

CALIFORNIA
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Number 138
2023

Bulletin





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If These Walls Could Talk...



Well,
At Least
They
Send Us
Postcards.

by Alex Vassar, CSL Director
of Communications



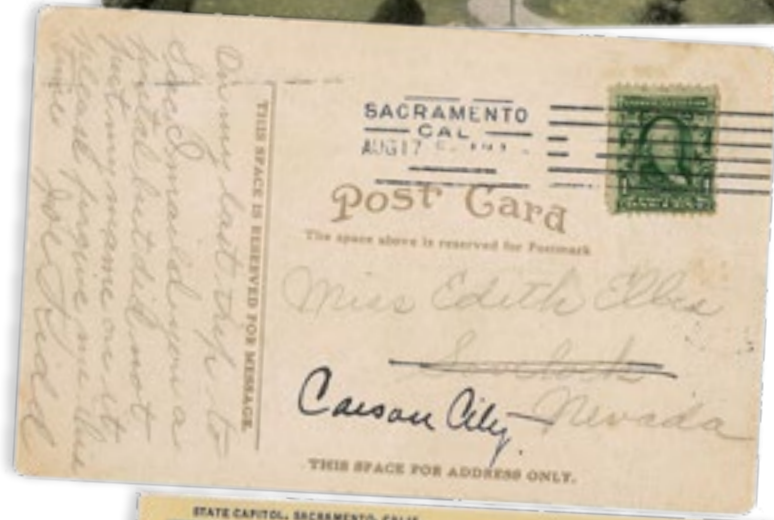
Some interesting items arrived at the State Library in late March after traveling a curious and most indirect of routes.

The California State Capitol was built between 1860 and 1874, and a Capitol Annex was added onto the eastern side of the building during the 1950s. The Annex always had a strange relationship with the historic Capitol Building; the hallways of the historic Capitol are wide and feature tall ceilings over ceramic tile floors that lead to ornately decorated rooms. In the Annex, linoleum floors lead to cramped offices with staff packed into cubicles.

After nearly 70 years of use, the state budget included funding for the demolition and replacement of the Annex to accommodate a growing legislative staff and improve accessibility. The Legislature moved out, and over to the new Swing Space building in early 2021. In the years since, work has begun with trees in Capitol Park being relocated and temporary entrance structures on the north and south sides of the building, providing access for staff and visitors to the Capitol.

In mid-March, a member of a work crew removing a wall on the sixth floor of the Annex noticed what appeared to be some old papers in a pile of material that had been removed from the wall. Reaching into the debris, the papers turned out to be historic postcards — some more than 100 years old — featuring images of the State Capitol from its early years. The cards made their way to Bethany Westfall of Assemblymember Chris Ward's office, who then contacted Alex Vassar at the State Library.

Vassar brought the eight postcards to





their new home at the library.

Four of the postcards were mailed to an Edith Ellis of Carson City, Nevada, between 1906 and 1910. They're typically light messages, from inviting Ellis to attend a "big time" at the Fair in September to lightly chastising Ellis for not writing back sooner.

"R. U. never going to write.

Would be pleased to hear from you."

- 1908 Postcard to Edith Ellis

A fifth postcard was a 1944 campaign mail piece for Assemblyman William Clifton Berry addressed to F. G. Mertley of San Francisco. The other postcards were unused but appeared to be from the same era as the others.

As demolition of the existing structure and excavation of the West Steps area continues over the next few years, other treasures may be discovered, shining a light on California's rich history and the people who lived it.

