

January , 2014

Dear Eric,

I finally got around to tackling the three cryptograms published in the little book you gave me at the R.I. Postcard Show on October 27th, "Postcards from Maine: 1900-1920," compiled by Deborah H. Gould.

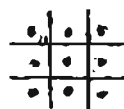
The book's pages are not numbered, so refer to photocopies enclosed, in the order they appear in the book (I think). By the way, the book binding stinks; the pages come out in your hands when you are reading the book.

POSTCARD I: Portland, Me., Post Office, with a cryptogram in the obverse right margin.

I was apprehensive about solving this one because the cryptotext consisted of only 11 symbols. The shorter a cryptogram is, the harder it is to solve or produce a unique solution.

However, a brief look at the symbols indicates that they are based on the tic-tac-toe matrix used in pigpen or Freemason cipher alphabets. However, the pigpen cipher has only one set of symbols with a dot in each similar shaped cell; whereas the Portland, Me., card has several cells with one dot, five or six with two dots and a couple with three dots. The cipher alphabet obviously is not for a classic pigpen cipher, but is called, instead, a Newark cipher.

I thought about it just a minute or two when it struck me that three tic-tac-toe matrices, with a dot in each cell of the first matrix, two dots to a cell in the second and three dots in a cell in the third matrix would produce a total of 27 cells, one more than needed for the 26-letter English alphabet. (The extra cell could be used for the punctuation mark period, or whatever.)



Inscribe the cells
left to right,
top to bottom thus:

A	B	C	J	K	L	S	T	U
D	E	F	M	N	O	V	W	X
G	H	I	P	Q	R	Y	Z	

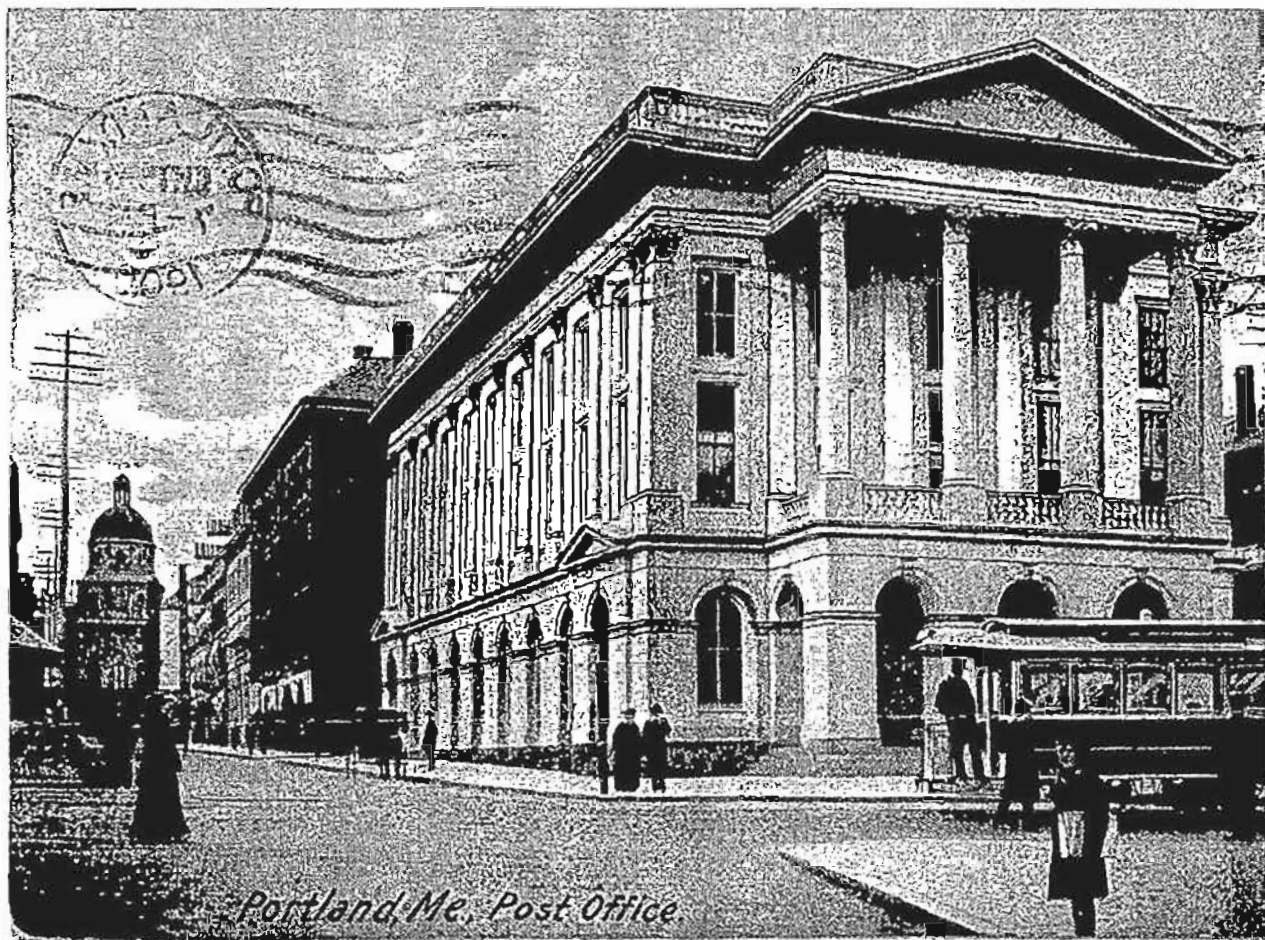
Ct.: 
Pt.: A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z (?)

One more thing I had to consider before proceeding: Which way is up insofar as the cryptotext on the right margin of the card goes? I decided the most likely natural way for the correspondent was to give the postcard a quarter-turn clockwise and then write the message.

Proceeding on those assumptions I got the plaintext: I AM SO LON(E)LY.

The cipher symbol for the letter E may have been an encryption error, but the cancellation ink on the reverse bled through the card and may have distorted the cipher symbol for E on the obverse. It is hard to tell from the picture in the book. But I'll bet a buck my solution is correct!

If the correspondents had chosen instead to use the matrices, in the order of 3 1 2, for example, I probably never would have solved the message through standard cryptanalytic frequency counts... it's just so short.



POSTCARD
CRYPTOGRAM I

POSTCARD CRYPTOGRAM I

Printed in Germany

POST CARD

MAINE
DEC 12
10:31 AM
1912



8-15-23+7
 26-8-9-14-19-24-29-34-39-44-49-54-59-64-69-74-79-84-89-94-99-104-109-114-119-124-129-134-139-144-149-154-159-164-169-174-179-184-189-194-199-204-209-214-219-224-229-234-239-244-249-254-259-264-269-274-279-284-289-294-299-304-309-314-319-324-329-334-339-344-349-354-359-364-369-374-379-384-389-394-399-404-409-414-419-424-429-434-439-444-449-454-459-464-469-474-479-484-489-494-499-504-509-514-519-524-529-534-539-544-549-554-559-564-569-574-579-584-589-594-599-604-609-614-619-624-629-634-639-644-649-654-659-664-669-674-679-684-689-694-699-704-709-714-719-724-729-734-739-744-749-754-759-764-769-774-779-784-789-794-799-804-809-814-819-824-829-834-839-844-849-854-859-864-869-874-879-884-889-894-899-904-909-914-919-924-929-934-939-944-949-954-959-964-969-974-979-984-989-994-999-1004-1009-1014-1019-1024-1029-1034-1039-1044-1049-1054-1059-1064-1069-1074-1079-1084-1089-1094-1099-1104-1109-1114-1119-1124-1129-1134-1139-1144-1149-1154-1159-1164-1169-1174-1179-1184-1189-1194-1199-1204-1209-1214-1219-1224-1229-1234-1239-1244-1249-1254-1259-1264-1269-1274-1279-1284-1289-1294-1299-1304-1309-1314-1319-1324-1329-1334-1339-1344-1349-1354-1359-1364-1369-1374-1379-1384-1389-1394-1399-1404-1409-1414-1419-1424-1429-1434-1439-1444-1449-1454-1459-1464-1469-1474-1479-1484-1489-1494-1499-1504-1509-1514-1519-1524-1529-1534-1539-1544-1549-1554-1559-1564-1569-1574-1579-1584-1589-1594-1599-1604-1609-1614-1619-1624-1629-1634-1639-1644-1649-1654-1659-1664-1669-1674-1679-1684-1689-1694-1699-1704-1709-1714-1719-1724-1729-1734-1739-1744-1749-1754-1759-1764-1769-1774-1779-1784-1789-1794-1799-1804-1809-1814-1819-1824-1829-1834-1839-1844-1849-1854-1859-1864-1869-1874-1879-1884-1889-1894-1899-1904-1909-1914-1919-1924-1929-1934-1939-1944-1949-1954-1959-1964-1969-1974-1979-1984-1989-1994-1999-2004-2009-2014-2019-2024-2029-2034-2039-2044-2049-2054-2059-2064-2069-2074-2079-2084-2089-2094-2099-2104-2109-2114-2119-2124-2129-2134-2139-2144-2149-2154-2159-2164-2169-2174-2179-2184-2189-2194-2199-2204-2209-2214-2219-2224-2229-2234-2239-2244-2249-2254-2259-2264-2269-2274-2279-2284-2289-2294-2299-2304-2309-2314-2319-2324-2329-2334-2339-2344-2349-2354-2359-2364-2369-2374-2379-2384-2389-2394-2399-2404-2409-2414-2419-2424-2429-2434-2439-2444-2449-2454-2459-2464-2469-2474-2479-2484-2489-2494-2499-2504-2509-2514-2519-2524-2529-2534-2539-2544-2549-2554-2559-2564-2569-2574-2579-2584-2589-2594-2599-2604-2609-2614-2619-2624-2629-2634-2639-2644-2649-2654-2659-2664-2669-2674-2679-2684-2689-2694-2699-2704-2709-2714-2719-2724-2729-2734-2739-2744-2749-2754-2759-2764-2769-2774-2779-2784-2789-2794-2799-2804-2809-2814-2819-2824-2829-2834-2839-2844-2849-2854-2859-2864-2869-2874-2879-2884-2889-2894-2899-2904-2909-2914-2919-2924-2929-2934-2939-2944-2949-2954-2959-2964-2969-2974-2979-2984-2989-2994-2999-3004-3009-3014-3019-3024-3029-3034-3039-3044-3049-3054-3059-3064-3069-3074-3079-3084-3089-3094-3099-3104-3109-3114-3119-3124-3129-3134-3139-3144-3149-3154-3159-3164-3169-3174-3179-3184-3189-3194-3199-3204-3209-3214-3219-3224-3229-3234-3239-3244-3249-3254-3259-3264-3269-3274-3279-3284-3289-3294-3299-3304-3309-3314-3319-3324-3329-3334-3339-3344-3349-3354-3359-3364-3369-3374-3379-3384-3389-3394-3399-3404-3409-3414-3419-3424-3429-3434-3439-3444-3449-3454-3459-3464-3469-3474-3479-3484-3489-3494-3499-3504-3509-3514-3519-3524-3529-3534-3539-3544-3549-3554-3559-3564-3569-3574-3579-3584-3589-3594-3599-3604-3609-3614-3619-3624-3629-3634-3639-3644-3649-3654-3659-3664-3669-3674-3679-3684-3689-3694-3699-3704-3709-3714-3719-3724-3729-3734-3739-3744-3749-3754-3759-3764-3769-3774-3779-3784-3789-3794-3799-3804-3809-3814-3819-3824-3829-3834-3839-3844-3849-3854-3859-3864-3869-3874-3879-3884-3889-3894-3899-3904-3909-3914-3919-3924-3929-3934-3939-3944-3949-3954-3959-3964-3969-3974-3979-3984-3989-3994-3999-4004-4009-4014-4019-4024-4029-4034-4039-4044-4049-4054-4059-4064-4069-4074-4079-4084-4089-4094-4099-4104-4109-4114-4119-4124-4129-4134-4139-4144-4149-4154-4159-4164-4169-4174-4179-4184-4189-4194-4199-4204-4209-4214-4219-4224-4229-4234-4239-4244-4249-4254-4259-4264-4269-4274-4279-4284-4289-4294-4299-4304-4309-4314-4319-4324-4329-4334-4339-4344-4349-4354-4359-4364-4369-4374-4379-4384-4389-4394-4399-4404-4409-4414-4419-4424-4429-4434-4439-4444-4449-4454-4459-4464-4469-4474-4479-4484-4489-4494-4499-4504-4509-4514-4519-4524-4529-4534-4539-4544-4549-4554-4559-4564-4569-4574-4579-4584-4589-4594-4599-4604-4609-4614-4619-4624-4629-4634-4639-4644-4649-4654-4659-4664-4669-4674-4679-4684-4689-4694-4699-4704-4709-4714-4719-4724-4729-4734-4739-4744-4749-4754-4759-4764-4769-4774-4779-4784-4789-4794-4799-4804-4809-4814-4819-4824-4829-4834-4839-4844-4849-4854-4859-4864-4869-4874-4879-4884-4889-4894-4899-4904-4909-4914-4919-4924-4929-4934-4939-4944-4949-4954-4959-4964-4969-4974-4979-4984-4989-4994-4999-5004-5009-5014-5019-5024-5029-5034-5039-5044-5049-5054-5059-5064-5069-5074-5079-5084-5089-5094-5099-5104-5109-5114-5119-5124-5129-5134-5139-5144-5149-5154-5159-5164-5169-5174-5179-5184-5189-5194-5199-5204-5209-5214-5219-5224-5229-5234-5239-5244-5249-5254-5259-5264-5269-5274-5279-5284-5289-5294-5299-5304-5309-5314-5319-5324-5329-5334-5339-5344-5349-5354-5359-5364-5369-5374-5379-5384-5389-5394-5399-5404-5409-5414-5419-5424-5429-5434-5439-5444-5449-5454-5459-5464-5469-5474-5479-5484-5489-5494-5499-5504-5509-5514-5519-5524-5529-5534-5539-5544-5549-5554-5559-5564-5569-5574-5579-5584-5589-5594-5599-5604-5609-5614-5619-5624-5629-5634-5639-5644-5649-5654-5659-5664-5669-5674-5679-5684-5689-5694-5699-5704-5709-5714-5719-5724-5729-5734-5739-5744-5749-5754-5759-5764-5769-5774-5779-5784-5789-5794-5799-5804-5809-5814-5819-5824-5829-5834-5839-5844-5849-5854-5859-5864-5869-5874-5879-5884-5889-5894-5899-5904-5909-5914-5919-5924-5929-5934-5939-5944-5949-5954-5959-5964-5969-5974-5979-5984-5989-5994-5999-6004-6009-6014-6019-6024-6029-6034-6039-6044-6049-6054-6059-6064-6069-6074-6079-6084-6089-6094-6099-6104-6109-6114-6119-6124-6129-6134-6139-6144-6149-6154-6159-6164-6169-6174-6179-6184-6189-6194-6199-6204-6209-6214-6219-6224-6229-6234-6239-6244-6249-6254-6259-6264-6269-6274-6279-6284-6289-6294-6299-6304-6309-6314-6319-6324-6329-6334-6339-6344-6349-6354-6359-6364-6369-6374-6379-6384-6389-6394-6399-6404-6409-6414-6419-6424-6429-6434-6439-6444-6449-6454-6459-6464-6469-6474-6479-6484-6489-6494-6499-6504-6509-6514-6519-6524-6529-6534-6539-6544-6549-6554-6559-6564-6569-6574-6579-6584-6589-6594-6599-6604-6609-6614-6619-6624-6629-6634-6639-6644-6649-6654-6659-6664-6669-6674-6679-6684-6689-6694-6699-6704-6709-6714-6719-6724-6729-6734-6739-6744-6749-6754-6759-6764-6769-6774-6779-6784-6789-6794-6799-6804-6809-6814-6819-6824-6829-6834-6839-6844-6849-6854-6859-6864-6869-6874-6879-6884-6889-6894-6899-6904-6909-6914-6919-6924-6929-6934-6939-6944-6949-6954-6959-6964-6969-6974-6979-6984-6989-6994-6999-7004-7009-7014-7019-7024-7029-7034-7039-7044-7049-7054-7059-7064-7069-7074-7079-7084-7089-7094-7099-7104-7109-7114-7119-7124-7129-7134-7139-7144-7149-7154-7159-7164-7169-7174-7179-7184-7189-7194-7199-7204-7209-7214-7219-7224-7229-7234-7239-7244-7249-7254-7259-7264-7269-7274-7279-7284-7289-7294-7299-7304-7309-7314-7319-7324-7329-7334-7339-7344-7349-7354-7359-7364-7369-7374-7379-7384-7389-7394-7399-7404-7409-7414-7419-7424-7429-7434-7439-7444-7449-7454-7459-7464-7469-7474-7479-7484-7489-7494-7499-7504-7509-7514-7519-7524-7529-7534-7539-7544-7549-7554-7559-7564-7569-7574-7579-7584-7589-7594-7599-7604-7609-7614-7619-7624-7629-7634-7639-7644-7649-7654-7659-7664-7669-7674-7679-7684-7689-7694-7699-7704-7709-7714-7719-7724-7729-7734-7739-7744-7749-7754-7759-7764-7769-7774-7779-7784-7789-7794-7799-7804-7809-7814-7819-7824-7829-7834-7839-7844-7849-7854-7859-7864-7869-7874-7879-7884-7889-7894-7899-7904-7909-7914-7919-7924-7929-7934-7939-7944-7949-7954-7959-7964-7969-7974-7979-7984-7989-7994-7999-8004-8009-8014-8019-8024-8029-8034-8039-8044-8049-8054-8059-8064-8069-8074-8079-8084-8089-8094-8099-8104-8109-8114-8119-8124-8129-8134-8139-8144-8149-8154-8159-8164-8169-8174-8179-8184-8189-8194-8199-8204-8209-8214-8219-8224-8229-8234-8239-8244-8249-8254-8259-8264-8269-8274-8279-8284-8289-8294-8299-8304-8309-8314-8319-8324-8329-8334-8339-8344-8349-8354-8359-8364-8369-8374-8379-8384-8389-8394-8399-8404-8409-8414-8419-8424-8429-8434-8439-8444-8449-8454-8459-8464-8469-8474-8479-8484-8489-8494-8499-8504-8509-8514-8519-8524-8529-8534-8539-8544-8549-8554-8559-8564-8569-8574-8579-8584-8589-8594-8599-8604-8609-8614-8619-8624-8629-8634-8639-8644-8649-8654-8659-8664-8669-8674-8679-8684-8689-8694-8699-8704-8709-8714-8719-8724-8729-8734-8739-8744-8749-8754-8759-8764-8769-8774-8779-8784-8789-8794-8799-8804-8809-8814-8819-8824-8829-8834-8839-8844-8849-8854-8859-8864-8869-8874-8879-8884-8889-8894-8899-8904-8909-8914-8919-8924-8929-8934-8939-8944-8949-8954-8959-8964-8969-8974-8979-8984-8989-8994-8999-9004-9009-9014-9019-9024-9029-9034-9039-9044-9049-9054-9059-9064-9069-9074-9079-9084-9089-9094-9099-9104-9109-9114-9119-9124-9129-9134-9139-9144-9149-9154-9159-9164-9169-9174-9179-9184-9189-9194-9199-9204-9209-9214-9219-9224-9229-9234-9239-9244-9249-9254-9259-9264-9269-9274-9279-9284-9289-9294-9299-9304-9309-9314-9319-9324-9329-9334-9339-9344-9349-9354-9359-9364-9369-9374-9379-9384-9389-9394-9399-9404-9409-9414-9419-9424-9429-9434-9439-9444-9449-9454-9459-9464-9469-9474-9479-9484-9489-9494-9499-9504-9509-9514-9519-9524-9529-9534-9539-9544-9549-9554-9559-9564-9569-9574-9579-9584-9589-9594-9599-9604-9609-9614-9619-9624-9629-9634-9639-9644-9649-9654-9659-9664-9669-9674-9679-9684-9689-9694-9699-9704-9709-9714-9719-9724-9729-9734-9739-9744-9749-9754-9759-9764-9769-9774-9779-9784-9789-9794-9799-9804-9809-9814-9819-9824-9829-9834-9839-9844-9849-9854-9859-9864-9869-9874-9879-9884-9889-9894-9899-9904-9909-9914-9919-9924-9929-9934-9939-9944-9949-9954-9959-9964-9969-9974-9979-9984-9989-9994-9999-10004-10009-10014-10019-10024-10029-10034-10039-10044-10049-10054-10059-10064-10069-10074-10079-10084-10089-10094-10099-10104-10109-10114-10119-10124-10129-10134-10139-10144-10149-10154-10159-10164-10169-10174-10179-10184-10189-10194-10199-10204-10209-10214-10219-10224-10229-10234-10239-10244-10249-10254-10259-10264-10269-10274-10279-10284-10289-10294-10299-10304-10309-10314-10319-10324-10329-10334-10339-10344-10349-10354-10359-10364-10369-10374-10379-10384-10389-10394-10399-10404-10409-10414-10419-10424-10429-10434-10439-10444-10449-10454-10459-10464-10469-10474-10479-10484-10489-10494-10499-10504-10509-10514-10519-10524-10529-10534-10539-10544-10549-10554-10559-10564-10569-10574-10579-10584-10589-10594-10599-10604-10609-10614-10619-10624-10629-10634-10639-10644-10649-10654-10659-10664-10669-10674-10679-10684-10689-10694-10699-10704-10709-10714-10719-10724-10729-10734-10739-10744-10749-10754-10759-10764-10769-10774-10779-10784-10789-10794-10799-10804-10809-10814-10819-10824-10829-10834-10839-10844-10849-10854-10859-10864-10869-10874-10879-10884-10889-10894-10899-10904-10909-10914-10919-10924-10929-10934-10939-10944-10949-10954-10959-10964-10969-10974-10979-10984-10989-10994-10999-11004-11009-11014-11019-11024-11029-11034-11039-11044-11049-11054-11059-11064-11069-11074-11079-11084-11089-11094-11099-11104-11109-11114-11119-11124-11129-11134-11139-11144-11149-11154-11159-11164-11169-11174-11179-11184-11189-11194-11199-11204-11209-11214-11219-11224-11229-11234-11239-11244-11249-11254-11259-11264-11269-11274-11279-11284-11289-11294-11299-11304-11309-11314-11319-11324-11329-11334-11339-11344-11349-11354-11359-11364-11369-11374-11379-11384-11389-11394-11399-11404-11409-11414-11419-11424-11429-11434-11439-11444-11449-11454-11459-11464-11469-11474-11479-11484-11489-11494-11499-11504-11509-11514-11519-11524-11529-11534-11539-11544-11549-11554-11559-11564-11569-11574-11579-11584-11589-11594-11599-11604-11609-11614-11619-11624-11629-11634-11639-11644-11649-11654-11659-11664-11669-11674-11679-11684-11689-11694-11699-11704-11709-11714-11719-11724-11729-11734-11739-11744-11749-11754-11759-11764-11769-11774-11779-11784-11789-11794-11799-11804-11809-11814-11819-11824-11829-11834-11839-11844-11849-11854-11859-11864-11869-11874-11879-11884-11889-11894-11899-11904-11909-11914-11919-11924-11929-11934-11939-11944-11949-11954-11959-11964-119

POSTCARD II: Postmarked Dec. 12, 1912, Skowhegan, Maine, to William True

Pretty easy cipher in the form of ct. 1 2 3 ... 24 25 26
Pt. A B C ... X Y Z

The only minor difficulty is part of ciphertext is missing because the paper was scrapped off, but easy to recover through context. There was one encryption error as noted below.

The plaintext message reads:

HOW G(O)ES EVERYTHING IN M.S. GOT YOUR LETTER YESTERDAY GOW (sic - HOW ?) IS YOUR COLD SISTER IS GOING HOME TOMORROW WOULD LIKE AWFUL WELL TO BE IN MERCER SAT. NIGHT WRITE SAT. NIGHT SO ON GRACE AHM SO ROMANTIC (Signed in plaintext: X)

POSTCARD III: To "dearest auntie"

This cryptogram was a real challenge! As I have told you previously, a would-be cryptanalyst dealing with pen-and-pencil cryptograms often faces several challenges: handwriting and/or penmanship, misspellings and encryption errors. In this particular case, it was penmanship that posed the greatest challenge.

First, I used a technique I have used before. I took the postcard to a photocopy machine that both enlarges the original and can darken or lighten a copy.

I sat down in a comfortable chair and studied the photocopy for about 15 minutes, character by character, looking at first for some suggestion of word or sentence divisions. No luck.

I put it aside for a couple of days, I again went over it character by character for about 15 to 20 minutes, seeking a little wedge that could build on and crack the message. Again unsuccessful. I was about halfway through a third session of staring at the characters of the secret message when suddenly I realized I was ... possibly ... sight-reading part of one of the sentences in the lower third of the message.

I quickly wrote out a plaintext alphabet of what I initially thought were some of the ciphertext equivalents in that sentence, and proceeded with the rest of the message. Success at last.

The plaintext message reads:

(Begins in plaintext: "Monday, My dearest auntie")

THIS IS BABE'S TENTH DAY AND HE AND HIS MOTHER ARE BOTH FEELING LOVELY. HE HAS BEEN SUCH A GOOD BABY SINCE HE BEGAN TO NURSE AND IT DOES NOT HURT HARDLY A BIT NOW. ISN'T THAT GOOD? TODAY DON'T YOU THINK I AM SMART? IT WON'T SEEM LONG NOW UNTIL I AM UP AND DRESSED. HAD ANOTHER LOVELY BUNCH OF DINKS (Sic: DRINKS ?) TODAY. YOU WILL BE SORRY TO KNOW OUR CAT FLUFFY IS DEAD. SHE DIED IN THE NIGHT AND MALCOM FOUND HER THE NEXT DAY.

(Ends in plaintext: "Love Gussie")

As for the composition of the cipher alphabet, that calls for a bit of analysis. Basically you should envision the normal English alphabet in capital block letters. Many of the cipher alphabet characters are simply modifications of alphabet block letters.

Ct.	-	3	∩	≡	=	∩		'	∩	-	∩	∩	°	∩	5	-		^	∩							
Pt.	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z

In analyzing the logographic symbols of the cipher text, the ct. symbol for pt. A is a block capital A with the legs stripped off. What remains looks like a hyphen, which, by the way, is what I thought it was at first glance.

Other examples:

- * The ct. symbol for B looks like a numeral 3, much like a capital B without the vertical leg.
- * The ct. symbol for C just looks like a small C.
- * The ct. symbol for D looks like a backwards C, much like a capital D without a vertical leg.
- * The ct. symbol for E looks like a capital E without a vertical leg.

And so it goes for much of the rest of the ct. alphabet.

However, there were some problems for the correspondents in devising the ct. alphabet. For example a the ct. symbol for I simply looks like an apostrophe; the ct. symbol for O looks like a small O or a temperature degree symbol, and the ct. symbol for S simply looks like a small S.

None of those ct. symbols were very effective because they look like I, O and S.

Penmanship produces a problem when trying to figure out three of ct. symbols standing for pt. A, L and T. (See alphabets above.)

Now if you think I have belabored all of this IT IS YOUR FAULT! It was you who said to me at the R.I. Postcard Show that I should write an article about secret message postcards which is unlikely. But I am saving copies of my letters to you about secret message postcards to use as reference notes in case I change my mind.

If you have some sort of contact with the author of "Postcards from Maine" feel free to share this letter with her ... or anyone else, for that matter.

Meanwhile, best wishes to you and Trish, good luck with your forthcoming move to California.

→ Uncle David