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Bowling Green in Vintage Postcards

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INTRODUCTION

Nostalgia is quite marketable today. Antique and collectible stores pepper even the smallest communities; "Antiques Road Show" and "Treasures in Your Attic" are Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) hits; and E-Bay has mushroomed the collectibles market. The word nostalgia has a Greek origin that actually means "to cause pain." Often when we remember the past, we pine for simpler times without e-mail, personal digital assistants, computers, fax machines, cell phones, and automobiles that actually talk. The purpose of this book is to cause that pleasant pain of remembering the past through the medium of postcards. Bowling Green, which now boasts a population over 50,000, has a proud past, a good portion of which has been documented in postcards.

Postcards are a little over 100 years old. Most historians seem to concur that the Columbian Exposition of 1893 held in Chicago popularized the postcard concept. The United States government printed cards that cost a penny to post; private vendors sold souvenir cards at the same event, but they cost 2¢ to post. The cards were chromolithographs and black and white printed scenes—chiefly buildings—from the great fair. Postal service authorities first issued the term "post card," later "postcard," for use on printed cards in 1901.

Postcards were inexpensive ways to send quick notes accompanied by a pleasant tourist scene, drawing, or cartoon. By 1900 many towns issued cards of prominent locations and sites within their borders. Although we cannot date Bowling Green's first postcard, we can say with some certainty that the first card for the community was probably of Fountain Square Park and was most likely done around 1900. Shortly afterwards several panoramic views of the community taken from different vantage points were issued. Samples of these have been included in this publication. Soon thereafter, several local mercantile stores began to send negatives to printing companies in Germany to publish cards of high quality for the local market. The most prominent of this genre were a series of cards printed for drugstore owner George A. Scherer. Other prominent businesses issuing postcards included T.J. Smith, William Cobb, F.B. Fleenor, and B.H. Dalton.

Photographers of postcard scenes are rarely credited on cards. One important, local exception was Edgar Cayce who lived in Bowling Green from 1902 to 1907. There are almost two dozen Bowling Green postcards attributed to this fine photographer, and undoubtedly there are others. Cayce went on to become one of the world's best documented clairvoyants. He was already involved in performing medical readings while he was here in Bowling Green. His studio here burned twice. Although fires were not uncommon in the time period, one wonders if perhaps he was not welcome here. While here, Cayce left quite a photographic legacy, including a number of ethereal portraits and a whole body of work for the Cherry Brothers and their Southern Normal School and Bowling Green Business College. A private collector also has a number of cards with inscriptions indicating that Cayce's wife Gladys was

an avid postcard collector.

The author combed through only two collections to find the cards you find in this publication. From these two collections, he chose 236 from well over 1,000 possibilities. It should be noted that many of these cards are of the same building or site, i.e. there are at least 10 images of State Street Methodist Church. Numerous examples surfaced for Bowling Green's major attractions, including Fountain Square Park, Beech Bend Park, Lost River Cave, and Western Kentucky University. Still, the author was surprised at the non-existent cards of significant local attractions, including the Opera House interior or exterior, the 1920s waterworks, the Younglove Drugstore, the Gasper River, the interior of the courthouse, Fruit of the Loom, the county's iron bridges, and the Masonic Lodge to name a few. Warren County postcards outside of Bowling Green are scarce, and the author included as many as possible.

This publication includes approximately 20 real-photo postcards, which were photographs taken by individuals with a postcard format printed on the back. This service was offered by local photographers and film developers after 1901. These images were not usually mass produced or sold, so they represent the most unique postcards in both collections used for this publication. People are usually the major focus of real-photo postcards, so they add a personal dimension lacking in many cards.

The author would like to acknowledge the Kentucky Library at Western Kentucky University and Laura and Ray Buckberry for making their collections available for this publication. Although the Kentucky Library has an important local postcard collection, the Buckberrys have surpassed it in volume.
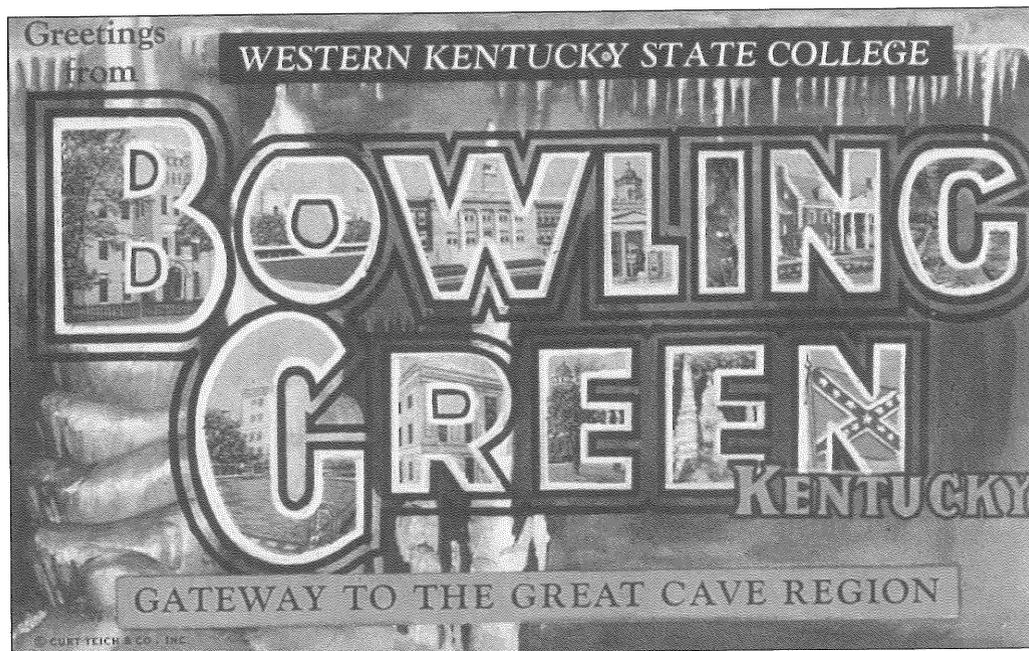
NOVELTY CARD. Each letter in this "Greetings" postcard represented a Bowling Green area entity or attraction: B-Business University, O-Stadium; W-High School; L-Cherry Hall; I-Mammoth Cave; N-Kentucky Building; G-Tobacco auction; G-WKU pool; R-Post Office; E-Courthouse; E-Great Onyx Cave; N-Confederate Capitol of Kentucky. The card captured two of the Bowling Green area's greatest attractions: WKU and Mammoth Cave.