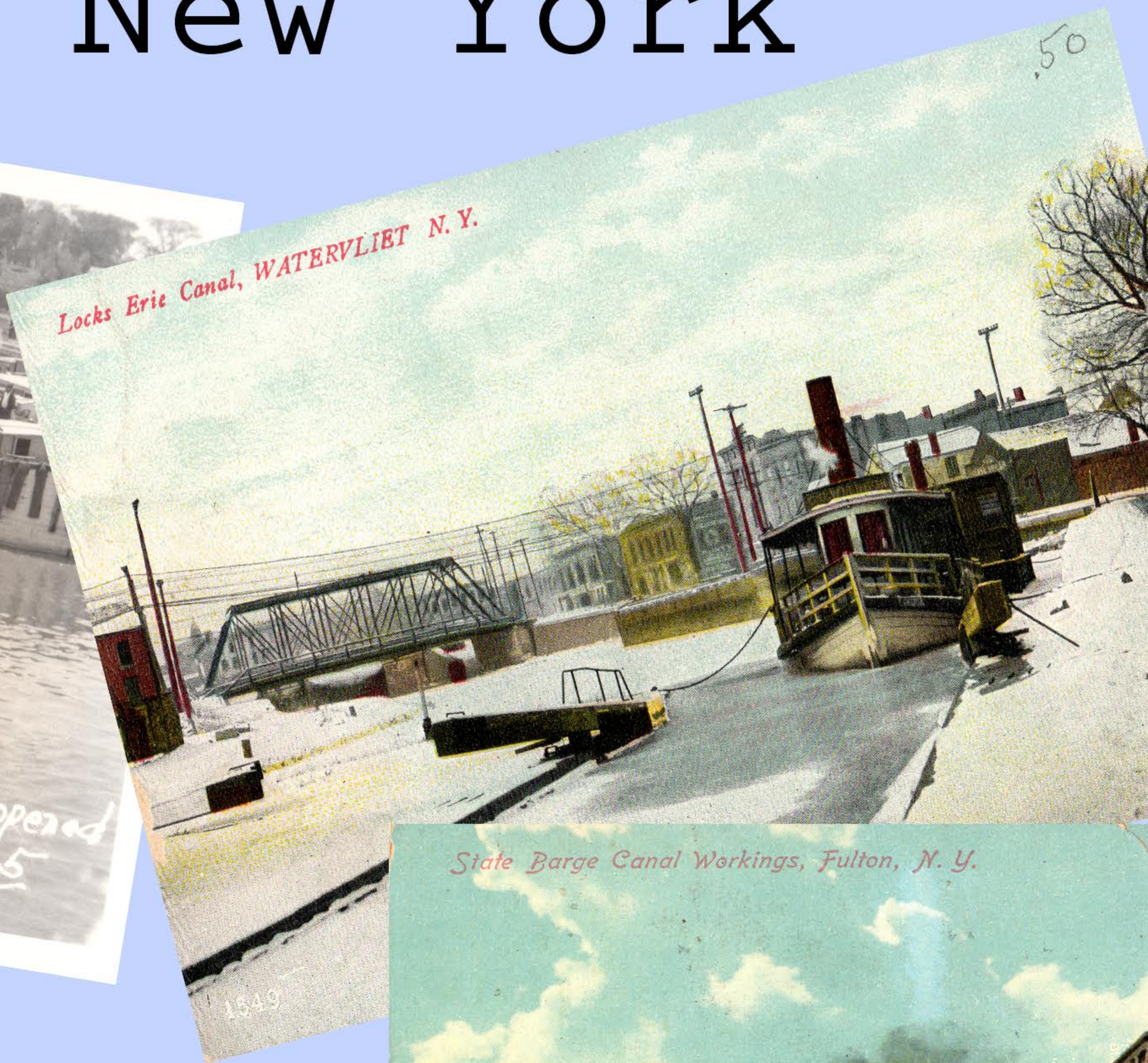




# Scenic New York



Waterford Flight of Locks, completed 1915



The current Canal system, the New York State Barge Canal, opened in 1918. It is depicted on many postcards.

There are many postcards which refer to Canal swimming...a bad idea!



The Canal was a dirty and dangerous place to swim. But the modern Barge Canal passes through Sylvan Beach, on Oneida Lake, giving much greater access to this site of summer fun.

