

Collection #
P 0842

**MARY EDITH MUGIVAN
POSTCARDS, 1905-1907**

Collection Information	1
Biographical Sketch	2
Scope and Content Note	3
Contents	4

Processed by

Matt S. Holdzkom
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Manuscript and Visual Collections Department
William Henry Smith Memorial Library
Indiana Historical Society
450 West Ohio Street
Indianapolis, IN 46202-3269

www.indianahistory.org

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COLLECTION INFORMATION

VOLUME OF COLLECTION: 1 folder of photographs

COLLECTION DATES: 1905-1907, n.d.

PROVENANCE: John Keltner Simpson and Acheson family, 2022-2023

RESTRICTIONS: None

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ALTERNATE FORMATS:

RELATED HOLDINGS: Jerry Mugivan letter (SC3383); Great Wallace Shows contract (SC3625); John Hanners Circus Research Collection (M1346)

ACCESSION NUMBERS: 2022.0118; 2023.0046

NOTES:

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Mary Edith Bledsoe was born in 1872 in rural Christian County Missouri on the Ozark Plateau. She grew up on the farm with her sisters Hattie and Addie and her brother Charles. After her father Hale F. Bledsoe died in 1891, her mother Nancy Keltner married John R. Simpson. By that marriage Edith gained a half-brother, John Keltner Simpson, and a half-sister, Ida.

By 1897, Edith had left home and met Jerry Mugivan from Terre Haute, Indiana. Jerry was a railroad butcher and shortchange artist riding the Union Pacific between Omaha and Green River, Wyoming. At about the same time, Jerry met John O. Talbott, who would be his partner in several business deals over the next decade.

Jerry and Edith first became associated with Benjamin E. Wallace and his Great Wallace Shows circus from Peru, Indiana in 1901. In 1902 Talbott joined them there. In 1904, Jerry and Bert Bowers purchased and managed their own circus called the Great Van Amburg Shows (later Howe's Great London), while Talbott stayed with the Wallace Show. In late 1906 Jerry and Talbott were Wallace's partners in his acquisition of the Carl Hagenbeck Wild Animal Circus and the subsequent Hagenbeck-Wallace combination.

Jerry and Edith were married in 1905. Edith often worked as treasurer of candy stands on the various circuses she was with and like Jerry, would eventually learn all there was to know about managing a circus. Circus employees and Peru locals knew her as "Aunt Jess," someone who would provide generous care and assistance to anyone who needed it.

With Edith by his side, Jerry's circus empire continued to grow until, in 1921, he and two other partners formed the American Circus Corporation with winter quarters in Peru. The ACC operated the Hagenbeck-Wallace, John Robinson, and Sells-Floto circuses, along with Howe's Great London, and owned several other titles. By the time they sold out to John Ringling in 1929, they had acquired the Al G. Barnes and Sparks circuses as well.

Jerry died unexpectedly in 1930, leaving Edith in their newly built mansion in Peru as the Great Depression descended onto the country. Edith never forgot her family in Missouri, and sent home gifts, gently used shoes, circus tickets, gold pieces, and even a pair of circus horses to do the plowing on the farm. Her family suspects that she may have sent the money to purchase her half-brother's farm. They attribute their survival of the Depression to Edith and her "elephant money."

Edith died in 1936, and through the joint will of Jerry and Edith, their families were well-provided for during the remaining years of the Depression.

Sources:

Ancestry.com

Helen Acheson, telephone interview by Matt S. Holdzkom, 18 July 2022.

Jim Acheson, telephone interview by Matt S. Holdzkom, 17 July 2022.

John Hanners Collection (M1346), Box 2, Folders 3 & 4

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The collection consists of real photo postcards from Mary Edith Mugivan's estate. They were retrieved from her home in Peru, Indiana by the Simpson family after her passing in 1936. In 2022 a group of four were gifted to the processor who donated them to the Indiana Historical Society. Three of the photos are directly tied to the Great Wallace Shows and Peru. The fourth, a view of two circus candy stands, has not been identified.

In 2023, the Simpson/Acheson family donated nine additional images to the collection. All are real photo postcards unless otherwise indicated.

CONTENTS

CONTENTS

“Return of the Circus, Peru, Ind.” [Elephants are led in a line down Broadway St. in Peru. The intersection of Broadway and Main Sts. is in the background. The postcard is addressed to “Mr. J.O. Talbott 1026 Broadway, Denver Colorado.” It is postmarked 10 Nov. 1905.]

“Mr. Bert Cole, advertiser; System of Advertising Great Wallace Show” [A man and a gas stove stand atop an elephant in the menagerie tent. The elephant wears a banner reading “Cook with Gas,” and the man raises his hat high over his head. On the front is written “I got \$75.00 from the Gas Co in (illegible) Ill. after (illegible) only got \$7.00.” The postcard is addressed to “Mrs. J.O. Talbott 1026 Broadway, Denver Colorado” and is postmarked 8 July 1906.]

[A bandwagon is shown from behind during parade in Muskegon, Michigan. On verso is written, “Jerry here is one I took in Muskegon. If you will send me your route will send you some of those taken in Grand Rapids Sorry I didn’t get to see Mr Talbert [sic]. Say hello to him for me. Sincerely S Bernard[?] The postcard is addressed to Jerry Muggavin Esq [sic] Vincennes Ind. and is postmarked 15 August 1907. Hagenbeck-Wallace appeared in Muskegon on 23 July, Grand Rapids on 29 July, and Vincennes on 9 August.]

“Wallace’s Winter Quarters, Peru Ind.” [Several buildings from the circus farm in Peru are shown, including the octagonal ring barn. The huge wagon barn in the background reads, “Winter Quarters of the Great Wallace Shows.” No writing or postmark.]

[Seven men stand in front of two circus candy stands featuring banners advertising Cracker Jacks. A steep bluff can be seen in the background as well as an obstructed view of an unidentified circus tableau wagon. Hastily written on verso: “too dk my out side stands spot. (illegible) away. With my pictures will (illegible) Robt soon. EDITH”]

CONTAINER

Photographs, Folder 1

Photographs, Folder 1

Photographs, Folder 1

Photographs, Folder 1

Photographs, Folder 1

[Drivers and a small band are pictured on top of a tableau wagon being pulled by horses. No writing or postmark.]

Photographs, Folder 1

[Five elephants standing in a row with two attendants. Names "Babe," "Mamma," "Topsy," "Mataga," and "Mayjor" have been written above each. These are the first elephants Mugivan and Bowers acquired for their circus. Major came in 1905, Babe in 1906, and the other three came from the dissolution of the Hagenbeck show in the winter of 1906-7. No writing or postmark on verso.]

Photographs, Folder 1

"Part of Wallace-Hagenbeck Parade, Peru Ind." [A bandwagon pulled by a team of 8 horses is shown on Broadway from an upper story. In the background is the West & Stevens wallpaper store advertising "circus tickets for sale here" on its windows. On verso, "S. Hart" and "I hope you are well and wish you would come and get the our shows trainers (sic) It is addressed to Mrs. J. Mugivan Rochester Ind. Hagenbeck Wallace Show. No postmark.]

Photographs, Folder 1

[A large group of unidentified people pose in front of an ostrich pen. Man in oversize grey jacket, derby hat and bow tie could be Jerry Mugivan. No writing or postmark.]

Photographs, Folder 1

[Photograph on thin paper. Mary Edith Mugivan stands in front of a rocky outcrop. She wears a dark dress and her hair is pulled up. On verso, "Edith Mugivan"]

Photographs, Folder 1

[Photograph. An unidentified female circus performer stands in front of a circus tent with her hands behind her back. She is wearing a white lacy costume with white tights and dark headband and ballet type shoes.

Photographs, Folder 1