

HAND-DRAWN SATIRIC & COMIC PICTURE POSTCARDS (1884-1887)

Introduction

The first official American postcard was introduced in 1873. These cards were designed for one purpose only: to convey a written message from A to B at a lower cost than a closed letter. Many other countries followed lead and postal stationery cards became widely used. **Prior to 1 July 1898**, the only way to send an American picture by post was to sketch a drawing on the reverse of a postal stationery card, as the front could only be used for the address and postage.

The artist

In **1884**, **Byron Clifford Stevens (1854–1905)**, a bookshop owner and newspaper illustrator from **Chicago, Illinois, USA**, began drawing satirical and comic cartoons on the back of standard postal stationery cards. Topics varied widely and covered cultural events, public holidays, newspaper articles and politically correct or even incorrect events. **Each card is unique and numbered** and was sent to his brother-in-law **Wilbur Nye Sibley in Town of Lake, Wisconsin, USA**, who married **Eleanor Stevens, Byron's sister**. The card exchange started on **3 January 1884** and continued until **21 March 1887**. While almost all cards bear the artist's initials **B.C.S.**, only three of the 145 cards carry his full surname.

Byron Clifford Stevens, the artist who created all the cartoons in the exhibit, **passed away on 16 November 1905** at the age of 51 after a prolonged period of illness.

He is buried at Forest Home Cemetery in Forest Park, Cook County, Illinois. Only a small tombstone remains: **BYRON C. STEVENS – 1854 – 1905**.



Purpose of the exhibited collection

To share the work, the spirit and wit of the work of an 19th century artist and newspaper illustrator, who made comic and satiric cartoons of all kinds of events. His whole work was unknown and remained hidden for over 130 years, until it was discovered in 2016 during the demolition of the house of his brother-in-law in Kankakee, Illinois, USA. The cards are **one by one unique**, no copies or additional cards have ever been made. The visitor will be guided through a period of just over 3 years and will certainly recognise many of the subjects being displayed, varying **form theatre and musicals, to politics and crime**.

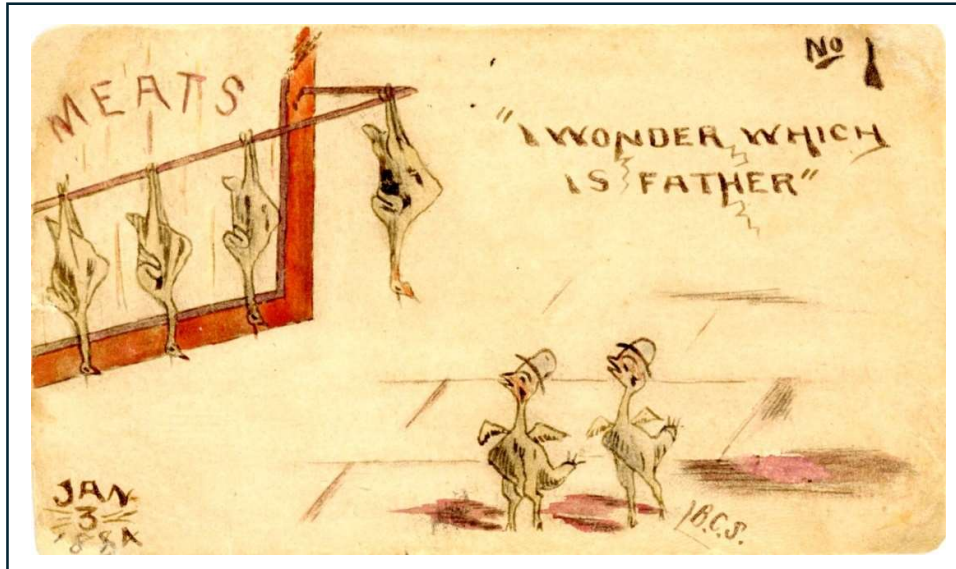
Plan of the exhibit

The exhibit is presented in chronological order, with items arranged by date sent. Additionally, every card is numbered by the artist, from **1** to **145**. Number **99** was (accidentally) used twice (**99** and **99/2**). The sequence starts in **January 1884** and ends in **March 1887**. The order has to be kept, as several cards tell a sequel story. The dates mentioned in the titles represent when the cards were sent, a few dates noted by the artist varies slightly from that sequence. The artworks are presented in one continuous presentation, so there is no need for separate chapters. A detailed explanation is provided for each cartoon, following careful analysis of the often cryptic or colloquial language used in the titles and/or bylines. The meaning of the illustrations has also undergone serious scrutiny, with many experts in the field offering their opinions on the subject.

Sources

- Chicago City Archives – microfilmed 1966
- Milwaukee Census records - 2016
- Hooley's Theatre Archives – Chicago
- Bloomington Eye newspaper – 1886-1887
- History of American Dime Museums - 1924
- Higgins & Gage USA Postal Stationery Catalogue 1982
- Library of Congress – Washington D.C.

3 January 1884 - 'I wonder which is father'



The meaning of this first cartoon is a classic example of dark, existential humour prevalent in 19th century American newspapers, typically appearing between Thanksgiving holiday (4th Thursday of November) and New Years Day. The humour of the headline 'I wonder which one is father' relies on two key elements: a human tradition (New Years dinner) viewed from the perspective of the victims and the turkeys observing what they understand as the inevitable fate of their community, including family members.

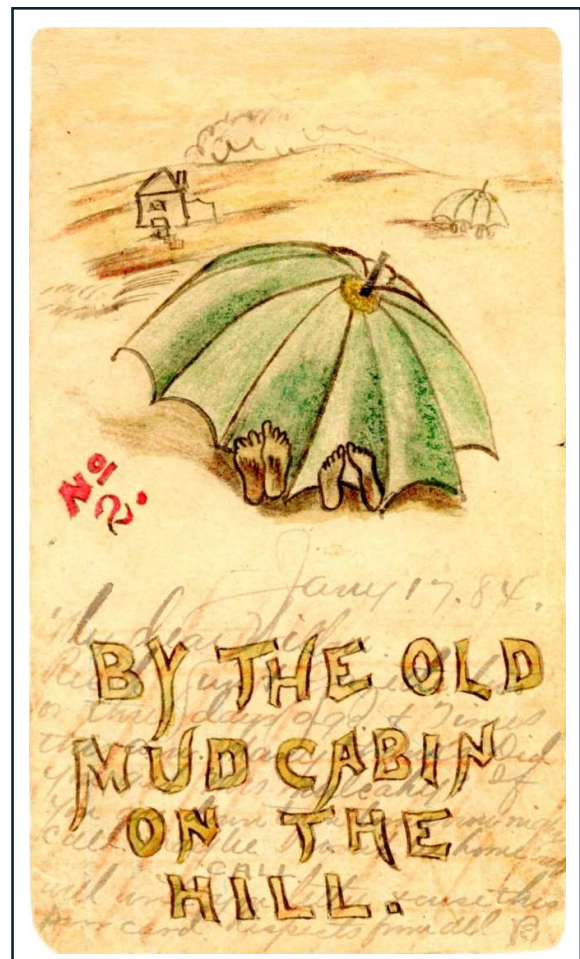
The live turkeys question is not one of sentimental identification but a morbid, resigned attempt to identify a relative among the slaughtered, highlighting their own grim future. It's a form of gallows humour, where the characters are contemplating their own impending doom or that of their kin in a , observational manner.

18 January 1884 – 'By the Old Mud Cabin on the Hill'

Many Chicago residents were of Irish descent. Byron Stevens's parents left Ireland when the Great Famine started in 1845. Every New Year in Chicago, many Irish people would gather to sing nostalgic Irish songs after enjoying a few glasses of whisky. One famous such song is 'By the Old Mud Cabin on the Hill', which reminds Irish emigrants of their departure from Ireland. The first two verses of the song can be found below.

*Go sell the pig and the cow and all,
And we'll take you far away,
For your dear old parents
You must leave behind.
Go and seek your fortune far away
In a land across the sea,
For in Paddy's land it's poverty you'll find.*

*Those were the words my mother spoke
As I left old Ireland.
And the sad farewell is in my memory still.
As I placed that bundle on my back,
And I left for ever more,
From your little old mud cabin on the hill.*



21 January 1884 – 'He didn't drink beef tea'

The headline 'He didn't drink beef tea' accompanying a drawing of a drunk man clinging to a lamppost, takes on a significantly sarcastic meaning.

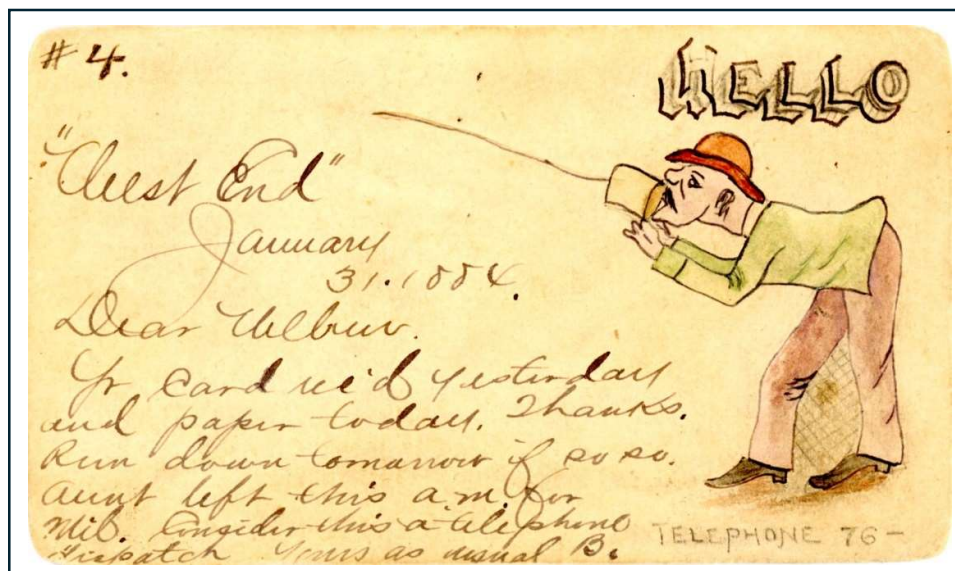
The humour shifts from a statement about robust health to a sardonic joke about his severe intoxication. He didn't drink weak tea; he drank hard liquor. The headline humorously implies that whatever beverage rendered him incapable of standing on his own must have been considerably stronger than the light beef broth given to invalids. He is sturdy, but only because he is holding the pole. The initial meaning of strength is twisted; his current 'robustness' is entirely dependent on external support (the lamppost) due to his inebriation.

In 1884 Chicago newspapers, this pairing would have been instantly understood by readers as a classic piece of visual-text humour. The contrast between the formal, slightly archaic language of 'beef tea' and the common, low-brow image of a public drunk highlights the sharp, dry wit characteristic of that era's journalism.



31 January 1884 – 'A Telephone'

The postcard depicts a toy wire telephone. The bottom line reads 'Consider this a telephone dispatch'. Commercial telephone services officially began in Chicago in 1878, with 455 initial subscribers, the vast majority were banks and businesses.



The service was initially operated by the **Chicago Telephone Company**, which was chartered in January 1881. The Chicago Telephone Company continued to operate under that name until around 1920, when it became known as Illinois Bell. The first long-distance telephone line connecting New York and Chicago was not established until 1892. On 31 January 1884, Byron Stevens, the artist, received the telephone number **76**.

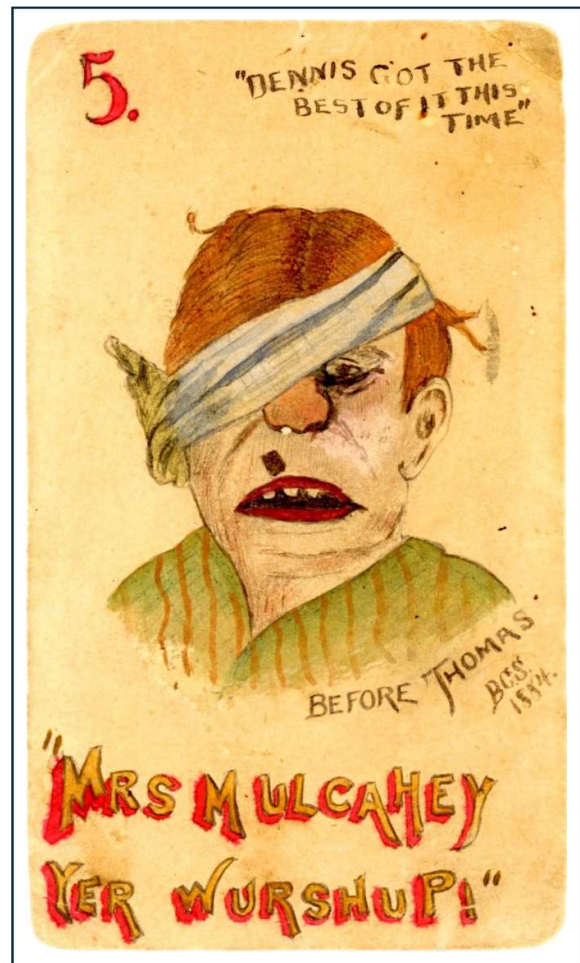
31 January 1884 - 'Mrs Mulcahey Yer Wurship'

The headline '**Dennis got the best of it this time**' with an image of a bandaged woman appearing in court is a dry, sarcastic comment referring to a domestic dispute (a physical fight) where 'Dennis' was the clear victor or recipient of less harm. The bottom line '**Mrs Mulcahey Yer Wurship**' is called by a court clerk when Dennis' wife appears in court.

The visual elements of the postcard provide significant context: the Bandaged Woman visually implied physical harm and/or injury. The woman was the apparent victim of the incident. The phrase 'Dennis got the best of it this time' suggests that Dennis 'Won' the fight. He inflicted the damage on its wife (the 'best of it' refers to his victory/her injuries).

The postcard's humour was in the sardonic juxtaposition of the woman's obvious suffering and the terse acknowledgment that the perpetrator (Dennis) 'came out on top.'

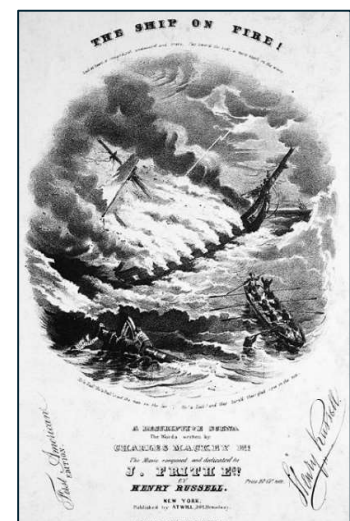
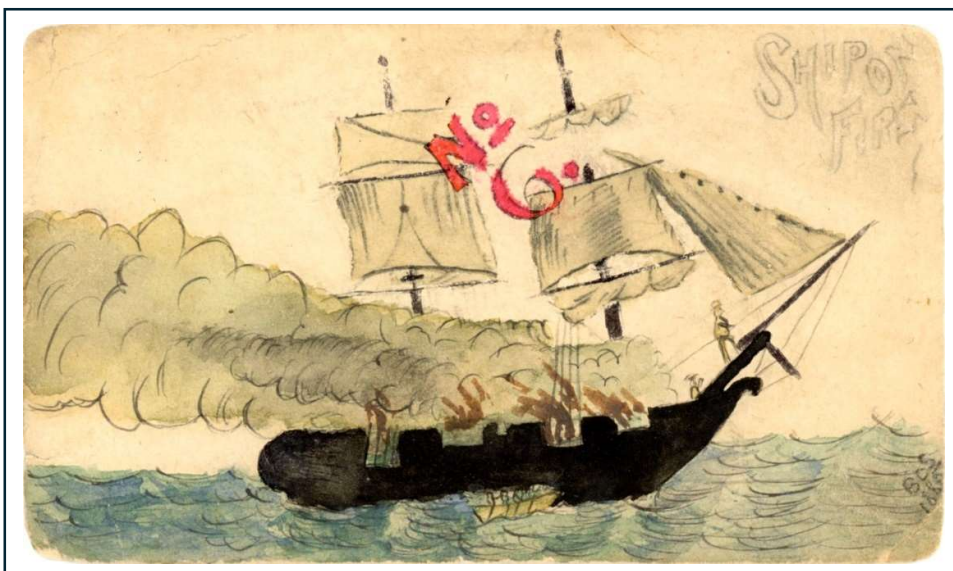
The Mulcahey family, living nearby Byron Stevens (the artist), appears also on the cards #93, #124 and #130. It was clearly a family where not all was going peacefully.



2 February 1884 - 'The Ship on Fire'

'The Ship on Fire' is a celebrated descriptive scaena with lyrics by **Charles Mackay** and music composed by **Henry Russell**. It was highly popular in the 19th century and often performed as a feature number in concerts and theatrical programs. **Thomas Frith** was the person to whom the sheet music for the piece was dedicated by Henry Russell. Charles Mackay was a Scottish poet and journalist who wrote the powerful lyrics. Henry Russell was a popular English composer and singer known for his 'descriptive' songs.

'The Ship on Fire' was a Scaena-Ballad that told a dramatic story set to music, often involving vivid imagery of a storm, a fire breaking out on a ship, a rescue, and prayers for salvation. The song was extremely popular and was even performed by the famous American abolitionist group, the Hutchinson Family Singers. The song captured the public's fascination with dramatic sea incidents and human bravery, ending on a note of hope and rescue. Below right, a scaled-down version of the poster of **The Ship on Fire**.



2 February 1884 - 'A Steven'

The artist Byron Stevens made a language joke about his surname. On this cartoon, he drew two sailing boats and wrote 'A Steven' next to them.

However, 'steven' is not an English term; it is the German translation of 'stem', and is a structural part of a boat. It's good to know that Byron Stevens' first wife was of German origin.

'A Steven' is the upright piece of wood or metal at the very front of a vessel, or an extension of the keel at the stern. The German phrase '**von Steven zu Steven**' translates as 'from stem to stern', meaning the entire length of the ship.



5 February 1884 - 'The World is Mine'



In the late 19th century, theatrical adaptations of Alexandre Dumas's novel **The Count of Monte Cristo** were hugely popular in the United States. **James O'Neill**, the father of playwright Eugene O'Neill, was the actor most famously associated with the role of Edmond Dantès and the phrase in question.

O'Neill's production, which ran for decades, featured a climactic scene in which Dantès, having escaped from prison and found the treasure on the Isle of Monte Cristo, stands on a rock, raises a cross and shouts a triumphant line (as shown on card).

According to contemporary newspaper accounts, O'Neill's famous line in that scene was often quoted as '**The world is mine!**'. This marked his transformation from victim to powerful avenger. It captures the core theme of the story: a man who gains immense wealth and power, believing he can control his destiny and exact justice on his own terms.

The O'Neill production was a touring staple and played in Chicago in February 1884. The phrase and the image of the actor on the rock have become iconic in American theatre history.

3 February 1884 – 'McSorley's Inflation'

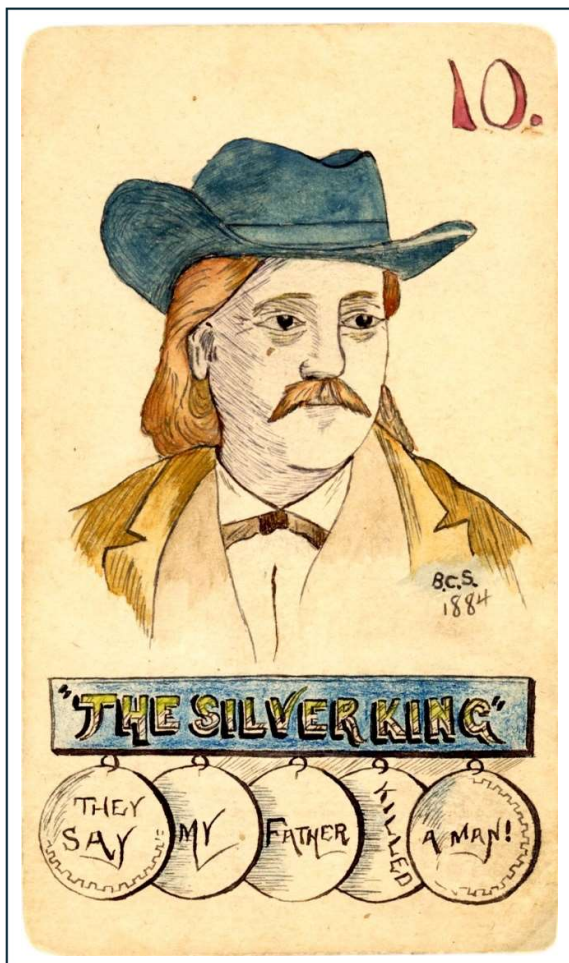
McSorley's Inflation was a theatre production from New York, which was brought to Chicago by a touring company. Performances took place in Chicago in February and March 1884, as part of a special '**Patrick's Matinee**' event to coincide with St Patrick's Day festivities. It was presented by M. W. Hanley's company, a touring troupe that performed the play with the permission of Edward Harrigan ('by kind permission of Harrigan & Hart').

The play is primarily set in the bar of '**Peter McSorley**', a fictionalised version of the real-life McSorley's Old Ale House. Harrigan's plays were known for their rich, detailed characters representing the various ethnic groups living in the 'scruffiest wards' of New York City. While plot summaries are scarce, the title suggests that the play focuses on some form of 'inflation' within the local community or the bar owner's life.

The humour stemmed from everyday real-life problems such as political corruption, inter-ethnic tensions, and gang violence, which were 'always served up with enough clownish humour to keep audiences laughing'. Popular songs such as 'McNally's Row of Flats' were also featured in the show. Harrigan was praised as a chronicler of the 'war of the races' in the New York melting pot. He depicted his characters with surprising sympathy, providing New Yorkers with a reflection of their times.



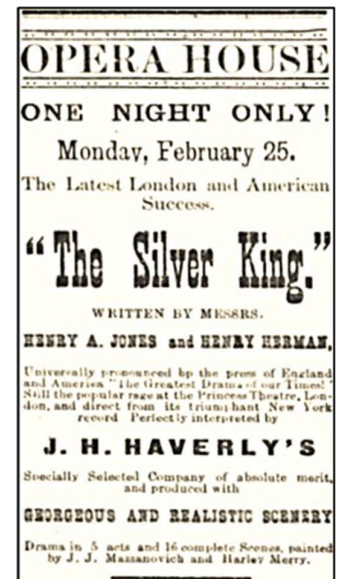
25 February 1884 – 'The Silver King'



The Silver King was a highly successful and popular melodrama play that had an acclaimed run in Chicago in 1884. It was considered a major theatrical event and a significant success at the time.

The plot of the play centred around a man who is wrongly accused of murder, goes into hiding, strikes it rich in silver mining, and eventually returns to clear his name and reclaim his family, embodying themes of redemption and justice.

The Silver King was written by the English playwrights **Henry Arthur Jones** and **Henry Herman** and premiered in London in 1882. It quickly became a sensation for its strong moral message and compelling story, which was often advertised as being 'as good as a sermon'. The play was the opening attraction for the season at a Chicago theatre (**Haverly's Theatre**) in February 1884. It continued to be a topic of conversation in Chicago theatrical circles long after its initial run.



5 March 1884 – 'The Finishing Touch'

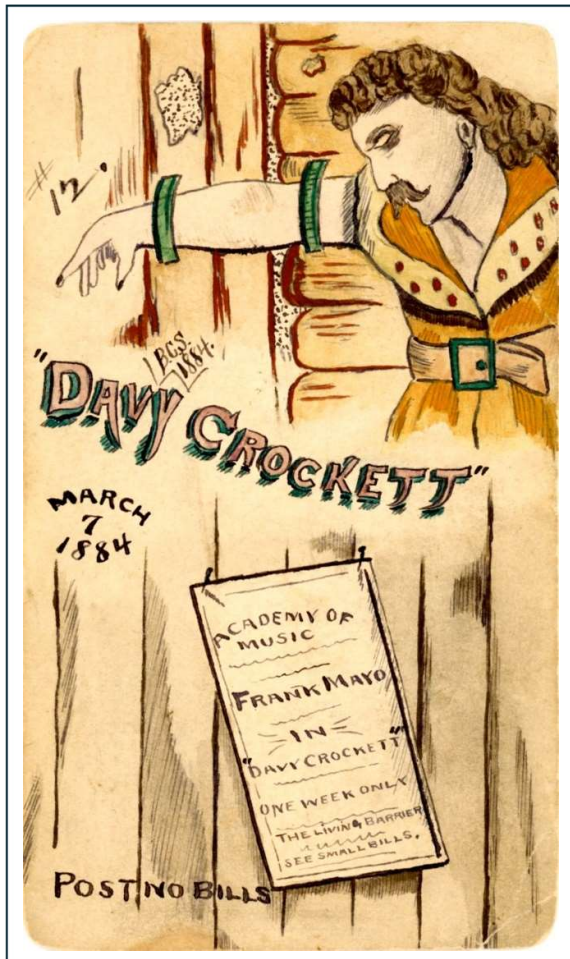
The original painting, entitled **The Finishing Touch**, was first created in the 1880s by the Czech artist **Václav Brožík** (also spelled Wenceslas Václav Brožík). The painting itself is in the collection of the Art Institute of Chicago.

As the painting was not particularly well-received, the artist **Oliver Dennett Grover**, who was associated with the Arts Club of Chicago and the Chicago Society of Artists, created a different version of the work with the same name.

The inscription '**not ORIGINAL**' on the cartoon refers to the second version of the painting.



7 March 1884 – 'Davy Crockett'



'Davy Crockett' was a highly successful 19th century American play written by **Frank Murdoch** and made famous by the actor **Frank Mayo** (left).

The play, titled Davy Crockett, was a melodrama that perpetuated the American myth of the frontiersman as a simple, brave, and chivalrous hero. Davy Crockett was the hero, portrayed as a

common-sense superhero with a 'firm resolution to do what is right'. **Eleanor Vaughn** (also called 'Little Nell'), was a woman from a higher social station with whom Crockett shares a childhood connection. She has returned from abroad with a guardian and fiancé.

The play's most famous and melodramatic scene involves Crockett using **his own arm to bar the door** of his hunting hut (as seen on the cartoon) against a howling pack of wolves during a blizzard, thus protecting Eleanor and her party inside. In a later act, Crockett rescues Eleanor from the villains, the villains are defeated and Crockett is able to marry Eleanor, proving that his frontier integrity is superior to the false aristocracy of his rivals.

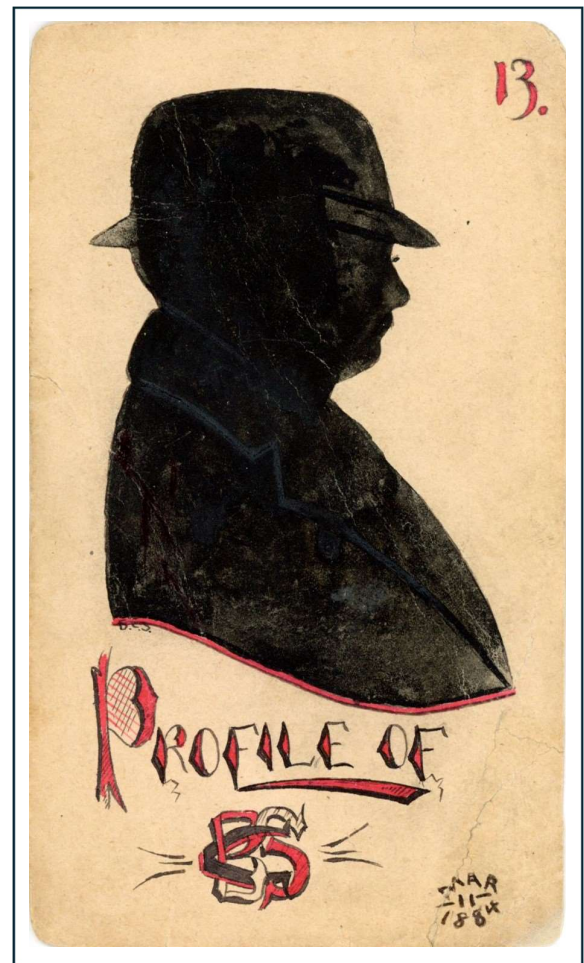
Frank Mayo became so synonymous with the role that he found it difficult to play other characters, performing Davy Crockett over a 1000 times from 1877 on and continuing until his death in 1896.

11 March 1884 – 'Byron Stevens self-portrait'

Byron Clifford Stevens was a distinctive voice in the burgeoning 'comic humour' scene of late 19th century America, particularly within the lithographic hubs of the North.

At age 30, Stevens was at the height of his creative output, contributing to a popular culture that favoured exaggerated character studies and 'witty' social commentary.

His 1884 self-portrait serves as a rare, earnest look at the artist behind the satire, capturing a moment of personal reflection just as the commercial postcard industry began to explode in popularity across cities like Chicago. A second version of his self-portrait can be seen on card #36.



19 March 1884 – 'Easter Card'



On 19 March 1884, the artist Byron Stevens sent the first Easter-themed card. However, the chick hatching from the egg was slightly premature (or not?), as the card was sent 25 days before Easter.

While Easter is a religious holiday, Victorian Easter cards were heavily focused on the arrival of spring. In the 1880s, these cards often served as 'spring greetings' intended to celebrate the end of winter. Sending a card in mid-March - the traditional start of spring - was a way to share the 'joy of spring' and 'new beginnings' well before the specific date of Easter Sunday.

By the 1890s, the 'craze' for sending cards had grown so large that the Post Office began pleading with the public to 'post early' to help handle the massive volume of seasonal mail.

21 March 1884 – 'Osterkasunta'

This cartoon requires a bit more explanation. The head-line **Osterkasunta** is blend of words and languages.

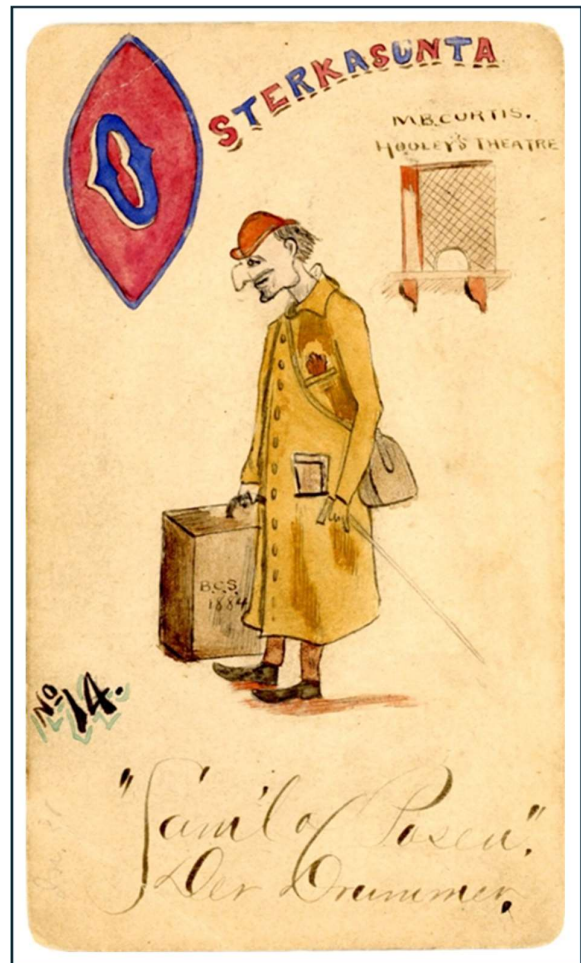
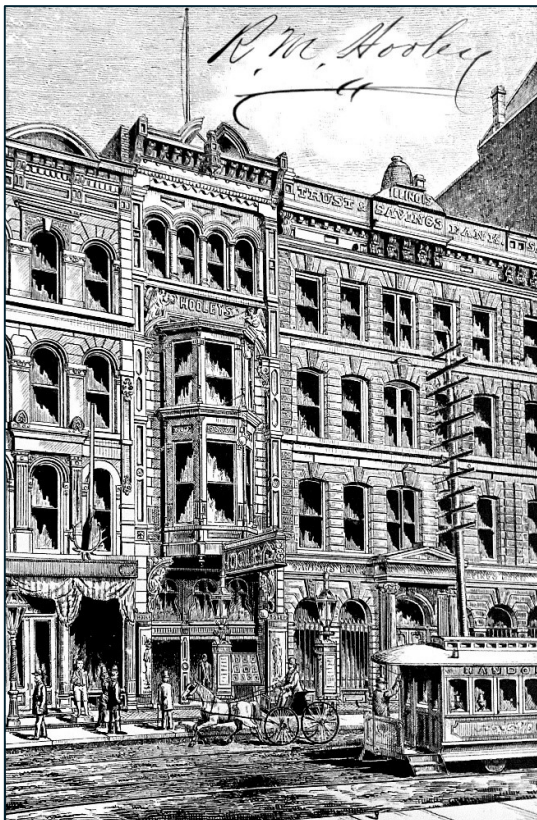
Oster(n) is the German for **Easter**. In the 19th century folklore, the word **Kasunta** (or **Kasunte**) is a Yiddish-German corruption of the Latin word **Quadragesima**, meaning forty. The word refers to the 40 days of Lent, the period of fasting and reflection leading up to Easter.

In the multi-ethnic neighbourhoods of 1880s Chicago, immigrant dialects often blended Latin liturgical terms with Yiddish and German. '**Quadragesima**' became '**Kasunta**.'

In the right-top corner, one reads **M.B. Curtis** and **Hooley's Theatre**. Hooley's Theatre was a prominent and elegant Chicago playhouse located on Randolph Street. It was a major centre for legitimate theatre and high-profile performances.

The owner was **Richard Martin Hooley** (1822–1893), commonly known as '**Uncle Dick**'. He was a prominent Irish-American theatre manager who played a critical role in the cultural development of Chicago and Brooklyn.

Below a drawing from unknown origin depicting the Hooley Theatre and the signature of R.M. Hooley on top.



M.B. Curtis (born as Moses B. Charlak, c. 1849) was an American actor and comedian. He specialized in playing Jewish dialect characters - stereotypical, often humorous portrayals of Eastern European Jewish immigrants—which was a popular form of entertainment in American theatre during that era.

On the bottom of the card, one can read '**Saul of Posen**' and '**Der Drummer**'.

Saul of Posen was M.B. Curtis's most famous and celebrated character role. The character was a Yiddish dialect storekeeper, portrayed with a mixture of humour, common sense, and wit. The name '**Posen**' referred to a region in Prussia (now Poland) with a significant Jewish population, providing a specific cultural context for the character's accent and mannerisms.

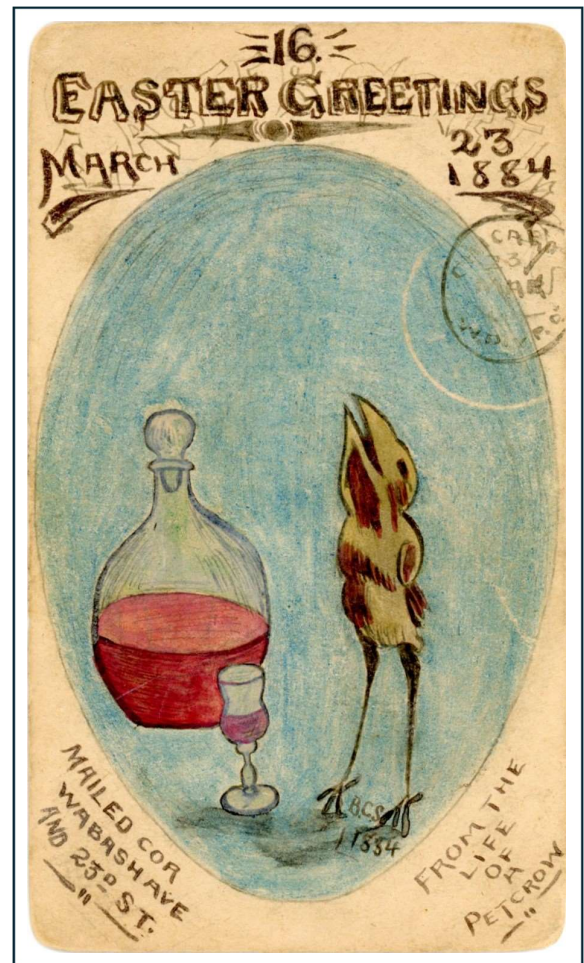
Der Drummer (German for '**The Drummer boy**') was a short play written as a vehicle for **M.B. Curtis** to showcase his '**Saul of Posen**' character. The plot involved Saul in various humorous situations as a travelling musician.

23 March 1884 Easter Greetings

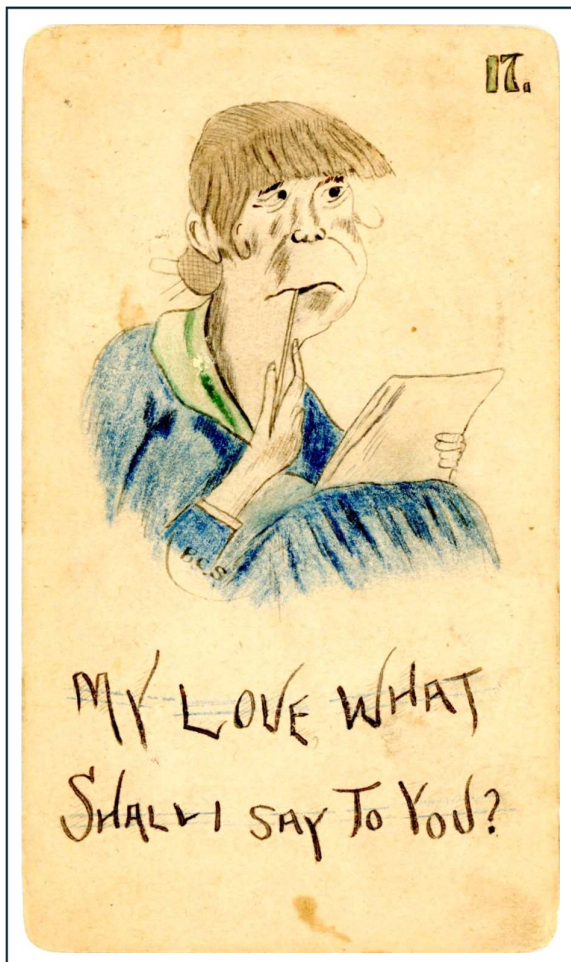
On 23 March 1884, people in America celebrated Half-Lent, which occurs 20 days before Easter; Easter fell that year on 13 April.

As depicted by the half-bottle in the drawing, celebrations and drinking were permitted on Half-Lent. The crow also clearly participated in the festivities.

But why keep a crow as a pet? They are exceptionally intelligent, curious and playful, making them fascinating and engaging companions. Like parrots, they can mimic human voices and other sounds — a popular parlour trick and source of entertainment in Victorian homes. When hand-raised or befriended, crows can form strong bonds with their owners, becoming loyal and responsive companions. Their natural curiosity can lead to mischievous behaviour, such as stealing small, shiny objects, which some owners find amusing.



25 March 1884 – 'My Love, what shall I say to you?'



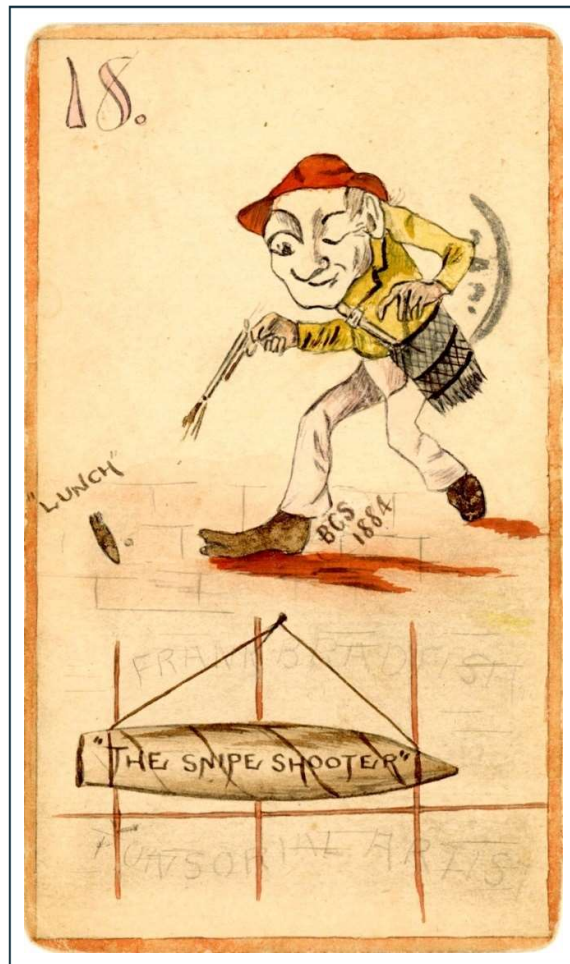
In March 1884, 30-year-old bachelor Byron C. Stevens met Augusta Langguth, a 20 year old daughter of a German immigrants family.

A few days after they first met, he wanted to write to her but couldn't find the words, so he drew a postcard bearing the words 'My love, what shall I say to you?' and sent it to his friend, Wilbur Sibley, for help.

Stuck in a **'writer's block'** Byron decided to utilize his artistic talent instead of his pen. But his girlfriend could hardly read English and Byron didn't master the German language very well.

His friend Wilbur Sibley provided advice, and Byron was able to convince Augusta to marry him, 3 months later.

However, the marriage didn't last very long due to language and cultural differences. Byron filed for divorce, which was granted in October 1884.



'The snipe shooter' refers to the popular practical joke known as a **'snipe hunt'**, a common 'fool's errand' prank in North America since the 1840s. It is used to refer to someone who has fallen victim to an April Fools' Day joke.

In the prank, an unsuspecting newcomer is sent on a fruitless search for a mythical animal called a 'snipe' (a real bird, which makes the story seem more believable). They are typically led to an outdoor spot at night, given an empty bag and a lantern, and instructed to make noises or wait quietly in order to lure the 'snipe' into the bag. The rest of the group then abandons the victim, leaving them alone in the dark to wait for something that will never happen. Eventually, the dupe realises the joke and is left 'holding the bag'.

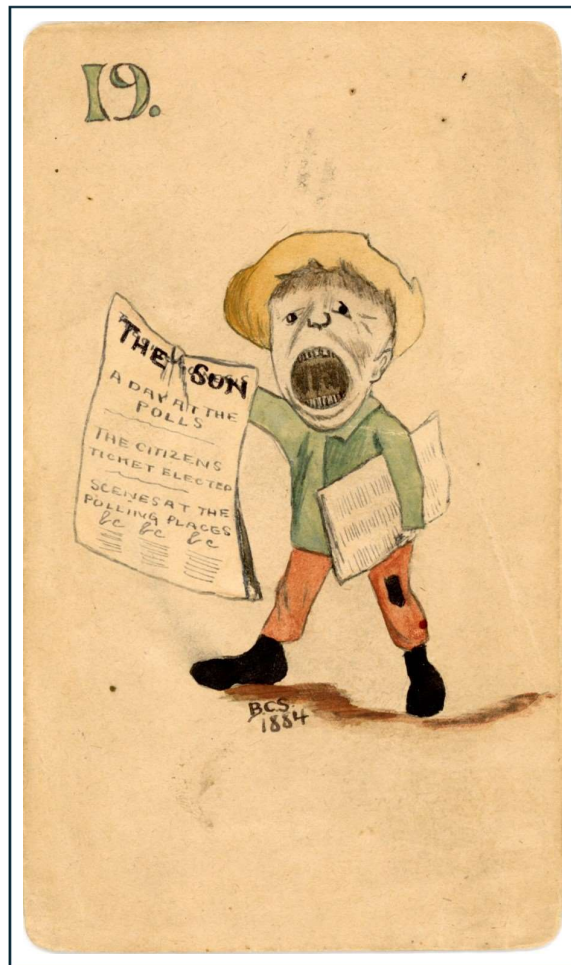
A 'snipe hunt' is a quintessential April Fools' prank because it relies on gullibility and social initiation. Just as people are sent on 'fool's errands' on April 1st, such as fetching 'tartan paint' or 'a bucket of steam', the snipe hunt involves giving a victim a ridiculous, impossible task.

Calling someone 'the snipe shooter on April Fools' Day' identifies that person as the dupe who has been tricked or sent on a pointless task.

But in slang, **snipe shooter** as double meaning, 'snipe shooter' was also used for a scavenger of **cigar butts**. The 'witty' postcard above played on this by showing a 'snipe hunter' proudly holding a bag, only to reveal he has been fooled into collecting trash instead of a prized game bird. On **1 April 1884**, Frank Bradfish (Byron Stevens' hairdresser and later brother-in-law) was **the dupe**.

The card reads (at the bottom) 'Tonsorial Artist', an archaic, formal and sometimes humorous or pretentious term for the job of a barber or hairdresser.

2 April 1884 'A Day at the Polls'



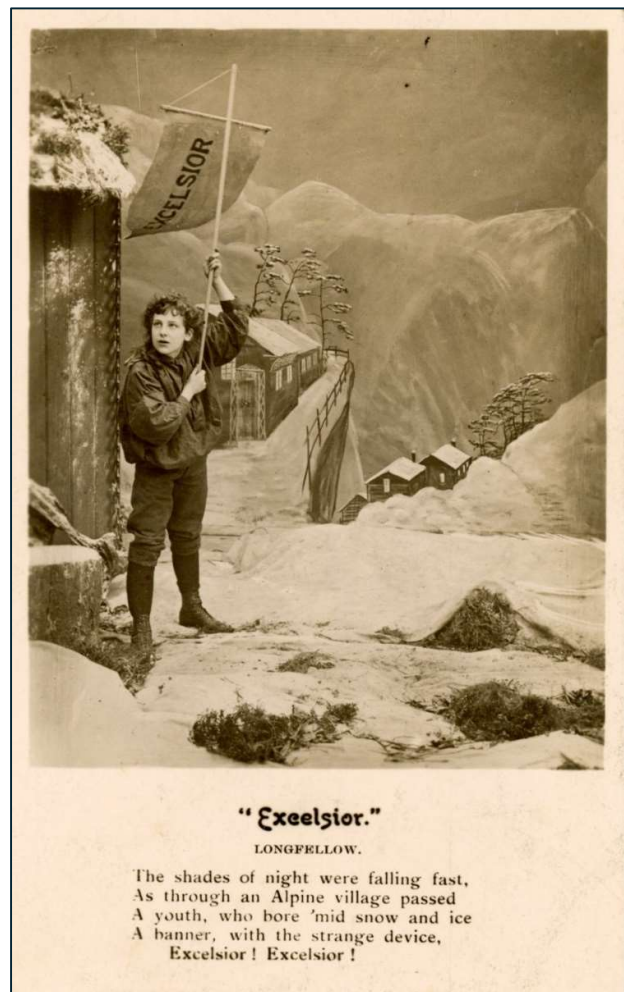
The **municipal elections**, held in Chicago on **1 April 1884**, were focused on local representation and the shifting power dynamics within the city's ward system. While there was no mayoral race that year the aldermanic contests were highly consequential.

Half of the seats in the Chicago Common Council (now the City Council) were up for election. Notable winners included Thomas C. Clarke, who was elected to represent the 4th Ward, and Michael McNurney, who was elected in the 10th Ward.

The 1884 elections became infamous for voter fraud. Investigations following these specific local races eventually led to the indictment of several political figures, including Joseph Mackin, a close associate of Mayor Harrison. A grand jury later found that significant election fraud occurred during these 1884 contests, which damaged the administration's reputation and set the stage for the highly contentious 1885 mayoral race.

This was one of the first major tests for new election procedures in Chicago. Following the Cities and Villages Act of 1872, city elections were standardized to occur on the **first Tuesday of April**, and the 1884 results were some of the first to be finalized under these refined municipal guidelines. The cartoon depicts a newspaper selling copies of *The Sun*, a newspaper that didn't exist in 1884 Chicago; the artist had first called it **The Chicago News**, which was founded in 1875 and was the city's first '**penny paper**' (1 dollar cent) which achieved massive circulation by the late 1880s.

While the April election was local, it served as a 'warm-up' for a massive year in Chicago politics: in November 1884, Chicago voters participated in the presidential race, which ultimately saw Grover Cleveland become the first Democrat elected to the White House since the Civil War. See cards #13 and #55, related to the election of Grover Cleveland.



'The shades of night,' is a reference to the opening line of a very famous and often-parodied poem '**Excelsior**' by **Henry Wadsworth Longfellow**, published in 1841. The original phrase 'Shades of night' simply means the darkness or twilight of evening is settling in. The meaning of the postcard is a contemporary satirical joke relying on stereotypes and the popularity of Afro-American minstrel shows during that era. It is not a record of real events but a caricature that might have contributed to discriminatory attitudes and violence toward Afro-American communities.

The '**shades**' in the cartoon refer punning to the skin colour of the men. The joke connects the visual 'blackness' of the men in the picture to the 'darkness' of the evening described in the poem.

The men are in 'fancy dress,' which were costumes used in minstrel shows, a highly popular but racially insensitive form of entertainment in the 19th century where white performers often used blackface to parody African Americans. The postcard likely engages with these common, stereotypical comedic tropes.

The humour comes from the juxtaposition of a refined piece of classic literature (Longfellow's poem) with a depiction of individuals who were often caricatured in popular media at the time.

On the right, an original picture postcard of '**Excelsior**'. Copyright Bamforth Photo – Holmfirth.

16 April 1884 - 'Only a Pansy Blossom'

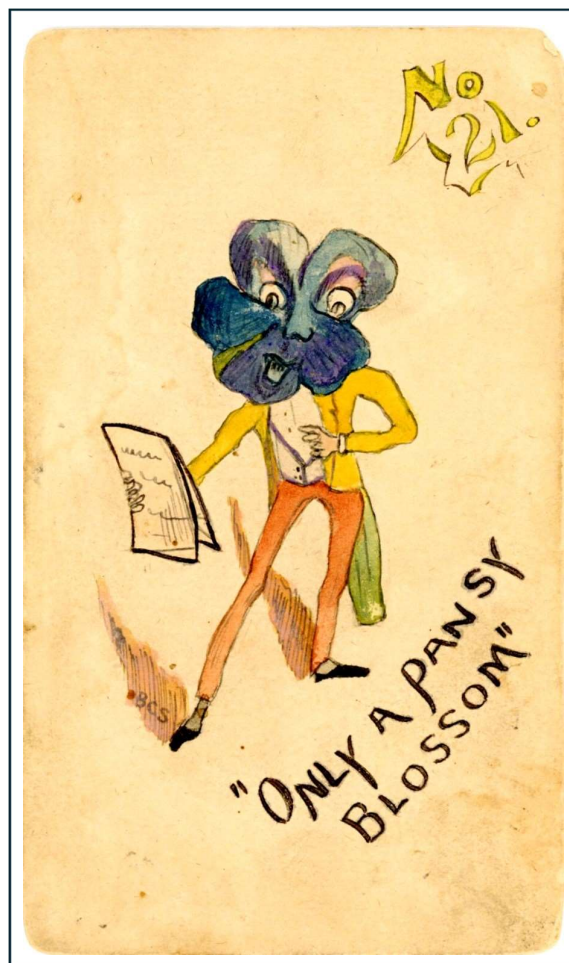
'Only a Pansy Blossom' is the title of a popular song and waltz composed in 1882 and became famous around 1884. **Frank Howard** composed the music and **Eben E. Rexford** wrote the lyrics.

The word '**pansy**' comes from the French word **pensée**, meaning 'thought'. In the Victorian language of flowers, giving someone a pansy was an indirect way of saying, 'I'm thinking of you,' 'Remember me,' or 'You are in my thoughts'.

The song itself is a sentimental ballad about affectionate remembrance, and it was popular for its melody and sweet message.

Consequently, the phrase 'Only a Pansy Blossom' became a delicate, romantic expression used to convey deep thought and affection for someone. It was a well-known phrase that encapsulated quiet, gentle admiration.

Below : An clipping of an 1884 partiture of the original 'Only a Pansy Blossom'.



ONLY A PANSY BLOSSOM.

Words by E. E. REXFORD.
Introduction.
LIVELY.

Music by FRANK HOWARD.

Unison.

TEMPO di WALTZ.

Voice.

Ah! 'Tis on - ly a pan - sy

Piano.

p

p

A musical score for the song 'Only a Pansy Blossom'. It features a piano introduction in 3/4 time, marked 'LIVELY'. The introduction is in unison for both hands. The main part of the score is for voice and piano, marked 'TEMPO di WALTZ'. The voice part has a melody with a long note on 'Ah!' followed by the lyrics 'Tis on - ly a pan - sy'. The piano accompaniment is in the right hand, with a melody that complements the voice. The left hand provides a simple harmonic accompaniment. Dynamics like 'p' (piano) are indicated.



The phrase 'Time is hanging heavy on his hands' on an 1884 Chicago cartoon is a **pun** and a **double entendre**. It relies on multiple layers of meaning related to the thief's situation.

- The Literal Punishment (Hanging): In the 19th century, 'hanging' was a common form of capital punishment for serious crimes. The phrase implies that because the thief has been caught by the policeman, his fate – execution by hanging – is now 'on his hands' or imminent.
- The Stolen Object (The Watch): The 'time' being referred to literally is the stolen watch (a timepiece) that is physically 'hanging' from the thief's hands as he is chased. This visual gag uses 'time' as a synonym for the watch itself.
- The Idiomatic Meaning (Boredom/Prison): The idiom 'time hangs heavy on one's hands' traditionally means that time is passing very slowly because one has nothing to do.
- In Prison: The phrase was (and is) specifically associated with serving a long sentence, where the hours feel burdensome. In the Victorian era, having 'too much time on one's hands' was often used as a moral warning that idleness leads to trouble or crime.

In 1884, Chicago was experiencing a rise in professional crime and a corresponding increase in police efforts to identify and capture 'rascals' and 'professional criminals'. Postcards like this were popular forms of satire and moral humour, mocking the criminal's inevitable capture and the 'heavy' consequences of his actions.

22 April 1884 – ‘Monkey Polka’

A man with the small barrel organ plays the tune ‘**Sweet Violets**’ while a monkey raises money. The tune was popular in the 1880s.

The tune mentioned, ‘Sweet Violets,’ was a major hit in the 1880s. It was written and composed by **Joseph Kline Emmet** and published in 1882.

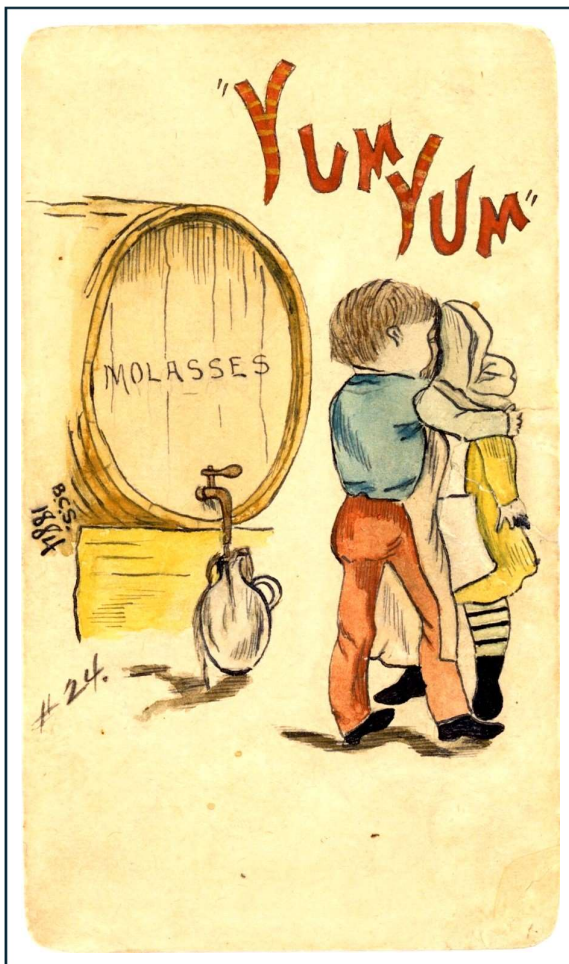
The song originally appeared in Emmet’s musical play, ‘**Fritz among the Gypsies**’.

While the original version by Emmet was a sentimental ballad, the tune became famous for its humorous ‘censored rhyme’ structure. In this format, a suggestive or ‘risqué’ rhyme is expected, but the singer abruptly stops and pivots to a wholesome chorus about ‘Sweet Violets’.

Its catchy melody made it a staple for barrel organs (mechanical instruments played by turning a crank), which were often operated by ‘organ grinders’ who used monkeys to collect coins from passersby.



25 April 1884 – ‘Yum Yum’



The cartoon’s message and imagery combine several literal and metaphorical meanings popular in the 19th century.

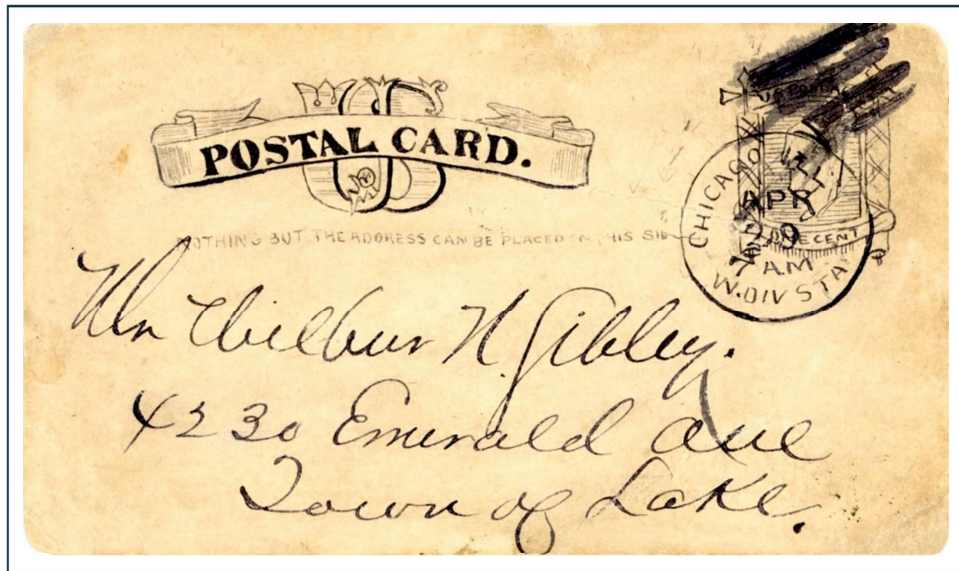
‘**Yum Yum**’ is an exclamation of pleasure associated with delicious taste. In this picture, it refers to the sweetness and enjoyment of the kiss itself.

The molasses barrel serves as a visual metaphor for the ‘sweetness’ of the kiss or the affection between the young couple.

The cartoon falls into a category of Victorian-era postcards that used playful, often food-related, innuendos to depict innocent flirtation and courtship.

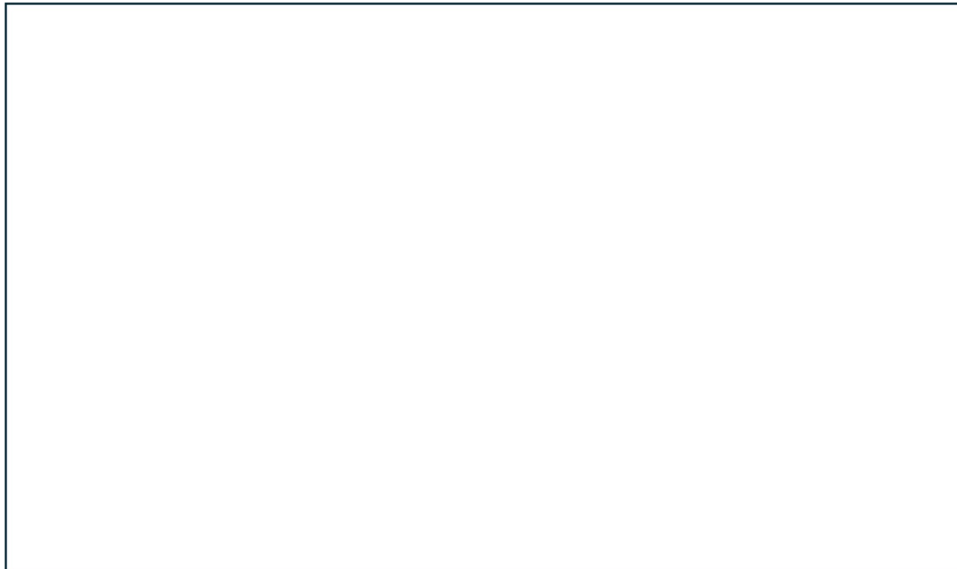
‘Spoonng’ was another slang term for courting/kissing. The term is believed to have originated in 19th century Wales from the tradition of ‘lovespoons’. Young men would carve intricate wooden spoons to give to their love interests as a declaration of devotion. If the woman accepted the gift, the couple was officially considered to be courting or ‘spoonng’. Over time, the word evolved from referring to courtship to the specific cuddling position used today.

29 April 1884 – 'A postcard'



The original drawing from Byron Stevens.

On **29 April 1884**, Byron C. Stevens (the artist) took a standard United States postal card and painstakingly hand-drew a near-perfect replica of the 'address side' (the front) onto the blank reverse side. This act was essentially a 19th century 'meta' joke. By drawing a stamp, the postmark area, and the address lines on the back, he left no room for an actual message or illustration. It was a cheeky response to the postal regulations of the time, which strictly forbade writing messages on the front of postcards.



The front side of the postal stationery card.

He mailed the card to Wilbur Sibley the following day, **30 April 1884**. When the post office processed it, the actual ink-cancelled stamp on the front created a stark contrast with Byron's hand-drawn 'fake' stamp on the back.

While seemingly a minor prank, this event occurred during a specific era of postal transition: in 1884, the back of a postcard was for the message, and the front was strictly for the address and stamp. By duplicating the 'address only' side on the back, Stevens was playfully 'obeying' the rules to an absurd degree—making a card that was legally nothing but address.

The story of Byron C. Stevens sending a 'mirror image' postcard on **30 April 1884**, is a popular historical anecdote illustrating the creative - and sometimes eccentric - ways Victorians utilized the new medium of the postal stationery card.

1 May 1884 – 'Are you going far this evening?'



The phrase 'Are you going far this evening?' on this cartoon, that features a person holding a bat and talking to a smartly-dressed man, certainly implies a threat.

The literal meaning of 'going far' is used in a darkly humorous way, given the presence of the bat. The image plays on a common comedic scenario of the time, in which the text subverts the polite nature of the question with the visual context of potential violence.

The cartoon captures a moment of social tension, in which an elegantly dressed individual is confronted by a rougher character with malicious intent (a robber).

Walking at night in Chicago carried significant risks and safety was highly dependent on which neighbourhood, the person's social standing, and race. While some areas like the downtown commercial district had a police presence and were popular with pedestrians, much of the city's night life was considered dangerous due to prevalent crime and poor lighting.

19 May 1884 - 'Getting to be a big Boy now'

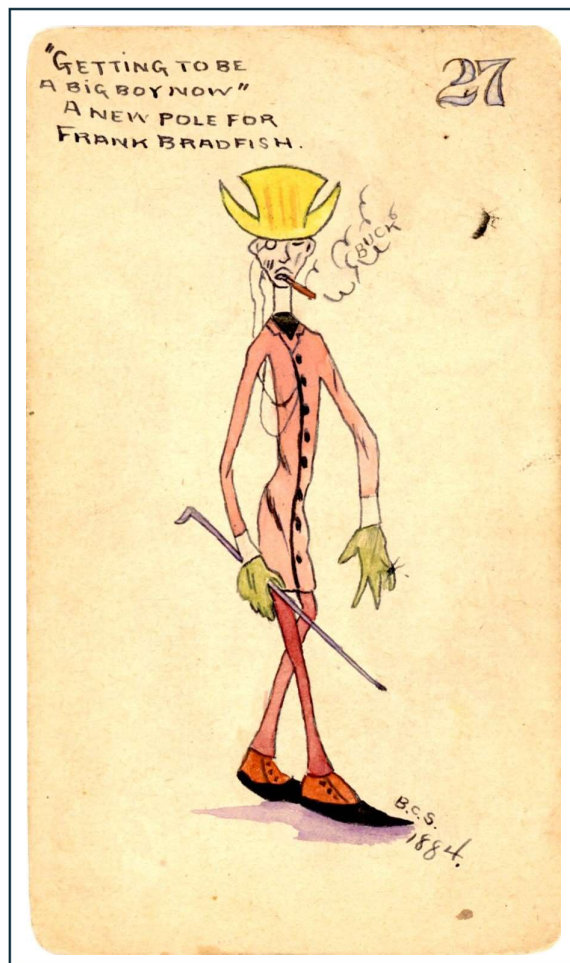
Frank August Bradfish was the son of **Johannes Bratfisch** and **Henrietta Therese Auguste Serflin**, both German immigrants. Frank was born on **11 November 1857** in Chicago. He was the father of Frank Emile Bradfish, born in Chicago on 9 December 1883.

After being trained as an assistant barber at the famous **Albert Worst Barber Shop** in **Plainfield** (southwest of Chicago), Frank Bradfish opened his own barbershop in **Kankakee** (south of Chicago).

The German name **Bratfisch** was changed to **Bradfish** upon the immigrants' arrival in America, as it sounded more English.

The '**pole**' in the byline refers to a cane (a walking stick), from the Old English *pal*, referring to a long, slender piece of wood. Canes were originally so-named because they were made from cane (rattan or bamboo) imported from the East. Staffs have ancient roots as symbols of spiritual authority or nomadic leadership, evolving into the 'poles' used by medieval pilgrims.

Frank Bradfish is also portrayed on cards #68, #69 and #112. **Wilbur Nye Sibley**, the brother-in-law of Byron C. Stevens, also lived in **Kankakee** and became a friend and client of barber Frank Bradfish.



20 May 1884 – 'Peek-a-Boo'



'Peek-a-boo' is a universal, classic game, typically played with infants and young children. The game involves two simple actions: one person hides their face, either with their hands, a blanket, or by ducking behind an object. The person suddenly uncovers their face and says the word 'Peek-a-boo!' often followed by 'I see you!'.

While it seems like simple fun, peek-a-boo is a critical cognitive and social learning tool. Very young infants (under 4–8 months) believe that if they cannot see something, it has ceased to exist. Peek-a-boo teaches them that people and objects remain even when hidden.

Linguists view the game as a precursor to speech. It teaches the 'rhythm' of conversation—waiting for a turn, anticipating a response, and reacting. The game follows a 'joke' structure - surprise balanced with expectation.

The thrill of the 'disappearance' followed by the joy of the 'reappearance' helps babies learn to manage excitement and surprise. The game has been recorded as far back as the 1590s. Before being called 'peek-a-boo' in the U.S., it was known in England as 'bo-peep'.

22 May 1884 - 'When Ignorance is Bliss'

This is a famous quote from Thomas Gray's 1742 poem, 'Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College'. In the 1880s however, it was a very common caption for comic postcards involving infidelity or secret affection.

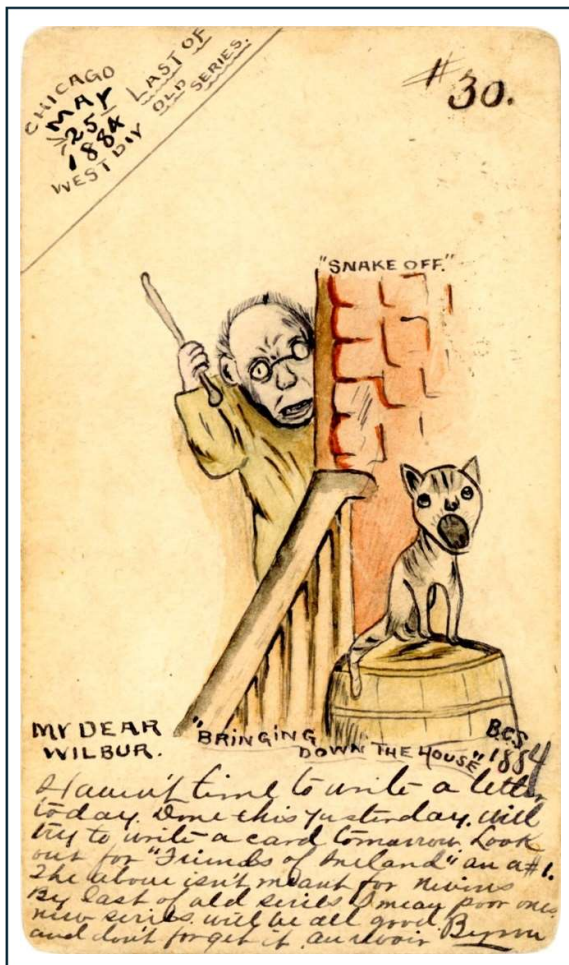
If two men have their hands around a woman's waist, the 'ignorance' usually refers to a third party (like a husband or suitor) who is unaware of the situation.

The two men are 'competing' for her waist without the other knowing. It suggests a 'blissful' unawareness of the crowded or scandalous nature of the embrace.

The phrase '**Norwegian High Life**' is a specific 1880s regional joke, referencing the large Scandinavian (Norwegian and Swedish) immigrant population in Chicago at the time. 'High Life' was a common Victorian term for the elite or fashionable society. By labelling a scene of two men clutching a woman's waist as 'Norwegian High Life,' the creator (Byron Stevens) was making a sarcastic jab at the supposed 'wild' or 'unrefined' social manners of immigrants. 'When Ignorance is Bliss' refers to the comedic secrecy of the embrace, while 'Norwegian High Life' serves as a sarcastic ethnic label for the rowdy disorderly behaviour depicted.



25 May 1884 'Snake Off'



The artist Byron Stevens tried to look after a stray dog, but he was unsuccessful. He tried several different methods to get rid of it.

This expression '**Bringing down the house**' originated in 18th century theatre, where the 'house' refers to the theatre building itself or the full audience within it.

The noise generated by enthusiastic cheering and clapping was so loud that it was hyperbolically said to threaten the very structure of the building.

The expression '**Snake off**' is the biblical metaphor of 'shaking off' a harmful individual, in this case the dog...

In the handwritten text at the bottom, Byron reminds his friend Wilbur to 'look out for The Friends of Ireland', his next cartoon.

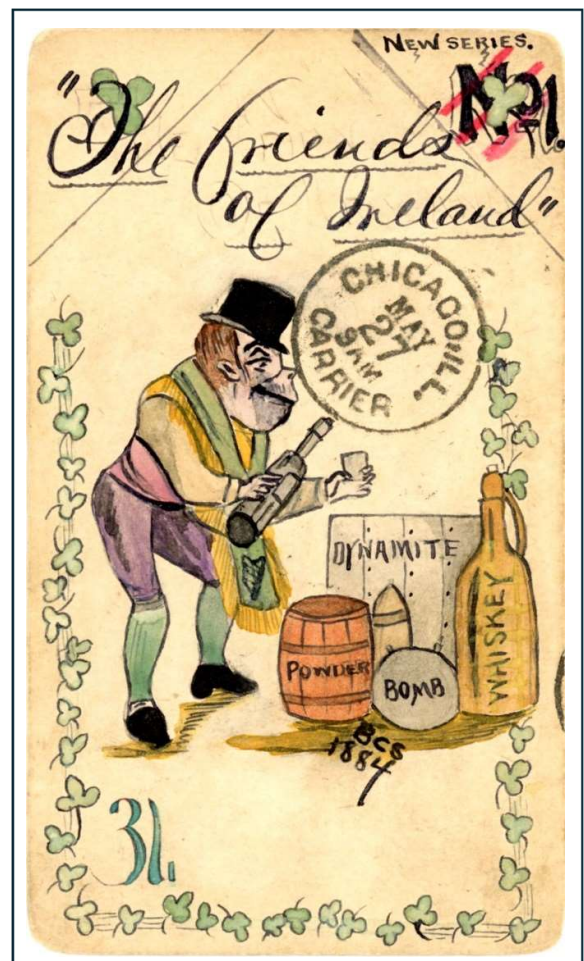
27 May 1884 – 'The Friends of Ireland'

The presence of '**dynamite, whiskey and bombs**' in relation to '**The Friends of Ireland**' refers to the Fenian dynamite campaign of 1881-1885, a period of intense political violence aimed at ending British rule in Ireland.

'The Friends of Ireland' was a name used by various Irish-American support groups over the years. In 1884, it refers to supporters (including **Clan na Gael** and the **United Irishmen of America**) of Irish republican paramilitary groups that funded or orchestrated attacks in Great Britain.

'Dynamite' and 'bombs' were the primary weapons used during this campaign. Irish-American Fenians, in response to their lack of direction in the 1880s, deployed recently invented high explosives to attack British government and civilian targets in cities like London, which was the first urban bombing campaign in history.

'Whiskey' in the phrase as a derogatory and stereotypical jab at the Irish, rather than a functional part of the campaign. News reports and English literature of the era often depicted Fenian sympathizers and agitators through negative cultural stereotypes, portraying them as drunks or charlatans to question their political goals and undermine their cause.





The expression '**Biddy McGee**' is a prototypical 'Stage Irish' name used in 19th century American culture to represent a stereotypical Irish woman, often a domestic servant. It combines a common diminutive of '**Bridget**' with a popular Irish surname to create a generic, often mocking, character.

Biddy is a diminutive or pet form of Bridget, which was arguably the most common name for Irish women in the 19th and early 20th century. McGee is an anglicized form of the **Gaelic Mag Aoidh** ('son of Aodh' or 'fire'), a very common surname in Ulster and later throughout the Irish diaspora. The combination of these common names '**Biddy McGee**' became a placeholder name, much like 'Jane Doe' or 'Average Joe,' but specifically for a lower-class Irish immigrant woman.

In 1884, '**Biddy McGee**' was a staple name used in vaudeville, minstrel shows, and comic songs. The name '**Biddy**' was often used as a generic, sometimes derogatory, term for an Irish domestic servant or '**hired girl**'.

A popular jig and comic song titled '**Biddy McGee**' was frequently performed on the Chicago stage during this period. It often depicted a boisterous, witty, and sometimes 'rowdy' Irish woman who held her own in the chaotic urban environment of 19th century Chicago.

During 1884 elections, names like '**Biddy McGee**' were used in political satire to represent the influential Irish-American voting bloc in Chicago's wards. She stood as a personification of the 'High Life' and the vibrant, noisy street culture.

9 June 1884

After a short courtship, Byron Clifford Stevens married **Augusta Langguth** (1864-1941), daughter of a German immigrant, on 9 June 1884.

18 June 1884 - 'The 4th July Fiend'



The word **'fiend'** originally comes from the Old English word **'fēond,'** meaning **'enemy'** and shares a linguistic origin with the word **'friend'** (from verbs for **'to hate'** and **'to love,'** respectively). It is used to indicate the unfriendly action of throwing fire crackers to people.

'The 4th July Fiend' refers to a humorous and satirical character, likely a self-deprecating caricature that represents the chaotic and 'rowdy' spirit of American Independence Day celebrations.

In the late 19th century, a 'fiend' was a common slang term for someone obsessed with a particular activity (an 'addict' today). A '4th July Fiend' was a person - often a young man - who became excessively 'fiendish' about using an abundance of firecrackers, cannons, and 'torpedoes' to create as much noise as possible, and participating in the boisterous street culture of 1880s Chicago, which often involved public pranks and exuberant celebrations that bordered on 'disorderly conduct.'

In 1880s illustrations and comic prints, a '4th July Fiend' was often depicted as a soot-covered man surrounded by smoke, holding a lit fuse or a giant firecracker. The 4th July Fiend was Byron Stevens's way of labelling the reckless, fun-loving American youth of the era.

21 June 1884 - 'Mrs O'Toole'

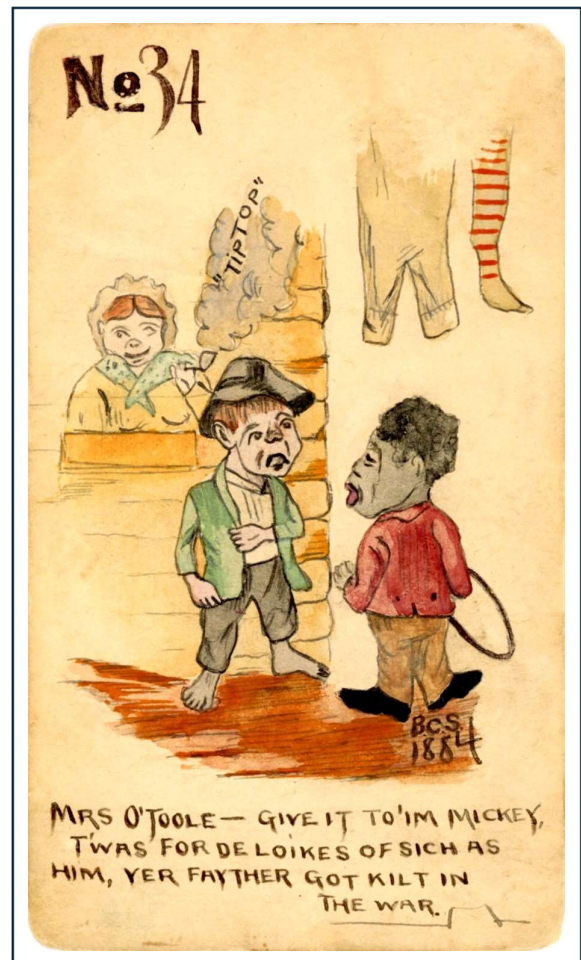
The quote **'Give it to him Mickey, t'was for de loikes of sich as him, yer father got kilt in the war'** is an expression of nationalistic, ethnic, and class-based resentment and encouragement to fight.

'Give it to him Mickey' is an encouragement to a person named Mickey to fight or strike the 'him' in the scenario.

'T'was for de loikes of sich as him' is referring to someone perceived as an adversary, perhaps a member of a rival group. The phonetic spelling ('de loikes of sich as him') suggests a specific dialect, likely Irish.

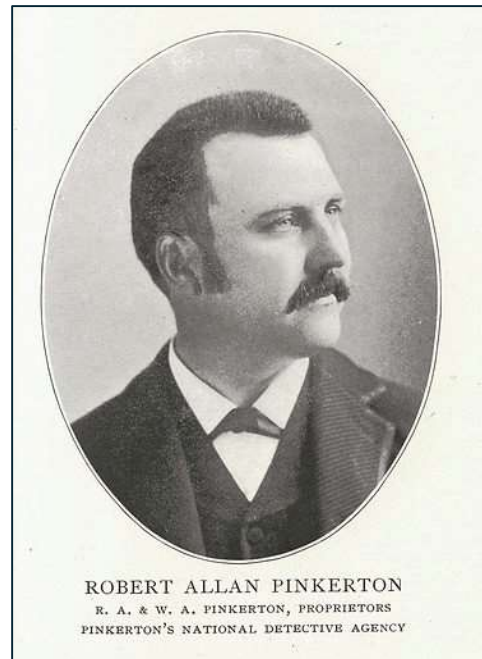
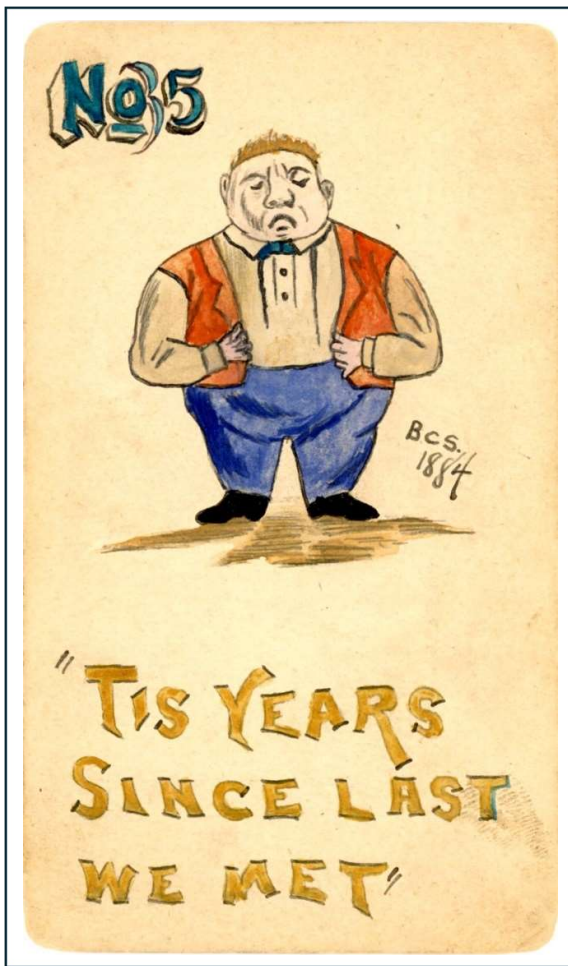
'Yer father got kilt in the war' suggests that Mickey's father was killed fighting against people like the current adversary. This ties the current conflict back to a historical grievance and a personal sacrifice.

Overall, the line is a powerful rhetorical device used to motivate Mickey by invoking the memory of his father's death and framing the current conflict as a continuation of that struggle, making it a matter of personal and collective honor. The speaker (**Mrs. O'Toole**) is using the past sacrifice to justify and intensify the present action.



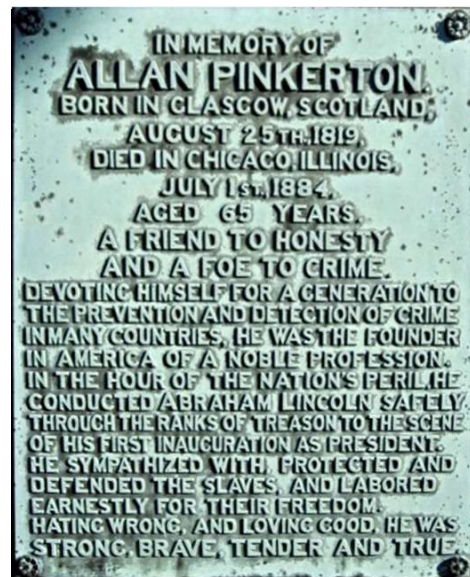
1 July 1884 – 'T'is years since we last met'

On Tuesday **1 July 1884**, Byron Stevens (the artist) received sad news; his longtime friend **Robert Allan Pinkerton** died unexpectedly, **aged 65 years**.



Above : State portrait of Robert Pinkerton

Below : memorial plate on his grave



Robert Allan Pinkerton was a prominent Scottish-American detective, spymaster, and abolitionist who founded the first national law enforcement agency in the United States.

He was born on **25 August 1819** in Glasgow, Scotland. He is buried on Graceland Cemetery, Chicago.

In 1850, he established the Pinkerton National Detective Agency. The agency used the slogan '**We Never Sleep**' and a wide-open eye logo, which is the origin of the term 'private eye'. Allan Pinkerton headed the Union Intelligence Service (1861–1862), a predecessor to the U.S. Secret Service. He famously thwarted a plot to assassinate President-elect Abraham Lincoln in Baltimore in 1861.

His home in Dundee, Illinois, was a major stop on the Underground Railroad, Pinkerton was hired by railroads to hunt famous criminals like **Jesse James** and **The Reno Gang**. He also personally assisted **Frederick Douglass** and **John Brown**, two of the most prominent abolitionists.

Pinkerton's death on **1 July 1884** was remarkably unusual for a man who lived a life of danger. In late June, he slipped on a pavement in Chicago and bit his tongue. He did not seek immediate treatment, and the resulting gangrene infection proved fatal.

After Allan Pinkerton died in 1884, his two sons, **Robert** and **William** took control of his agency. The company continued to grow under their watch, and by the 1890s, it boasted 2,000 detectives and 30,000 reserves, more men than the standing army of the United States.



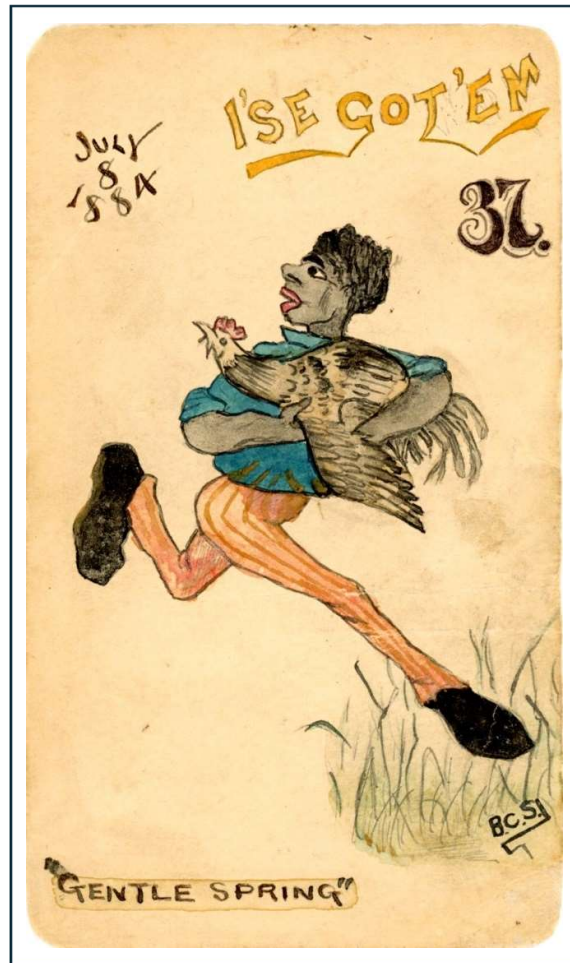
In **July 1884**, a special request was made for the **Liberty Bell** to be taken to the World's Industrial and Cotton Exposition in New Orleans. This marked the first time the Liberty Bell had ever left Philadelphia, which was a significant event given that the South was seeking to establish a stake in the national icon following the Civil War.

Coincidentally, on 4 July 1884, the completed **Statue of Liberty** was formally presented to the US ambassador in a ceremony held in Paris, France. Although the Statue of Liberty arrived in the US that month, this was a separate event and a different symbol of liberty to the Liberty Bell in Philadelphia.

For the festivities, the artist Byron Stevens shaved, got dressed up and, looking satisfactorily in the mirror, mumbled, 'Ah! Dear Boy'.

The phrase '**Ah! Dear Boy**' on a postcard of a perfectly groomed man carries layers of irony, social standing and 19th century slang. If the grooming was overly perfect, it might imply that the man was a 'half-hour gentleman', a term of derision for someone whose polished appearance was only superficial and did not reflect true breeding. 'Ah! Dear Boy' was a classic Victorian greeting between men of the upper or aspiring middle classes. It signalled a level of casual intimacy and shared social status.

Stevens' work on cards like the 'Ah! Dear Boy' cartoon demonstrates a sophisticated level of self-parody that was ahead of its time. By inserting his own likeness into the cartoon, Stevens bridged the gap between the creator and the consumer, transforming himself into one of the very caricatures he used to lampoon Victorian social norms. This blend of formal artistic skill and irreverent humour allowed Stevens to navigate both the world of serious illustration and the profitable market for 'burlesque' ephemera, leaving behind a visual record that is as much a personal diary as it is a chronicle of 1880s pop culture.



Gentle Spring is a popular Victorian-era song and musical piece from the extravagant theatrical production **'Babil and Bijou'**. Byron Stevens used the title for a very different topic when a young boy from Kankakee stole one of his chickens and made a **'Gentle Spring'** (a jump) to get away with it. The headline **'I'se got him'** is dialect for **'he has got him'** (the thief got the chicken).



The phrase 'Gentle Spring' originally refers to a hit song from the 1880 musical spectacle 'Babil and Bijou.' It was an elaborate 'fairy spectacle' known for its grand costumes and exotic settings. The song 'Gentle Spring' was a sentimental celebration of nature and the changing seasons.

According a newspaper article of **7 July 1884**, a young man from Kankakee, Illinois, was caught trying to steal a chicken. To escape, the thief made a sudden, athletic leap over a fence. In his correspondence with Wilbur Sibley, Byron Stevens described the escape as a 'Gentle Spring.' He was playing on the double meaning of 'spring' : the physical 'spring' or leap the thief took to get away.

By using the title of a refined, popular song to describe a messy street crime, Stevens was engaging in satire. This allowed him to mock the 'high-life' sensibilities of the era while documenting the 'rowdy' everyday life in 1884 Chicago.

Left : reduced size copy of the poster from Spring Gentle Spring.

14 July 1884 - 'My girl, she lives in Kankakee'



The phrase is the opening line to the well-known American folk and blues song 'Kankakee' or '**Kankakee Blues**', written by **Lester McFarland** and **Robert A. Gardner**, a popular blind folk duo from Kentucky known as **McFarland & Gardner**.

The song is a notable example of early 'mountain' or old-time music, featuring the duo's signature vocal harmonies accompanied by guitar and mandolin. It has since been recognized as a regional folk standard, with later versions recorded by artists such as The Songbird Blues Band.

The song tells a simple story of a man whose love interest lives in the city of Kankakee, Illinois, often expressing a desire to travel there to see her.

He wrote to his friend Wilbur Sibley to tell him that he was coming to Kankakee to meet him.

*My girl, she lives in Kankakee
I'm visiting there for her to see
I'll see her before I go to bed
Or I'll paint the town red, red.*

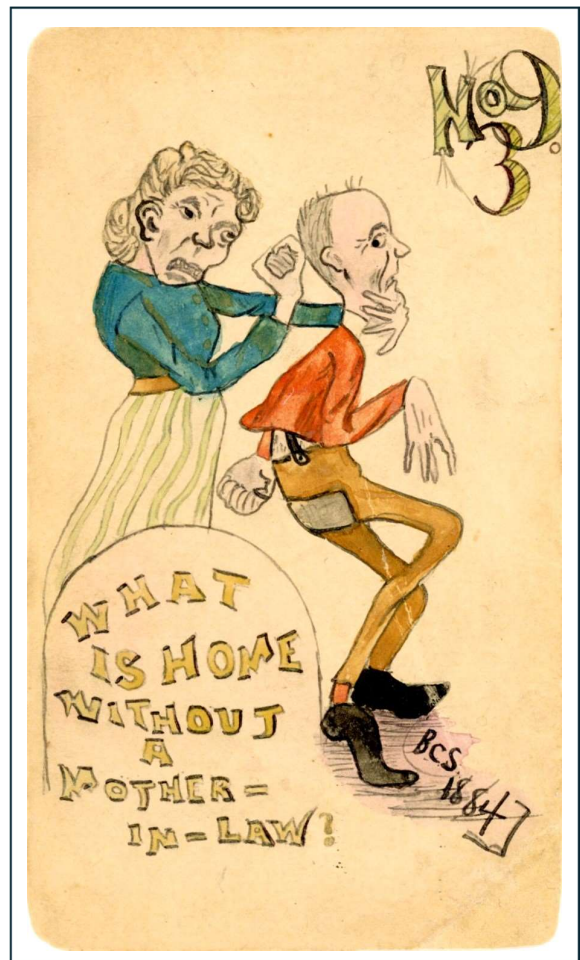
18 July 1884 – 'What is Home without a Mother-in-law?'

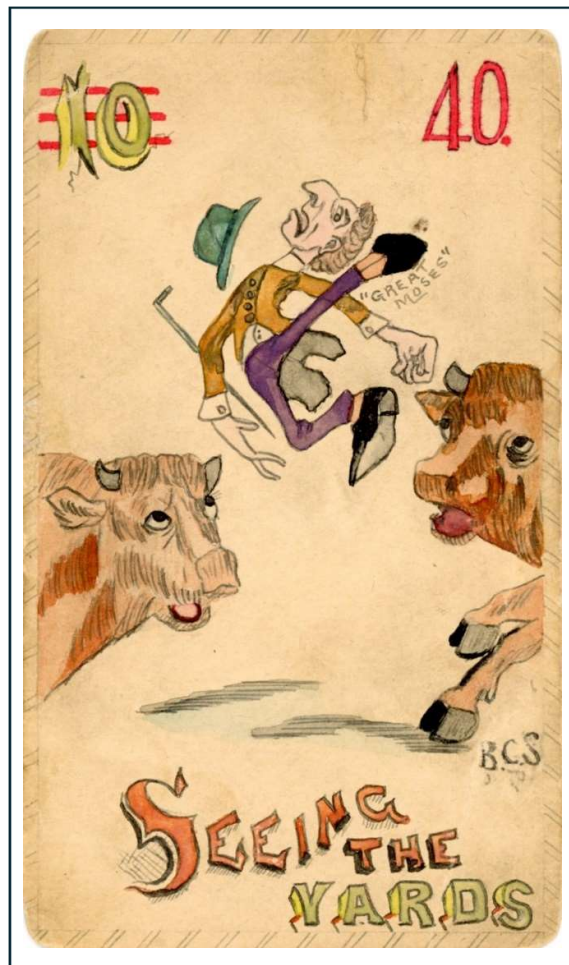
The phrase has been in popular culture for well over a century: a comic ditty titled 'What is home without a mother-in-law' was published with lyrics by **Grace Carleton** in **1874**. A silent film with the title 'What Is Home Without a Mother-in-Law?' was produced in 1907.

'What is home without a mother-in-law?' is a common question that functions as the setup for a joke, or as a reference to the comedic stereotype of the interfering or overbearing mother-in-law.

The expected answer to the question is typically a punchline that plays on the idea that the absence of a mother-in-law makes a home a much better, quieter, or more peaceful place.

The phrase is a direct parody of the sentimental late-Victorian song and poem '**What Is Home Without a Mother?**'. By replacing '**mother**' with '**mother-in-law**', the phrase uses the contrast between the revered image of a loving mother and the stereotyped, often humorously despised, figure of the mother-in-law for comedic effect.





In 1884 Chicago, the phrase '**Seeing the Yards**' (or 'a trip to the Yards') referred to visiting the **Union Stock Yard**, the city's massive meatpacking district that was the largest in the world. By 1884, the Stock Yards were not just an industrial hub but **a primary tourist destination**. Visitors came to witness the 'disassembly line' where animals were processed with industrial efficiency. It was considered a marvel of the modern age, representing Chicago's status as the '**Hog Butcher for the World**'.

For visitors to Chicago in the 1880s, 'Seeing the Yards' was as essential as visiting the city's first skyscrapers. Many visitors began their trip at the Union Stock Yard Gate (built in 1879), which still stands today as a Chicago Landmark. A typical tour included walking through elevated galleries to watch the slaughtering and dressing of cattle, hogs, and sheep.

Historical accounts frequently mention the 'legendary smell' and the electric lights that made the Yards a 24-hour operation. The Yards and the adjacent 'Back of the Yards' neighbourhood were known for their vibrant, rough, and 'rowdy' immigrant culture. For a gentleman like Byron Stevens, 'Seeing the Yards' was a way to experience the raw, powerful engine of Chicago's economy while gathering the 'street colour'.

In the Victorian era, it was considered improper or even blasphemous to use the name of God in vain. To express strong emotion without 'swearing,' people used 'minced' versions of religious names. Alternative to 'Great God', Byron Stevens used '**Great Moses!**', served as a socially acceptable way to exclaim at a surprising event (when he was kicked by a bull or cow during his visit to the Yards). Other similar expressions were 'Holy Moses', 'Great Scott' or 'Great Caesar's Ghost'.



'Die Wacht am Rhein' (The Watch on the Rhine) is a famous German patriotic anthem that served as the unofficial national anthem of the German Empire in 1884. Written as a poem by **Max Schneckenburger** in 1840 during a crisis with France, it was set to music by Karl Wilhelm in 1854. It calls for national unity and the defence of the Rhine River against potential French annexation, with the famous refrain: 'Dear fatherland, put your mind at rest / Firm and true stands the Watch on the Rhine'.

The song became a massive cultural phenomenon during and after the Franco-Prussian War (1870–1871), symbolizing the birth of a unified Germany. In 1884, Chicago was home to one of the largest German-immigrant populations in the world, and 'Die Wacht am Rhein' was a central element of their social and political life.

There were several political organisations in Chicago who wanted the German culture to be preserved by the immigrants. The German Aid Society (**Deutsche Gesellschaft von Chicago**) was established in 1854 and provided essential services to new German-speaking immigrants including financial assistance, clothing, healthcare expenses, and an employment office. The German Workers' Clubs (**Arbeiter-Vereine**) brought radical ideas from Europe (including friends of Karl Marx) and were at the forefront of Chicago's labour movement in the 1880s. These organizations served as a centre for a vigorous cultural and social movement and were instrumental in forming trade unions and advocating for labour rights. Newspapers like the **Chicagoer Arbeiter-Zeitung** and **Illinois Staats-Zeitung** served the massive German-speaking population, covering local politics and events in both German and English.

Byron Stevens, although married with a German immigrant, was a cold supporter of the Germanic heritage but rarely expressed his feelings openly.

4 August 1884 - 'Is That a Man?'



The bottom-line question '**Is that a man?**' depends heavily on the specific situation in which it was uttered or written.

The late 19th century saw emerging discussions around masculinity and gender roles. A question like 'Is that a man?' might have been asked in a situation where a person's appearance, dress, or behaviour challenged conventional Victorian gender norms.

In Scottish dialect, the phrase 'Is that a man or 'oman?' (pronounced 'oman' as a colloquial shortening of 'woman') was used in the late 19th century to question someone's gender, suggesting it may have been a local usage around that time.

The expression was also a common comedic trope used in minstrel shows and vaudeville theatre. The phrase was typically used as a punchline or a recurring gag to mock a character's appearance, specifically targeting the working-class Irish or African American characters portrayed on stage.

The question was a way for straight man in a comedy duo to mock a female character's lack of traditional grace. In vaudeville, many female roles were played by men in drag. Using "**oman**" was a meta joke that acknowledged the performer's actual gender while insulting the character's beauty.

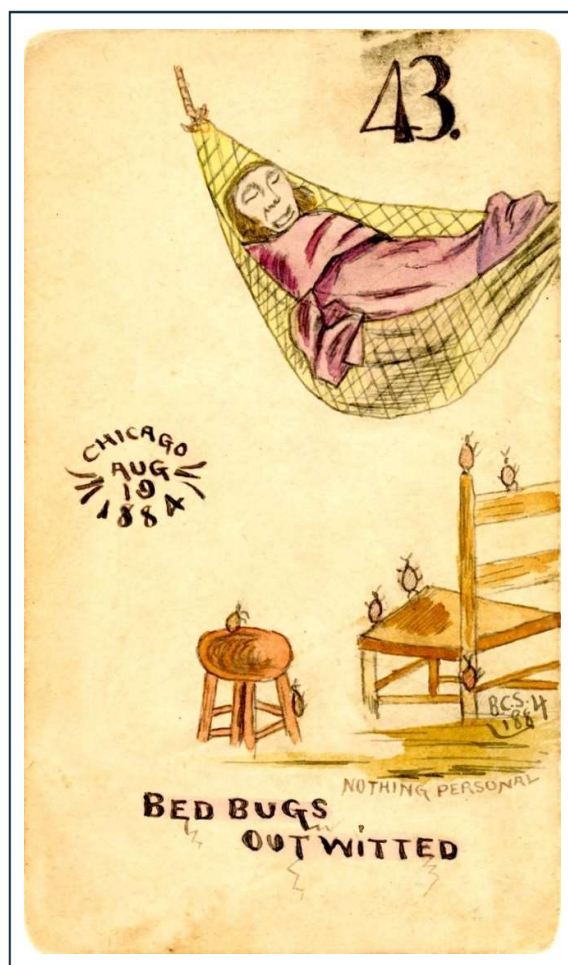
19 August 1884 – 'Bed Bugs outwitted'

In 1884 Chicago, bed bugs were a widespread problem, and while people employed various methods to control them, they were far from being 'outwitted'; effective eradication would not be achieved until the mid-20th century with potent chemicals like DDT. Methods used in the 1880s were often ineffective and sometimes dangerous to human health.

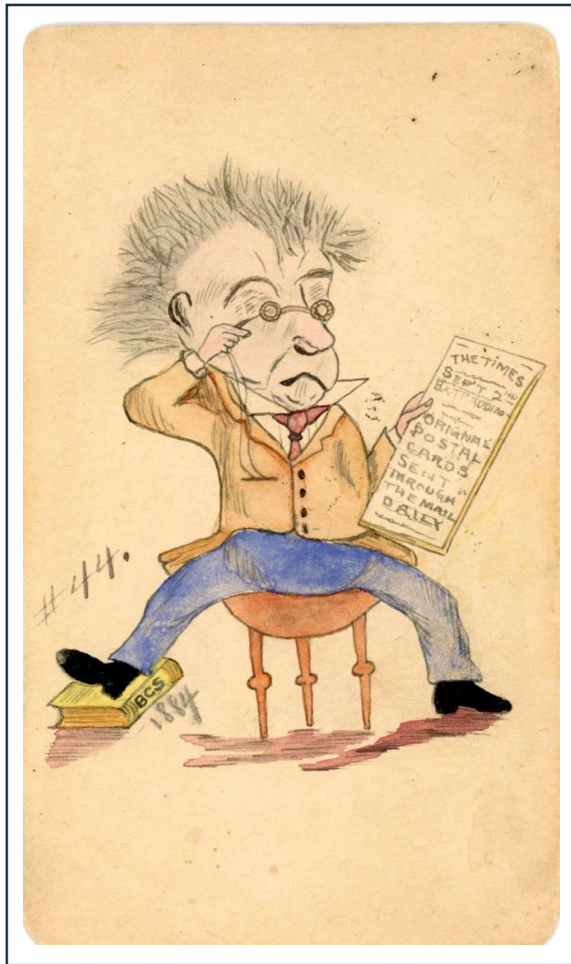
People primarily relied on a mix of vigilance, physical removal, and toxic chemical applications to manage bed bug infestations. Hand-picking and crushing was the most basic method, it involved manually searching for and destroying bugs and eggs.

Alternatively, beddings were doused with boiling water to kill bugs and eggs. Cotton mattresses, which were becoming more common, made this process easier as they could be boiled. A highly dangerous method involved using candles or plumbers' torches to burn bugs out of crevices in bed frames, which often resulted in fire hazards.

But Byron C. Stevens developed his own effective method and showed in on postcard to his friend. The 'nothing personal' remark at the bottom was a satiric remark to his friend after a probably annoying experience when sleeping over in Kankakee...



2 September 1884 – 'Original Postcards'



An article published in the **Chicago Times** of 2 September 1884, referring to '**original postal cards sent through the mail daily**', highlights the routine use of official, government-issued postcards as a cheap and efficient form of mass communication in the United States.

The concept of 'original postcards' refers to early, unillustrated government cards or potentially Stevens's very first hand-painted, privately-produced cards. By 1884, sending a message on a pre-printed government card was already a standard practice since 1873. Private postcards were only allowed from 1 July 1898 onwards.

The drawing depicts the artist Byron Stevens, who was (satirically) surprised by the news. He was sending cards already for almost a year...

22 September 1884 - 'A Political Debate'

The primary political dispute in the USA was the highly personal and bitter 1884 presidential election campaign between **Democrat Grover Cleveland** and **Republican James G. Blaine**.

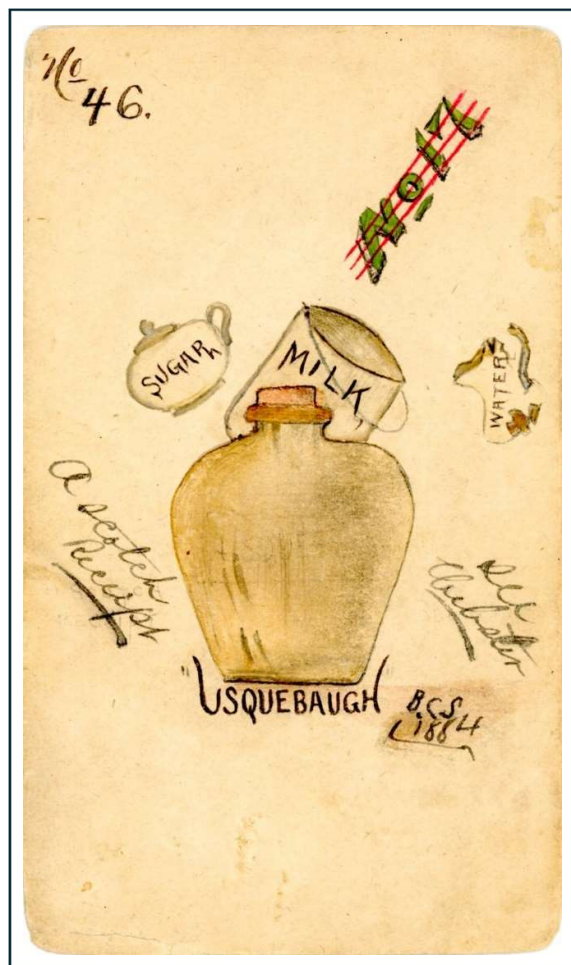
Cleveland was accused of having fathered an illegitimate child, a charge he honestly admitted might be true. Republican opponents chanted, '**Ma! Ma! Where's my Pa? Gone to the White House—Ha! Ha! Ha!**'.

Blaine, a long-time Congressman and Senator, was known as 'Slippery Jim' due to his alleged involvement in corrupt railroad deals, which were detailed in the 'Mulligan letters'. Democrats famously chanted, '**Blaine, Blaine, James G. Blaine, the continental liar from the state of Maine!**'.

A deciding moment came when a Protestant minister supporting Blaine referred to the Democrats as the party of '**rum, Romanism, and rebellion**' (a slur against Irish Catholics, temperance advocates, and Southerners).

Blaine failed to disavow the remark, which cost him crucial votes in New York and ultimately the election. Blaine further damaged his working-class appeal by attending an extravagant dinner with millionaires, which opponents dubbed '**The Boodle Banquet**'.





The term **Usquebaugh** (pronounced **Us-kwuh-baw**) is an archaic Anglicized form of the Gaelic words for whiskey, directly translating to 'water of life'. It serves as the linguistic ancestor of the modern English words 'whisky' and 'whiskey'.

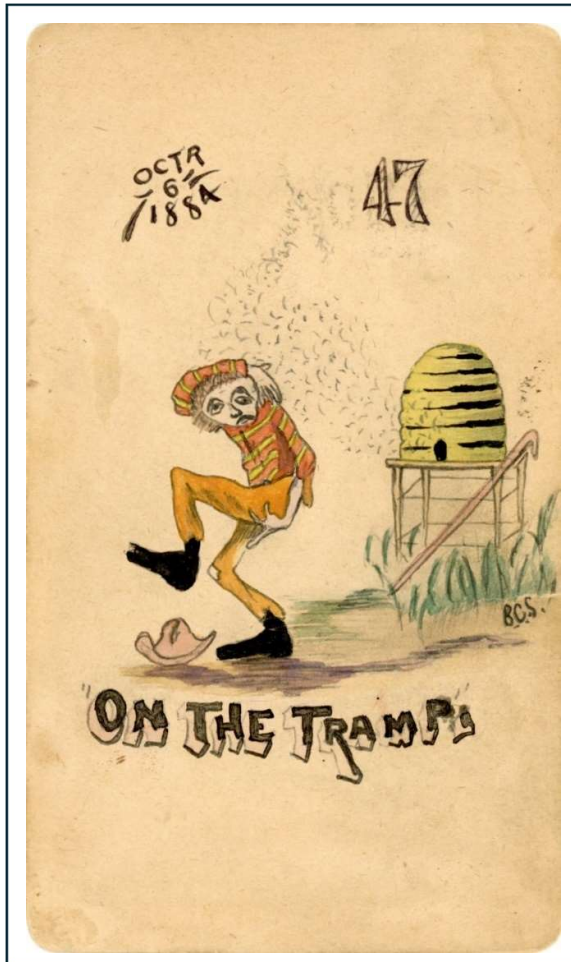
The term originated from a combination of Gaelic words that mirror the Latin term *aqua vitae*. It is derived from the Old Irish **uisce** (water) **beatha** (life) and Scottish Gaelic **uisge beatha**. The 'water of life' meaning is shared by other global spirits, including Scandinavian Akvavit, French Eau-de-vie, and even Vodka (which literally means 'little water').

Over centuries, the term underwent several stages of 'Anglicization' and abbreviations. Usquebaugh was the full phonetic spelling used in the 16th and 17th century. Usquebae / Usquebea was a common Scottish variation where the final syllable began to soften. **Usky / Usque** was a shortened version that dropped the second word entirely. Whisky became the final modern evolution, which replaced the 'u' sound with a 'w'.

The earliest known written use of 'usquebaugh' in English dates back to 1581. It was famously defined in Samuel Johnson's 1755 dictionary, where he noted that 'by corruption, in Scottish they call it whisky'. In the medieval period, 'usquebaugh' was initially used by monks and apothecaries as a medicine for ailments such as smallpox and colic.

While rarely used in everyday speech today, it remains a 'folkloric synonym' for whisky in literature and poetry, most notably in Robert Burns' 1791 poem Tam O'Shanter: '**Wi' usquebae, we'll face the devil**'. Historically, usquebaugh was not always the clear or amber spirit we know as modern whiskey. It was often a compound spirit flavoured with botanicals like licorice, fennel, aniseed, and saffron for colour. This 'spiced' version remained popular until the late 18th century.

6 October 1884 - 'On the Tramp'



The expression 'On the Tramp' specifically relates to individuals who avoid consistent work. In the hierarchy of 19th century transients, being a 'tramp' was strictly differentiated from being a 'hobo' based on their willingness to labour. During the industrial era, there was a clearly understood social division among mobile, homeless men. A migratory worker who travels and works was called a **Hobo**. A migratory person who travels but avoids work if possible was called a **Tramp**. While they might take occasional 'odd jobs' when forced by hunger or desperation, they generally preferred to live off charity or scavenging.

A stationary person who neither travels nor works, was called a **Bum** often associated with alcoholism and staying in city slums.

For many who were 'on the tramp', work avoidance was seen as a way of life or even a form of social protest. Historical sociological studies defined the tramp as one who 'dreams and wanders,' as opposed to the hobo who 'works and wanders'. Some tramps intentionally avoided participating in the economic system as a rejection of the exploitative conditions of low-wage labour during the Gilded Age.

In the Byron Stevens's anecdotes, his use of 'on the tramp' playfully poked fun at friends or rowdy characters who preferred 'wandering freedom' over the 'respectable' life of labour expected in 1884 Chicago.

9 October 1884 - 'Let me like a soldier fall'

The expression 'Let me like a soldier fall' is a direct quote of a popular well-known song of the era. The phrase is from the tenor aria 'Yes! Let Me Like a Soldier Fall' in William **Vincent Wallace's** opera **Maritana**.

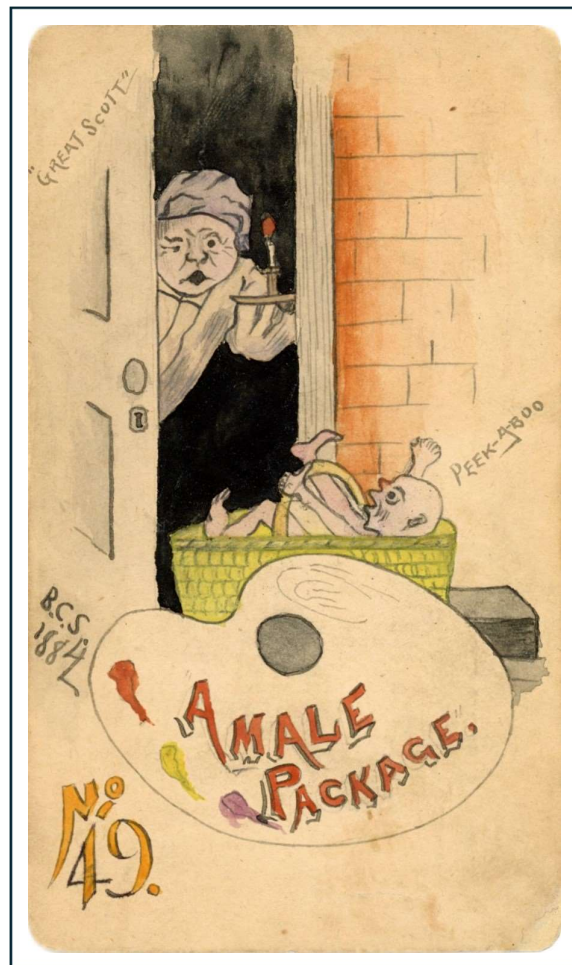
In the opera, the hero, Don Caesar de Bazan, is sentenced to death. Rather than being hanged like a common criminal, he wants to be executed by a firing squad so he can 'die with honour' on the battlefield of life. It was the 'epic ballad' of its day, known for its dramatic, soaring melody and themes of noble sacrifice.

In social circles, the phrase was used satirically or dramatically in several ways: if a man was facing a social 'disaster' - such as a rejected marriage proposal or a public embarrassment - he might dramatically exclaim, 'Let me like a soldier fall!'

In Victorian 'comic' postcards, this phrase often appeared as a caption for humorous illustrations, such as: a man tripping over his own walking stick (or 'pole'), a 'perfectly groomed' gentleman (a 'Swell') falling into a puddle.

The satiric drawing from Byron Stevens shows a cart driver being kicked by the horse, a less noble way for a heroic death in battle...





In a rapidly growing city like Chicago, **'doorstep babies'** (also commonly known as **foundlings**) referred to infants abandoned by their parents in public or semi-private places - literally on the doorsteps of private homes, churches, or specialized institutions, were a real phenomenon. The phrase 'a male package' used as a caption for an image of a baby boy left on a doorstep was a satirical play on the Victorian postal boom and the then-rising concept of **'mail-order'** goods..

The term 'doorstep babies' described a tragic social reality of the Victorian era. Because there was a severe social stigma against unwed mothers and few resources for the extreme poor, desperate parents (usually mothers) would leave their infants in places where they hoped the child would be discovered and cared for.

'Great Scott' (above left) was a popular exclamation of surprise or astonishment in the late 19th century, equivalent to saying 'My Goodness!' or 'Good Heavens!'. This line would have been the woman's reaction to opening her door and seeing an abandoned baby.

'Peek-a-boo' refers to the traditional children's game where one hides their face and then suddenly reveals it. This line is attributed to the baby in the picture (anthropomorphizing the infant, much like in a comic strip) as its way of greeting the woman, adding a layer of ironic, dark humour to the situation of abandonment.

In this scene, the phrase 'A male package' is a euphemism or a crude, jocular term used to refer to the baby itself. The humour comes from reducing a human infant to an inanimate object that was delivered like a parcel or a package and left on the doorstep. This term is a caption below the image, provided for the viewer's amusement. People were becoming accustomed to receiving almost anything via the post. By labelling a foundling or an abandoned baby as a 'male package,' the sender was jokingly suggesting that children could be ordered and delivered just like a set of tools or a new suit.

29 October 1884 – 'A Crabbed Person'



In 1884, and still today, 'crabbed' is an adjective that means cross, ill-tempered, irritable, or peevish.

The cartoon on the card is a visual joke designed to illustrate this abstract personality trait literally: the man is likely intended to be a character known for his bad temper or grouchy demeanour. He is physically being attacked ('bitten') by an actual crab.

The humour comes from the direct, absurd visualization of the idiom. The man is a 'crabbed' person because his personality is 'crabbed' (grumpy), and he is being physically 'crabbed' (being bitten by a crab).

Byron made this cartoon after his marriage with Augusta Langguth was broken up. For him, Augusta was the crab that bit him... a metaphor for the money he lost by the divorce.

4 November 1884 - 'Election Day'

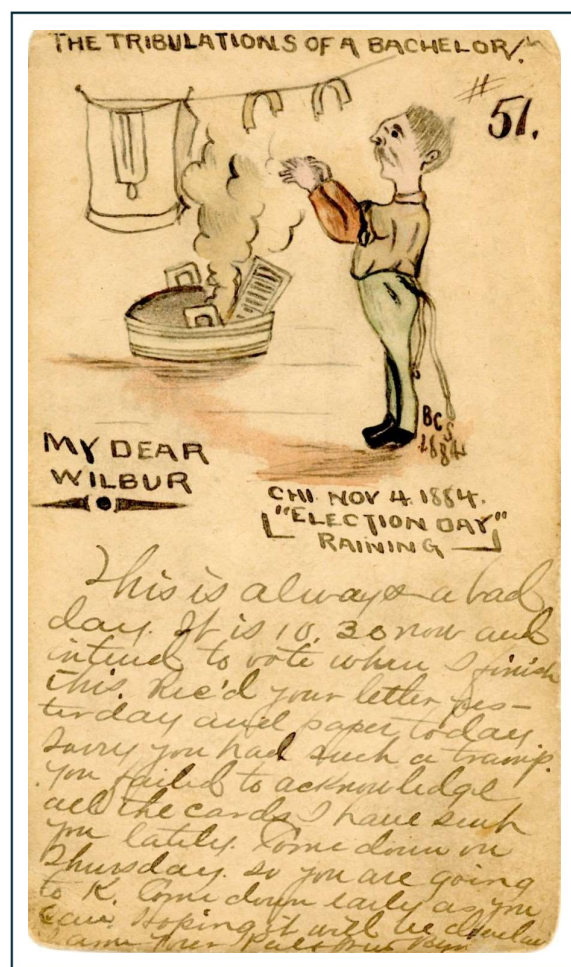
The phrase '**The tribulations of a bachelor**' at the top of the card refers to the specific difficulties, struggles, or annoying life experiences faced by a man who is not married.

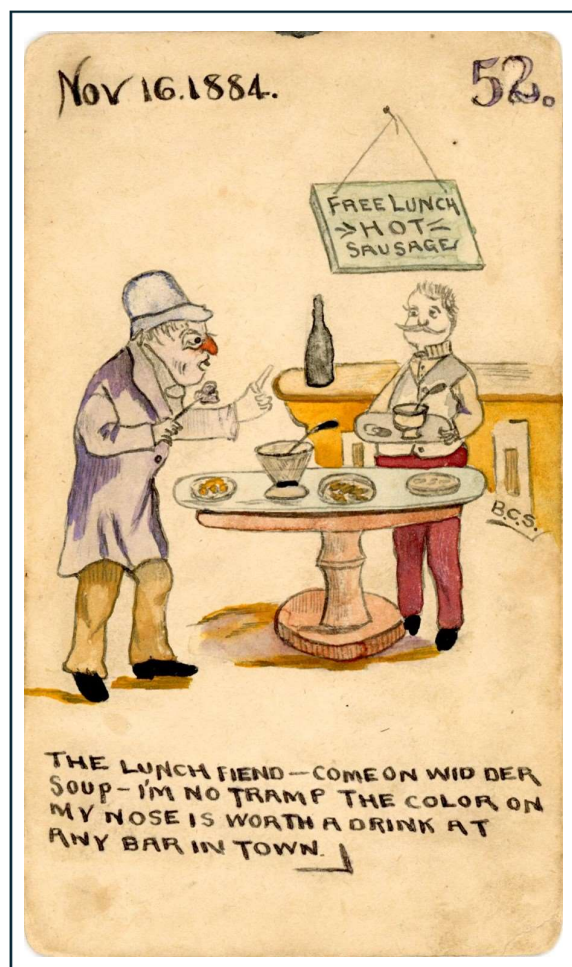
The term is often used humorously to describe the unique inconveniences of single life, such as difficulties with housekeeping, cooking for one, or maintaining a home without a partner, the pressures of the 'dating game,' dealing with societal expectations to marry, or the loneliness that can accompany long-term singledom.

While the word 'tribulation' often carries heavy religious or biblical weight—referring to intense spiritual testing or the apocalyptic 'Great Tribulation'—the phrase 'tribulations of a bachelor' is almost always used in a lighter, secular sense to describe the mundane 'trials and tribulations' of daily life as a single person.

The artist Byron Stevens was (again) a bachelor on Election Day. He had to do his own washing while it's raining outside. He was also planning to go vote at 10:30, as he writes to his friend Wilbur Sibley. But the rain was still falling...

'The tribulations of Byron would linger on for a while...





The board reading '**Free Lunch - Hot Sausage**' is the central element of the joke. The entire scene, including the character identified as 'The lunch fiend' who makes that proud declaration, relies on the culture of the late 19th century American saloon, where free food was offered to paying customers. Saloons commonly offered substantial 'free lunches' (like hot sausage) to attract customers. However, the unwritten rule was that you had to buy a drink to partake in the free food. People who tried to just eat the free food without buying a drink were considered '**tramps**' or '**fiends**'.

The term 'fiend' is primarily a German word meaning 'enemy' and is the etymological root of the English word 'fiend', the common noun for an enemy, foe, or hostile opponent. The from origin English word refers to an evil spirit, demon, or diabolically cruel person. In modern informal usage, it describes a fanatic or an addict (e.g., 'coffee fiend'). The word originates from ancient Germanic verbs for 'to hate,' making it a direct linguistic opposite to 'friend,' which comes from verbs for 'to love'.

In Old English, the word was *fēond*, originally meaning any hostile enemy. In late Old English, its meaning shifted toward religious moods to describe the 'enemy of mankind' (Satan) or demons, while the general sense of 'enemy' was eventually replaced by the word 'foe' or the French-derived 'enemy'. It is related to the Dutch *vijand*, Old Norse *fjándi*, and Gothic *fijands*, all meaning 'foe'.

The character labelled 'The lunch fiend' is a well-dressed but perhaps down-on-his-luck individual trying to eat the free sausage without buying a drink. When challenged by the bartender (or just stating his case to the viewer), he says, 'I'm no tramp, the colour on my nose is worth a drink at any bar in town.' He is arguing that his permanently red, alcohol-damaged nose is visible proof of a lifetime of drinking and patronage. He believes his past spending habits should grant him credit and the right to the 'free' lunch now, without having to buy another drink. The entire scene is a classic piece of 1880s saloon humour, highlighting the tension between the saloon's business model and the customer's desire for a cheap or even free meal.

15 November 1884 – 'The Owl Story'



The phrase '**No ma'am, I didn't come to shoot birds**', in a scene where a man is speaking to a big and a small owl sitting on a tree, is a specific piece of dialogue from a 19th century illustration or comic strip that relies on a pun for its humour.

The joke relies on a play on words where the man is clarifying his intent: he man is responding to an implied accusation or question from the owls (anthropomorphized to speak and understand human language). He is confirming he isn't there to hunt them.

The humour comes from the dual meaning of the word '**hoot**': the sound an owl makes ('hoot, hoot').

The large female owl (addressed as '**madam**') has presumably **hooted** at him, and he is humorously misinterpreting her 'hoot' as an inquiry about his intention to 'shoot' them. The man with the gun is assuring them he didn't come to 'shoot' (or hoot at) them.

19 November 1884 - 'The Boy and the Dog'

The phrase, 'Say boy, what are you going to do with that kettle?' in an illustration showing a little boy with a small dog and a kettle in his hand is a simple, visual, and anthropomorphic joke from the late 19th century.

The humour stems from two main points: the dog is portrayed as being able to speak English and interact with the human child in a sensible, conversational manner and is taking the role of the responsible adult, questioning the child's intentions with the domestic item (the kettle). The dog is acting as the 'straight man' in the comic scene, asking an obvious question that sets up a potentially mischievous action by the boy.

The core of the joke is likely the implied action the boy intends to perform with the kettle. The dog's question adds a layer of dry, observational humour to the scene of domestic mischief.



16 November 1884 – Results of the Presidential Election

In the United States, the Presidential Election Day in 1884 took place on Tuesday 4 November. The results of the 1884 election were only officially confirmed on 16 November 1884. While voting concluded on November 4, the outcome remained in doubt for nearly two weeks due to several factors.

The entire election hinged on New York's 36 electoral votes. Grover Cleveland won the state by a razor-thin margin of just 1,047 votes out of more than 1.1 million cast; Both the Democratic and Republican parties made allegations of voter fraud in New York, which delayed the final certification of the results.

After the final counts were verified, Cleveland was eventually declared the winner on 16 November, making him the first Democrat to win the presidency since before the American Civil War. The 1884 presidential election was a historic turning point in American politics, marking the first time a Democrat won the White House since before the Civil War.

Grover Cleveland (Democrat) defeated James G. Blaine (Republican). He won 219 electoral votes to Blaine's 182.

The Popular Vote was extremely tight; Cleveland received 48.8% (approx. 4.9 million votes) to Blaine's 48.3% (approx. 4.8 million votes).



On the left, the original drawing made by newspaper illustrator Byron C. Stevens on **16 November 1884**.

On the right, a clipping from the French weekly magazine *L'Illustration* of **6 December 1884**.

The similarity between the two drawings is remarkable...



The phrase 'Get up or I knock you down' is a direct and forceful command used in a scene where a policeman jumps on a man lying on the ground. It is a comic or ironic expression, typical of police procedural humour or physical comedy from the late 19th and early 20th century, which highlights a logical absurdity.

The scene: the policeman is ordering the man to stand up and threatens with physical force if the man does not comply. The man is already being physically subdued or pinned to the ground by the officer jumping on him, making it difficult or impossible for him to 'get up.'

The phrase is meant to be humorous by illustrating the officer's aggressive and contradictory logic - he is using force to demand cooperation that the force itself is preventing.

The phrase '**One of the Finest**' is used as sarcastic irony to highlight the contradiction between the officer's violent actions and the idealized reputation of the police force. The phrase originates from the mid-19th century, specifically associated with the NYPD (New York Police Department). It was intended to suggest that only the '**best**' and most virtuous citizens were chosen to protect the city.

Law enforcement agencies and government officials use the term '**finest**' as a laudatory title to represent ideals of heroism, service, and integrity. When applied to an officer beating someone, the phrase serves as a satirical critique: it creates a sharp contrast between the 'fine' ideal of a protector and the 'heinous' reality of excessive force.

In literature or film, this usage often mocks the '**blue wall of silence**' or the way police departments may protect 'rogue' officers despite clear misconduct.

22 November 1884 – ‘As in the days of yore’



The phrase ‘As in the days of yore,’ is used with dark irony to describe a ‘traditional’ or ‘old-fashioned’ way of disciplining a child. When a mother beats a child with a broom while this phrase is used, it carries several layers of meaning:

- ‘**Days of yore**’ were yore refers to time long ago (The Good Old Days). In this scene, it suggests that the mother is using ‘old-school’ corporal punishment-methods that were once common and socially acceptable but are now often viewed as archaic or abusive.
- The phrasing ‘**as in the days of...**’ mimics biblical language (e.g., ‘as in the days of Noah’ or ‘as in the days of yore’ from the Book of Malachi). Using such lofty, solemn language to describe a violent and messy act like a broom-beating creates a jarring contrast.
- Similar to the phrase ‘**one of the finest**’ used for a corrupt policeman, this expression is likely satirical. It mocks the idea of ‘traditional values’ or ‘traditional parenting’ by showing the brutal reality of what those ‘old-fashioned’ methods actually look like.

The reason why Byron Stevens created this caricature is unknown. He didn’t have a wife or children, but maybe the scene took place at the neighbours and Byron overheard the sobbing of the child?

24 November 1884 – ‘A Dumpling’



The word ‘dumpling’ is used as an affectionate term of endearment, similar to calling a child ‘sweetheart,’ ‘honey,’ or ‘little one.’

It describes a child who is perceived as round and full, and the term **dumpling** is used to lovingly describe a healthy, well-fed, and cuddly child. It is a gentle, positive nickname emphasizing the child’s sweetness and endearing qualities.

On the left, a trading card, based on the original cartoon from the artist, used here to promote **Lustro**, a nickel and silver cleaner.





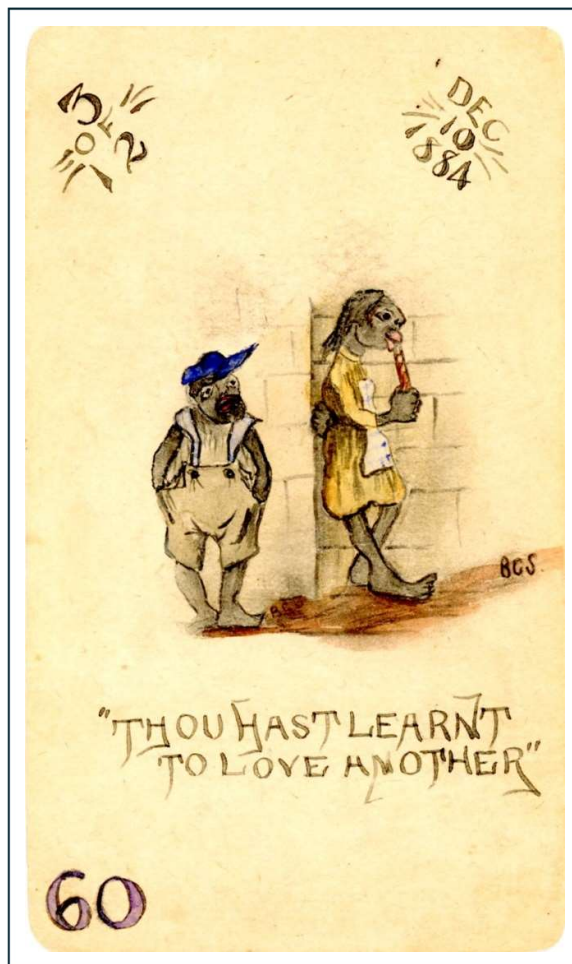
The turkey sitting outside a restaurant with the phrase '**Eat and be Merry**' depicts a classic example of dark humour (or gallows humour) common in late 19th century satire. The humour relies on the stark contrast between two perspectives: for the people inside, 'Eat and be Merry' is a traditional festive blessing, encouraging celebration and indulgence during Thanksgiving. For the turkey sitting outside, the phrase is a grim reminder of mortality. The 'merriment' of the humans is directly fuelled by the death of the 'carcasses hanging inside.' The turkey is essentially a witness to its own species' slaughter.

The date of Thanksgiving was officially designated by President Chester A. Arthur in Proclamation 261, issued on November 7, 1884. At that time, it was tradition for the holiday to be observed on **the last Thursday of November**, which was the 27th in 1884.

This tradition continued until 1939, when President Franklin D. Roosevelt moved the holiday to provide more shopping days before Christmas, eventually leading to the current federal law fixing the date on **the fourth Thursday of November**.

In the text at the bottom, written by Byron Stevens, he mentions the K.K.K. (Ku Klux Klan) dimes. This refers to an old habit of the K.K.K. who were giving out money on Thanksgiving Day. The original Ku Klux Klan (KKK) was active during the Reconstruction era, roughly from 1865 to the early 1870s, after which federal crackdowns diminished its power. It's important to note that while the Klan was largely defunct as a national organization by 1884, local chapters or individuals using the name may have persisted, and the organization's legacy was well-known enough for the term 'K.K.K.' to carry strong negative connotations. The K.K.K. was only reborn in 1915.

10 December 1884 - 'Thou hast learnt to love another'



'Thou hast learnt to love another' is a solemn and archaic expression that means the person being addressed has fallen in love with someone new or different. This phrase conveys a sense of heartbreak, betrayal, or sorrow, as it implies that the speaker was previously the recipient of the other person's love, which has now shifted to someone else.

The language used ('Thou hast learnt') is older, poetic English, suggesting the phrase likely comes from 19th Century or Earlier Literature/Poetry. It is typical of Romantic era poetry or Victorian melodrama, where themes of lost love, fidelity, and emotional betrayal were common.

The phrasing is also very common in traditional songs and religious texts. The expression is dramatic and directly addresses a profound change in affection, marking the end of a relationship or a deep attachment.

Byron Stevens depicts the scene when a man finds out that his sweetheart got a sweet from a new lover...

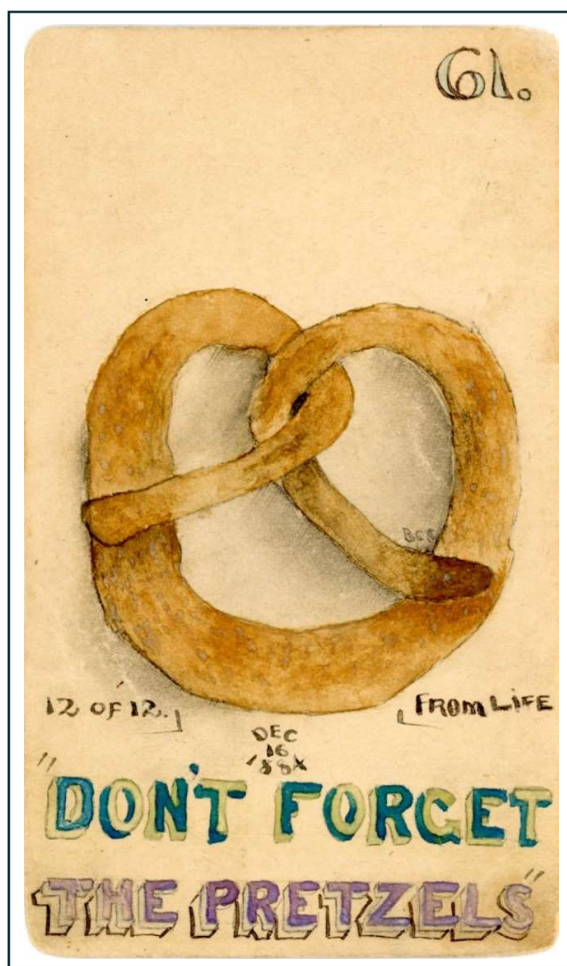
16 December 1884 - 'Don't forget the Pretzels'

'Don't forget the Pretzels' is a literal instruction or a casual remark with a specific, simple meaning within the context it was written.

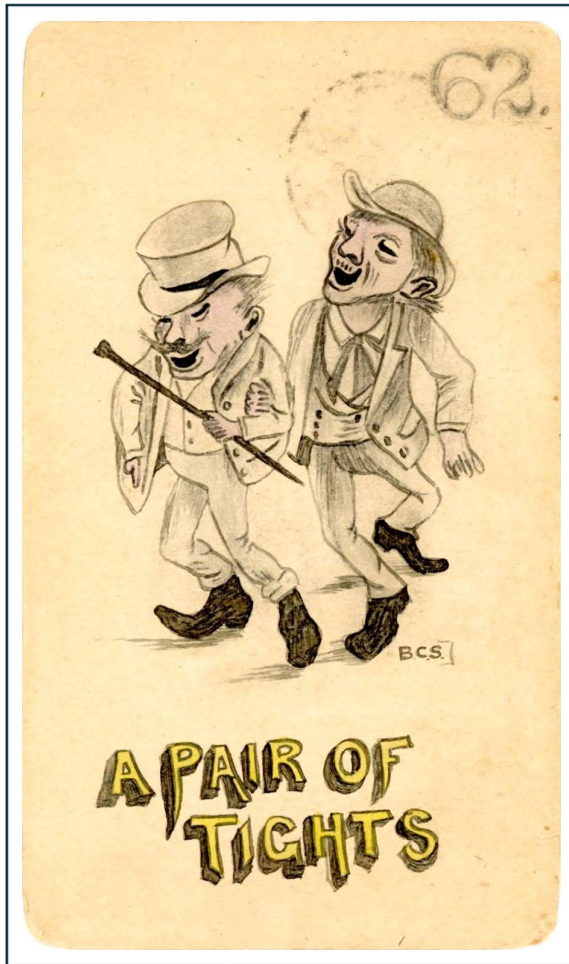
The phrase is meaning literal reminder to purchase, bring, or serve pretzels. Pretzels were a common and inexpensive snack, often served for free in saloons in the late 19th century because their saltiness encouraged customers to buy more beer.

In Chicago, a major city with a large German immigrant population, pretzels would have been a staple item, an essential good or element that is used regularly, consistently, and often daily.

As Byron writes the instruction on a card sent to his friend Wilbur, he only wanted to remember him to get pretzels for his upcoming visit.



21 December 1884 - 'A Pair of Tights'



The phrase 'A Pair of Tights' refers to being in a difficult, awkward, or restrictive situation. It is a play on the word 'tight,' which has several colloquial meanings in 19th century.

'**Tight**' was a very common slang term for being drunk. A 'pair of tights' sarcastically refers to two people seen together in a state of public intoxication.

This fits the 'Rum, Romanism, and Rebellion' themes of the 1884 election, where temperance and alcohol consumption were major political flashpoints.

The term is also often used with irony. Just as literal tights are restrictive and uncomfortable garments, the phrase mocks a person who has lost their freedom by social ruin, or being '**trapped**' by their own scandalous actions.

The two men, depicted caricatural in the cartoon were Byron Stevens and his friend Wilbur Sibley, two unmarried men on a roll... The one on the left is Byron with Wilbur on the right.

23 December 1884 - 'Struck'

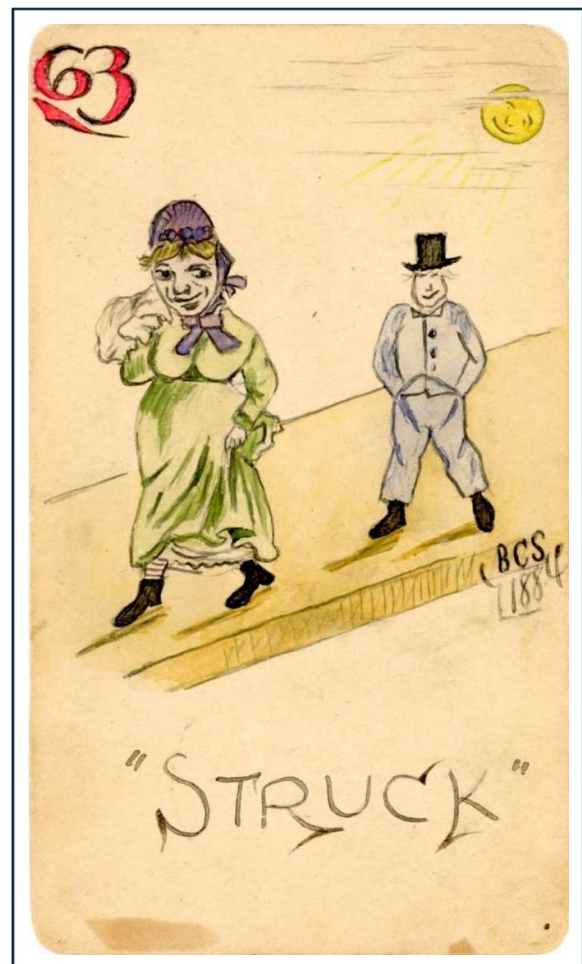
In a scene where a man is walking closely behind a woman, the word 'struck' would typically be used in a figurative sense to indicate a powerful emotional or psychological impact, rather than a physical one.

It would different things, depending on the surrounding dialogue or narration.

The man was suddenly struck by an emotion or overwhelmed by a feeling or an idea while observing the women.

He might have been 'struck by her beauty,' 'struck by a sudden thought,' or 'struck by the realization' that he knew her.

He might have been so lost in this feeling that he wasn't paying attention to the distance between them. We will never know...



24 December 1884 - 'Sweet Solitude'



In 1885 Chicago and wider Victorian culture, 'Sweet Solitude' was a multi-layered expression used in art, literature, and religion to describe the positive, restorative aspects of being alone, contrasting it with the pain of loneliness. It represented a retreat from the 'chaos of the world' or the 'treadmill' of daily life into nature or one's own inner thoughts.

'Sweet solitude' was also considered a state where a believer could experience 'nourishing connection' and enlightenment rather than isolation.

The expression 'Sweet Solitude' was also used for paintings, such as those by British artist Edmund Blair Leighton (1852–1922), which typically depicted solitary figures in peaceful, contemplative settings.

'Old Judge' (written in the cloud of smoke) was a well-known brand of cigarettes produced by the Goodwin & Co. tobacco company (which was later acquired by the American Tobacco Company).

In this cartoon, the phrase 'Sweet Solitude' refers to the fact that Byron Stevens was still 'home alone' on Christmas evening, after the divorce from Augusta Langguth.

25 December 1884 - 'Merry Christmas'

Christmas in 1885 Chicago was a period when modern domestic traditions - centred on the home, family, and commercially purchased gifts - became firmly established.

State Street was the primary retail hub, featuring stores like Marshall Field & Company, which pioneered the tradition of elaborate, thematic Christmas window displays.

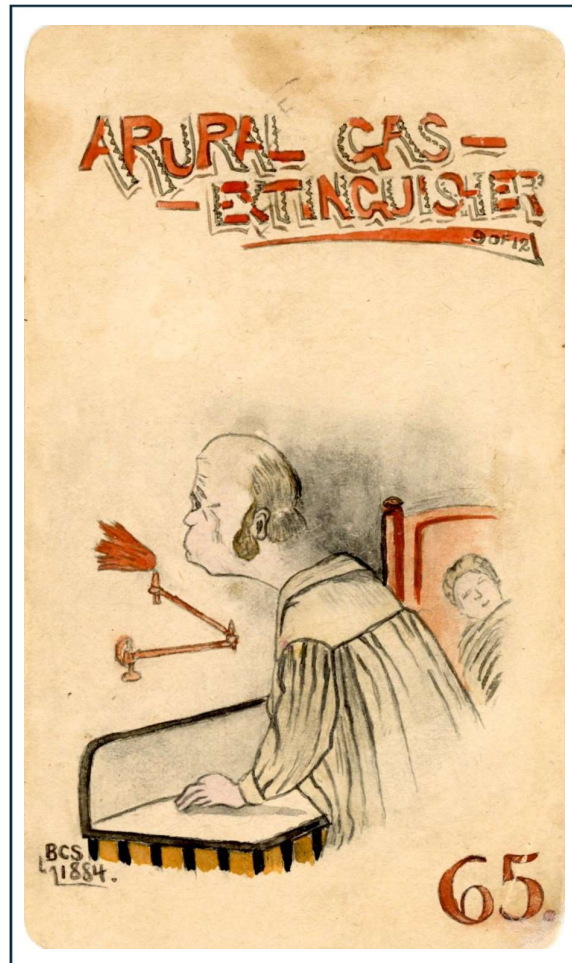
Trees were typically petite tabletop versions or stately spruce for those with high parlour ceilings. They were lit with real candles, a significant fire hazard. A major 1884 Chicago hospital fire was famously caused by a Christmas tree's candles.

Trees were adorned with edible treats (gingerbread, fruit, nuts), popcorn or cranberry garlands, and newly imported glass baubles from Germany.

Popular presents included silver tea strainers for women, cigar cases or carriage robes for men, and toys like tin soldiers, dolls, and toy trains for children.

This Christmas card shows a self-made caricature of Byron C. Stevens dressed as father Christmas, bringing presents.





This cartoon depicts a man blowing out a gas lamp in a hotel room; he is apparently not familiar with gas lamps connected to the city gas grid. It was a known and significant safety problem in the 1880s and early 1900s for hotel guests to mistake a gas lamp for a candle or an early electric light and try to 'blow it out'.

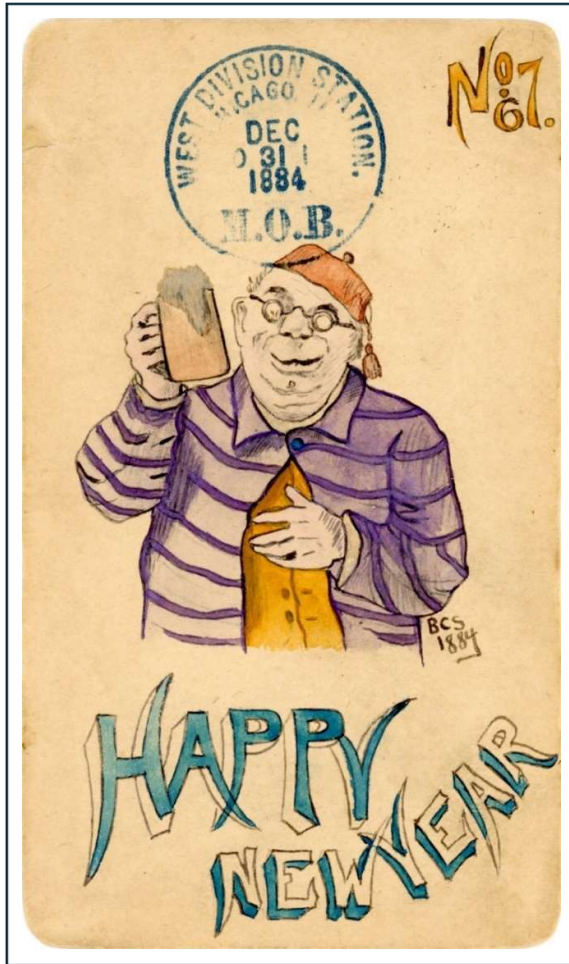
Because guests were accustomed to extinguishing candles or oil lamps with a puff of air, many applied this habit to the unfamiliar gas fixtures. Blowing out the flame did not shut off the flow of gas from the city supply. This allowed unburned coal gas (which contained lethal carbon monoxide) to leak into the hotel room and sometimes into adjacent rooms, posing a severe risk of suffocation or accidental poisoning while guests slept. An accumulation of gas in an enclosed space also presented a risk of fire or explosion if it came into contact with an open flame (e.g., a match being struck later).

The confusion became so common that when hotels began installing electric lighting in the late 19th and early 20th century, they often posted specific signs in guest rooms to educate visitors about the new technology and its safe operation.

These signs served as a 'bridge between two eras' of technology. Common instructions on these signs included warnings such as: 'Do not attempt to light with match' or 'Simply turn key on wall by the door', reassurances that the use of electricity was 'in no way harmful to health' and would not 'explode like faulty gas lines'.

For a period, some hotels even maintained both gas and electric lighting to accommodate guests' comfort and habits, further illustrating the transitional period and the prevalence of the problem.

31 December 1884 – ‘Happy New Year’



On the 366th day (leap year) – Wednesday 31 December 1884 – various different news items rattled the news wires.

The ‘Georgia Wonder’ performed by **Lulu Hurst** at Central Music Hall, was received sceptical, claiming that she failed to exhibit any force other than ‘muscular or nervous’ and that an ordinary man could replicate her tricks.

Though not a single-day event, the Home Insurance Building was in the final stages of its 1884 construction at LaSalle and Adams Streets. It is widely considered the world’s **first steel-framed skyscraper**.

Severe weather reports emerged of individuals ‘frozen to death’ in the region.

News reached the city about the ongoing Berlin Conference (discussions regarding the Congo) had reached an agreement whereby Belgium acquired the Congo Free State.

The earthquake in Spain, known as the **Andalusian earthquake** (*Terremoto de Andalucía*), struck on the night of **December 25, 1884**, at approximately 9:08 p.m.. It remains one of the deadliest seismic events in Spanish history.

... And Byron C. Stevens sent his Happy New wishes to his friend Wilbur Sibley in Kankakee. The New Year card depicts a caricature of **Zebulon Stevens (1821–1894)**, the father of Byron.

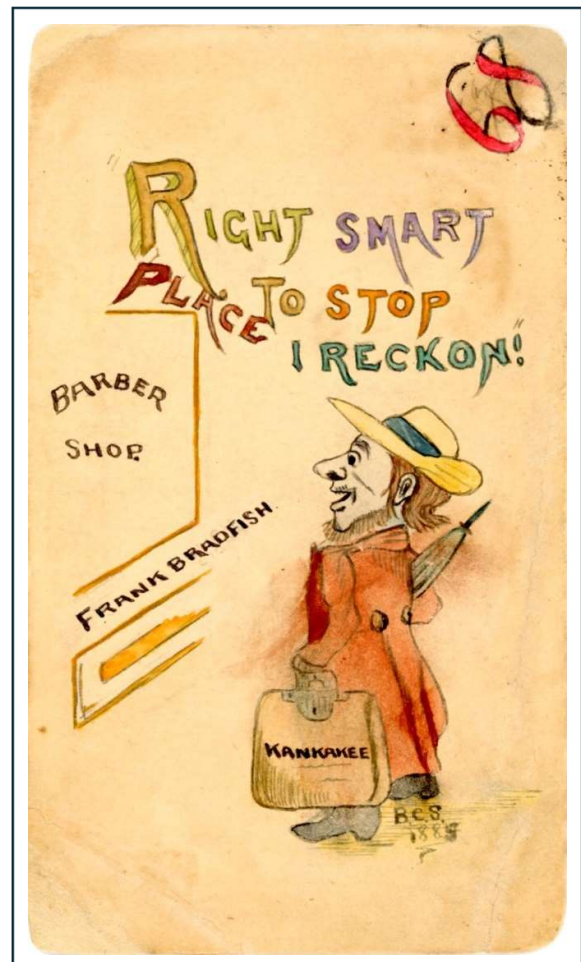
2 January 1885 – ‘Right Smart Place to stop I reckon!’

The first cartoon of 1885 shows Wilbur Nye Sibley (from Kankakee as written on his suitcase), arriving in Chicago to visit his friend Byron C. Stevens for the New Year. As Byron was living on a small flat, Wilbur stayed at the barbershop of **Frank (Francis) Bradfish**, the barber seen on several other of the cartoons. Frank Bradfish was also a friend of Byron C. Stevens.

The expression ‘**Right smart**’ is a colloquialism primarily used in the rural United States to mean considerable, quite a bit, or very. In this setting, ‘a right smart place to stop’ would mean a very good or highly suitable location to end a journey. Right Smart is used as an intensifier or to describe a significant amount/quality.

‘I reckon’ is a common informal term meaning ‘I think,’ ‘I suppose,’ or ‘I believe’.

The speaker is expressing his opinion (‘I reckon’) that the current location is an excellent choice (‘right smart’) to stop.



3 January 1885 – 'Searching for Tulips'



Tulips have a profound symbolic meaning around the New Year, primarily representing rebirth, renewal, and hope.

Because they are among the first flowers to emerge from the dormant earth after winter, they serve as a powerful metaphor for fresh starts and the promise of brighter days in the year ahead.

Their seasonal emergence aligns with the turning of the calendar, making them a common choice to welcome a 'new chapter' with positivity and optimism.

The ability of tulips to survive harsh winters and bloom in the cold symbolizes resilience and the triumph of beauty over adversity.

In modern floral traditions, gifting tulips for the New Year is a gesture of warmth and good intentions. If we can derive one symbolic meaning for the tulip, it is love.

The cartoon shows **Frank Bradfish, the barber** and his wife **Catherine Gruenewald** in a gently loving pose. Apparently, Frank couldn't find tulips in the cold 1885 Chicago winter.

4 January 1885 - 'A case of a Big Head'

The phrase 'A case of a big Head' is a longer version of a late 19th century humorous idiom meaning to having a hangover or being drunk. In 19th century slang, 'to get the big head' or 'have the big head' was a term for becoming intoxicated or drunk. In this cartoon, Byron C. Stevens is shown in a state of seeking relief or recovery. Sitting in warm pyjamas with one's feet in hot water is a traditional, old-fashioned home remedy for alleviating the physical discomforts of a hangover (headache, general malaise) after a night of **heavy drinking**.

Next to the chair is a bottle of medicine with a label from the **J.BARNES** drugstore. John Barnes (and sometimes listed as J. Barnes) served as a letter carrier after the Civil War but eventually entered the pharmaceutical trade as a practicing pharmacist and drugstore proprietor. His presence in the city during this period is most notably linked to the early life of his son, **Albert C. Barnes**, the famous art collector and founder of the **Barnes Foundation**. Albert C. Barnes (born 1872), grew up in this environment, which may have influenced his later career in developing the antiseptic **Argyrol**, the source of the fortune that funded his world-renowned art collection.

Next to chair is also a bottle of **Castor Oil**, a versatile vegetable oil derived from the seeds of the *Ricinus communis* plant. It is a stimulant laxative for temporary constipation relief.



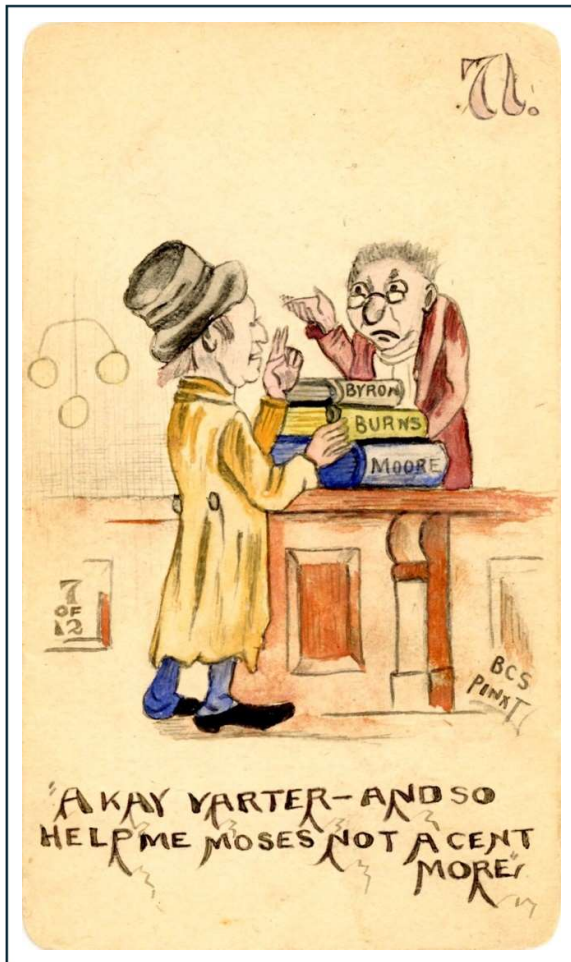
4 January 1885 - 'A case of a Big Head' (continued)

On the floor is also a box of **Ayer's Pills** which were a famous 'patent medicine' produced by Ayer & Co. of Lowell, Massachusetts, since 1853. They were marketed as a 'cathartic' or laxative, but were claimed to cure an impossibly wide range of conditions. **Ayer's Cathartic Pills** were promoted as a 'surefire solution' to cure almost everything.

Original Ayer's trading card.



6 January 1885 - 'A Kay Varter'



The cartoon shows Byron C. Stevens in his small bookshop, trying to sell a book to a Jewish customer. The expression '**A Kay Varter - and so help me Moses - not a cent more**' is a phonetic rendering of a German-Jewish or Yiddish-accented customer haggling over a price.

'**A Kay Varter**' is a phonetic transcription of the word 'Quarter' (25 cents) spoken with a thick accent (likely German or Yiddish). In this accent, the 'Qu' sound (kw) is often pronounced as a 'K' or 'Kay' sound. The 'er' at the end of 'Quarter' is often softened or shifted to an 'er' or 'ah' sound (Varter). Meaning: The customer is offering exactly 25 cents for the book.

'**And so help me Moses**' is a humorous stereotypical oath used in 19th century literature and postcards to identify a character as Jewish. In 1885, popular culture frequently used 'So help me Moses' (instead of 'So help me God') in 'dialect humour' to characterize Jewish merchants or customers. It serves as a solemn (if exaggerated) vow to show that the offer is final and they will not negotiate further.

'**Not a cent more**' reinforces the 'bottom line.' In the 1880s, bookshops often had 'fixed prices,' but second-hand stalls or street-side bookshops in bustling cities like Chicago were places where haggling was common.

Chicago in 1885 was a melting pot of immigrants. This specific phrasing was commonly found in 'Dialect Humour' newspaper sketches of the era. These publications often poked fun at the diverse accents of the city's new residents (German, Irish, Jewish, etc.).

On the counter of Byron C. Stevens's cartoon lies a pile of books from famous writers like **Lord Byron** (1788–1824), **Thomas Moore** (1779–1852) and **Robert Burns** (1759–1796).

10 January 1885 – 'In want of a drink'



'In want of a drink' is a descriptive phrase indicating a strong desire or need for an alcoholic beverage. It was a common way of speaking at the time.

In the 1880s, the term '**Barrelhouse**' was American slang for a cheap, rough-and-tumble saloon. The name came from the fact that the establishment typically served liquor, especially whiskey, straight from the barrel, which were often stacked along the walls. The alcohol served was often of low quality, sometimes referred to with terms like '**red-eye**' or '**kerosene**' in contemporary slang.

Barrelhouses were generally considered disreputable and rowdy drinking establishments. The atmosphere was informal, loud, and often featured live music. They were frequently located on the outskirts of towns, in levee camps, or in working-class neighbourhoods to cater to labourers and the rural workforce, particularly African American freedmen who were barred from most white establishments due to Jim Crow laws.

Besides drinking, many of these venues often included dancing, gambling, and sometimes prostitution, functioning as informal social spaces or 'juke joints'.

12 January 1885 – 'It takes Two to Show the Style completely'

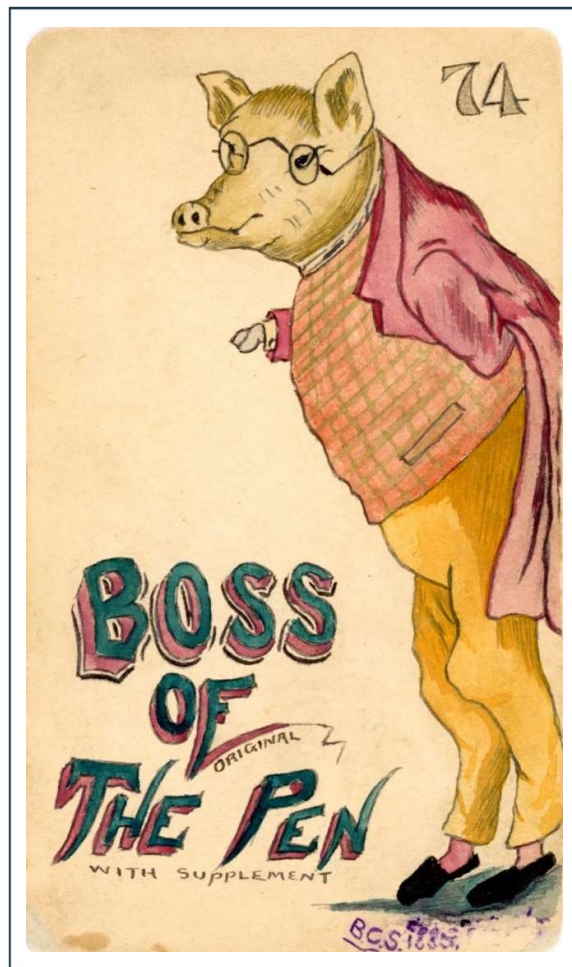
In the 1880's Chicago had a visual culture, the coordination of looks between two people - **particularly a mother and daughter** - carried deep social, symbolic, and practical meanings.

Matching outfits were a powerful visual signal of a family's 'mirrored respectability'. A daughter dressed as a smaller version of her mother reflected the era's emphasis on modesty and discipline, while identical or highly coordinated clothing symbolized a deep emotional bond and unity. This was especially common in sisters or mother-daughter pairs to signify shared identity and heritage.

Coordination required significant resources - either the money for bespoke tailoring or the time for intricate home sewing. Matching luxurious fabrics, such as silk or velvet, served as a 'proclamation of family affluence'.

In a rapidly changing city like Chicago, dressing alike helped families establish a consistent '**social standing**'. It signalled that they belonged to a class that valued meticulous presentation and adherence to strict social codes.



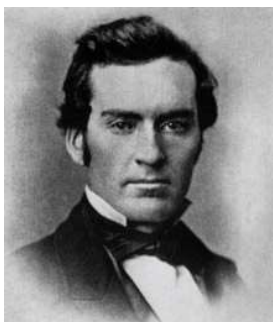


In the literary and journalistic landscape of 1885 Chicago, the relationship between the '**Pen**' and the '**Boss**' reflected an era of 'personal journalism' where editors were often more famous than their publications. The 'Pen' was not just a tool but a symbol of the growing professional class of reporters and columnists.

Reporters in Chicago often viewed themselves as '**literary labourers**'. They frequented local saloons and press clubs, where the '**power of the Pen**' was a common toast.

Writers during this time - like Mark Twain or local Chicago journalists - began moving away from stiff, formal prose toward the 'pen of the people,' using local dialects and realism to capture the grit of the city. Most reporters wrote anonymously or under 'noms de plume' (pen names). Using a pen name was a strategic choice to protect their professional reputation or bypass biases from editors.

The 'Boss' in a newsroom was typically the **Editor-in-Chief** or the **Managing Editor**, who held absolute authority over the publication's voice and political leanings. Reporters often referred to their editors simply as '**The Chief**' or '**The Boss**,' a term that carried a mix of respect and fear. This reflected the hierarchical, almost military organisation.



Joseph Medill (6 April 1823, New Brunswick, Canada – 16 March 1899, San Antonio, U.S) from **The Chicago Tribune** was in 1885 the definitive 'boss' of Chicago journalism. He controlled the Tribune with an iron fist, using the paper to influence national politics and champion the Republican party. The 'boss' determined the 'editorial line,' which every 'pen' in the office had to follow. In this era, if a reporter's pen did not align with the boss's views, they were quickly replaced.

15 January 1885 - 'What use of the casket when the jewel's gone'



In 1885 Chicago, this scene captures a blend of Victorian melodrama and common street slang used to mock the plight of the urban drunkard. The phrase is a cynical play on the 'language of sentiments.' The '**Jewel**' refers to the **gin** or the '**spirit**' (alcohol) that was inside the bottle. It represents the only thing the man valued. The 'Casket' refers to the empty bottle. In 19th century English, a 'casket' was a small, ornate box for jewels (before the word became exclusively synonymous with a coffin).

The message was clear, once the bottle is empty, it is worthless 'trash.' By throwing it in the river, the man is performing a dramatic, drunken parody of a philosopher - stating that the container has no value once its 'precious' contents are gone.

'Casket' as a **Double Entendre** as Chicago was a centre of the Temperance Movement. Anti-alcohol activists often used death-related metaphors (like 'caskets') to warn that the bottle leads to the grave. A drunk using this refined language to describe a gin bottle is a form of 'low-brow' satire, mocking the very people who preached against him. In the 1880s, the Chicago River was notoriously filthy, used as a dumping ground for industrial waste and sewage. Throwing a bottle into it was a common, everyday act of littering that reinforced the 'bottom-of-the-barrel' social status of the character.

17 January 1885 - 'A Quiet Smoke'

This cartoon is a piece of '**taboo humour**' or '**shock humour**', popular in late 19th century American culture. The humour comes entirely from the absurdity and the reversal of social norms, rather than a single coded meaning.

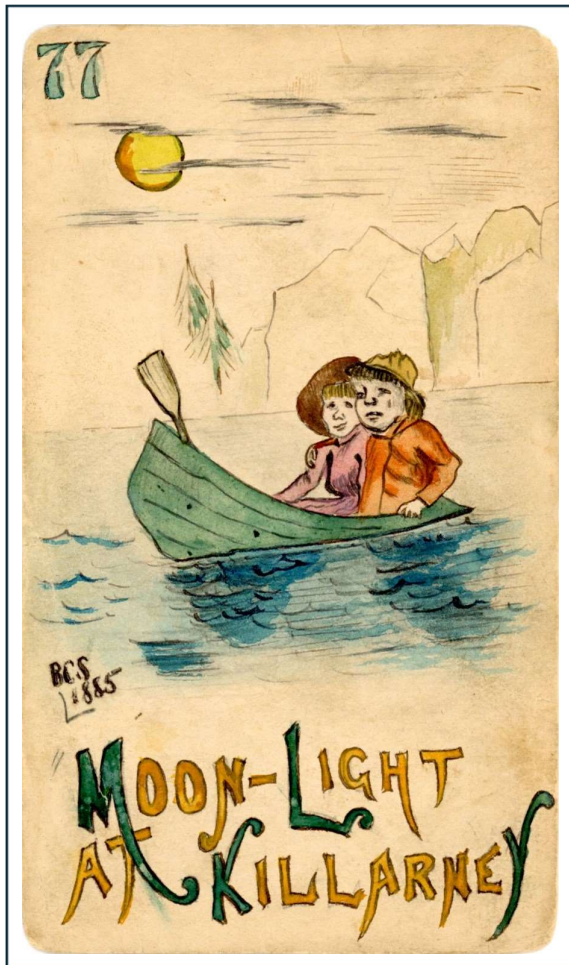
The primary source of humour is the stark contrast between the subject and her actions. The Subject, a young girl, symbolizing innocence, purity, and childhood fragility and the smoking of a pipe, an activity associated with adult men, labourers, and rough behaviour. Sitting in a wash basin, often associated with children's baths or hard domestic labour, reinforcing her juvenile or working-class status.

The image forces the viewer to confront a deeply inappropriate scene portrayed in a deliberately quaint or cute style. The humour lies in the shock of seeing a child completely defying expectations of Victorian etiquette and modesty. The image is a visual representation of the 'cheeky' child or a child 'getting away with' adult behaviour. The girl appears comfortable and in control, perhaps mocking the very parents or authority figures who would normally forbid such an action.

Byron Stevens made this cartoon with '**Tongue in cheek**', to describe a statement or action that is meant to be humorous, ironic, or sarcastic, rather than serious or literal.



16 February 1885 – 'Moonlight at Killarney'



'Moonlight at Killarney' is a quintessential example of Victorian Romanticism and Irish-American nostalgia. The theme was a popular cultural trope that combined several sentimental elements of the 19th century: moonlight provided a 'nostalgic contrast' to the industrial noise of cities like Chicago. It was the ultimate setting for romance, implying intimacy, quietude, and a 'dream-like' state. Depicting a couple in a small rowing boat was a standard visual shorthand for a private, romantic excursion. It suggested the couple was 'drifting' away from social supervision. These romantic boat trips often ended at historic sites like **Ross Castle** or **Kate Kearney's Cottage**, which were legendary in Victorian popular culture.

For Chicago's large Irish immigrant population, Killarney was more than just a place; it was a symbol of a lost, beautiful homeland. **Killarney's lakes (Lough Leane, Muck-Ross Lake, and Upper Lake)** were famous globally as the most beautiful spots in Ireland. The popularity of these scenes was driven largely by the poet **Thomas Moore**, who wrote famous odes to Killarney and its islands, such as **Innisfallen**, a historic and highly scenic island located in Lough Leane, the largest of the three Lakes of Killarney in County Kerry, Ireland.

23 February 1885 – 'Going to the Damrosch Opera'

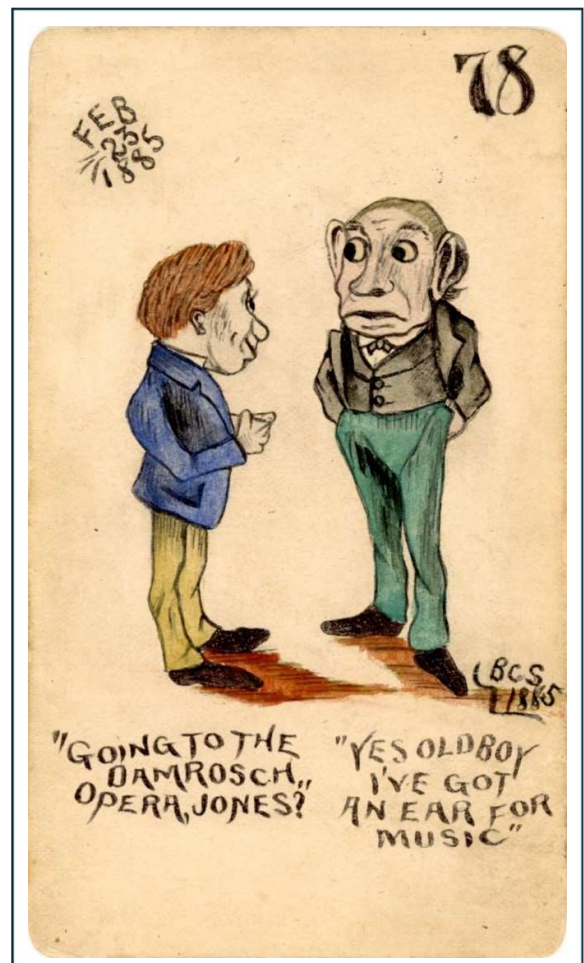
The Damrosch Opera Company performed the first time in Chicago on **24 February 1885**.

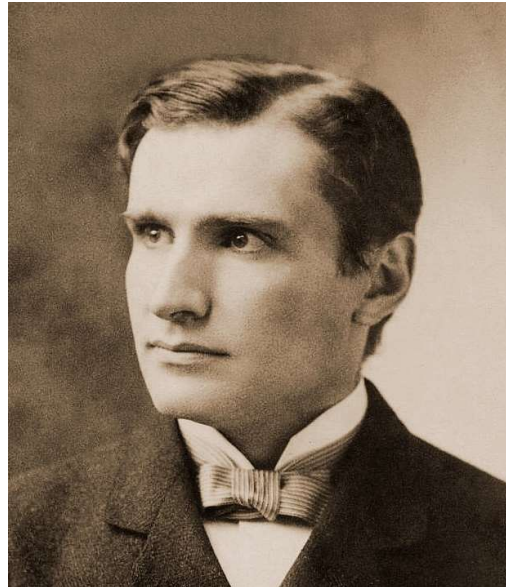
The company, under the leadership of **Dr. Leopold Damrosch** and his son **Walter**, brought their all-German opera repertoire to Chicago during a multi-city tour.

The company experienced significant delays and arrived very late in the city, an event noted in contemporary news reports as 'Opera Under Difficulties'. **Dr. Leopold Damrosch died shortly after this tour in New York City**, and his son Walter took over the conductorship, completing the season, including the remaining tour dates.

This tour was instrumental in introducing large audiences across America, including Chicago, to German opera and the works of composers like Richard Wagner, performed in their original language.

Leopold Damrosch was the general manager and principal conductor who had turned around the struggling Metropolitan Opera ('the Met') in its second season (1884-1885) by committing to an ambitious all-German repertoire, including works by Richard Wagner.





Portraits of Walter Damrosch (father) and Walter Damrosch (son).

In February 1885, the ‘Damrosch opera’ was a highly successful, artistically respected German opera, but also a period of crisis and transition following the sudden death of its pioneering leader, **Leopold Damrosch**. Leopold fell ill with a severe cold (pneumonia) during a rehearsal and died on **15 February 1885**. The **23-year-old Walter Damrosch** had to step in on short notice to conduct several major operas, including **Tannhäuser** and **Die Walküre**, launching his own career and allowing the season to continue.

6 March 1885 - ‘Jo-Jo the Dog-faced Man’

Fedor Jeftichew (1868–1904) was a famous Russian sideshow performer known as ‘**Jo-Jo the Dog-Faced Boy**’ (later ‘Jo-Jo the Dog-Faced Man’). He was born with hypertrichosis, a condition causing excessive hair growth across his body and face, which he inherited from his father, Adrian.

Fedor began performing in Europe with his father, who was billed as the ‘Wild Man from the Kostroma Forest,’ around 1873 when he was just five years old. In 1884, he was brought to the United States by showman P.T. Barnum, who developed the persona of ‘Jo-Jo’. Barnum created a sensational, false backstory claiming Fedor and his father were captured in a cave in the Russian wilderness.

As part of the performance, Fedor was instructed to bark and growl at the audience, reinforcing the ‘dog-faced’ image. He was highly intelligent and well-mannered in reality, speaking Russian, German, and English fluently. Jeftichew became one of Barnum’s most popular and highest-paid performers, reportedly earning \$500 a week in 1886.

Fedor Jeftichew toured extensively throughout Europe and the United States until shortly before his death from pneumonia on **31 January 1904**, in **Thessaloniki**, Greece (then part of the Ottoman Empire), **aged 35**.



7 April 1885 – 'In the Wee Sma' Hours'



The phrase '**In the Wee Sma' Hours'** refers to the very early morning, typically between midnight and dawn, specifically around 1:00 AM to 4:00 AM. These hours are called '**wee**' or '**small**' because they are designated by the lowest numbers on the clock (1 to 4).

The phrase is distinctively **Scottish** in origin, popularized by the poet **Robert Burns** the '**National Bard of Scotland**' in the 18th century. In Chicago, a city with a large immigrant population (including many Scots), this '**Burns-esque**' dialect was commonly used in humorous literature.

The cartoon, showing Wilbur Sibley in pyjamas holding a crying baby, carries a double meaning of exhaustion and domestic reality : the image is a humorous take on the disruption of sleep. It depicts the father performing 'night duty,' a time when he would normally be asleep but is instead awake with a restless child during the quietest, most isolating part of the night.

The expression '**the wee sma' hours**' was also referred to late-night partying after New Year's Eve. Using it for a crying baby is a tongue-in-cheek reversal: instead of staying up for fun, the father is up because he has no choice.

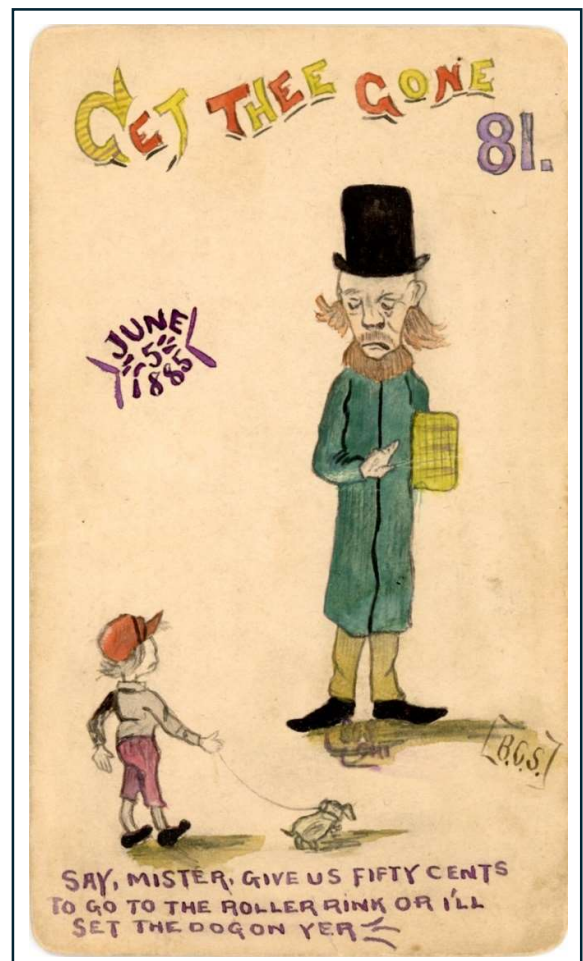
5 June 1885 – 'Get Thee Gone'

The interaction between the man and the young boy is a humorous take on extortion and urban social shifts. The phrase '**Get Thee Gone**' is a Shakespearean expression meaning 'Go away' or 'Leave at once.'

Byron is using elevated, 'gentlemanly' language to address what he considers a '**street urchin**.' By saying 'Get thee gone', he tries to maintain his dignity while being confronted by a rude child. It is a tongue-in-cheek use of formal English to deal with a very informal (and aggressive) situation.

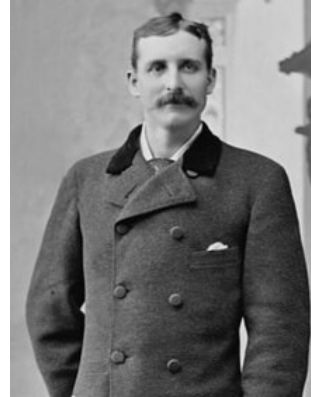
1885 was at the height of the first major roller skating fad in America. Massive rinks were being built in cities like Chicago, and they were the most popular social 'hangouts' for youth. The boy isn't asking for bread; '**Say mister, give us fifty cents to go to the roller rink or I'll set the dog on yer**' is a demand for luxury entertainment money. Fifty cents was a significant amount of money for a child to demand in 1885, as a standard ticket to a show or a basic meal might cost only 10 to 15 cents.

The humor comes from the absurdity of the 'threat.' The boy is holding a small, harmless-looking dog on a leash, yet he is using it to 'mug' a grown man.

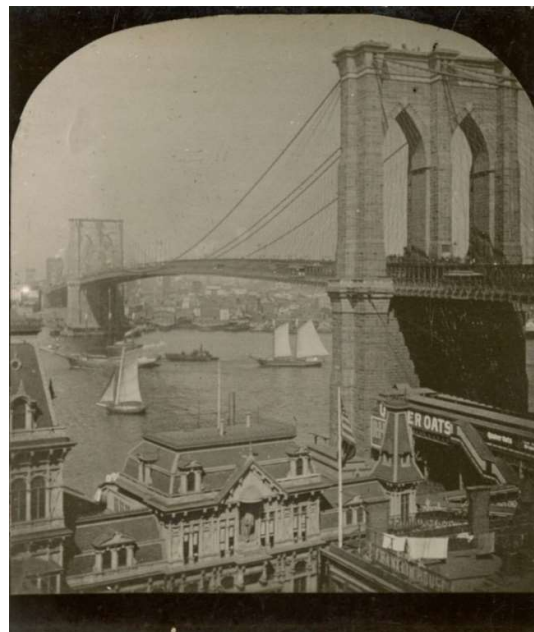


8 June 1885 – ‘Odlum’s Leap From Brooklyn Bridge’

The Brooklyn Bridge is one of the most iconic symbols of American engineering, connecting the boroughs of Manhattan and Brooklyn across the East River. Its construction was a landmark achievement in the 19th century. Construction began on **2 January 1870** and took 13 years to complete. It was the first steel-wire suspension bridge and, at the time of its completion, the longest suspension bridge in the world, with a main span of 1,595 feet (486 meters). At least 27 workers died during its construction from various accidents and an unknown condition at the time called ‘caisson disease’. The final cost was over \$15 million, far exceeding the initial budget of \$5 million. The bridge was officially opened on **24 May 1883**.



Robert Emmet ODLUM (1884)

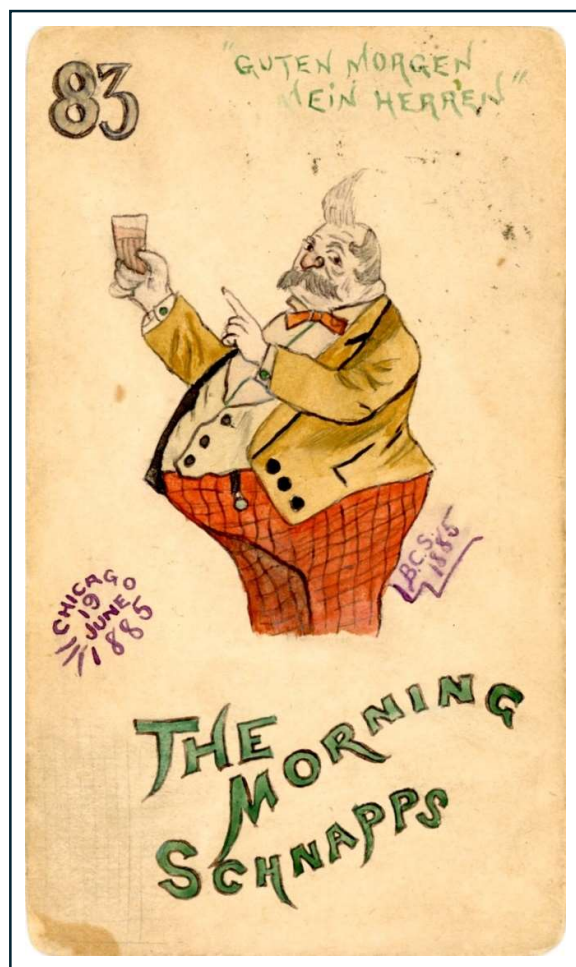


Original picture of Brooklyn Bridge (1885)

Robert Emmet Odlum jumped from Brooklyn Bridge on **19 May 1885**. Known as ‘Professor’ Odlum, he was a renowned swimming instructor in Washington, D.C. He was a proponent of the theory that a person would not die from the mere act of falling through the air. Odlum was an experienced diver, having previously successfully jumped 90 feet from Occoquan Falls (1881) and 110 feet from a steamer ship ladder (1882).

Odlum jumped at **5:35 p.m.** Approximately 100 feet into his 135-foot fall, a strong crosswind caused his body to twist and he struck the water at an angle on his side. After being pulled from the East River, Odlum briefly regained consciousness and asked, ‘**Is it all over?... Did I make a good jump?**’. He began spitting blood and died shortly after. An autopsy revealed his spleen, liver, and kidneys were ruptured, and he had three broken ribs. The official cause of death was listed as ‘**concussion from the impact**’.

19 June 1885 – 'Guten Morgen Mein Herren – The Morning Schnaps'



The two phrases 'Guten Morgen Mein Herren' and 'The Morning Schnaps' refer to a common greeting and the 19th century practice of having an alcoholic drink early in the day, reflects the strong German immigrant culture of Chicago at the time.

In the 1880s, Chicago had a significant German immigrant population. The use of the German language on a postcard was a common, familiar greeting within the **German-American** community. The greeting, combined with an alcoholic drink, sets a jovial, informal tone among friends or acquaintances.

'Guten Morgen Mein Herren' translates from German to English as 'Good morning, gentlemen', while '**The Morning Schnaps**' refers to the widespread custom of drinking a small amount of hard liquor (schnapps, whiskey, or sometimes beer) as a 'pick-me-up' early in the morning. In the era before modern medicine and labour laws, alcohol was often seen as an energy boost, a remedy for various ailments, or simply a daily habit. In working-class communities, particularly those with a strong German or Irish immigrant demographic where taverns were central social hubs, this practice was commonplace. The image of the overweight man lifting a glass humorously depicts indulgence in this morning habit. It plays on stereotypes of the time, associating German culture with hearty appetites and frequent alcoholic consumption.

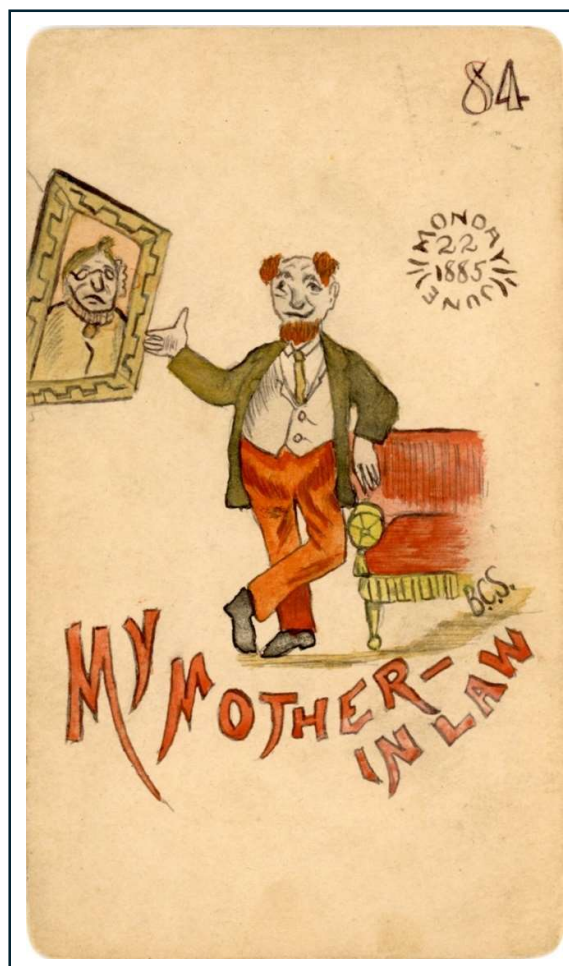
22 June 1885 – 'My Mother-in-Law'

The phrase 'My Mother-in-Law' is intended as a classic example of 19th and early 20th century humour, specifically a derogatory joke based on negative stereotypes of mothers-in-law. This humour relies on the common cultural trope of the interfering, unpleasant or unattractive mother-in-law who makes life difficult for her son-in-law. This stereotype was prevalent in cartoons, jokes and postcards of that era.

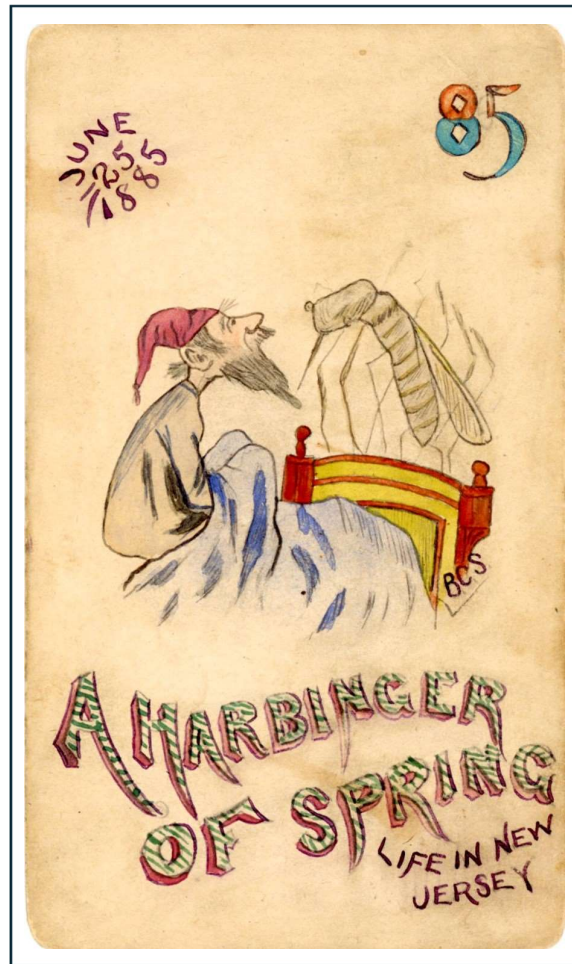
By pointing to the picture of the 'older, poorly kept woman', the man is visually associating her with the title 'My Mother-in-Law'. The implicit joke is that his mother-in-law is so undesirable that this unflattering picture accurately, and perhaps charitably, represents her.

The 'joke' is simple yet effective for its time. The man is complaining about his wife's mother using visual innuendo and a universally understood (though highly sexist and outdated) source of marital friction to get a quick laugh. The cartoon is intended to make the recipient laugh by making light of the supposedly dreadful relationship between a man and his mother-in-law.

"My mother in Law" refers to the fact that Byron was soon got married again. He got permission from her...



25 June 1885 – 'A Harbinger or Spring'



'A harbinger of spring' is an idiomatic expression used to describe the first sign or indicator that spring is approaching or has officially begun. It can also be defined as a person or thing that announces or signals the approach of another. A harbinger is something that precedes and indicates the arrival of something else, e.g. **'The first mosquito is a harbinger of spring'**.

The word 'harbinger' is neutral in itself, but depending on the context, its connotations can vary. In a negative way, it is frequently paired with ominous outcomes, such as a **'harbinger of doom'**, 'death,' or 'disaster'. Positively it signals hopeful events, such as a **'harbinger of better days'** or 'hope and renewal'.

The word harbinger has a surprising etymological and historical history related to travel and hospitality. It is derived from the Old French **herbergeor**, meaning 'innkeeper' or 'one who provides lodging'. In the 12th to the 15th century, a harbinger was a person sent ahead of a royal party or army to secure lodgings. Because these individuals arrived just before the main group, the word evolved to mean anything that announces an arrival. It is etymologically related to the word **harbour** (meaning 'to shelter').

In Chicago in June 1885, the term 'harbinger' related to mosquitoes, primarily as a signal of the city's dire sanitary conditions and the imminent threat of waterborne disease, though not in the way contemporary legends often suggest. The persistent urban legend was that a late spring storm caused a cholera and typhoid epidemic that **killed 90,000 people in 1885. This is false**; while the storm did wash massive amounts of sewage into Lake Michigan (the city's drinking source), there was no mass die-off that year.

27 June 1885

On **27 June 1885** Byron Clifford Stevens married Emily Leonard, a young lady from New York..



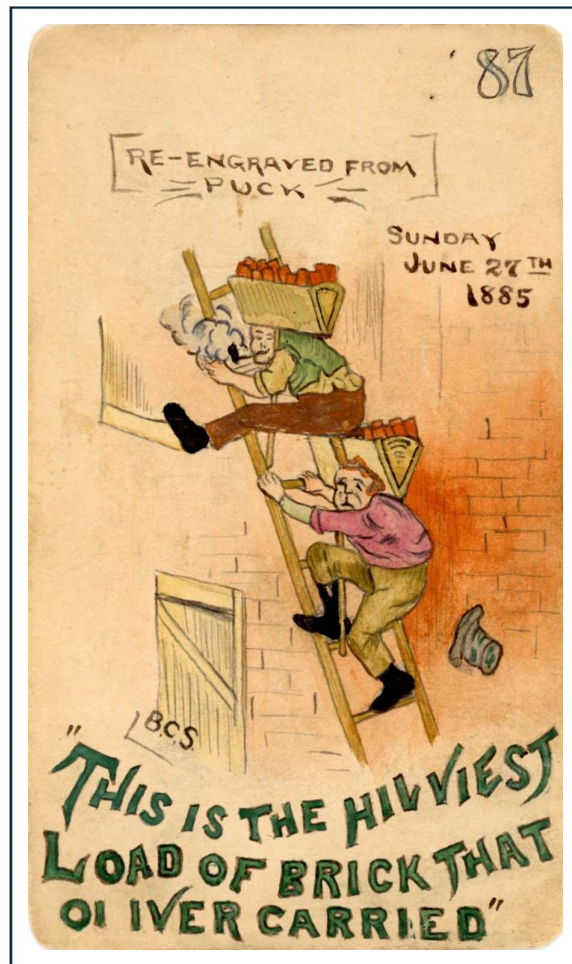
The phrase '**More bites than fish**' followed by the byline '**On the coast of Calumet**' appeared as a satirical observation in Chicago newspapers during July 1885. It referred to the **overwhelming mosquito infestation** plaguing the Calumet region (South Chicago) during a period of extreme environmental distress.

In the summer of 1885, Chicago's sewage and drainage systems were failing. The Calumet region, then a mix of marshland and emerging industrial sites, became a massive breeding ground for mosquitoes due to stagnant water that caused high lake levels and poor drainage caused the Calumet River and surrounding wetlands to stagnate.

The '**bites**' mentioned in the quote were a humorous but frustrated play on words. Recreational fishermen heading to Lake Calumet or the Little Calumet River **expected 'bites' from the abundant perch and pike**. Instead, they were '**bitten' relentlessly by swarms of mosquitoes**'. The press used this phrase to mock the city's inability to manage its swampy outskirts and to warn residents that the insects were a harbinger of the 'sickly season' (malarial fevers).

Leading up to the massive rainstorm of August 1885, the region experienced frequent, heavy summer rains that flooded the low-lying 'sloughs' (marshy inlets), providing perfect conditions for mosquito larvae. At the time, these mosquitoes were often referred to as '**Calumet Gallinippers**' a 19th century term for large, aggressive mosquitoes. Local reports from July 1885 claimed that the insects were so thick on the 'coast' (the shoreline of Lake Calumet) that they could 'cloud the sun' and drive cattle into the lake to escape the stinging. This specific grievance was part of the public outcry that eventually forced the city to take action.

The misery of the 'bites' in July 1885 contributed to the political momentum for the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal, designed to flush the stagnant, insect-ridden waters of the Calumet and Chicago Rivers away from the city.



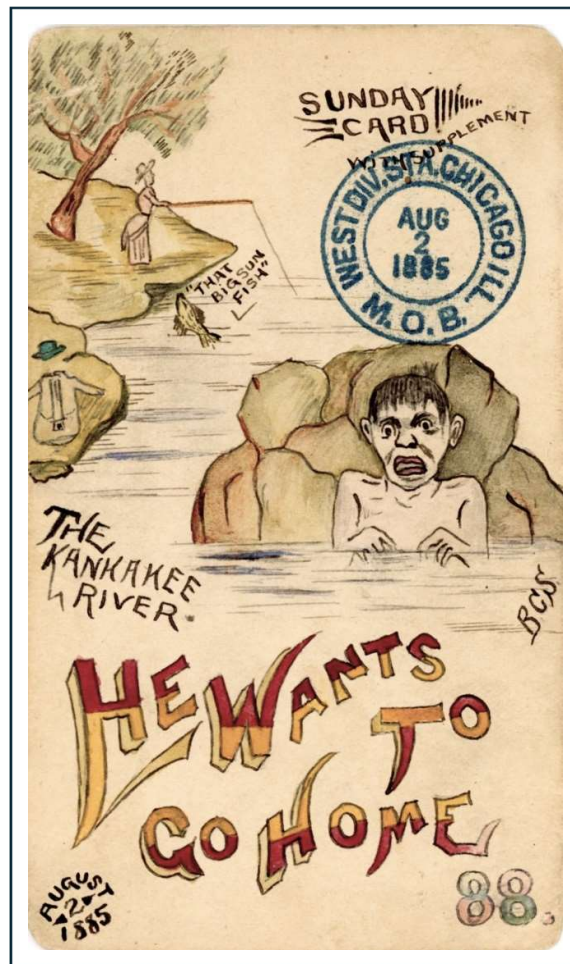
The headline '**Re-engraved from Puck**' is a credit line for a political cartoon or illustration that was originally published in **Puck Magazine** and then copied for a local newspaper. The local newspaper artist (Byron C. Stevens in this case) would take a copy of the high-quality Puck lithograph and manually drew a new version.

Why 'Puck'? Puck was the gold standard: It was the first successful humour magazine in the U.S. to use colourful, high-quality lithography. Its cartoons were so influential, local papers would copy them to provide their readers with high-level political satire.

In 1885, Puck magazine published a series of satirical illustrations addressing a major New York City scandal involving shoddy building construction and the use of inferior materials like '**rotten**' bricks. The primary context for these cartoons was the **Buddensiek collapse in April 1885**. Charles A. Buddensiek, a notorious speculative builder, was responsible for the collapse of eight nearly completed tenement buildings on West 61 Street. The disaster, which killed several workers, became a flashpoint for public anger against 'jerry-building' and corrupt building inspectors. Buddensiek was convicted of manslaughter after investigators found his buildings were held together by 'mud' instead of mortar and used extremely **poor-quality, brittle bricks**. Cartoonists like Frederick Burr Oppen frequently lampooned these events.

A notable cartoon from **22 July 1885**, titled 'Justice in the Web,' depicted the legal system's struggle to trap wealthy, influential figures like Buddensiek. The term '**load of bricks**' referred metaphorically to the weight of evidence against corrupt builders or literally to the substandard materials used in New York's rapidly expanding tenement districts.

Byron Stevens made some errors with the dates. He wrote '**Sunday June 27th 1885**' on the card, but that was a Saturday. As the Puck cartoon appeared on **22 July**, Stevens couldn't have made a copy before that date. The copy was made on 27 July 1885, which was a Monday. The artist probably had a 'thirsty' weekend.



In this cartoon, Byron Stevens (the artist) depicts a boy, hiding on a Sunday in the Kankakee River, naked, as his cloths lie on the shore, where a lady is fishing for '**That Big Sun Fish**'. The metaphor of a woman fishing for 'That Big Sun Fish' relies on a complex layer of 19th century social codes regarding courtship, gender roles, and 'sensual' pursuit. Social etiquette dictated that women should be the 'passive' party in courtship, the prize to be won, not the hunter. By depicting a woman with a rod and line, the artist signals that she has taken on the active, traditionally male role of the 'angler.'

The choice of a '**sunfish**' as the target is significant as in 19th century slang, the 'sunfish' referred to a young man who was bright, cheerful, and perhaps a bit naive or 'dazzled' by a woman's attention. Unlike a shark or a bottom-feeder, a sunfish is a desirable, surface-dwelling catch. Metaphorically, this suggests she is pursuing a 'choice' bachelor—someone visible and attractive in society.

Sensually, a 'bite' represented the moment a man became captivated or 'hooked' by a woman's flirtation. The 'more bites than fish' joke implies an environment where men are constantly being 'stung' or captivated by women's charms, even if no formal 'catch' (marriage) has occurred yet.

For a woman to hold a fishing rod was to hold a phallic symbol of authority and direction. It suggested she was in control of the 'line' (the conversation or the relationship). Fishing was an outdoor, often secluded activity. Placing a woman in this setting in a drawing often hinted at the 'closeness' and lack of chaperonage that summer resorts allowed, fostering a more 'sensual' and private atmosphere for courtship than the city drawing-room.

The cartoon suggests a predatory elegance. The woman is not looking for a literal fish; she is skilfully navigating the 'waters' of a summer resort to 'hook' a man. The 'sunfish' represents her desire for a high-status or particularly attractive young man, and the act of fishing itself is a sensual metaphor for flirtation, entrapment, and the thrill of the chase.

6 August 1885 - 'I wonder which is mine'



In the first week of August 1885, Chicago was experiencing 'tremendous storm' that dropped about 6.5 inches of rain in 24 hours.

That storm contributed to August 1885 becoming the fifth-wettest month in Chicago's recorded history, with a total monthly precipitation of 11.28 inches (30cm).

Byron Stevens sent a card to his friend, Wilbur Sibley, in Kankakee.

The message 'This is a bad day for your departure' suggests that the weather is still poor.

In an attempt to lighten the mood, Byron draws a caricature of Wilbur, who must choose which of the two umbrellas is his.

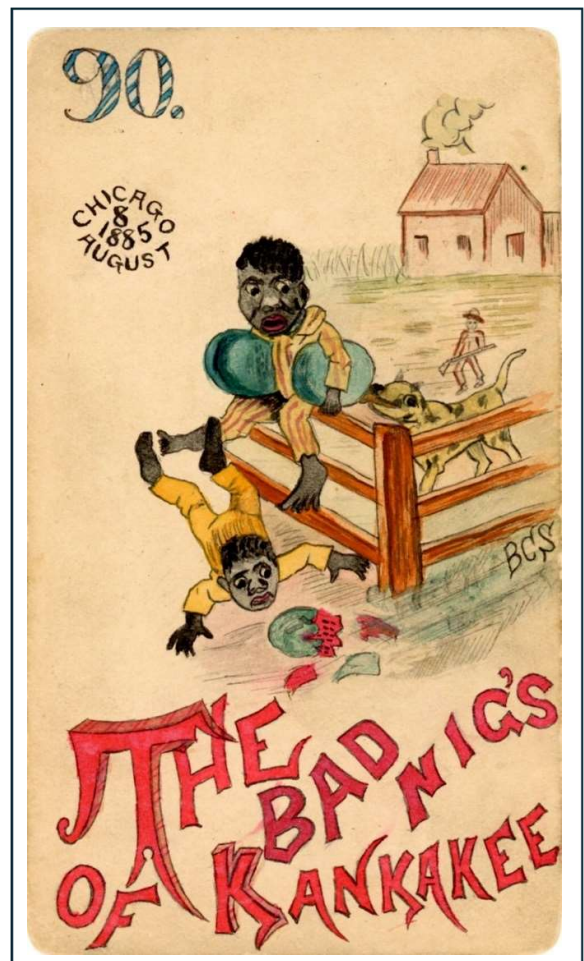
Byron probably has a good idea which one Wilbur will choose.

8 August 1885 - 'The Bad Nig's of Kankakee'

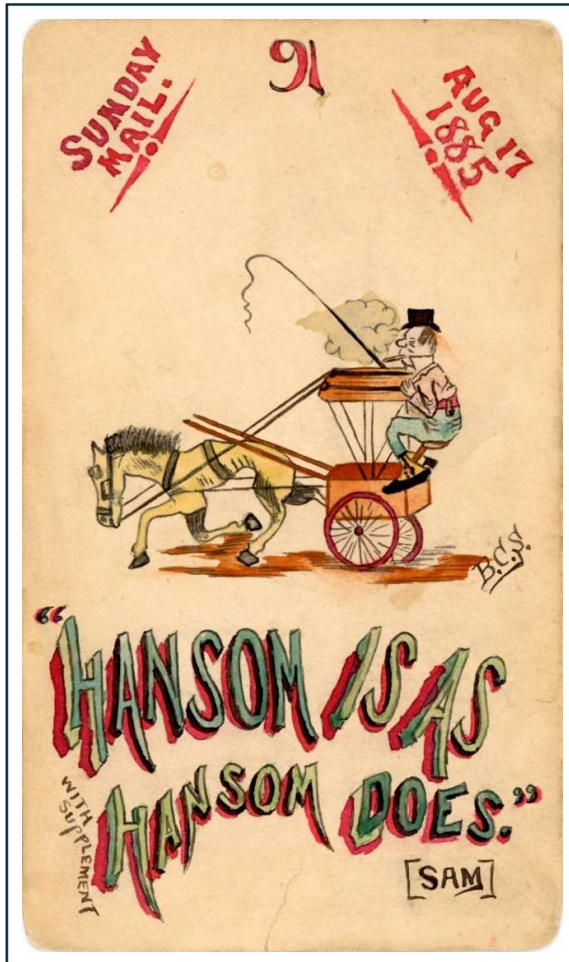
This postcard, created in the late 19th century, uses a racial slur and a caricatured scene to depict two youths as criminals, pursued by a white farmer and a dog. It rests on enduring white-supremacist stereotypes that framed Black people as threats and justified coercive control in the post-Reconstruction era.

In the late 19th century, many rural and agricultural regions depended on plantation and small-farm labour systems that had evolved under Reconstruction and Jim Crow. Economic competition over crops, wages, and land fuelled social tensions in tight-knit farming communities. Visual culture reflected and amplified white anxieties about Black mobility, labour, and political presence: Black workers seeking better opportunity could be portrayed as threats to white livelihoods and social order.

The item is presented as a **historical artifact** that reveals how visual culture reinforced racial hierarchies and fear. It is not a record of real events but a caricature that might have contributed to discriminatory attitudes and violence toward Black communities.



17 August 1885 – ‘Hansom is as Hansom Does.’



The phrase ‘Handsom is as Handsom goes’ (often rendered with spelling variations) is a folksy adage from the late 19th to early 20th century American English.

In other words, beauty or charm is judged relative to the situation or prevailing standards; what is considered ‘handsome’ depends on the context, and one’s attractiveness can vary depending on the circumstances. In other words, the saying **‘Handsome is as handsome goes’** suggests that beauty or value is situational and relative, not absolute.

This cartoon is a quintessential example of Victorian graphic whimsy, centred on an elegant phonetic pun. By substituting the ‘Hansom’ cab for the ‘Handsome’ of the traditional proverb, the artist creates a sense of narrative levity that celebrates the style and speed of 1880s transit.

The visual charm is found in the jaunty carriage and the animated posture of the horse, presenting a world where even the most mundane commute is treated with sartorial wit and nostalgic grace.’

18 August 1885 – ‘The Policeman in Love and Law’

Milton Nobles was a prominent American actor, writer, and vaudevillian during the late 19th and early 20th century. He was a key figure in the popular melodramatic theatre of the era.

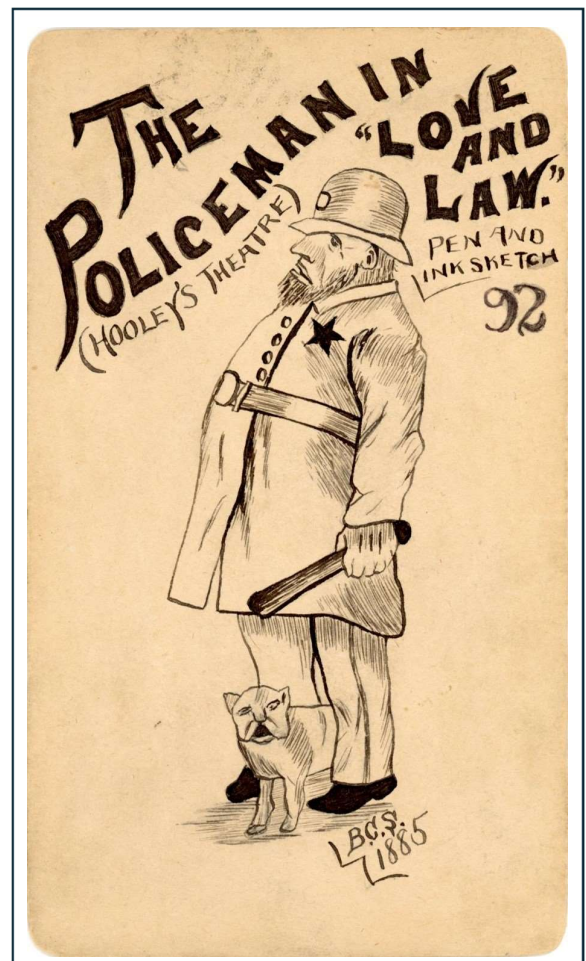
Born **Milton Nobles Taisey** in Cincinnati, Ohio, on 28 September 1844, he died in Brooklyn, New York, on 14 June 1924, at the age of 79.

Nobles began acting in stock companies across the West after his debut in 1867. He was a ‘star’ performer who often toured the country starring in his own written plays for decades. He specialized in melodrama. His work often featured sensational plots and dramatic lines. He is famous for writing the phrase **‘And the villain still pursued her’**, which became a widely recognized cliché of the melodrama genre. (see the caricature # 102 on 7 November 1885)

The play **Love and Law**, written by Milton Nobles, was performed at **Hooley’s Theatre** in Chicago on **16 August 1885**. Byron Stevens drew his card two days later.

Besides *Love and Law*, his notable plays include *The Phoenix* and the dramatization of *Jim Bludsoe*.

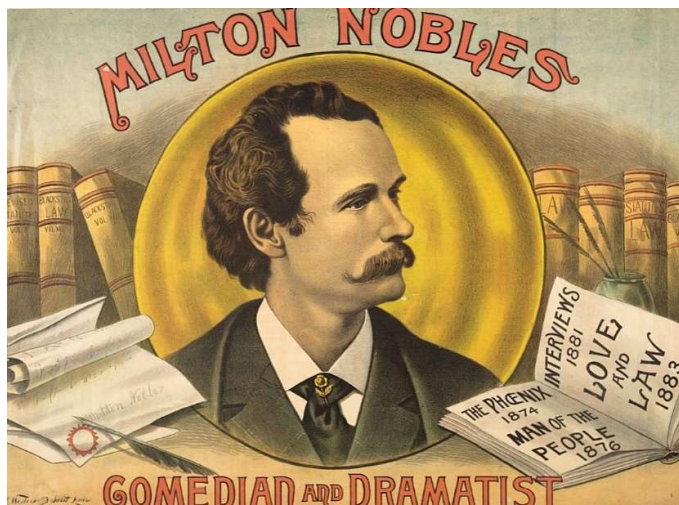
(continued on next page)



18 August 1885 – ‘The Policeman in Love and Law’ (continued)

In his later career, around 1895, he and his wife, actress Dolly Woolwine (whom he married in 1881), performed together in vaudeville. He also worked as an actor and screenwriter in silent films in the 1910s.

Milton Nobles was also known for collecting and publishing anecdotes and stories about the stage in a book titled **Milton Nobles' ‘Shop talk.’** Stage stories, anecdotes of the theatre, reminiscences, dialogue and character, sketches. Nobles retired from the stage in 1905 but returned in the 1920s for a final run in the popular play ‘Lightning’.



Left : Image of a head-and-shoulders portrait of American actor **Milton Nobles** wearing formal dress, framed in a circle, and surrounded by legal books on a shelf with papers signed by Nobles with a quill pen and one book open and listing plays and dates including the play ‘**Love and Law**’ written by Nobles in 1883 and performed in **Hooley’s Theatre**, Chicago on **16 August 1885**. **Right :** State portrait of **Milton Nobles Taisey**, made in 1895 in New York.

23 August 1885 – ‘Mrs Mulcahy Up Again’

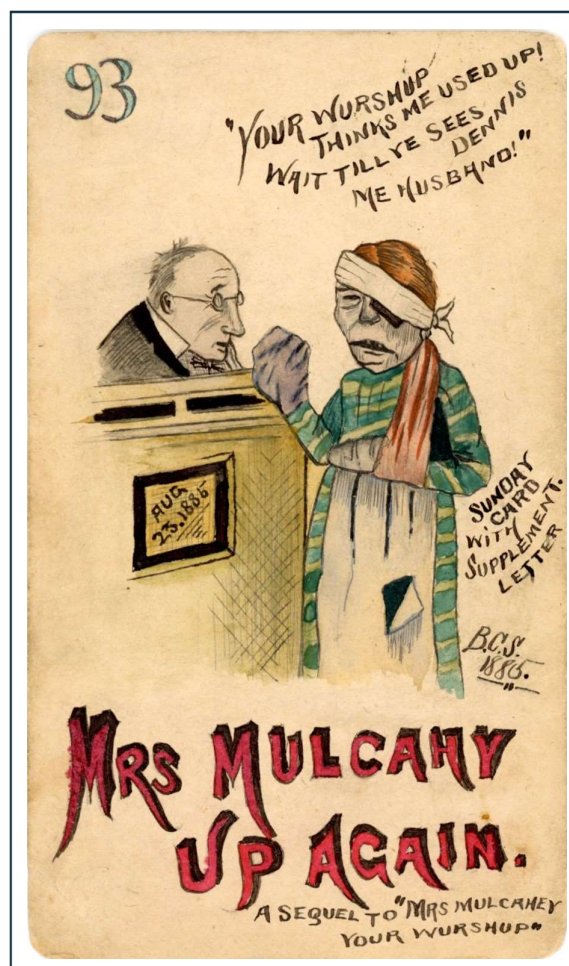
The bottom line ‘**Your Wurshup thinks me used up. Wait Till ye sees Dennis, me Husband.**’ This card is sequel of ‘**Dennis got the best of it this time**’ (card #5, 14 December 1884).

The visual elements of the postcard provide significant background: the Bandaged Woman visually implied physical harm and/or injury. The woman is now not the victim of the incident. The phrase ‘**Wait Till ye sees Dennis**’ suggests that Dennis ‘**Lost**’ the fight this time as Mrs Mulcahy inflicted the damage on her husband.

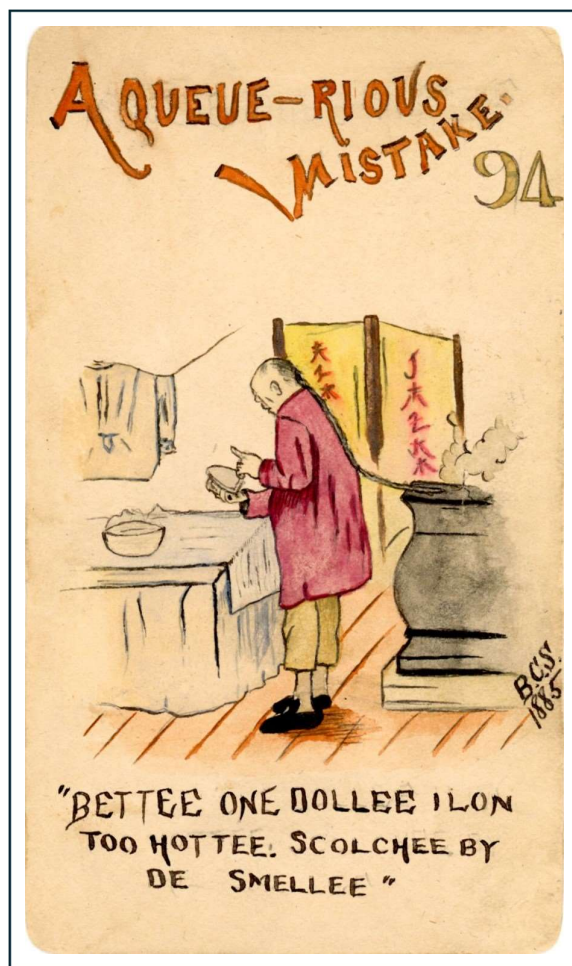
The postcard's humour was in the sardonic juxtaposition of the man's obvious suffering and the terse acknowledgment that the perpetrator (Mrs Mulcahy) ‘came out on top.’

The Mulcahey family, living nearby Byron Stevens (the artist), appears also on the cards #124 and #130. It was clearly a troublesome family.

P.S. The family’s name can be **Mulcahey** or **Mulcahy**.



31 August 1885 – 'A Queue-rious Mistake'



The bottom phrase - '**bettee one dollee ilon too hot tee. Scolchee by the smellee**' is not a real quote of English spoken by a Chinese person, but rather a racist caricature found in some late 19th and early 20th century American and British literature, vaudeville acts, and possibly plays.

This phrase is a deliberately exaggerated and offensive stereotype of the way native English speakers imagined Chinese immigrants spoke English at that time. The phrase is a form of 'pidgin English' as written by white authors of that era, intended to represent broken English with a heavy accent.

It is designed to look 'curious' or humorous to a native English reader. Here is a likely translation of the intended meaning: '**bettee one dollee**' (**bet you one dollar**). '**ilon too hot tee**' (**iron too hot**). '**Scolchee by the smellee**' (**burned according to the smell**). Something was scorched because the iron was too hot, and the smell is evidence. But the reality was that the **cook's ponytail was hanging in the hot kettle**.

This kind of 'broken English' dialogue was a common literary device used in the 1880s and later. It was used to make Chinese characters appear foreign, simple, or comedic to a white audience, often reinforcing negative stereotypes and racial prejudice prevalent during the era of the Chinese Exclusion Act in the US.

13 September 1885 – 'The Banana, an ever day scene'

Slipping on a banana peel is a real, scientifically validated phenomenon caused by the release of a lubricating polysaccharide gel when the peel is crushed under pressure.

It was a common public hazard and safety concern in the late 19th and early 20th century, later becoming a classic slapstick comedy trope, a universal pattern that recurs across different cultures and stories.

A postcard showing a man slipping on a banana peel with the byline 'An every day scene' typically carries a double meaning rooted in late 19th and early 20th century urban life.

While today the image is seen as a cartoonish cliché, it was a literal 'every day scene' in cities like New York and London during the late 1800s. Before modern waste management, banana peels were discarded directly onto sidewalks. Fresh peels aren't very slippery, but rotting peels bake in the sun and turn into a hazardous black slime. (continued)



13 September 1885 – 'The Banana, an ever day scene' (continued)

The problem was so severe that cities passed laws against 'casting' rinds on public walkways to prevent 'broken limbs'.

The byline 'An every day scene' served as a sarcastic critique. The image mocked the lack of public manners and the 'carelessness' of citizens who refused to use trash bins.

It tapped into the human tendency to find humor in a sudden loss of dignity, especially for a 'finely-dressed' or 'snooty' individual who is humbled by a common object.

Some historians argue the banana peel was a polite visual substitute for a more common, grosser street hazard: horse manure. In a pre-car world, streets were covered in horse droppings. Since early films and postcards were meant for 'family' consumption, the banana peel was used as a cleaner way to depict a person slipping in filth.

Today, the scene represents an embarrassing public failure or a 'slip-up' caused by an oversight. By calling it an 'every day scene,' the postcard suggests that life is inherently unpredictable and that even the most 'mighty' can be brought down by a small, overlooked detail.

14 September 1885 – 'By the Moons Pale Light'



While there is no single famous literary 'canonical' work titled exactly 'By the Moon's Pale Light' published in 1885, the names Arabella and Algernon are iconic 'stock' names used in late-Victorian comedy and melodrama to represent upper-class, sentimental, or foppish characters.

The phrase and character names likely refer to a Victorian Parody or Drawing Room Comedy, a genre that peaked in the 1880s and 1890s.

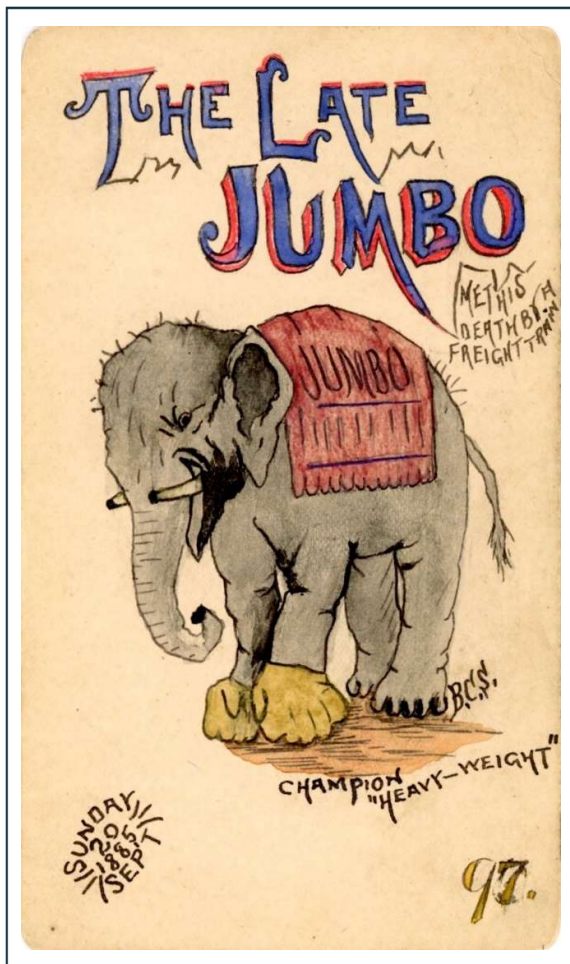
Algernon became the definitive label for the '**dandy**' or the '**idle rich**' youth. It was most famously cemented by Oscar Wilde's Algernon Moncrieff in **The Importance of Being Earnest**.

Arabella: was a standard name for the '**heroine of sensibility**' or the overly romanticized Victorian lady. It appears frequently in comedies of manners, such as George Meredith's *The Egoist* (1879) or the works of Anthony Trollope.

The title or line 'By the Moon's Pale Light' is a quintessential example of Victorian Melodrama. In the 1880s, these tropes were often used to set a Romantic Scene: Moonlight was the standard atmospheric cue for a secret meeting (tryst) between two lovers who were forbidden to marry by their wealthy parents.

In the late 19th century, 'parlor plays' were a popular home hobby. Many short scripts were published in magazines for families to perform. '**Arabella and Algernon**' were common placeholder names in these amateur scripts to signal '**The Lovers**.'

In 1885, the British theatrical world was transitioning from heavy melodrama to Satirical Operetta and Farce, influenced by Gilbert and Sullivan, who frequently used overly poetic lines like '**By the moon's pale light**' to mock the flowery language of the era.

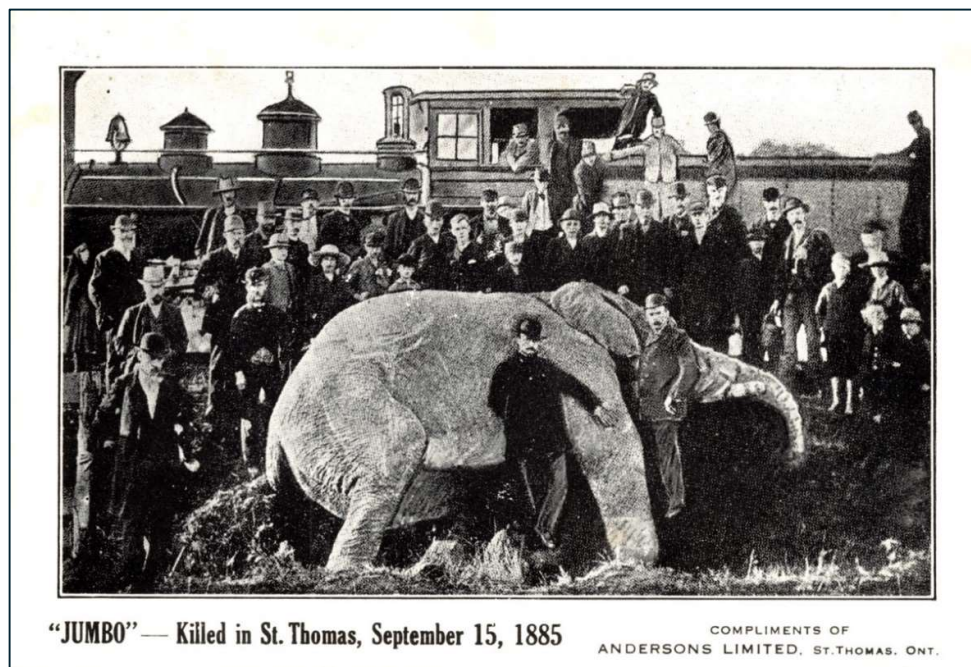


In 1885, Jumbo the Elephant, the world-famous star of P.T. Barnum's '**Greatest Show on Earth**', met a tragic end in St. Thomas, Ontario, Canada. **His death on 15 September 1885**, became one of the most publicized events of the 19th century.

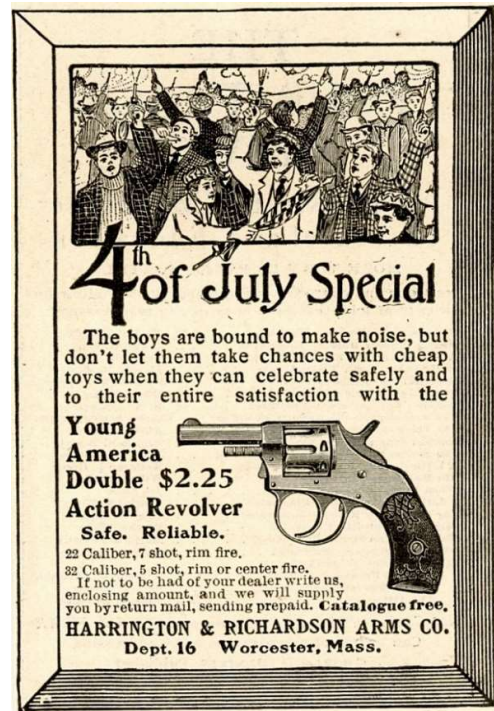
After a performance in St. Thomas, Jumbo and a dwarf elephant named Tom Thumb were being led along the rail tracks toward their specialized palace cars. An unscheduled freight train unexpectedly rounded a bend. The train struck Tom Thumb first, tossing him aside, before hitting Jumbo from behind. Jumbo was pinned between the moving train and the parked circus cars. Jumbo suffered massive internal injuries and a fractured skull. He died roughly 15 to 30 minutes later, reportedly holding the hand of his longtime keeper, Matthew Scott, with his trunk.

P.T. Barnum, ever the showman, heavily publicized a fictionalized version of the death, claiming Jumbo died heroically while pushing Tom Thumb out of the train's path to save him.

Barnum had Jumbo's hide stuffed and his skeleton articulated to continue touring. Donated to **Tufts University**, it served as the school mascot until it was **destroyed in a 1975 fire**. A peanut butter jar containing his ashes and his original tail are still kept at Tufts.



The skeleton was donated to the American Museum of Natural History in New York, where it remains in the collection. Jumbo's fame was so immense that his name became the origin of the word '**jumbo**' meaning exceptionally large. In 1985, on the 100th anniversary of the accident, the city of St. Thomas erected a life-size statue of Jumbo near the site of the collision.



1885 Clipping from **The Chicago Tribune**, promoting real guns for kids from **Harrington & Richardson**

The **4th of July**, officially known as Independence Day, is the national day of the United States. It commemorates the formal adoption of the Declaration of Independence on 4 July 1776, which established the U.S. as a sovereign nation free from British rule.

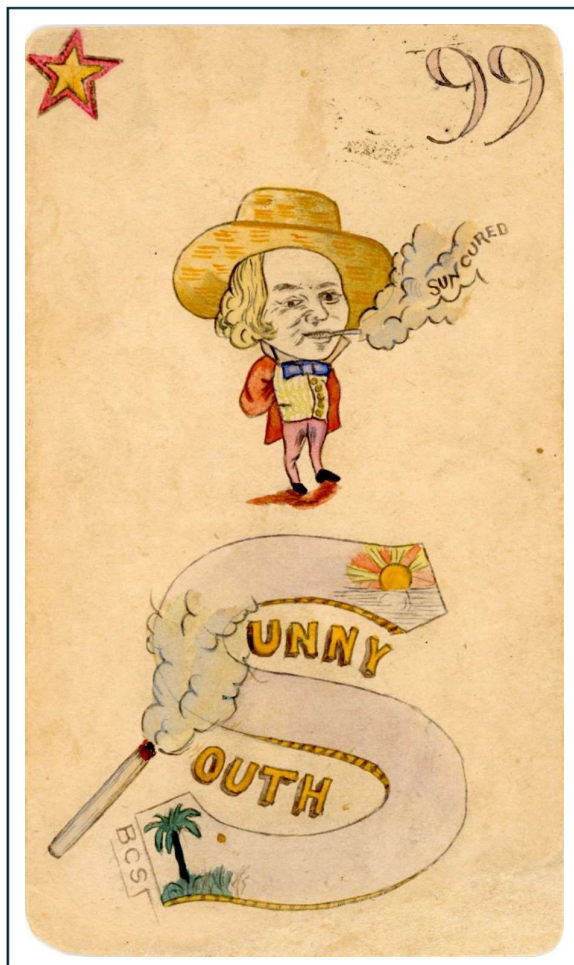
Fireworks symbolize the 'rockets' red glare' from the national anthem and have been part of the tradition since the first anniversary in **1777**.

Harrington & Richardson (H&R) Arms Company is one of America's oldest firearms manufacturers, founded in 1871. They did not typically produce 'toy' guns in the modern sense (such as plastic or non-functional replicas); instead, they aggressively marketed small-caliber revolvers as safer alternatives to the 'dangerous toys' and high explosives often given to children for 4th of July celebrations.

H&R marketed their actual firearms, specifically the **Young America Double Action revolvers**, as a responsible way for a boy to celebrate. The company encouraged parents to let their sons use these revolvers with blank cartridges to create the desired noise of the holiday without the perceived danger of 'cheap' toy pistols or unstable fireworks.

Byron Stevens' cartoon depicting a 'decapitated rump' was a criticism of the potential consequences of children acquiring firearms. Long before federal laws existed, states and cities began passing their own age-based restrictions. Between 1868 and 1899, over 100 local and state laws were enacted across 46 states restricting minors' access to guns. Several states set minimum ownership or purchase ages ranging from 12 to 21. The Gun Control Act of 1968 established the first national age requirements for purchasing firearms from licensed dealers, buyers must be at least 21 years old.

18 July 1885 – 'Sunny South'



In the 1880s United States, '**Sunny South**' was a popular regional nickname used to describe the former Confederate states of the American South.

The term was widely used in literature, media, and marketing during this era to evoke a romanticized or nostalgic image of the region. It primarily referred to states such as Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Florida, South Carolina, North Carolina, and Virginia.

The term 'Sunny South' was also a branding effort by Southern boosters in the 1880s to attract Northern investors and tourists. In reality, while the region had a longer growing season than the North, it was subject to severe seasonal unpredictability during the 1885–1888 period.

Byron Stevens made a sarcastic cartoon about his stay in the Sunny South. Just after the 4th of July, his doctor informed that he should stop smoking as he was developing **COPD** (Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease), attributed to smoking.

The cigarettes and the byline 'sun cured' gave away a hint of his medical condition. He only returned to Chicago by early October 1885.

15 October 1885 – 'A Citizen of Lyons'

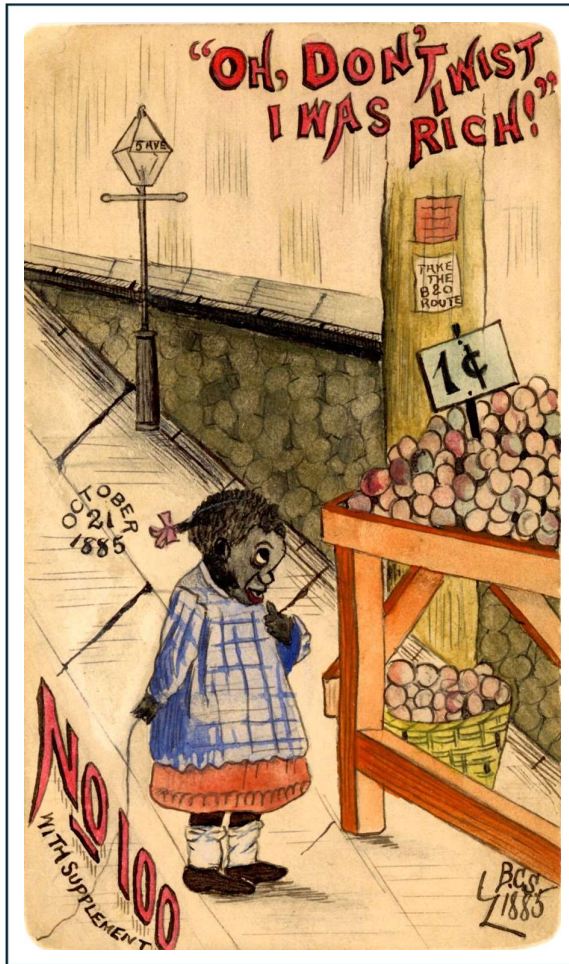
The phrase 'A Citizen of Lyons' was used here by Byron Stevens with a double meaning. The factual meaning is quite simple: This card was addressed to his friend Wilbur Sibley, who had a short vacation in **Lyons, Iowa**. The arrival date stamp is visible at top left (**LYONS IOWA / OCT 17 / REC'D**).

The cryptical of the text to Peter Waldo a 12th century merchant who founded the Waldensians, a Christian movement often called the '**Poor Men of Lyons**'. Multiple historical texts identify him specifically as a '**Citizen of Lyons**' who gave away his wealth to live in poverty.

Byron Stevens' portrait in the cartoon shows him as a rather poor fellow, one of the '**Poor Men of Lyons**', just as Peter Waldo who gave up his possessions. Not that Byron gave up his possessions, he just made little money because of his health condition (he didn't make any illustration newspapers for about 3 months).



21 October 1885 – ‘Oh, don’t I wist I was rich!’



At first side, the artist is being sarcastic with both the drawing and the headline. Placing the words 'I wish I was rich' on the lips of a poor black child in Chicago, standing next to a pile of apples that costs just one cent each, is akin to pouring salt on an open wound.

The phrase 'Oh, don't I wist I was rich!' or 'I wish I was rich' is a basic English expression of a hypothetical desire that has been used for centuries. The expression is a simple, direct statement of longing for wealth, a desire common across all time periods.

The use of 'was' in this setting has become very common in modern American English but the 'were' form was considered more proper at the time. The specific phrasing 'Oh, don't I wist I was rich!' adds emphasis through the use of 'Oh, don't I', a common intensifying exclamation. This sort of emphasis was in use in everyday language in the late 19th century.

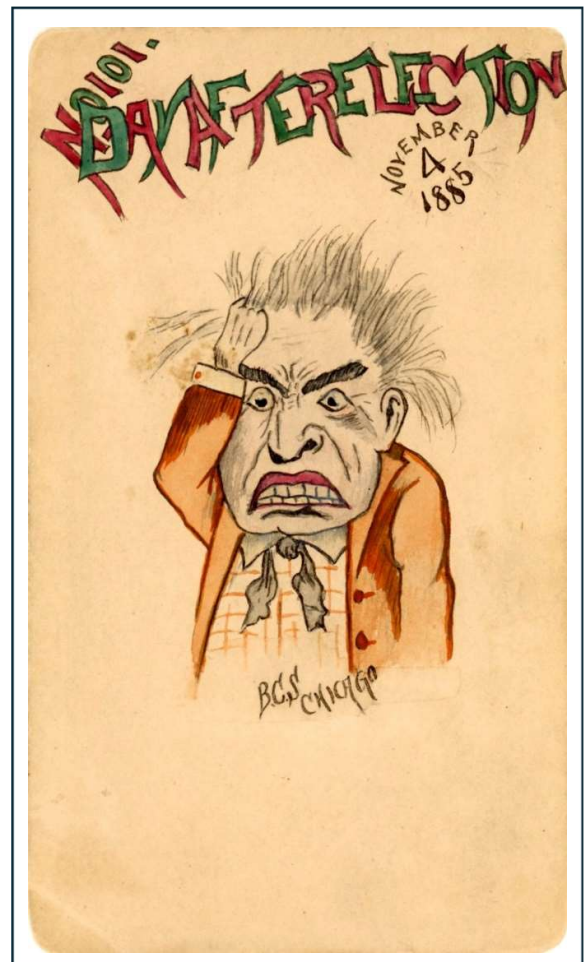
But for Byron Stevens, the headline was a hard reality. Being sick and having little work left him with little income, hence his wish to be rich.

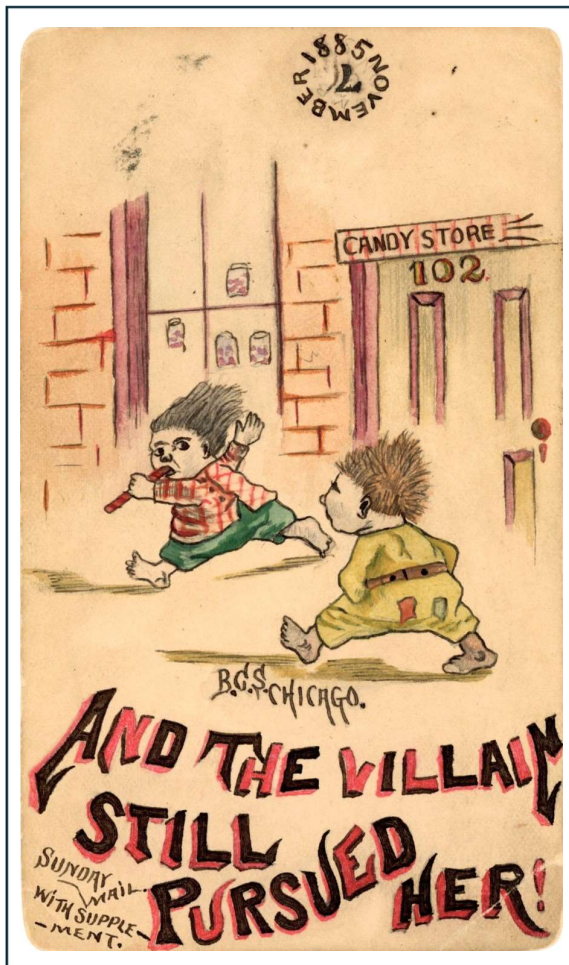
4 November 1885 – ‘Day After Election’

In the United States, **Tuesday 3 November 1885**, was a significant '**off-year**' **election day**. While no presidential or standard biennial federal elections were held, several states conducted major **gubernatorial and legislative contests** that reflected the shifting political landscape following Grover Cleveland's 1884 victory.

However, they had a significant impact on state politics and the national trajectory of the Democratic and Republican parties. The most impactful result was the election of David Hill to a full term as Governor of New York. Hill had become acting governor after Grover Cleveland resigned to become President. Unlike Cleveland, who favored civil service reform, Hill embraced political patronage. His victory helped solidify a powerful Democratic machine in New York that was often at odds with Cleveland's national reformist agenda.

On the day after the election, Byron Stevens was clearly not very happy with the results. From frustration, he literally pulled out his hair.





The use of ‘And the villain still pursued her’ is generally dated from 1875, when it was used in a play called **The Phoenix** by **Milton Nobles**.

Milton Nobles was a prominent American actor, writer, and vaudevillian during the late 19th and early 20th century. He was a key figure in the popular melodramatic theatre of the era.

Born **Milton Nobles Taisey** in Cincinnati, Ohio, on 28 September 1844, he died in Brooklyn, New York, on 14 June 1924, at the age of 79. Following his debut in 1867, Mr. Nobles was for several years in stock companies throughout the West, and in 1875 produced the dramatization of ‘Jim Bludsoe’ in Philadelphia.

He starred himself in this piece and in his own play ‘**The Phoenix**,’ and toured the country in them for twenty-five years. In ‘The Phoenix’ occurred the line ‘**and the villain still pursued her**’, a fair sample of the melodramatic character of its author's writing. One of the characters in the play is a writer of melodramas and there is an extended monologue in which he pens his next installment. The actor playing the role is directed to narrate the story and offer humorous asides for the audience. He is famous for writing the phrase ‘**And the villain still pursued her**’, which became a widely recognized cliché of the melodrama genre.

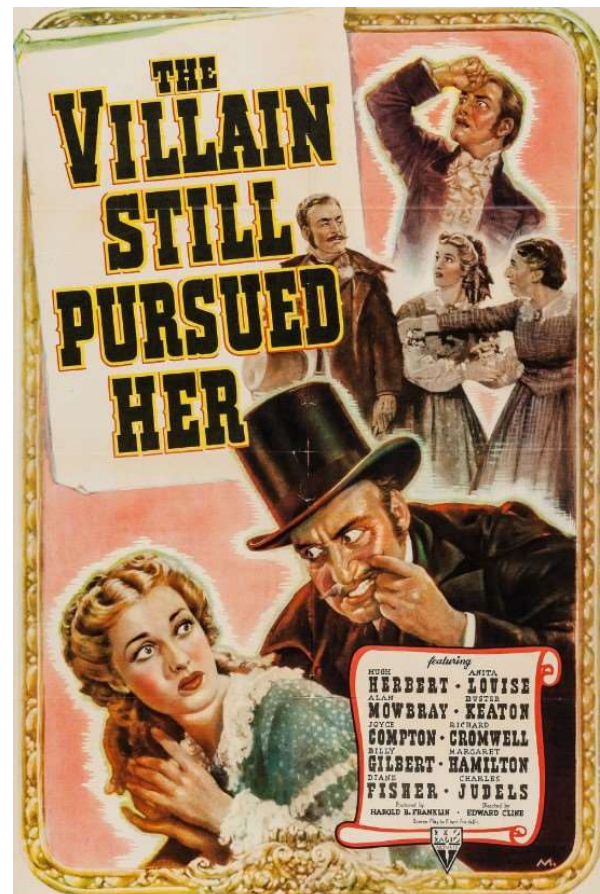
Nobles wrote a dozen or so plays of this type, and in his acting, too, followed the same school of melodrama. In 1881 he married Dollie Woolwine, an actress in his company. For some years following 1895 they appeared together in vaudeville.

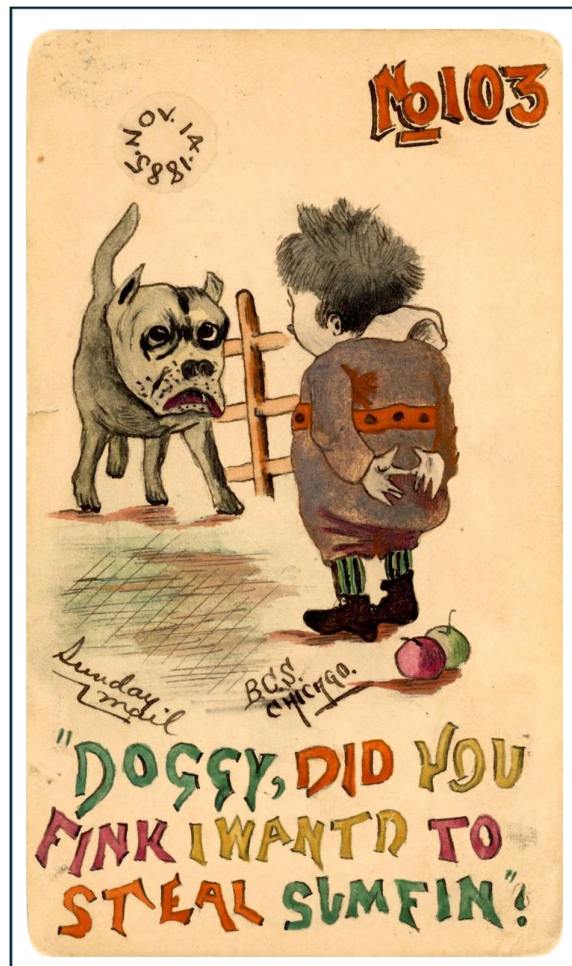
Nobles began acting in stock companies across the West after his debut in 1867. He was a ‘star’ performer who often toured the country starring in his own written plays for decades.

He specialized in melodrama. His work often featured sensational plots and dramatic lines. He is famous for writing the phrase ‘**And the villain still pursued her**’, which became a widely recognized cliché of the melodrama genre.

The play was filmed in 1940, with Buster Keaton as one of the lead actors.

On the right : reduced size poster of the 1940 movie ‘**The Villain still pursued her**’





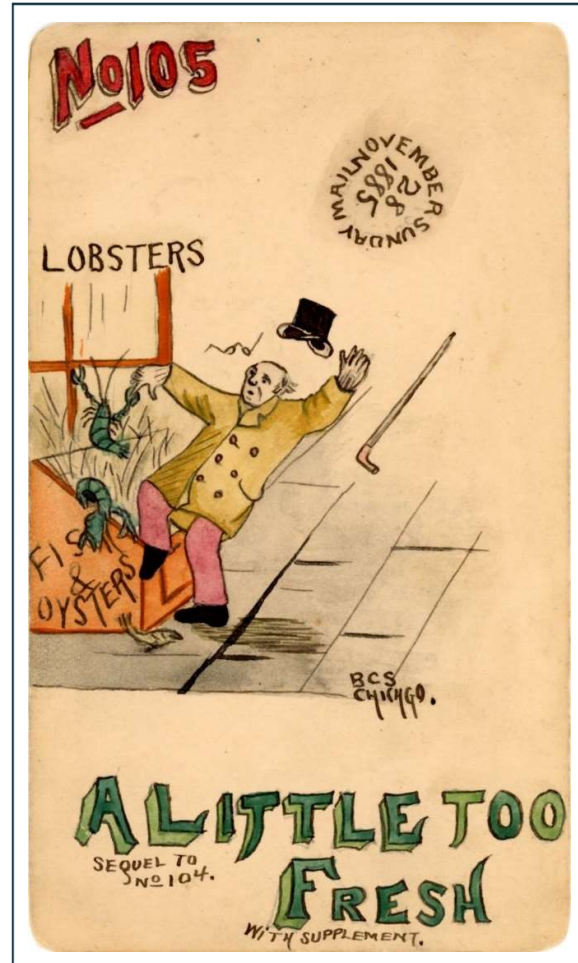
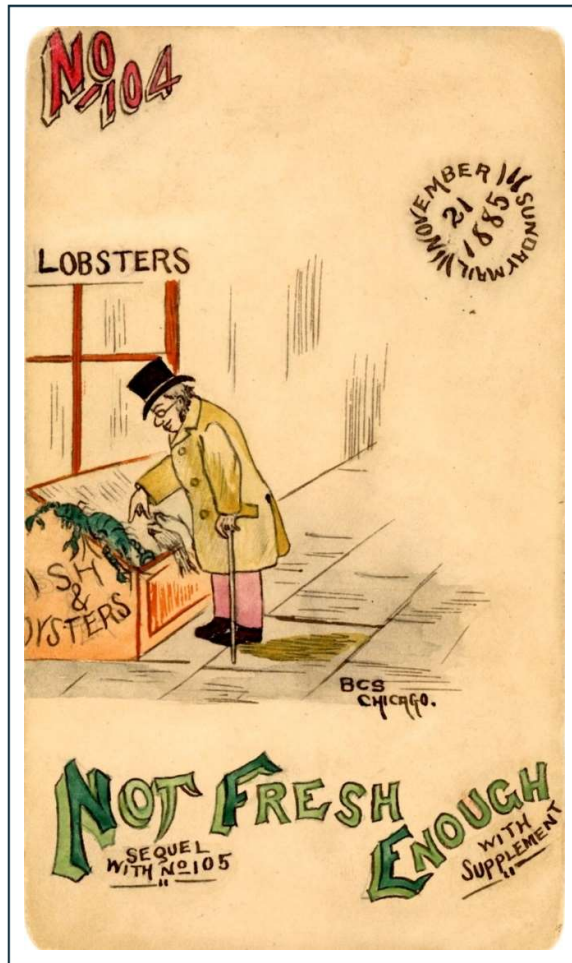
This cartoon depicts a small boy threatened by a dangerous-looking dog. He quickly drops two stolen pieces of fruit behind his back and asks the dog: **'Doggy, did you think I wanted to steal something?'**

This scene is a visual gag that relies on misdirection and quick wit to resolve a moment of tension. It's a classic, simple form of humour.

The scene creates tension by putting a boy in immediate danger: a dangerous-looking dog is threatening him. The boy's actions are designed to do two things simultaneously : distract the dog: The sudden movement of dropping the apples behind his back creates a new sensory stimulus (sound and potential food) for the dog to focus on, potentially making the dog momentarily forget its aggressive stance. By dropping the fruit before he asks the question, he sets up the perfect alibi for being near whatever it is the dog is guarding (e.g. the fruit).

The core of the joke lies in the boy's clever use of the situation: the dog's threatening posture implies that it believes the boy is doing something wrong (stealing). The boy denies the implied accusation by physically proving he isn't holding the 'stolen' items anymore. He can now honestly say he isn't holding them. The humour comes from the fact that the boy clearly did steal something, but he cleverly disposes of the evidence right before making his defence. He's technically telling the truth in the moment he speaks, having dropped the fruit he presumably just took. It's a simple, playful joke about quick thinking under pressure.

From 7 November 1885 onwards, the artist Byron Stevens is only designing weekly illustrations for the Sunday Mail. His health did not allow him to work full-time for a while.



This two-panel scenario sounds like a classic visual gag from a 19th century illustrated story by Wilhelm Busch ('Max and Moritz'), where a simple action escalates into slapstick humour.

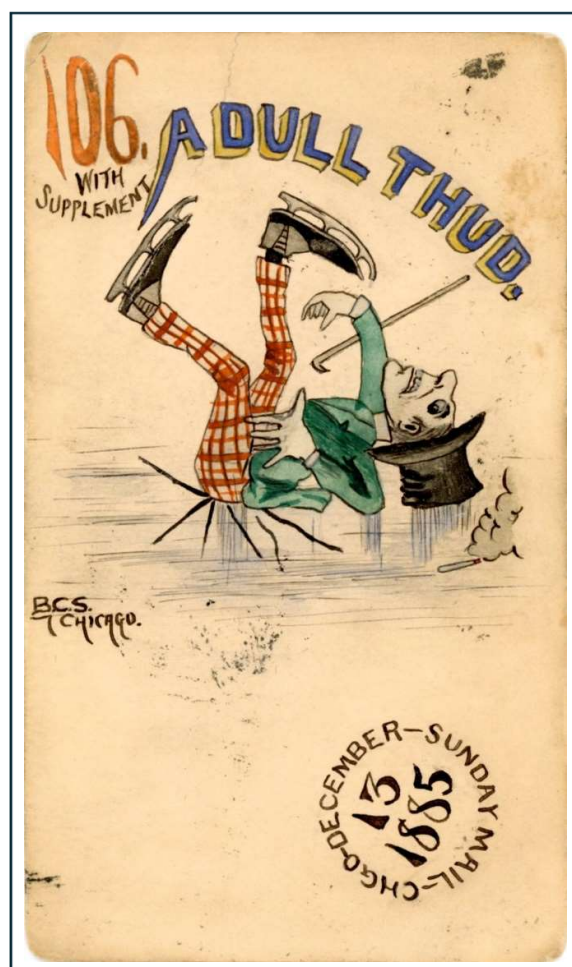
The first drawing opens on a finely dressed man (**Byron Stevens**) standing before a counter with lobsters on ice. His expression is fastidious. Behind the counter stands the fishmonger, a broad, aproned fellow looking on with weary patience.

Mr. Pumble points a gloved finger at a large, rust-coloured lobster lying perfectly still. He gives the lobster a tentative poke. The lobster does not move. Byron Stevens pokes it harder. It remains motionless. Byron Stevens draws back his hand with a sniff of disdain. He fixes the fishmonger with a stern look, his face a mask of disappointment: '**Not fresh enough**'.

The fishmonger simply wipes his hands on his apron and sighs.

A week later Byron Stevens, undeterred, looks again for lobster. He selects a particularly large, vigorous lobster and prepares to repeat his test of freshness. He reaches out his bare hand this time, eager to confirm the vitality. He barely touches the creature's shell when the lobster, proving its extreme freshness beyond any doubt, snaps its large claw shut with an audible Crack - right onto Stevens's testing finger. His eyes bulge. He throws his arm into the air, the lobster clamped firmly to his finger. He dances a frantic jig in the fish oil on the floor, yelling, '**A Little Too Fresh!**'

The fishmonger just leans against his counter, shaking his head slightly and muttering, 'You can't please some people.'



On the morning of **13 December 1885**, the air in Chicago was the colour of a wet slate shingle. It was a Sunday, and the **'Sunny South'** branding seen in weekly magazines seemed like a cruel joke compared to the biting wind that had transformed the overnight slush into slippery sheets of ice.

The little ice rink near Lake Michigan looked innocent enough, its surface glossy as new whitewash with a hint of frost along the edges. **Wilbur Sibley (the friend of Byron Stevens)** wore his black high hat with stubborn dignity and approached the ice as if it might bite if he showed it too much enthusiasm.

The town kids formed a semi-circle around the edge of the lake. They whispered jokes about uphill battles and downhill tumbles, as children do when danger seems far away and laughter seems like the right response. Wilbur put on his skates, took a step, then another, as if the ice itself were a test he could ace with enough calm and gravity, and a dash of luck.

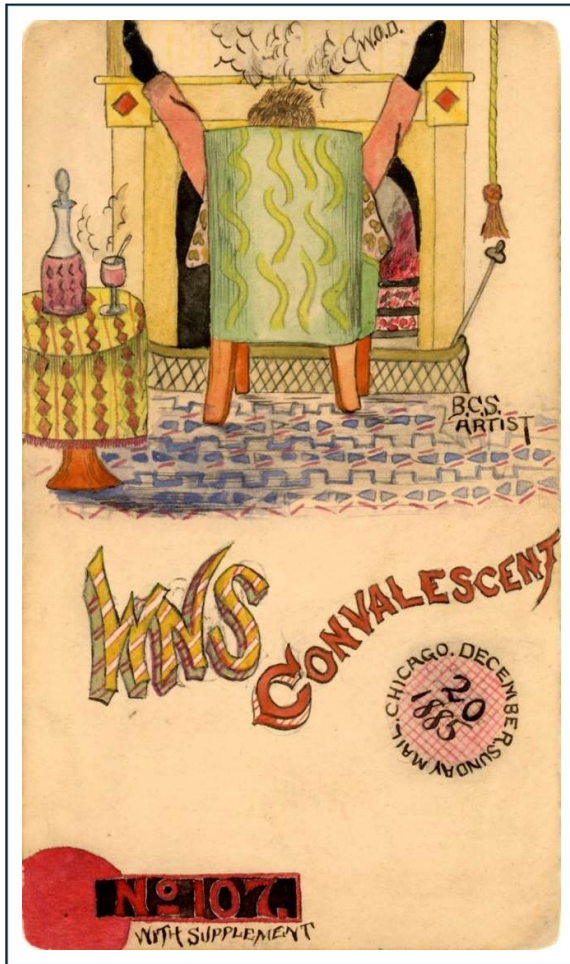
'Mind that patch by the willow,' someone called from the edge, 'That spot's been talking to the wind all morning.' Wilbur nodded, and then he was on the ice. His glide began as a modest arc, a subtle display of suburban athletic ability.

For a moment, the world narrowed to the precise line of his path: the careful curve of practice; the breath in a pale cloud; the crisp snap of air that felt like a compliment from winter itself. Then, abruptly, there was **'a dull thud'**.

'Are you all right, Mr Sibley?' a child asked, pressing closer with the solemn gravity that only children can muster when an adult looks ridiculous in public. 'Excellent, excellent,' Wilbur replied, the humour arriving late but welcome. 'All part of winter's curriculum: practice, humility, and the occasional lesson in gravity'.

The story, slightly changed, was published in the **Chicago Daily News**, a few days after Wilbur's **'dull thud'**.

20 December 1885 – 'WNS Convalescent'



In a United States in 1885, **WNS** was an acronym for a specific, localized benevolent society : **William N. Smith Convalescent Home** (for poor or elderly people). In the late 19th century, many such facilities were founded by religious or philanthropic groups.

The reputation of a convalescent home in Chicago around 1885 was primarily tied to its religious or philanthropic sponsorship, which generally guaranteed a certain level of funding and oversight. This was the era's equivalent of accreditation. The top tier were homes run by large, established Protestant charities or well-funded Catholic orders, would be rated highly due to their perceived moral integrity and reliable funding.

Secular or municipal benevolent societies provided more basic care, but funding could be inconsistent, while privately run '**boarding homes**' or unlicensed establishments were generally seen as a last resort, as quality varied wildly and oversight was non-existent.

A top-tier home in 1885 Chicago would have been described as a 'respectable, clean, and quiet Christian retreat' located away from city congestion, offering 'wholesome, simple food' and 'fresh air' to its 'deserving' patients.

The home in the cartoon made by Byron Stevens certainly rates as a very top-tier convalescent 'castle'.

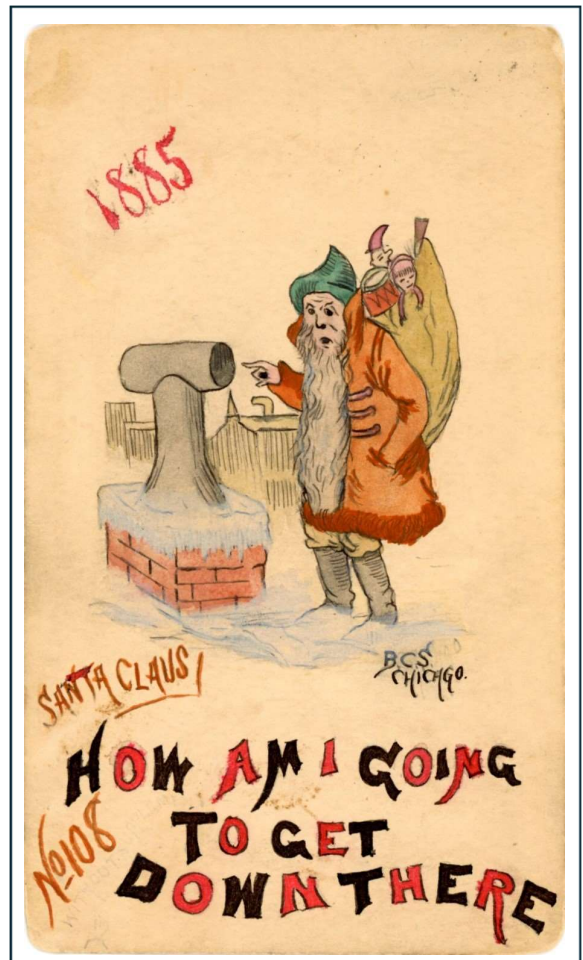
27 December 1885 - 'How am I going to get down there?'

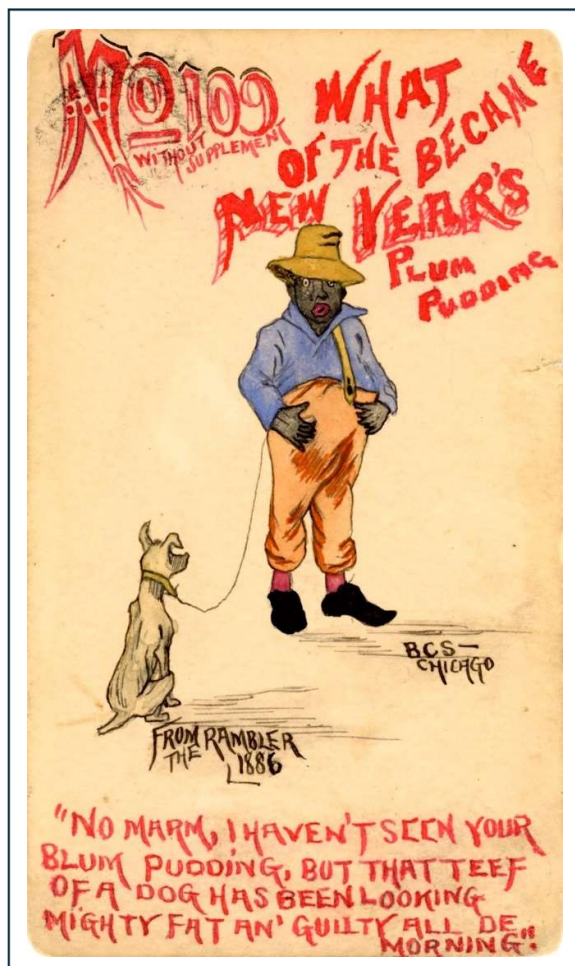
Santa Claus is on the roof, ready to crawl down the chimney and leave presents for the children by the fireplace. Unfortunately, the chimney is far too narrow. Santa Claus sighs: 'How am I going to get down there?'

He doesn't have all night; dozens more houses await. He leans over the edge of the roof and looks down at a nearby tree, thick with snow. The window to the living room is right beneath him. It's shut tight. 'Drat.' He considers simply breaking the window, but the noise would wake the entire household, a cardinal sin for a man in his profession.

He looks up to the starry sky, whispers a hurried prayer to the spirit of Christmas, and takes a deep breath. With a determined look, he positions himself at the top of the narrow chimney, points his boots down the hole, and, with a tremendous push, squeezes himself in headfirst. There's a scraping, a muffled 'Oof!', followed by a loud thud from inside the house. He untangles himself, shakes his head, and begins placing the presents by the now-glowing embers. 'Right,' he says, that's why we always leave room for a little Christmas magic.'

Extract from '**A Visit from Santa Claus**', a 1822 story from Clement Moore, adapted by Byron C. Stevens in 1885.





A typical Plum Pudding New Year's postcard.
(from Taylor Brothers – Cleveland, Ohio)

The phrase 'What became of the New Year's Plum Pudding' is a rhetorical question or satirical headline popular around the New Year holiday in 19th century newspapers. The phrase refers to something substantial and festive that was expected to last but disappeared quickly. It was a metaphor for money spent too quickly over the holidays, leaving nothing left by January.

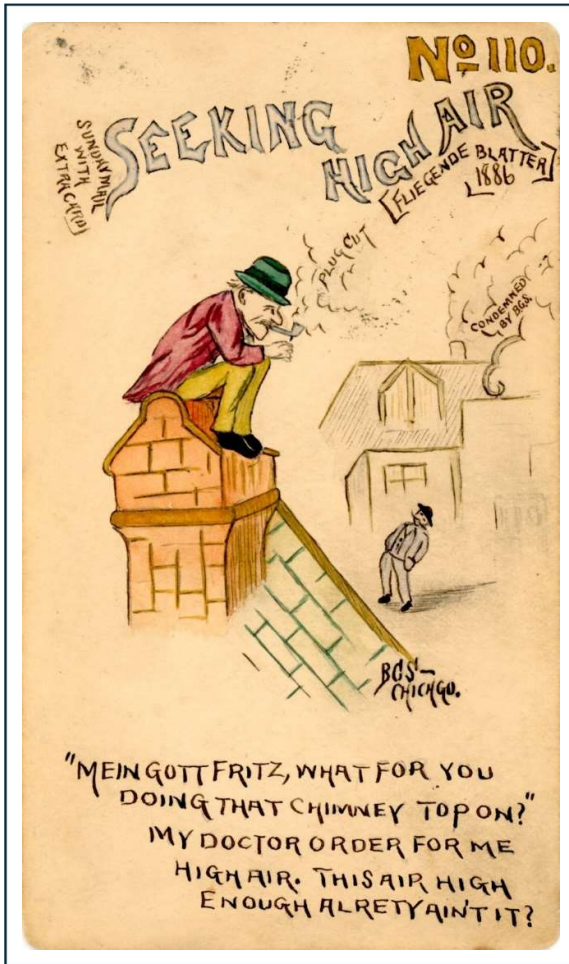
The plum pudding, a rich and traditional centrepiece of a Victorian Christmas and New Year's feast, served as a perfect symbol for something valuable or anticipated that was suddenly gone. This sketch is characteristic of Victorian-era comic postcards (c. 1870-1890), which often poked fun at the relationship between the servants and their employers, using food and pets as physical comedy tropes.

The scene: A servant is being questioned by the lady of the house : 'What became of the New Year's Plum Pudding?' on which the servant replies : ***'No Marm, I haven't seen your blum pudding, but that teef of a dog has been looking mighty fat an' guilty all de morning!'***

The servant clearly doesn't want to admit that he ate all of the plum pudding, and has tried to make the dog look guilty instead. Unfortunately for him, his posture, with his hands on his well-filled belly, is a clear indication that the dog is not guilty at all.

The cartoon appeared in '**The Rambler**', a common name for newspaper columns or independent journals that featured conversational, humorous, or satirical commentary on society, politics, and daily life. The informal, slightly cynical tone of the phrase matches the style often found in such 'Rambler' columns. A writer for such a column would use a familiar cultural symbol like a New Year's plum pudding to make a witty observation about current events.

9 January 1886 – 'Seeking High Air'



In 1886 around **470,000** people of German descent lived in Chicago, constituting roughly one-third of the city's total population.

Chicago was a major hub for German speakers, with robust German-language newspapers, political involvement, and distinct neighbourhoods known as '**Little Germanies**'. They made up a vital and substantial segment of the rapidly growing city.

The scene: **Fritz**, a German immigrant in Chicago, sits on top of the chimney of his house, smoking his pipe (*plug cut*). **Max**, his neighbour stands below in the street and calls to Fritz : '**Mein gott Fritz, what for you doing that chimney top on?**' to which Fritz replies : '**My doctor order for me high air. This air high enough alrety ain't it?**'

The cartoon appeared in the **Fliegende Blatter** (a German-language magazine from Ohio), it served as a recognizable source label for readers of German humour.

The magazine was known for its satirical characterizations of the German middle class and provided a compendium of humorous social criticism through comics, poems, and short stories. Wilhelm Busch, the editor of the magazine, was also the creator of **Fritz and Max**, appearing in '**The Friends**'.

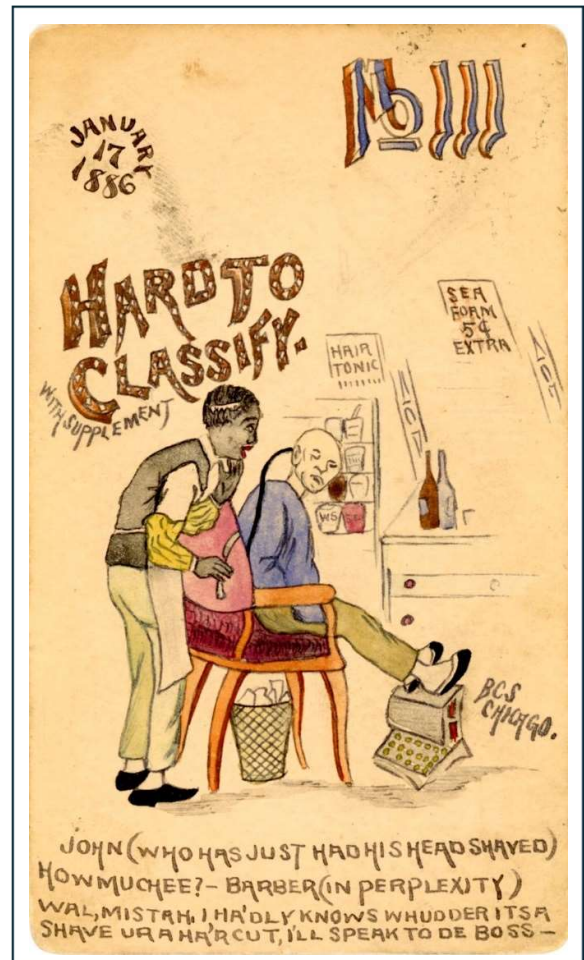
17 January 1885 – 'Hard to Classify'

John (a Chinese man who just had his head shaved) ask the barber : **How Muchee?**. The barber replies (in perplexity) : **Wal mister, I ha'dly knows whudder it's a shave ur a ha'r cut, I'll speak to de boss.** (Well mister, I hardly know whether it is a shave or a haircut, I'll talk to the boss).

Under the Qing Dynasty, all Chinese men were legally required to wear a queue, shaving the front and sides of the head and braiding the back into a long tail. Because the front of the head was already bald (shaved), and the back was exceptionally long, the American barber is 'perplexed.' He cannot decide if he is performing a shave (for the bald front) or a haircut (for the long back).

The term '**How Muchee?**' is a classic example of '**Pidgin**' dialect used in 19th century media to portray Chinese immigrants as fundamentally foreign and intellectually inferior. The barber speaks in a stylized 'uneducated' American dialect ('Wal,' 'whudder,' 'ha'r'). This sets up a 'low-brow' comedy scene where two different classes or races struggle to communicate.

The cartoon is a derogatory classification of an Afro-American person and a Chinese immigrant, which was unfortunately common at the time.



16 January 1886 – 'A State Street Statue'



The meaning of '**A State Street Statue**' on the 1886 Chicago postcard is a local, topical slang term implying the subject is a stylish, well-dressed, and possibly self-important individual who spends time conspicuously posing on the city's most fashionable street.

In 1886, State Street was Chicago's premier commercial and retail corridor, akin to Fifth Avenue in New York or Regent Street in London. It was the place where Chicago's elite shopped and, more importantly, strolled to be seen.

The term '**statue**' is a sarcastic nickname for someone who stands around posing or '**striking a pose**' rather than actually working or moving with purpose.

This phrase would have served as a localised, contemporary, humorous caption that gently mocks the subject's formal appearance while firmly placing him in the setting of Gilded Age Chicago commerce and society.

This caricature of the barber (**Frank Bradfish**) was created by the artist Byron Stevens. Frank Bradfish is also shown on card #27 in May 1884.

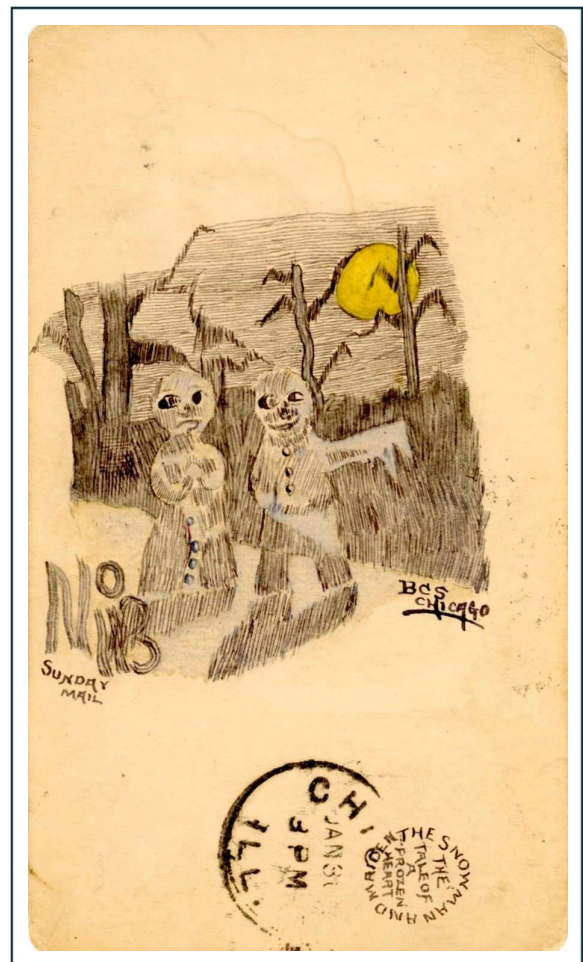
30 January 1886 – 'The Snowman and Maiden'

While less common in the U.S., the Russian folk character **Snegurochka** was gaining international recognition due to Rimsky-Korsakov's 1882 opera **The Snow Maiden**.

'The Snowman and the Maiden' is the title of a sentimental 19th century poem which tells a cautionary tale about a cold heart. It involves a young woman and a '**snowman**', who is a metaphor for a cold, unfeeling man. The poem was often performed as a dramatic reading under titles such as '**The Snowman and Maiden: The Tale of a Frozen Heart**' (see text at the bottom of the card).

The narrative usually centres on the maiden, a young woman who is perhaps pure or innocent, and the snowman, a man with a '**frozen heart**', who is emotionally distant, cruel or cold to her affections.

The poem typically builds to a tragic climax in which the maiden is destroyed by the man's emotional coldness. This is often symbolised by the melting snowman and the fleeting nature of love (or life).



1 February 1886 – 'Red Hot (sausage)'



Grilling sausages over open fires was done in Chicago since the 1850's.

In the 19th and early 20th century, Chicago attracted a large number of German immigrants. They settled in neighbourhoods like Lincoln Square, South End, and Clark Street, bringing culture, businesses, and culinary traditions.

Sausage-making is a traditional German culinary craft (think bratwurst, kielbasa, and other varieties). German immigrants helped popularize these types of sausages in Chicago, contributing to the city's rich sausage scene and the broader American sausage culture.

Chicago developed a robust meatpacking and sausage industry, with German and other European immigrant communities playing key roles. Ethnic enclaves operated butcher shops, markets, and restaurants, helping to standardize and spread sausage recipes and techniques.

Over time, sausage-eating in Chicago became more about the city's diverse food landscape—German sausages overlapped with Polish, Czech, Italian, and other influences. Street fairs, German-American clubs, and breweries further embedded sausage into Chicago's culinary identity.

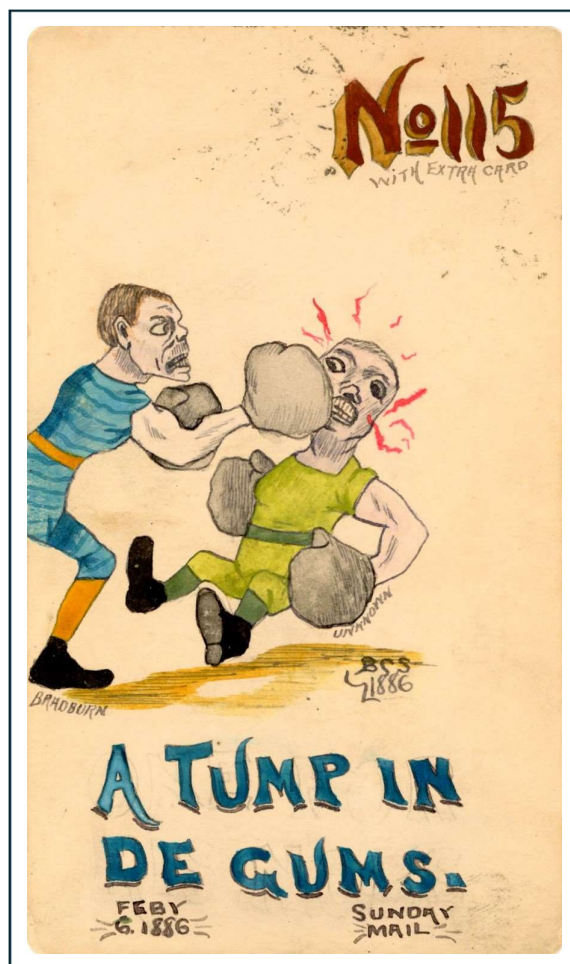
6 February 1886 – 'A Tump in de Gums'

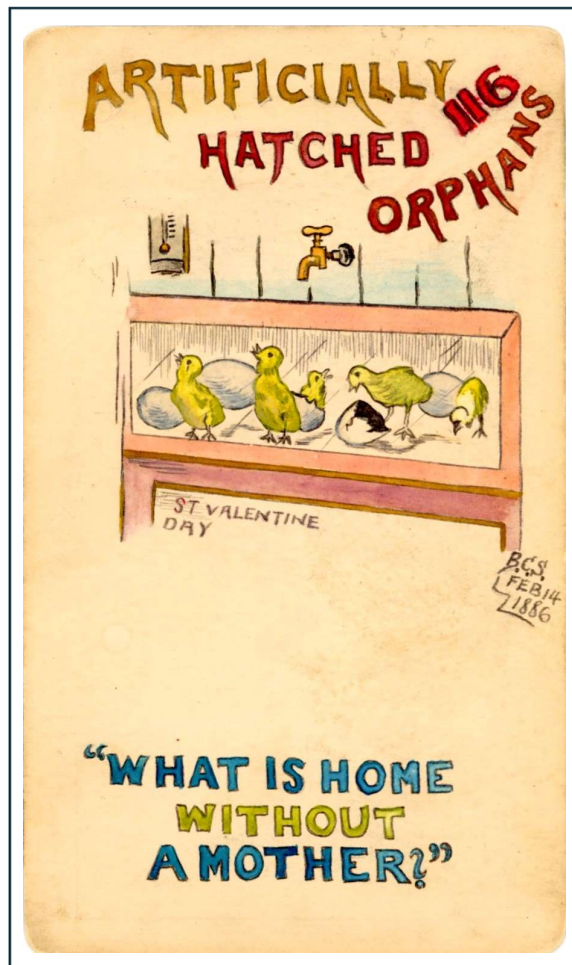
The expression '**a tump in de gums**' is derived from the Jamaican patois verb '**tump**', which means '**to punch or hit**' someone in the mouth or face.

The cartoon depicts a boxing match between **Bill (William) Bradburn** (on the left), a renowned American heavyweight boxer from the bare-knuckle era, and his opponent **Frank Glover** (on the right). At that time, professional boxing was largely governed by the London Prize Ring Rules, although the Queensberry Rules, which mandated the use of gloves, were gaining prominence.

Bradburn was a notable heavyweight fighter during this pivotal period in boxing history. A notable account from 1884 recounts a significant brawl in which Bradburn offered \$500 to fight the renowned **John L. Sullivan**. When Sullivan failed to appear, Bradburn ended up fighting his friend and fellow boxer, Al Marx, in a violent encounter.

Frank Glover was also an American heavyweight boxer active in the late 19th century. His exact date of birth is unknown, he died on 22 September 1892.





The practice of hatching chickens in an incubator was introduced in the United States in the mid-19th century. The first U.S. patent for such a device was granted in 1844 and it was capable of hatching a few hundred eggs per batch.

Throughout the 1880s, the technology was refined, becoming more reliable and commonplace among farmers.

The incubators of this era were fundamentally heated boxes designed to maintain a consistent temperature for hatching eggs artificially. Early models used simple heat sources like kerosene or coal lamps, which warmed a water reservoir or hot water pipes beneath the egg trays.

Advanced models, like the Petaluma Incubator developed around this time, featured automatic heat regulators to maintain a steady temperature, essential for successful hatching.

The incubators were typically made of wood, often double-walled and insulated with materials like sawdust, to retain heat. By 1885, at least seven different brands of small 'still air' cabinet incubators were on sale across the US.

The subtitle '**What is Home without a Mother?**' (at the bottom of the card) in relation to **St-Valentine's Day** byline is a perfect touch by the artist Byron C. Stevens.



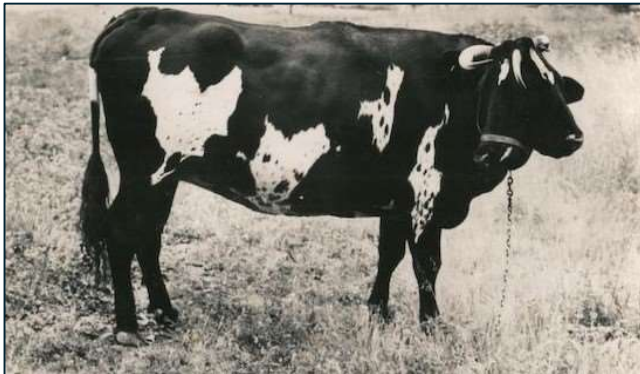
Advertising picture postcard of an incubator for hatching chickens, with regulated temperature system on the right.

At the front, the windowed wooden trays in which the eggs were placed. This type of incubator was of U.S. design, but altered for the European market.



A two-headed cow (or more commonly, a two-headed calf) was a very common type of exhibit displayed at dime museums in the late 19th century, including those in Chicago. Dime museums, like those operated by P.T. Barnum and his contemporaries, relied heavily on exhibiting physical anomalies, both real (like giants or 'armless wonders') and fake, to attract mass audiences.

These were not typically live animals but taxidermized specimens of polycephalic calves, a genuine but rare birth anomaly. The 'two-headed calf' was a staple in these collections across North America. Many historical museums still have their own two-headed calves on display today, acquired from these historical collections. The South Side Dime Museum in Chicago in 1886 featured such an exhibit as a regular attraction



DOLLY AND ROLLY

Pronounced by Doctors and Scientists the WORLD'S GREATEST LIVING EXHIBIT. No, this is not trick photography, but an actual photograph of the world's only creature, either animal or human, ever to live any length of time with two normal heads on one normal body. Her heads are male on the left and female on the right and form a perfect V. She has three horns which form a triangle. She is the largest cow in the world, weighing approximately one ton. Born April 4th, 1936, on the Blue Ribbon Dairy near San Diego, Calif., one of a pair of twins weighing 180 pounds at birth, the heaviest on record in the world, Dolly stands five feet in height, nine feet in length and 28 inches through the shoulders, and still growing. She is also the most remarkably marked animal in the world. On her left side, in the natural white and black of the Holstein, is pictured a camel, a lamb, a child in prayer and a footprint or dumb-bell. On her right side is the map of the United States, a dog with two heads, a seagull and a woodpecker. We realize that a description of this animal to those who have not seen her, sounds like a fairy tale. Consequently we invite you to come in and see her, with this unconditional guarantee: If you do not find her as described, ALIVE and in perfect health and in your judgment the BEST LIVING EXHIBIT you ever saw, your admission fee will be refunded. If you can find another like her we will pay you \$100,000. Exhibited in 40 states and Canada, two years in the World's Fair in New York City. Exhibited by J. Elvin Thomson, National City, California.

Two clippings showing DOLLY and ROLLY the two-headed cow, the world's only creature ever to live any length of time with two normal heads on one body. Dolly was a Holstein born in April 1936 at Blue Ribbon Dairy in San Diego, she had three horns and was, according to her promoter (J. Elvin Thomson of National City, CA), not only the largest cow in the world, but also 'the most remarkably marked animal in the world'. Dolly was shown on the World Fair of 1939 and 1940 in New York.



Barbara Stevens (1876–1924) was the niece of the artist Byron C. Stevens, the artist who drew all the cartoons in this collection. One evening in late February 1886, Barbara fell ill after eating green pears while visiting her cousin.

In the late 19th century, medical literature and parental warnings often classified green pears alongside green apples as a major cause of '**Cholera Morbus**' (a general term for severe gastrointestinal upset). While we now know these incidents were often caused by bacteria on the unwashed skin of fallen fruit, the reputation of the green pear as a 'stomach-ache fruit' was cemented in folklore. This was famously depicted in period trade cards and comic postcards, showing children doubled over in pain after a visit to an orchard.

The consumption of unripe, green pears, particularly when eaten in excess or by those with sensitive digestive systems, presents a specific set of physiological challenges. While not inherently toxic, the 'green' state of the fruit involves chemical and structural properties that differ significantly from its ripe counterpart.

The primary issue with green pears lies in their physical composition. Pears are unique among fruits for containing sclereids, commonly known as '**stone cells**'. These are gritty, lignified cells that provide the fruit its structural integrity. In an unripe pear, these cells are densely packed

and rigid. When ingested, they can act as a mechanical irritant to the lining of the stomach and intestines, potentially leading to cramping and discomfort.

Green pears are high in resistant **starch and sorbitol**, a sugar alcohol. Unlike the simple sugars (fructose and glucose) found in ripe fruit, the starches in green pears have not yet broken down. The human small intestine struggles to digest these complex chains, passing them instead to the large intestine.

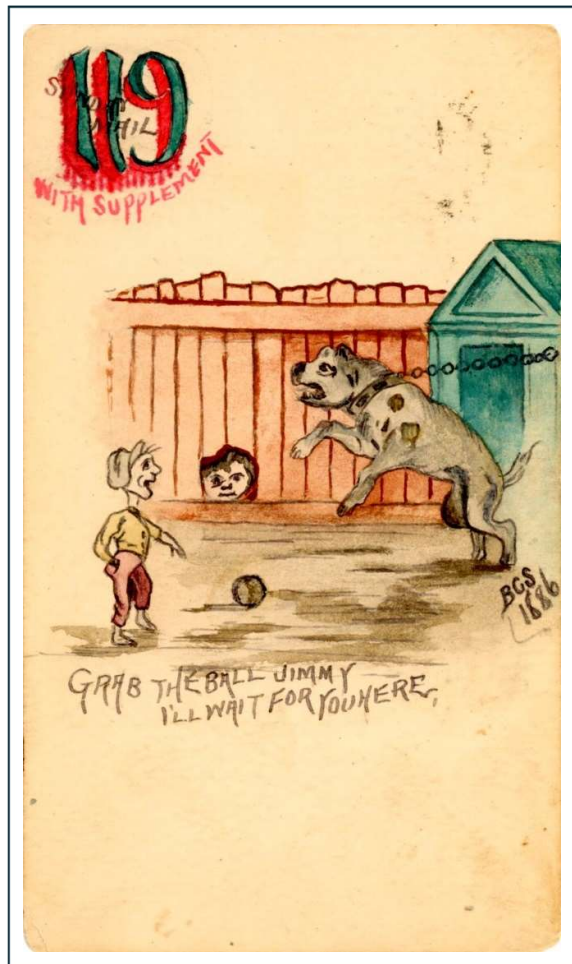
Once in the large intestine, gut bacteria begin to ferment these starches and sorbitol. This process releases gases—primarily hydrogen and methane—which cause bloating, flatulence, and 'heavy' stomach pain. For individuals with Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS), this can trigger a significant flare-up.

Unripe pears also contain higher concentrations of **tannins**, the same astringent compounds found in tea and red wine. Tannins are part of the plant's defence mechanism, designed to deter animals from eating the fruit before the seeds are ready for dispersal. Tannins bind to salivary proteins, creating that 'dry' or 'fuzzy' mouthfeel (astringency). Once in the stomach, high levels of tannins can interfere with digestive enzymes, slowing down the breakdown of other foods and leading to a sensation of 'indigestion' or nausea.



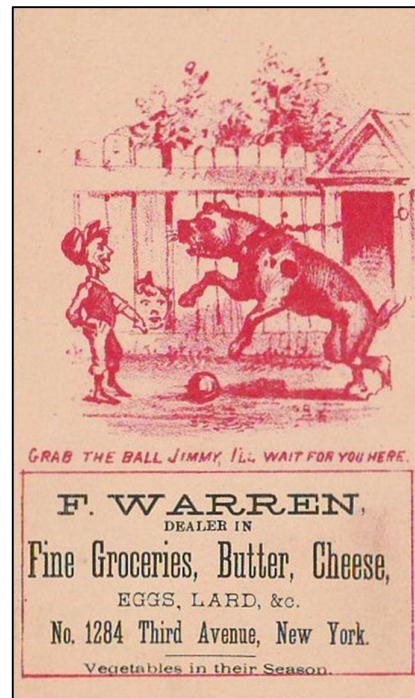
Finally, eating a pear before it is ripe means missing out on the fruit's peak nutritional value. As a pear ripens, its antioxidant levels increase, and its fibre becomes more soluble. A green pear is harder for the body to extract nutrients from, as the rigid cell walls (cellulose) protect the vitamins inside from being fully absorbed during the transit through the digestive tract.

Conclusion: it is advisable to allow pears to ripen at room temperature until the neck gives slightly to pressure. This process converts the starches to sugars, softens the stone cells, and reduces the tannin load, transforming a potential irritant into a healthy source of fibre and energy.



In early March 1886, artist Byron C. Stevens created a design for a trade card depicting a boy looking at a baseball. Another boy is encouraging him from behind a fence, while a menacing dog stands in his way. The text speaks for itself: 'Grab the ball, Jimmy. I'll wait for you here.'

There are a few variations of this cartoon with a slightly different caption, some with shorter text: 'Grab the ball, Jimmy'. The version is fragile, printed in black on thin paper, as a trading card from **Atlantic & Pacific Tea Co.**



From the original design by Byron Stevens (above left), a trading cards (in red print) have been found in the collection of Erick Walters (New Jersey). The design of the cartoon is very similar as the original form 1886.

The (original) black version (left) is slightly more different from the original made by Byron Stevens. This trading card as an advert for teas and fresh coffees from the Great Atlantic and Pacific Tea Company. Reduced size copy of the reverse side of the card is shown below.



20 March 1886 – 'My Great Gabriel!'



With the byline '**Look at dem legs a wagglin. Don't neber tell me Turkeys ain't got no sperrits.**'

A scene from the kitchen: a dead turkey lies on the table, its neck and head hanging down. A cat on the floor has reached the neck and is trying to pull the turkey down. The maid starts yelling, 'My Great Gabriel ! Look at those legs waggling. Don't ever tell me turkeys haven't got spirits'.

This text is derived from a theatre play from James Matthew Barrie (best known as the author of Peter Pan). He was born on 9 May 1860 in the small weaving town of Kirriemuir in Angus, Scotland and died on 19 June 1937.

The text from the cartoon is spoken by the character Mrs. Tovey while she is preparing a Christmas turkey. The full context involves her marvelling at the bird's appearance and 'spirit' as she looks at it.

The artist only signed almost all of his cards with the abbreviation 'B.C.S.', which stands for his name. This is one of **only 3 cards** on which he noted his full family name: **B. C. Stevens**.

21 March 1886 – 'Hides for Sale'

An clearly somewhat older man walks into the stable and stares at the cow's tail, which is hanging through the stable door.

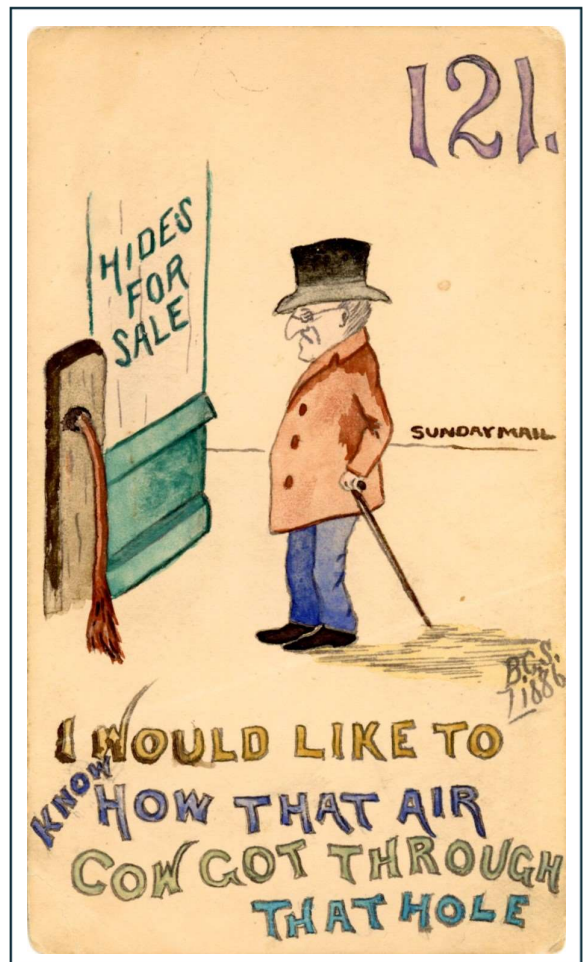
He is stunned by his observation and utters: '**I would like to know how that air cow got through that hole**'.

While that specific phrase does not appear as a widely recognized literary quote, its meaning can be interpreted based on the setting of common idioms and the literal absurdity of the imagery.

Perhaps the man's eyesight isn't that good, or maybe he was rather the worse for wear.

'Being rather the worse for wear' is a common idiom meaning to be in a poor or deteriorated condition, typically due to physical exertion, a difficult experience or the effects of alcohol.

Or maybe it was a combination of all these causes? The inclusion of 'rather' emphasises the extent of the poor condition.





An applicant arrives at the gates of Heaven and asks to be let in. St Peter asks him who he is. The applicant replies: **'Smith from Chicago.'** St Peter answers. **'You can come in if you want to. But I'll give you a fair warning. You won't like it here.'**

This is a classic joke that plays on a well-known city stereotype. The hidden joke is a humorous jab at the intense and unwavering civic pride of people from Chicago. The humour is based on the unbeatable Civic Pride because of the stereotype that Chicagoans believe their city is the greatest place in the universe, superior to everywhere else including, in this case, Heaven itself. St. Peter's warning isn't a critique of Heaven, it's a commentary on the man from Chicago. St. Peter knows that this man's loyalty and love for his city are so absolute that even the perfection of Paradise will seem like a disappointment in comparison.

The implication is that the man will spend eternity complaining: 'The celestial choirs are nice, but they're no Chicago Symphony Orchestra.' Or 'These clouds are okay, I guess, but have you seen the skyline from Lake Shore Drive?' and 'Sure, the ambrosia is good, but you can't get a decent deep-dish pizza or an Italian beef sandwich up here.'

Heaven is simply too perfect and boring; there's another angle to it. Chicago is famously known as the 'City of Broad Shoulders', a place of hard work, grit, hustle, and challenging weather. It has a vibrant, energetic, and sometimes chaotic character. In this setting, the serene, peaceful, and perfect nature of Heaven might be genuinely unappealing to someone who thrives on the action and energy of a city like Chicago.

St. Peter's warning could also mean, 'You're used to a city with real character and challenges. You're going to find eternal, blissful peace... incredibly boring.' In summary, the joke is that, for a true Chicagoan, even Heaven is a step down. Their city is the real paradise, and St. Peter is simply giving him a friendly heads-up about the inevitable disappointment.

27 March 1886 – ‘The 2-Tongue Girl’ in the West Side Dime Museum

Dime museums were popular 19th-century American entertainment institutions that provided a mix of education, spectacle, and ‘lowbrow’ amusement for a cheap admission fee of 10 cents. Unlike traditional, elite-only museums, dime museums were designed for the working class. They peaked in popularity between 1870 and 1900, serving as urban social hubs where immigrants and labourers could find affordable diversion.

Pioneers like P.T. Barnum blended legitimate scientific specimens with sensational theatre, circus acts, and hoaxes, marketing them as moral and educational experiences for families. The ‘**freak shows**’ featured individuals with congenital anomalies or unique skills, such as giants, midgets and ‘armless wonders’.

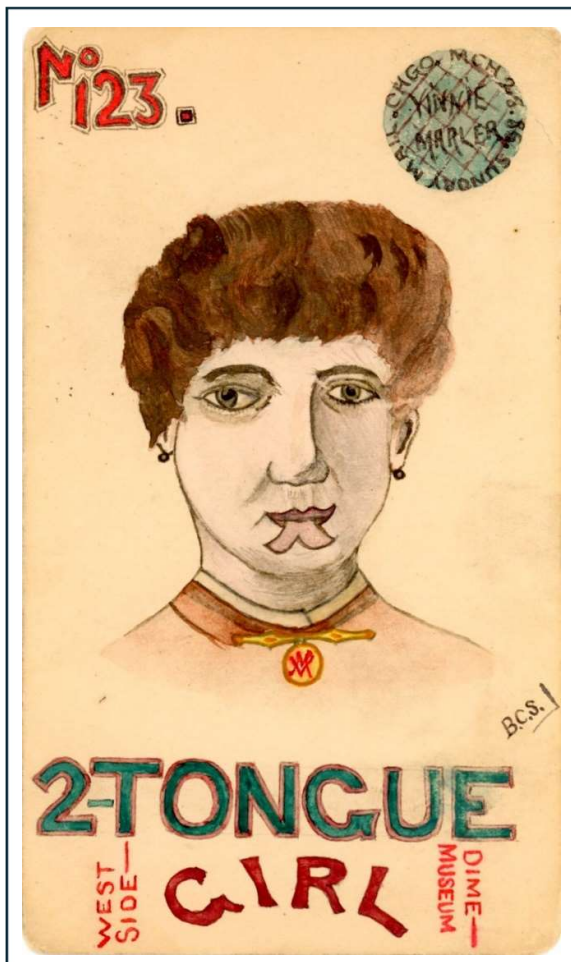
Apart from taxidermy & mutations displays, like the two-headed cow, the cyclopic pigs and other exotic animals rarely seen by the general public, many museums included a stage for magicians, sword swallowers, moralistic plays, and early vaudeville-style acts.

Dime museums helped establish modern marketing techniques like sensational headlines and ‘humbug’ (marketing hype). They were also the starting ground for famous entertainers like Harry Houdini.

The format faded by World War I, replaced by more dynamic entertainments like motion pictures, amusement parks, and higher-quality vaudeville. Their influence lives on in institutions like ‘Ripley’s Believe It or Not!’ and contemporary curiosity shops that celebrate the strange and unusual.

P.T. Barnum or George Middleton would often invent sensational backstories for performers, claiming their condition was the result of a supernatural event or a rare medical mystery.

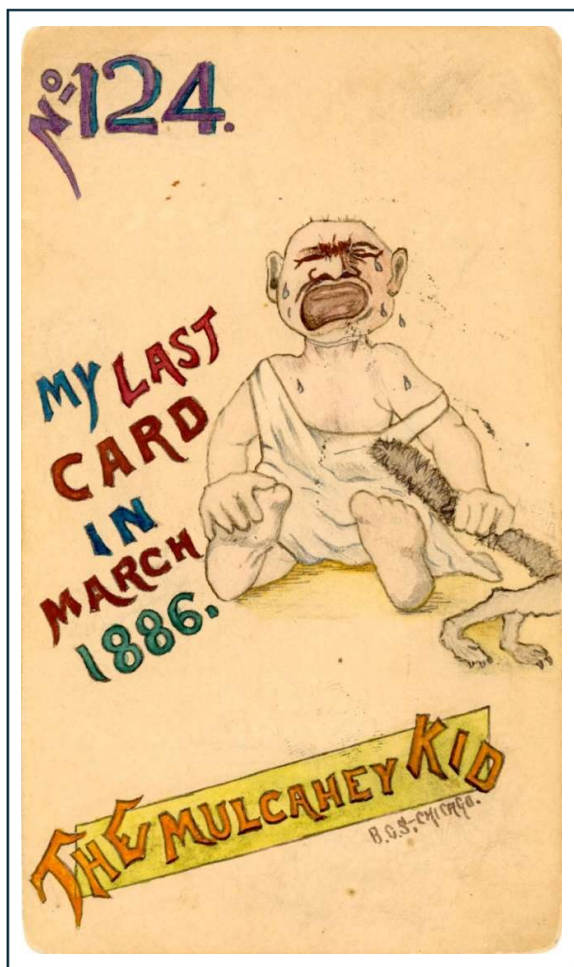
Alberta Greenfield (also known as **Winnie Marler**) was a dime museum performer who was exhibited as a ‘living freak of nature’ due to an unusual anatomical feature, she had a **bifurcated tongue**). She was active in the dime museum circuit, advertisements and historical records mention her performing around the time the user specified (1886) in Midwestern US cities, which included Chicago.



A bifurcated tongue, also known as a split or forked tongue, is a tongue that is divided down the centre into two separate halves. It can be a rare congenital anomaly (present at birth) due to incomplete fusion of the two sides of the tongue during embryonic development. It can be an isolated condition, but it is often associated with other syndromes or conditions, such as **Down syndrome** or **Melkersson-Rosenthal syndrome**. Depending on the severity of the split, it may affect the ability to eat, swallow, or pronounce certain sounds, but in many cases, it is a harmless variation that causes no issues other than appearance. If it causes functional problems, it can often **be corrected with a simple surgical procedure**.

But if you're a reptile... you won't need surgery...





The expression '**Grab the cat by the tail**' refers to learning through direct, often painful, experience.

The most famous use of this imagery comes from a quote attributed to **Mark Twain**: '**A man who carries a cat by the tail learns something he can learn in no other way**'.

Some lessons cannot be taught through books or advice; you must live through the "claws" (the consequences of a mistake) to truly understand and remember the lesson.

If used as "got the cat by the tail," it describes being in a difficult situation that is hard to manage, similar to '**stuck between a rock and a hard place**', it implies that both holding on and letting go may lead to being attacked or facing negative consequences.

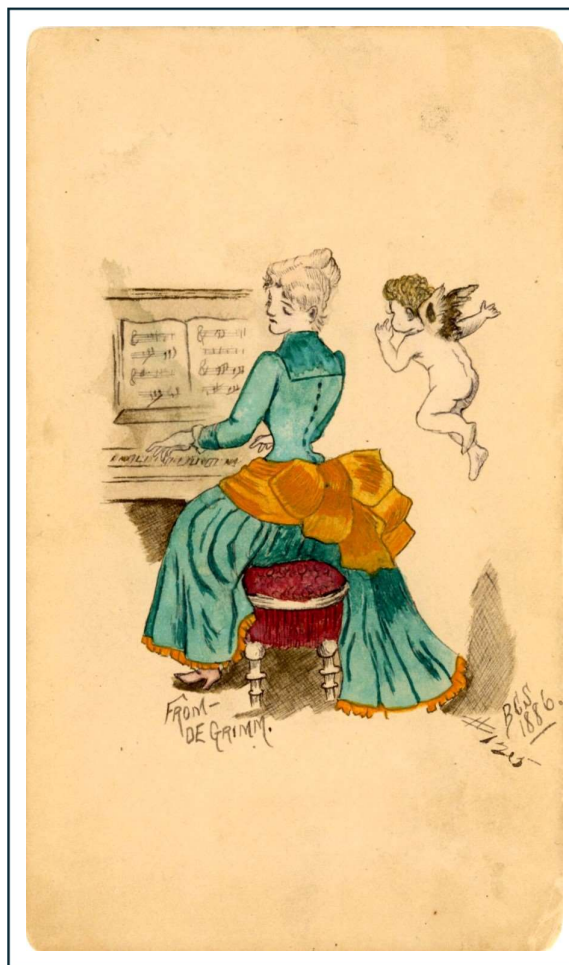
P.S. The family's name **Mulcahey** is in several court documents also written as **Mulcahy**. Mulcahey and Mulcahy are fundamentally the same name, and both are almost exclusively of Irish origin. Both are anglicized forms of the Gaelic name Ó Maolchathaigh (or Ó Maolchatha), meaning 'descendant of a devotee of Cathach'. The difference in spelling arises from phonetic transcriptions by different scribes before standardized literacy. Other variants include O'Mulcahy, Mulcahee, and Mulkey. The family name originates in County Tipperary and is associated with the counties of Limerick and Waterford.

4 April 1886 – 'From De Grimm'

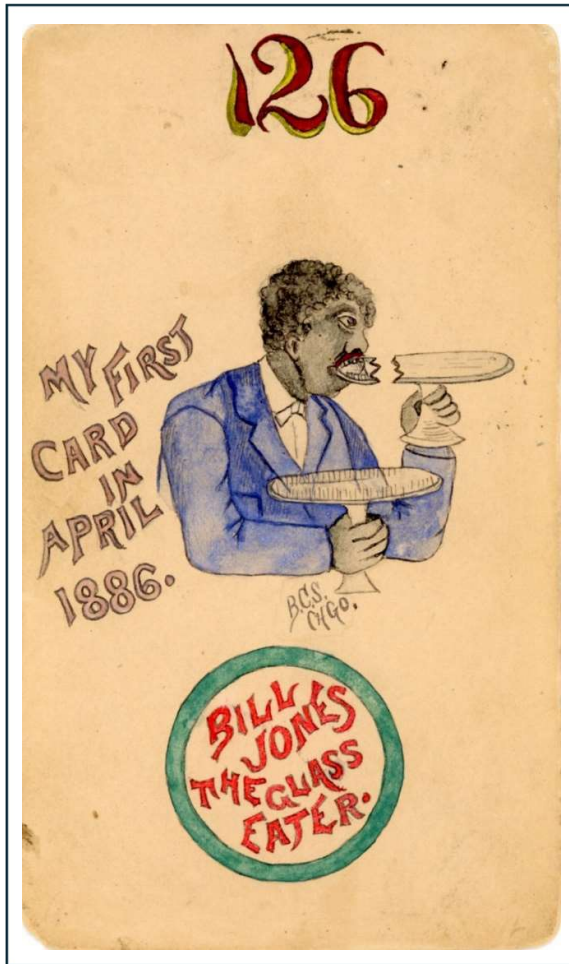
Julius Otto Grimm (1827–1903) was a German composer, conductor, and musician, primarily recognized today for his lifelong and close friendship with the celebrated composer Johannes Brahms.

Grimm is born in Pernau, Livonia (now Pärnu, Estonia), he lost both parents at a young age and was raised by relatives. He initially studied philosophy at the University of Dorpat before pursuing formal music education in Leipzig in 1851, where his teachers included Ignaz Moscheles and Moritz Hauptmann. He met the young Johannes Brahms in Leipzig in 1853, and they quickly formed a close bond. He was also acquainted with Robert and Clara Schumann and the violinist Joseph Joachim, forming part of their influential musical circle. After working as a professor of music and choral conductor in Göttingen, Grimm accepted the influential position of conductor of the Musikverein (music association) of Münster in 1860. He remained in this post for 40 years, becoming a central figure in the city's musical life, receiving an honorary doctorate in 1897.

Grimm's compositional style was heavily influenced by the Romantic tradition, particularly the circle around Brahms and the Schumanns. He remained distant from the 'New German School' associated with Wagner and Liszt.



5 April 1886 Bill Jones - The Glass Eater



The practice of glass eating was a popular, albeit dangerous, act in American dime museums and sideshows during the late 19th and early 20th century. These performers would consume glass bottles, beakers, and other items as part of an illusionary or extreme stunt for entertainment.

'**Bill Jones the glass eater**' was a performer at the Wabash Ave. Museum in Chicago. Advertisements for his act appeared in newspapers in April 1886. He was a well-known curiosity who displayed the unusual act of consuming glass and sometimes other unnatural foods, appearing at dime museums.

His act was characteristic of the popular dime museum and sideshow entertainment of the era, which featured various 'human abnormalities' and unique talents. Patrons would pay a dime (ten cents) to witness such curiosities, a prominent form of entertainment before the rise of movies and modern amusement parks.

In February 1886, reports mention that one Chicago dime museum 'feature' was lost due to an 'another's rash act,' referring to an incident involving Jones. News articles from January 1887 indicate that Jones was gravely ill, described as '**The Dying Glass Eater**' who still craved his 'unnatural food'.

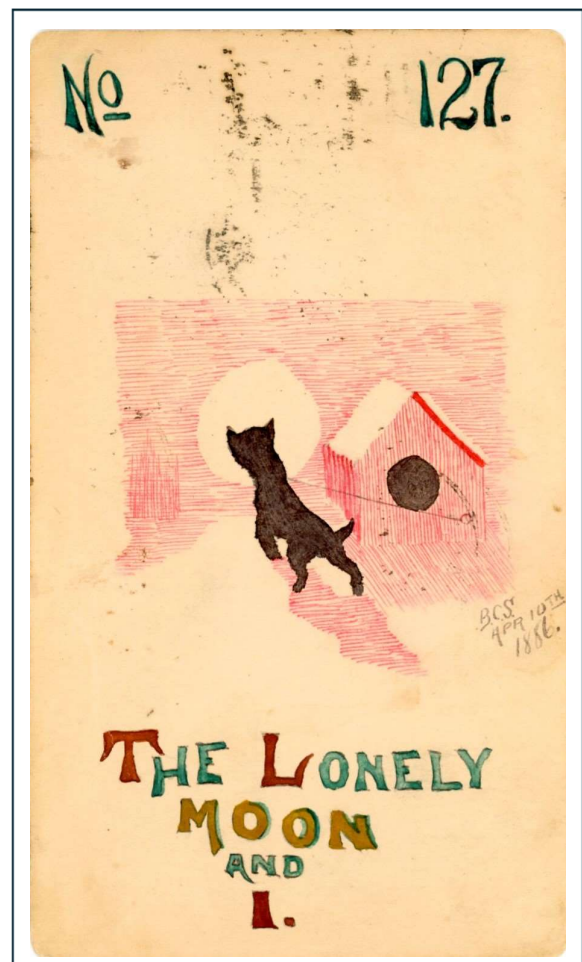
10 April 1886 – 'The Lonely Moon and I.'

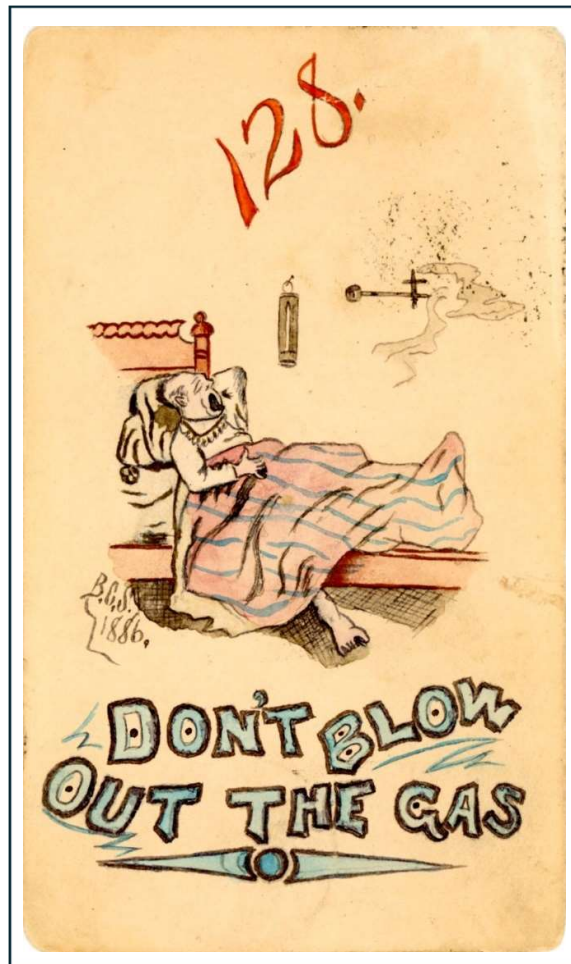
The phrase '**The Lonely Moon and I**' is a poetic expression. In general terms, especially within the sentimental and romantic literature of the 19th century, the phrase evokes themes of solitude and introspection: the speaker is alone with the moon (and his dog) as their sole companion, creating a scene of quiet contemplation or isolation.

The 'lonely' moon symbolizes the speaker's own loneliness, a feeling of being an isolated observer of the world. The night setting is a traditional backdrop for sadness or reflection.

The moon, a constant and silent celestial body, acts as a witness to the speaker's private thoughts, feelings, or secrets. In 1886, it would resonate with the lingering influences of the Romantic movement, where nature, particularly the moon, was often used as a mirror for human emotion and a companion in solitude.

On April 10, 1886, the Moon was at First Quarter (half illuminated), approaching Full Moon on 18 April 1886. The drawing shows a full moon, an artistic interpretation of the cartoonist.





Before the widespread adoption of electricity, hotel rooms were lit by gas jets, small wall-mounted fixtures fuelled by ‘coal gas’ or ‘illuminating gas.’ For many travellers, especially those from rural areas, the only artificial light they had ever known came from candles or oil lamps. To extinguish a candle or a kerosene flame, the standard practice was to simply blow it out. Unlike a candle, blowing out a gas flame did not stop the source of the fuel. It merely extinguished the light while leaving the gas valve open, which had lethal Consequences.

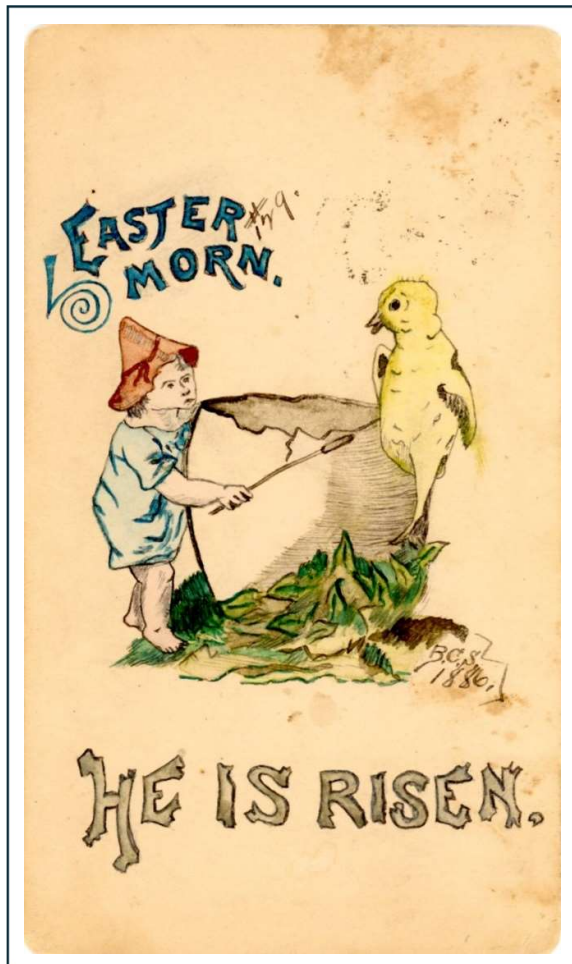
Coal gas in the 19th century was rich in carbon monoxide. If a guest blew out the flame and went to sleep, the odorless and colourless gas would continue to fill the room, leading to ‘gas poisoning’ and often death by morning. A room filled with unburnt gas became a ticking time bomb. The moment another guest or a maid entered with a lit match or candle, the concentrated gas would ignite, causing devastating structural explosions.

To combat these frequent fatalities, hotels and boarding houses posted prominent signs near the gas fixtures. These signs were necessary because the technology lacked modern safety features, such as automatic shut-off valves. Guests had to be taught to manually turn the small metal key or lever to cut off the flow of gas entirely.

Many guests found the invisible power of gas terrifying and counterintuitive. Signs often included step-by-step instructions: **‘Turn the key to the right until the flame is gone. Do not blow.’**

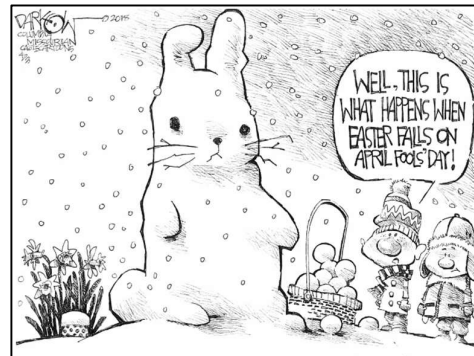
By the late 1880s and 1890s, as electricity began to replace gas, hotels had to pivot their warnings. New signs were posted reassuring guests that electric lights were safe, did not require matches, and, most importantly, did not pose a risk of ‘suffocation’ if left on or handled incorrectly. The **‘Don’t blow out the gas’** warning remains a famous artifact of a period when human habits were struggling to keep pace with rapid technological change.

25 April 1886 – ‘Easter Morning’



In **1886**, Easter Sunday fell on **25 April**, the **latest possible date**. This is an extremely rare occurrence, as it is the latest possible date on which Easter can fall. Before the introduction of the Gregorian calendar (initially only adopted by Catholic countries - Italy, Spain, Portugal, France in **1582**), it occurred only in **1666** and **1734**.

Within the Gregorian calendar, adopted in the U.S. (then British colonies) in **September 1752**, this has only happened twice before: in **1866** and **1943**. In the 21st century, it will not happen again until **2038**.



The phrase **‘He is risen’** at the bottom of Byron Stevens’ Easter card is phrase in Christianity used to celebrate and proclaim the Resurrection of Jesus. It affirms the belief that Jesus was raised from the dead after his crucifixion and signifies the triumph of life over death to believers.

4 May 1886 – ‘Mulcahey in Repose’

This cartoon depicts Dennis Mulcahey (*) **‘in repose’**, a formal or poetic phrase that primarily means at rest or in a state of calm and stillness. This is the most common and literal use of the phrase, referring to someone who is resting peacefully, usually asleep.

The phrase **‘cut plug’** (left of his head) refers to a portion of compressed chewing tobacco.



Historically, especially in the 19th and early 20th century, tobacco was often sold in large, pressed, brick-like blocks called ‘plugs’. Consumers would then use a knife or bite off a ‘cut plug,’ or a portion-sized piece, from the main block to chew or to prepare for pipe smoking.

(*) Other cards about the Mulcahey family: #5, #93 and #124.



8 May 1886 - The Monkey and the Parrot War (Part 1 & 2)

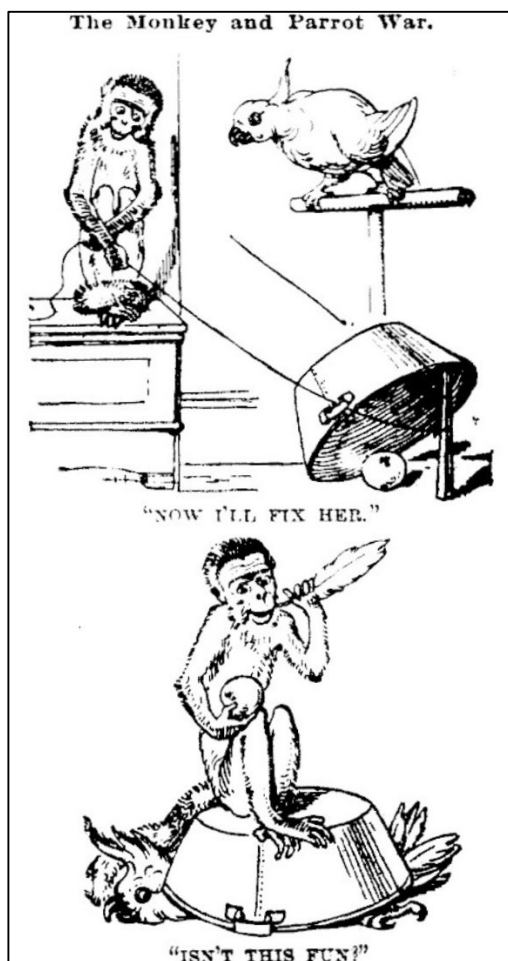
This is a traditional tale originating from ancient Indian fables (Panchatantra) involving a monkey and a bird (in this case a parrot), but the core theme involves the parrot advising the monkey.

The modern late 19th century version of the tale use these two animals to teach simple lessons about friendship, sharing, or cleverness.

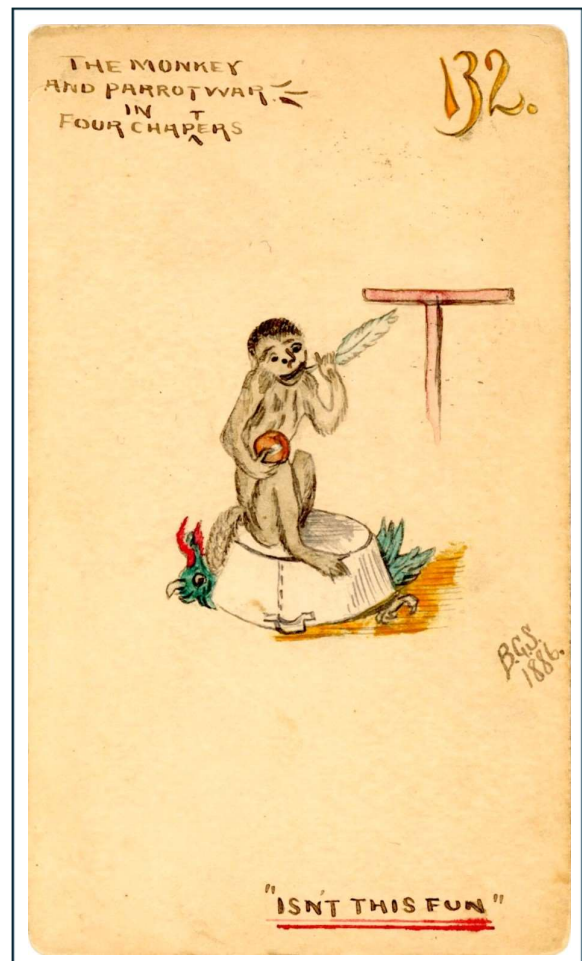
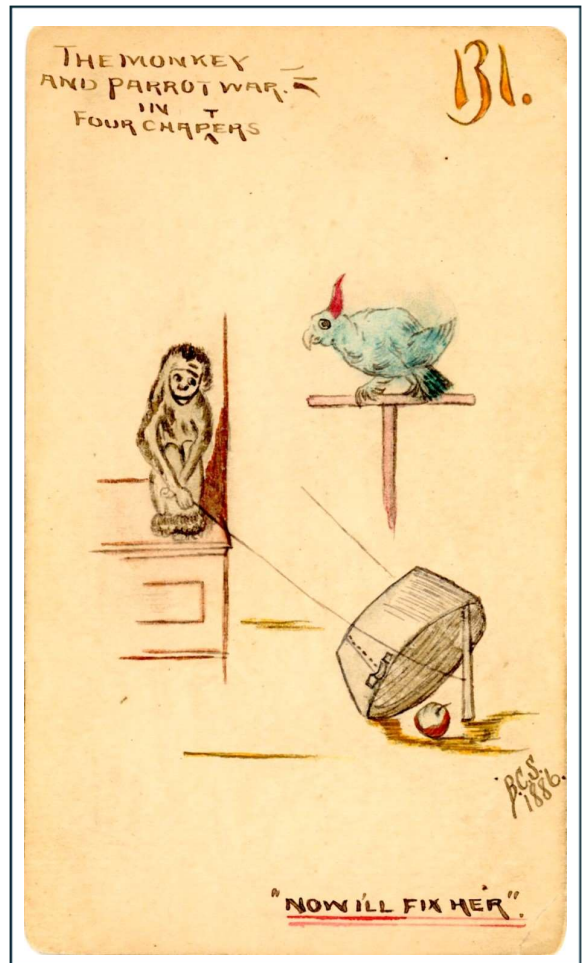
A mischievous monkey is taught a lesson about kindness and greed by a clever parrot, in a sequel of 4 chapters.

The first chapter depicts the monkey playing a trick on a parrot. He sets up a trap by hiding an apple under a thin basin. The monkey believes he will win 'Now I'll Fix Her'.

In the second chapter, the parrot is trapped under the basin and the monkey got the apple and a plume of the parrot's tail. The monkey is confident that he won the battle 'Isn't This Fun!'.



The strip of four cartoons made by Byron C. Stevens appeared in **The Plattsburgh Sentinel**, **The Chicago Tribune** and **The Chicago Daily News** in April and May 1886. The Canadian **Montreal Weekly Witness** published the cartoon on **30 June 1886**.



8 May 1886 - The Monkey and the Parrot War (Part 3 & 4)

In the third chapter, the parrot can escape from under the basin by lifting it and the monkey drops both the apple and the parrot's plume, his confidence is shaken. The parrot bites the monkey's tale, who finds it '**Not quite so funny**'.

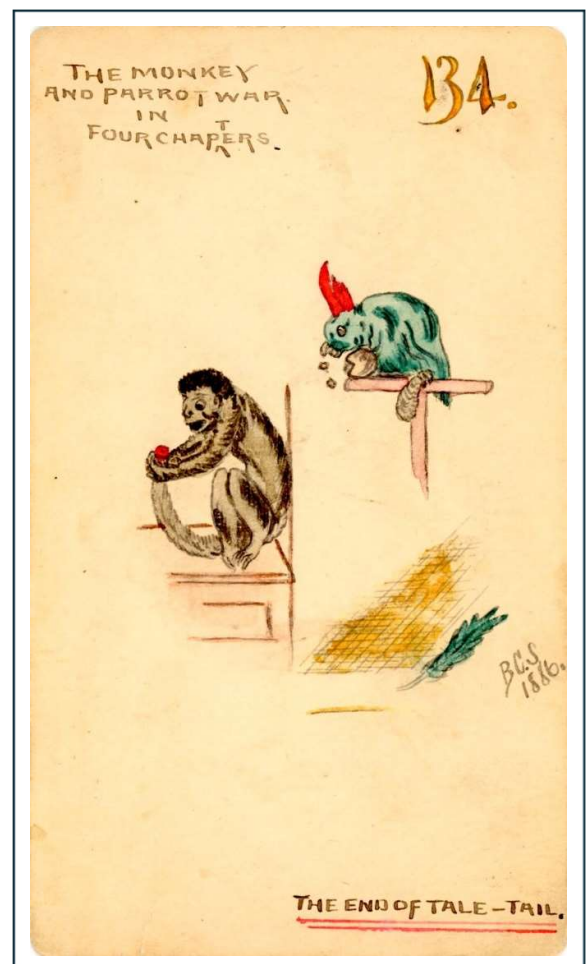
In the last chapter, the parrot is happily eating the apple while the monkey looks baffled to his shorter tail. '**The end of the Tale (Tail)**'.

The moral of the story.

Greed is a self-defeating vice. In pursuing more than one needs, a character often ends up with nothing at all. The relentless pursuit of wealth or possessions often blinds people to the consequences of their actions, leading to their downfall or loss of what they already had. The pursuit of riches often destroys relationships. Greed frequently causes characters to betray friends or family, leaving them isolated and unhappy even if they achieve wealth temporarily.



In the version published in *The Plattsburgh Sentinel*, the original bottom line '**The end of the Tale - Tail**' was shortened to only '**The End**'. It's unknown why the newspaper editor removed the very witty expression '**Tale - Tail**'. Maybe kids wouldn't catch the word-joke?





Byron Stevens made a cartoon depicting four satiric versions of frequently used phrases in weather reports: **'Wet and Muddy Weather'**, **'A Dcold Snap or Rain'**, **'Dark and Cloudy Weather'** and **'High Winds, Fair Weather'**. At the bottom, he wrote **'The Fudge'**. What is this?

The Fudge (or Fudgebox) was a metal device that enabled late-breaking news to be printed without stopping the press. A Stop Press column on the front page would be left blank so stories that broke after deadline could be 'fudged'. It was the specific location on a newspaper's front page used for printing the most immediate, last-minute news or weather updates.

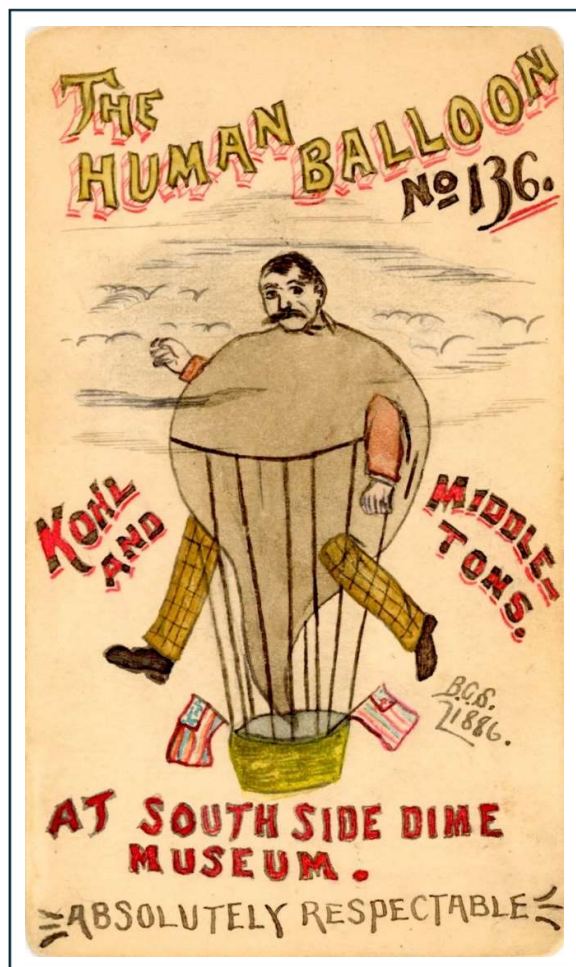
Because 19th and early 20th century weather forecasts changed rapidly, the fudge box allowed editors to insert a late-arriving storm warning or temperature change without stopping the main printing press or recasting the entire page plate. In many newspapers, this dedicated space became known as the 'The Weather Box,' providing a consistent spot for readers to find local alerts or daily predictions. To emphasize urgency, weather bulletins in the fudge box were sometimes printed in red ink, contrasting with the black-and-white body of the newspaper.

A typical 'fudge box' insert is shown on this clipping, inserted in the fudge box when an update arrived of the Titanic disaster of 1912, which was immediately filled (at 1 A.M.) with the **'VERY LATEST NEWS'**. Almost every few hours, new information was put in the fudge box of the Chicago Examiner newspaper.

**VERY LATEST NEWS
OF GREAT DISASTER**

HIGHLAND LIGHT, Mass., April 18,
1 A. M.—(Thursday) — By Wireless —
Capt. Rostrom of the Carpathia says:
"I know for sure that there were no
lives saved except those I have on
board. I have not the body of Colonel
John Jacob Astor on board.
"Mrs. Astor is very sick; dangerous-
ly ill. More than 100 are sick and in
the hospital.
"When the collision occurred about 200 sailors sleeping
in the bow of the Titanic were drowned like rats. After the
impact the lights on the Titanic went out in four minutes.
The dynamos lasted about the same time, which caused the
wireless operator to abandon his calls for help. As his stor-
age batteries were only capable of carrying from 50 to 100
miles, the wireless operator was rendered helpless."

22 May 1886 – 'The Human Balloon'



'The Human Balloon' was a specific stage name used by the **Kohl & Middleton in the South Side Dime Museum** in Chicago (1883-1886). The act involved the performer demonstrating unusual control over their body to inflate themselves in some way. The performer name The Human Balloon was **Jainca Wilson** (sometimes spelled **Jinca Wilson**).

The '**Human Balloon**' act was a physical curiosity performance that capitalized on the audience's fascination with extreme, unusual body feats. The performer would seemingly 'inflate' their body, likely their stomach or chest area, to a remarkable size, often done through controlled breathing techniques and muscle manipulation, giving the illusion of being filled with air like a balloon. This act was part of the standard lineup of dime museums, which featured 'strong men, the human balloon and other attractions'. These venues thrived on showcasing extraordinary human abilities, physical anomalies, and novel talents to curious crowds.

The act would have been presented with a strong dose of showmanship and 'humbuggery' (the **P.T. Barnum** style of presenting something ordinary as extraordinary), relying on the performer's skill and the audience's willingness to be amazed.

5 June 1886 – 'A Stockyards Man'

A 'stockyards man' was a person employed in or associated with the operations of a large-scale livestock market or meatpacking centre, commonly known as a stockyard.

This term was particularly prevalent in cities like Chicago and Kansas City, where massive stockyards were central to the economy in the late 19th and early 20th century. The job was vital to the food supply chain, involving a wide range of roles and responsibilities. The work included coordinating with transporters and commission merchants who acted as agents for the producers.

The term 'A Stockyards Man' refers to anyone from a common labourer who handled animals on the ground to a high-level executive, commission man, or **businessman who made his fortune in the livestock industry**. The job was often physically demanding and required working in a bustling, often chaotic, industrial environment known for its strong odours and intense labour struggles.

Byron Stevens drew a caricatural self-portrait, presenting himself as A Stockyards **Business** Man.

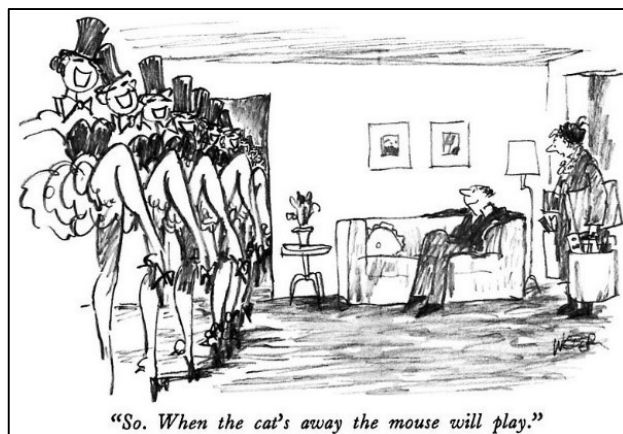


17 June 1886 – ‘Having a good time now Sib is away’



The title is the common English phrase used to describe a situation where subordinates or less-disciplined people misbehave or have fun in the absence of authority is: **‘When the cat’s away, the mice will play.’**

This proverb perfectly captures the scenario where supervision is lifted, and those who are normally restrained take the opportunity to enjoy themselves or cause mischief. The person Sib in the drawing is actually **Wilbur Sibley**, the brother-in-law of Byron Stevens, so Byron could build a party...



4 July 1886 – ‘The Fourth’

4 July 1886 was primarily celebrated as the 110th anniversary of the **United States Declaration of Independence** with typical patriotic festivities across the country, while globally a few significant events occurred.

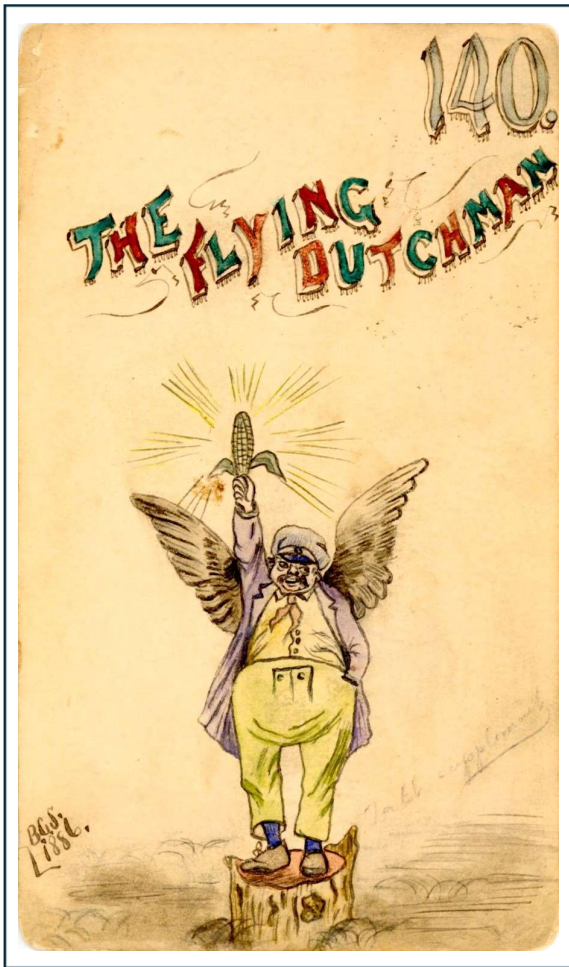
Across the nation, the day was marked by parades, speeches and **fireworks**, consistent with 19th century traditions.

President Grover Cleveland and his new wife, Frances Folsom, made an appearance at a Fourth of July concert on the South Portico of the White House, drawing a large crowd eager to see the new First Lady.

In Chicago, the day followed the tumultuous **Haymarket affair** of 4 May 1886. The **Haymarket affair**, also known as the **Haymarket massacre**, **Haymarket Square riot**, was the aftermath of a bombing that took place at a labour demonstration at Haymarket Square in Chicago. On July 4th, jury selection for the highly publicized trial of the eight anarchist defendants was ongoing.



19 July 1886 – 'The Flying Dutchman'



Richard Wagner's opera **The Flying Dutchman** (in German: **Der Fliegende Holländer**) is a romantic opera in three acts based on the legend of a cursed sea captain. The central theme is redemption through unwavering love and fidelity beyond death.

The Dutchman was a ghost-ship captain, cursed to sail the seas forever. He can only make landfall every seven years to seek a faithful wife whose sacrifice will free him. Senta was the daughter of a Norwegian captain, Daland (who is greedy for wealth). She is obsessed with the legend of the Dutchman and believes she is destined to save him. Erik is the local hunter and Senta's suitor, who is genuinely in love with her. Mary is the nurse/companion of Senta.

Richard Wagner's opera *The Flying Dutchman* was first performed in Chicago in March 1886. In July 1886, the opera was on tour with the American Opera Company, under the musical direction of Theodore Thomas (founder of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra). They performed the opera as part of its first season in an English translation. The summer months had no performance in Chicago itself, as the company was touring.

26 July 1886 – 'Stopped by the Wind'

Strong winds were recorded in and around Chicago on several days in July 1886. Records of heavy wind events were also registered across the US and the Great Lakes region during this period. Local newspapers from July 1886 mention wind activity.

Both the *Chicago Tribune* and the German-language newspaper *Illinois Staats-Zeitung*, which served the city's large German-speaking population, reported that 'heavy winds blew in from Lake Michigan'. Similar stories appeared in other local newspapers; one snippet mentioned a 'heavy wind swamping the skiff' as part of a local story.

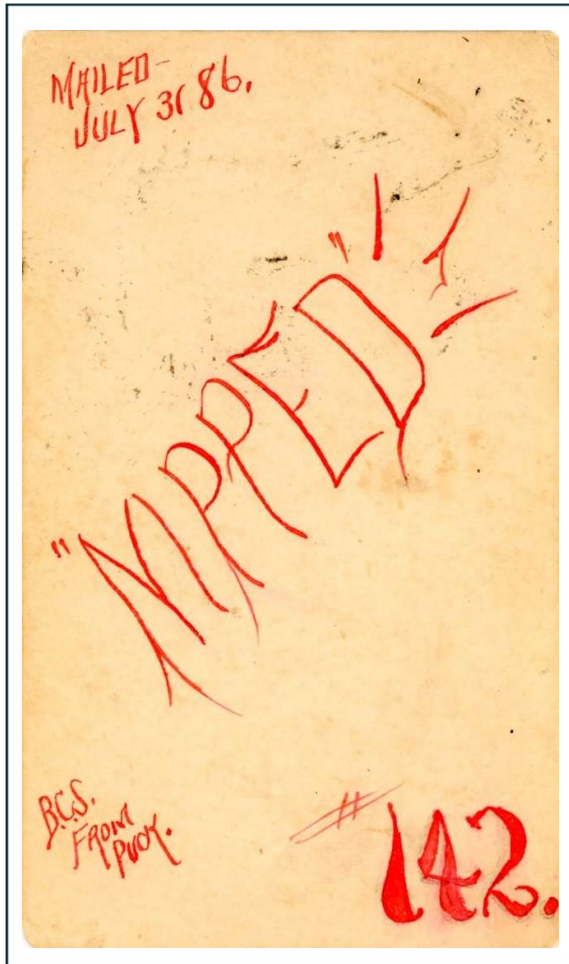
Historical weather reports for July 1886 also note significant wind and hailstorms in other locations, such as Pennsylvania, Dakota Territory, Tennessee, and New Jersey. In some places, recorded wind speeds reached 75–90 mph, worse than the conditions experienced in Chicago.

The artist Byron Stevens captured the heavy winds in a self-portrait showing him battling against the wind and rain.

'Don't remember ever being stopped by the wind before.'



31 July 1886 - 'M'pped'



On 31 July 1886, Byron Stevens faced a moment many urban dwellers would recognize: a forced retreat from a familiar, comfortable space into a much smaller house. To vent the frustration of this sudden constraint, Stevens sketched a simple card and uttered a single, curt cry: 'MPPED', the clipped form of 'mupped.'

The word, though brief, carried a loose, portable sense of grievance that could travel with the speaker as quickly as the street noise of a city block.

The term 'mupped' sits intriguingly at the crossroads of regional dialect and immigrant speech. In historical Irish and British dialects, mupped or mupped up described being crowded or inconvenienced for want of room. It was a compact expression for that familiar ache, the pressure of insufficient space, the sense that one's environment had closed in just when one needed it to open.

By 1886 Chicago, the term found a new setting among immigrant communities grappling with the city's rapid expansion and the proliferation of cramped tenement housing.

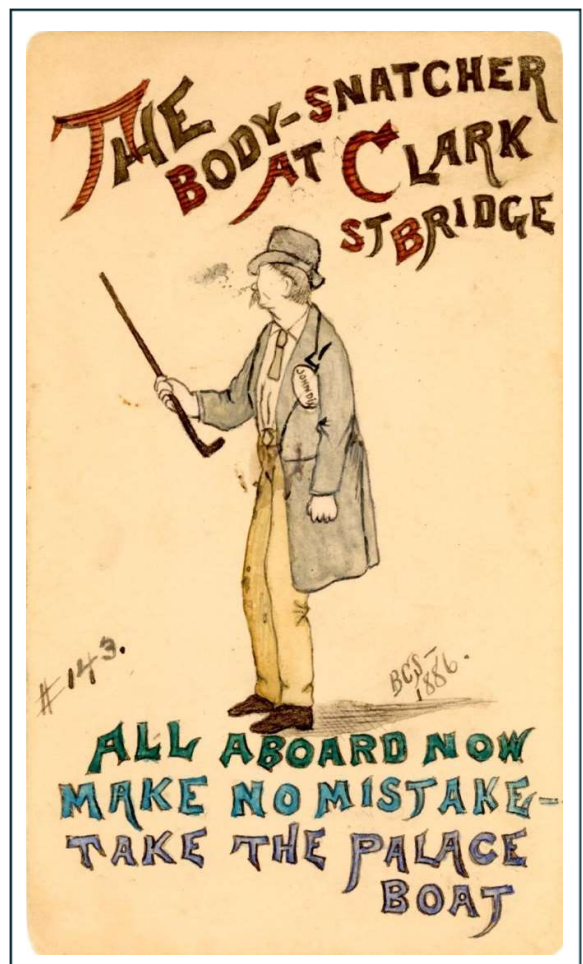
Thus, Byron Stevens's cry of mupped on that July day is less a lone utterance than a window into a broader urban vernacular.

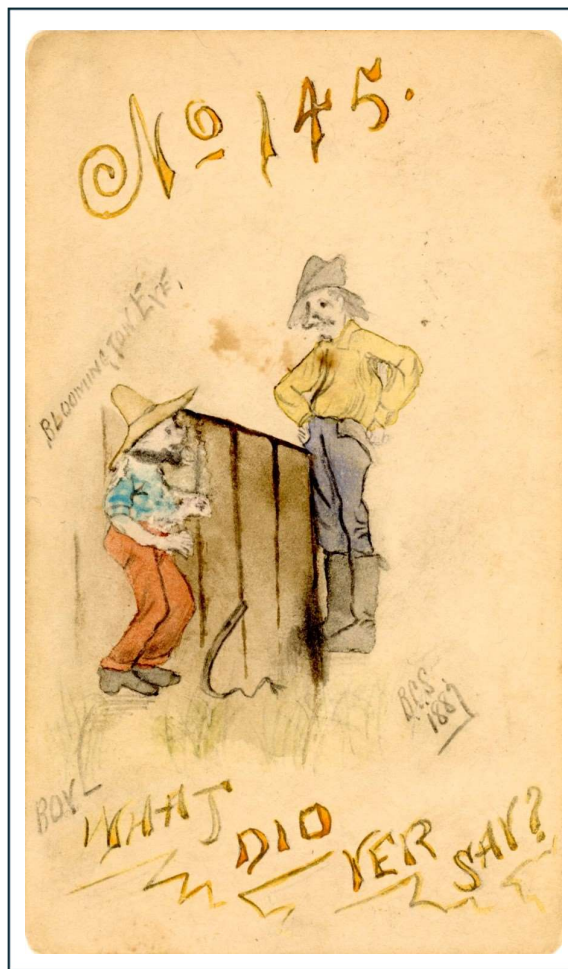
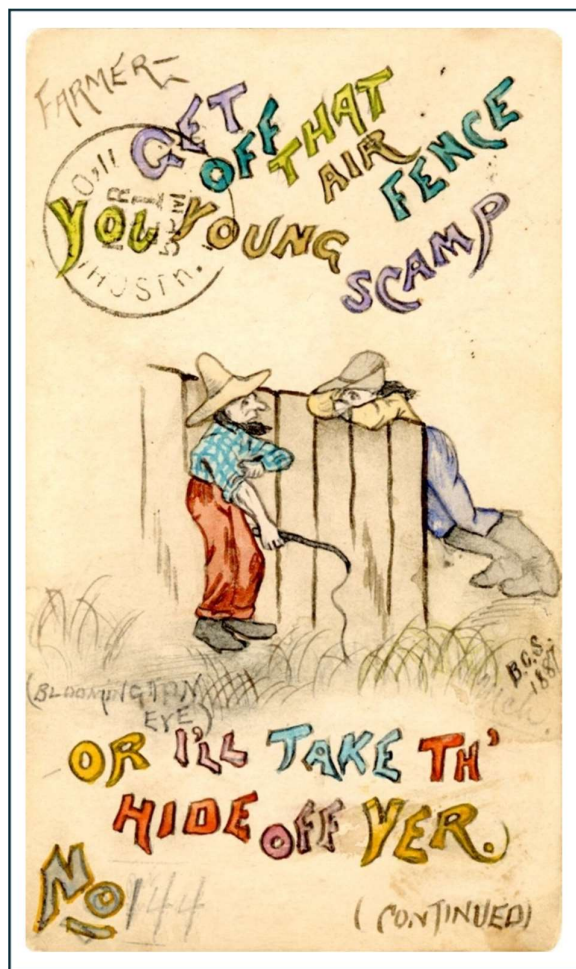
30 August 1886 - 'The Body-Snatcher at Clark Street Bridge'

In late 19th century Chicago, 'The Body-Snatcher at Clark Street Bridge' refers to a mixture of high-profile medical scandals and the local 'resurrection men' who illegally exhumed bodies from the Chicago City Cemetery to sell to medical colleges. The phrase reflects a widespread cultural fear in 1880s Chicago regarding grave robbery for medical science. Before the Illinois Anatomy Act of 1885 fully regulated the supply of cadavers, medical students and professional 'snatchers' frequently raided the old City Cemetery, located at the northern end of Clark Street, where Lincoln Park sits today.

Modern ghost tours frequently use the Body-Snatcher title to refer to the various 'ghouls' (zombie-like creatures) or medical students caught transporting stolen bodies across the bridge or along Clark Street toward the city's medical schools.

The phrase at the bottom '**All aboard now, make no mistake, take the palace boat**' was a popular advertising slogan in Chicago around the 1880s for local 'Ghost Tours' on the Chicago River and Lake Michigan.





This two-part cartoon was originally published as a sequel. In 1887, the **Bloomington Eye** newspaper started to publish a humorous column called Short Stops (also known as Eyelets). Renowned for its witty, occasionally aggressive, and surreal one-liners, the column became a hallmark of late 19th century regional journalism.

One of the most well-known examples from this collection is the phrase '**Get off that air fence or I'll take the hide off you**'. This phrase is a prime example of the era's unique brand of satirical slang used to mock pretension or indecisiveness.

In the vernacular of the time, '**taking the hide off**' someone was an exaggerated way of saying they would be severely reprimanded in public. Pairing it with the '**air fence**' created a humorous image of someone being threatened with a physical beating for an imaginary or intellectual offence.

In the first cartoon, the boy (on the right) is standing on the ground next to a wooden fence. The farmer is not amused and shouts, '**Get off that air fence or I'll take the hide off you!**' In the second cartoon, the small boy has stood up and is now much taller and stronger than the farmer. Startled, the farmer drops his whip. The tall boy puts his hands on his hips and replies, '**What did you say?**', which is a strong verbal threat.

The end of an Artist.

These two cartoons are the last the artist and newspaper illustrator **Byron Clifford Stevens** ever made. His long illness got worse and worse and he was no longer able to work. He moved in with his brother-in-law, Wilbur Sibley, in Kankakee. Byron Stevens died **16 November 1905** after a long illness and is buried in Forest Home Cemetery in Forest Park, Cook County, Illinois.