

Second Man in 2c Trans-Mississippi Stamp Positively Identified!



Over one hundred years have passed since the Post Office Department issued the Trans-Mississippi commemoratives. The occasion was celebrated by last year's issuance of reproductions of the original bi-color essays as stamps. The nine stamps in the series depict scenes of Native- and immigrant-American life in the West during a period of great agricultural and urban development.

The domestic letter rate was 2 cents in 1898, and as one might expect, more of the 2-cent denomination were printed than any other in the series, with nearly 160 million were produced. Anticipating the stamp's wide-spread usage, the Congressional Postal Committee -- the body which approved the designs for the series -- took the opportunity to use it as an advertising vehicle, hoping that its enigmatic "Farming in the West" scene would attract people to the business of agriculture in the midwest. However, despite its ubiquity, the 2-cent stamp is arguably the most remarkable stamp of the series -- it is the first stamp produced by the Post Office Department depicting images of (then) living people.

Marcus Baldwin, engraver of the vignette for this stamp (and many of the others in this series) used a photograph of an actual farming scene as his model. The photograph (pictured above) was taken at a farm owned by the Amenia and Sharon Land Company, probably around 1893. It portrays a huge train of farmhands, plowing equipment, and horses working the land.

About a year ago, I acquired a large 8" x 10" sepia-toned photograph of the very scene depicted on the stamp. The image measures approximately 5.25" x 9". A pencil notation on the back of the

photo reads:

"1898 Original photo used for engraving of stamp"

Affixed to the lower margin of the photo was the 2-cent copper-red stamp. I've spent many an enjoyable hour comparing the details of the image in the photo with that of the stamp itself.

I published a scan of this photo on **The Museum of United States Essays & Proofs**, an on-line museum which I produce with fellow essay-proof collector Ralph Zerbonia (<http://www.essayproof.net>). Ralph and I met via an on-line stamp auction. After our transaction, we discussed, through email, the idea of creating the on-line equivalent of the now defunct Essay-Proof Society. The Museum is now into its second year of publication -- truly a story of how fulfilling relationships pertinent to the hobby can be established via the Internet.

Through The Museum, I've enjoyed correspondence with other essay & proof collectors. But one day, I got a remarkable email letter from **John Arthur DeLance, Jr.** While researching the stamp, Mr. DeLance, a 69-year-old retiree, saw my exhibit on the 2-cent Trans-Mississippi published on The Museum site. He wrote:

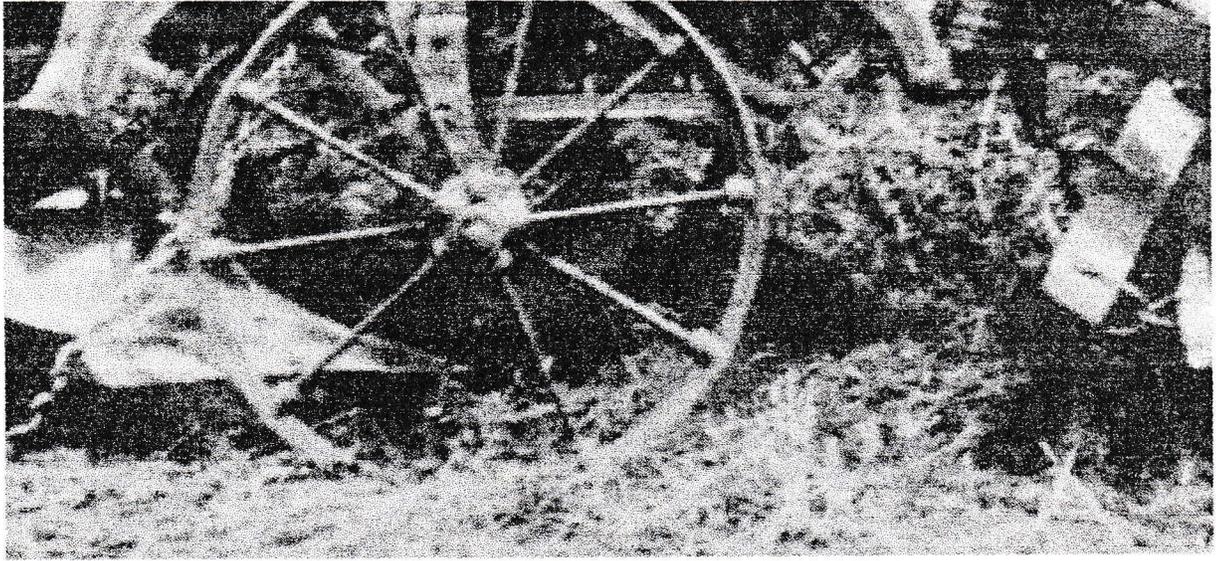
"I have just recently acquired from my brother a photograph that has been handed down through our family. My father would often show the picture to us and other family members pointing out his father, Arthur John DeLance. At my father's death the picture went to my brother and I had forgotten about it these many years. The photograph is mounted on hardboard with a stamp attached. This photograph depicts the image on the stamp. I had just begun to research the stamp and you can imagine my surprise coming across your website and then seeing the same photograph. My grandfather is the gentleman seated on a wagon with a large brim hat and a dog next to him...

"A cousin just recently got me hooked on tracing our family's roots. Along with the conventional avenues of research I thought the 'Stamp Picture' as we called it would be a good lead to follow. The original photograph is 5" by 7.25" and is mounted on hardboard that is 8" x 10" inches. There was writing on the back, but is too worn and faded to read. (*Authors. note:* subsequent examination of a digitally enhanced scan of the verso shows "DeLance", and, "1898"). My grandfather was in that general area in that time frame, and was a farmer. Looking into the enlarged face of that man was like looking into my father's face. Same face, same

build, uncanny!"

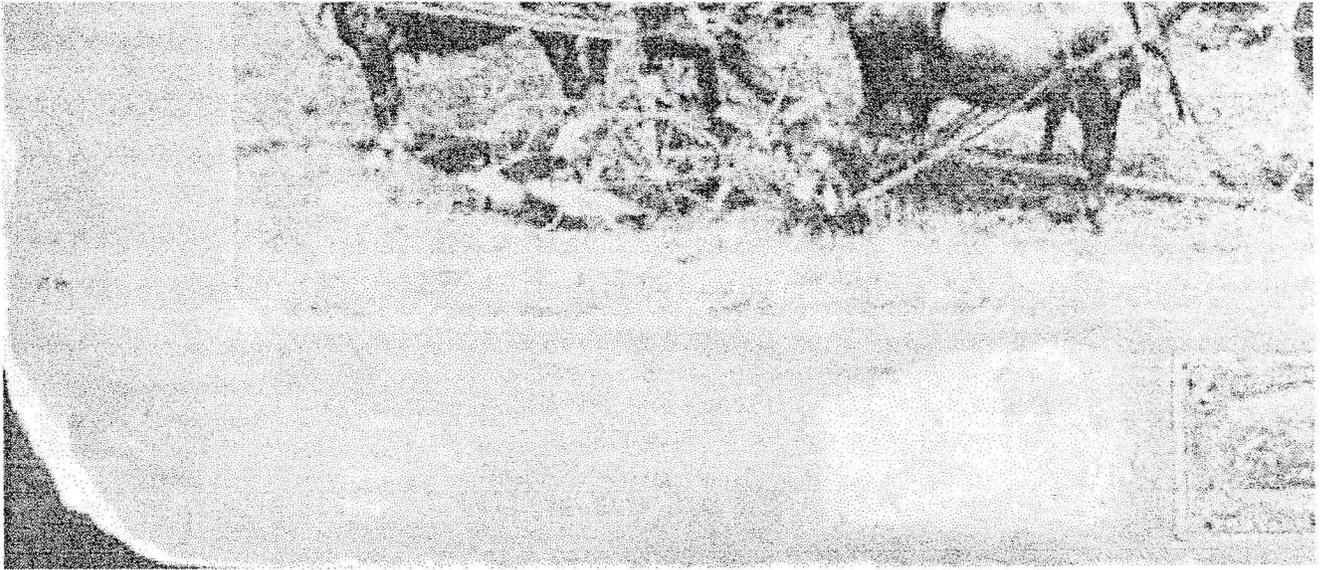
**A Close-Up View of the Central Subjects
from the "Farming In The West"
Photograph
(From the Peter Schwartz Collection)**





He also forwarded me a following scan of the photograph in his family's possession. Mr. DeLance's photo is cropped to the edges and mounted on hardboard. The one from my collection is unmounted and has wide borders of blank photographic paper. Similar to both is the 2-cent stamp affixed to the lower margin of each.





Of the farmers shown in the photograph (and on the stamp), the name of the farming team's leader -- Mr. "Ed" Nybakken -- is well known to aficionados of the Trans-Mississippi series. He is the man who's face was obscured by the movement of his arm (apparently, a gust of wind made it necessary for him to secure his hat, and as he raised his arm to do so, the shutter closed on the camera which captured the scene). It is said that Mr. Nybakken lamented this incident for the remainder of his life! Perhaps Baldwin could have exercised some artistic license in depicting Mr. Nybakken's face, but he did not.

However, the identity of Arthur John DeLance -- seated on the buggy directly behind Nybakken -- has, until now, been mis-identified in the philatelic press. Excerpted in Randy Neil's The Trans-Mississippi Issue of 1898 (the most complete treatise on the history of design development and postal usage of these stamps) all accounts identify Mr. DeLance as "Barber". But according to grandson DeLance, this is a misnomer.

Arthur John DeLance was born in 1863 in Pottsdam, NY. His family eventually traveled westward from New York to homestead, ending up in The Dakota Territory in 1882 (North Dakota did not achieve statehood until November 2, 1889). The 1885 Census of the Dakota Territory shows Arthur John DeLance as living in Stutsman County. His occupation is listed as "Farmer", age: 22, nativity: "NY".

Arthur and Ida DeLance had ten children. Their first child, Jessie May was born in Jamestown, Stutsman County, Dakota Territory on April 29, 1884 (see map below). Then came Florence Maria, in November of 1887. According to Arthur DeLance's notes another girl, Marion Bell, was born in January 1889 in Casselton, Cass

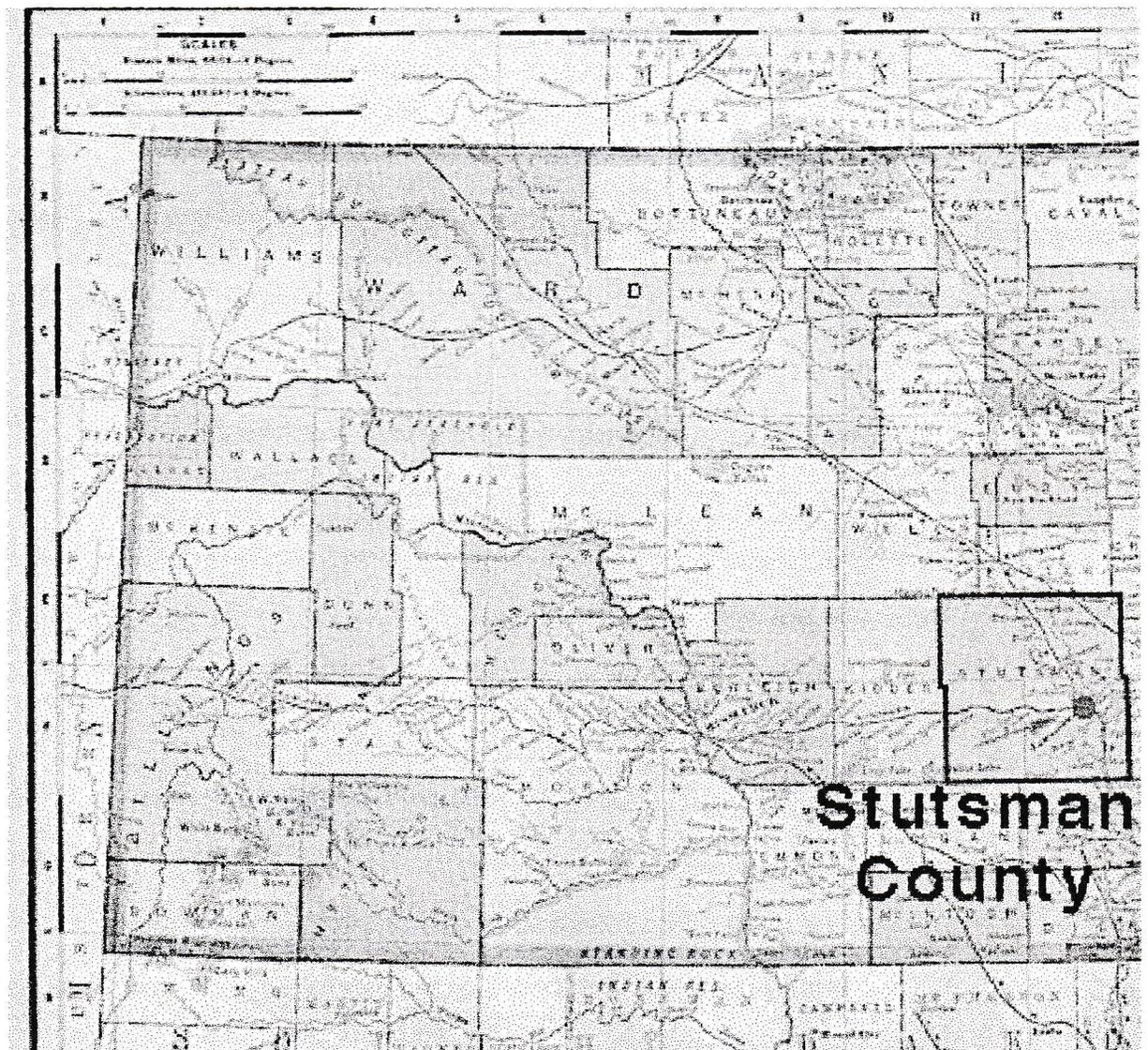
County. However, according to a notation in her mother's Bible, she was born in the town of Amenia. Their first boy, Eugene Arthur, was born in Everest, south of Casselton -- within 10 miles of Amenia proper. Assuming that the dating of the original "Farming In The West" photo is correct (ca. 1893) then the birthdate and birthplace of Marion Bell places the DeLance's in the immediate area town for which the farming company is named, and still at least 4 years before the photo is said to have been taken. It's entirely possible that the photograph was taken in 1889, placing Arthur DeLance in Amenia proper, perhaps dating the photo back to this year as well. Considering that the DeLance's moved to the general area in 1882, this gives us at least an 11-year spread during which the photograph could have been taken, and still include Arthur DeLance as a member of the farming team.

Map of North Dakota, 1895

Stutsman and Cass Counties highlighted. Red arrow indicates location of Jamestown.

Circled area of Cass County shown in greater detail below.

Map provided courtesy John A. DeLance



Enlarged view of Cass County, North Dakota, ca. 1895

At
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time,
The
Dalrymples
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Amenia,
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to
have
claimed,
albeit
erroneously,
that
the
photo
was
a
view
of
their
land.

Red arrows added by the author, indicating towns mentioned in this article.
Map provided courtesy John A. DeLance



(Image)

This story is one of many which I'm happy to be able to relate on how, through the Internet, disparate people can meet, exchange valuable information and re-claim a part of their past. Steve DeLance, second cousin to John DeLance, told me of how he has been able to locate "missing" family members via the Internet. Another tale: An old letter I recently sold via an on-line afforded the high bidder the opportunity to acquire what amounted to a family heirloom -- correspondence between two of his great-great uncles! And, of course, as this story shows, the Internet continues to be of great importance to philatelic research. Who knows who'll I'll hear from next!