A musician touring with Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show, F. H. “Fritz” Parker sent frequent postcards home to his small town in northern New Jersey. Carrying only brief messages—“All next week in Boston, Mass,” “Next week we play a return slate at Fort Wayne,” “6 weeks more and I will be home”—the postcards individually say little about the musician himself or about the Wild West Show. Taken together, however, this group of postcards offers some sense of the rigorous travel schedule of a turn-of-the-20th-century touring entertainment program and information about the kinds of communities such tours visited. To the rough tour outline that can be discerned from two years of postcards, scholars may add information gleaned from programs, ticket stubs, contemporary reviews clipped from local papers, and other materials found in archival collections. Drawing on a range of ephemeral traces, researchers begin to understand more about precise events, communities, or cultural trends in a specific time and place. Other records—personal recollections, photographs, and artifacts—may reveal still more. Researchers working in archival collections regularly face incomplete information and partial records. They endeavor to map a space between and among various documentary pieces, devising hypotheses and best guesses; over time, a patient and dogged researcher may piece together an indelible portrait or irrefutable narrative.

Postcards from F. H. Parker to Maud Blowers, Boontoon, NJ, 1906-1908

Objects

Buffalo Bill program — “official program”

F. H. Parker Postcards to Maud Blowers
YCAL MSS 1014
Folder 1: 17 postcards (marked)
Folder 2: 12 postcards (marked)