Book Club to discuss *The Secret Life of Postcards: Tracing Art and History Through One Woman's Collection*

Farming

On page 95, the postcard (1923) says, "We are busy husking. We have 60 acres left." Then on page 98, a postcard (1913) says, "We finished sowing oats here today and tomorrow they are going to sow at James's."

     Question 1: What did farming look like in 1913 or 1923? Why was it necessary for farmers to pitch in and help each other? And how did that translate into a sense of community or connectedness?

Women's Schooling

On page 5, it is revealed that Elsie Costigan was 20 years old when she graduated Kankakee High School in 1920.

    Question 2: What influences caused her to graduate so late? (Hint, she grew up on a farm until she was almost 13)

Women's Suffrage

Pages 189-194 presents the State Lady series of postcards printed circa 1912-1915.

   Question 3: What are your thoughts on the subliminal messaging of showing women in positions of capability on the push for the women's suffrage movement during that time?

   Question 4: How do we think that our grandmothers felt when they were given the vote at ages 20, 25, 30, etcetera? (In this book, Elsie was 20 years old when the 19th Amendment passed in August 1920.)

Women's Voices in the Household (1920s, 30s, and beyond)

    Refer to "Part 5: Skating Around Texas," which began a phase for Elsie and Ned Lemenager of leaving their Illinois home/family in mid-1929, and running a traveling skating rink in the south of Texas.

     Question 5: How much of a say did Elsie have in how the family would make their way in the world? After losing two of her three children, and being pregnant when they hit the road, what do you think were her thoughts about living on the road?

Art History and Symbolism

    Question 6: Refer to the index, under "symbolism" -- do you have a favorite symbol from this book? Were you surprised to find out the symbolism behind some things we see regularly on old postcards (or greeting cards of today)?

Postcards as Time Pegs

   Question 7: Do you have a favorite example of an image in this book that evokes long ago (or not so long ago) things that we no longer do?

 History is in Everything we see

    On pages 196-97, we hear about Elizabeth Packard's plight that began in Manteno in 1860, then we see Elsie's great-aunt's postcard from an "insane asylum."

    Question 8: What are your thoughts on women being treated as crazy when they spoke their opinions or acted eccentric?

World War II

On page 123, it talks about Ned Lemenager having caught the Influenza (of 1918-19) while in a military camp, and that the flu pandemic took the lives of more soldiers and sailors than all of enemy weaponry during WWII.

    Question 9: Do you see any correlations between the flu pandemic of 1918-19 and the Covid-19 pandemic?

Conclusion

Question 10: Have you ever analyzed old letters or postcards (of your parents or grandparents) in order to learn more about their lives or prior time periods?