

**Greetings from
Sydney to Samoa**

1909

Alice Hunt

Acknowledgments

Thanks to -

Anthony Brunt,
Peter Gilderdale,
Valda Palenski, and
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- who answered my
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card.

Manuia Books

Alice Hunt

Palmerston North

email: alice@manuia.org.nz

Book website: www.maniuia.org.nz

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Previous collection of early postcards
on website —

Greetings from Samoa (2016)

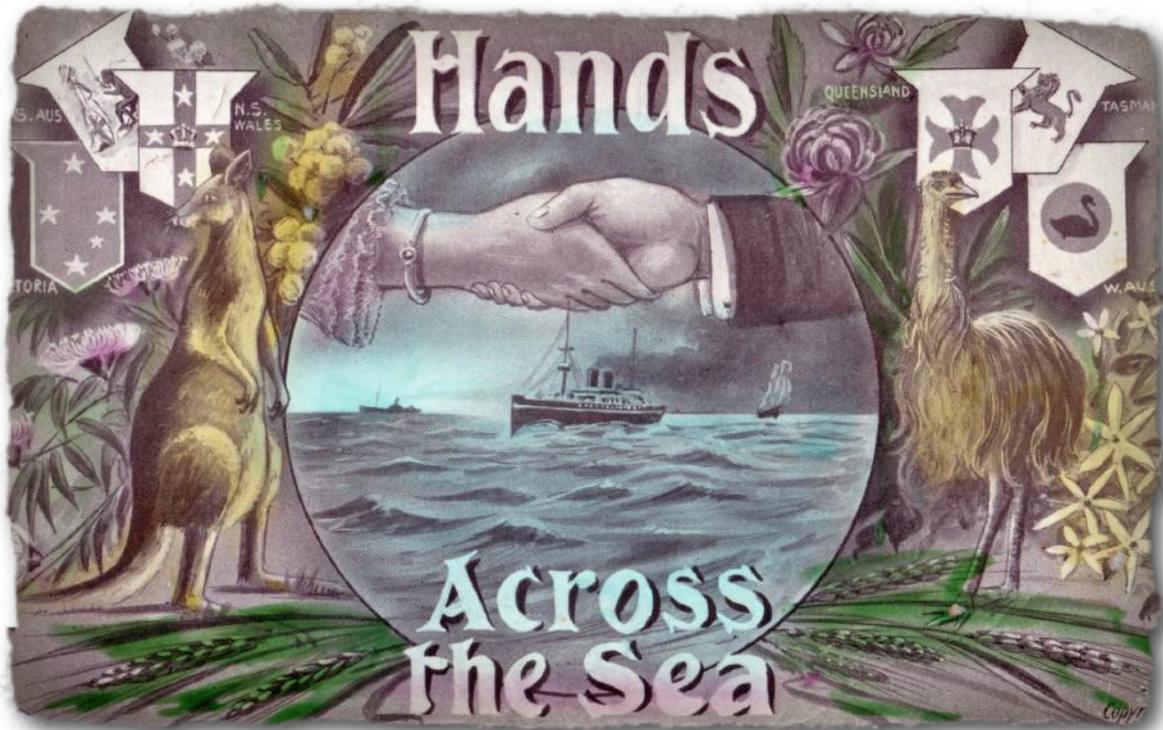
Greetings from Sydney to Samoa

1909

This 1909 Postcard, treasured by the family of Florence King, who received and kept the card in an album, relates a story with a multicultural setting in the South Pacific.

It also illustrates how nature, with a volcanic eruption, and global events, such as World War One, impacts on human fortunes.

This story has been written by Alice Hunt, daughter of Florence, with help from many people who have knowledge about postcards and the history of Samoa.



THE YEAR 1909 IN SAMOA

Samoa, at this time, was a German Protectorate, following the Tripartite Convention signed at Washington on 2 December 1899. Many German families settled in Samoa, and became successful plantation owners, traders and businessmen. Their administration is now considered to have been reasonably fair and benevolent.

THE CARD

This card was in the postcard album of my mother, Florence Fleck (nee King), probably the earliest card she collected.

The postcard was addressed to -

Frl Flora King, c/o Mr Emil Haaben, Apia, Samoa.

Sydney 22/6.09

Hoffe du freust dich, dass ich wieder da bin.

This translates - I hope you're pleased I'm back.

Then in English -

Had a nice time the last three months. With love, Yours, A.H.

HANDS ACROSS THE SEA

This series of cards has been researched by Peter Gilderdale, who provides the following information about the card -

This is among the earliest Hands Across the Sea cards published in Australia, and its design influenced a number of later New Zealand cards. I have a copy that was sent for New Year 1907, meaning that it was certainly available in 1906.

The Hands Across the Sea postcard developed relatively late. The earliest dated example I have is from Scotland in 1904, and it took a couple of years for the concept to get enough traction for Australian and New Zealand postcard publishers to start emulating it. Although it is possible the card was from 1905, I have yet to find one dated to that year and think that we can be pretty certain that it was published in 1906.

The publisher was the Melbourne-based company of W.T. Pater. One seller of a copy of the card was convinced that the artwork was by Norman Lindsay, but I have never been able to verify that. Postcard artists were normally anonymous.

THE RECIPIENT

Florence (Flora on the card) was 17 years of age and had been living with the Haaben family since about 1905-6, helping with the children. Her family had lost everything in the lava flow after the eruption of Mt Matavanu, Savai'i. She was the oldest child in the family, her father was Arthur A. King, an Englishman, her mother was Susana Key, part-Samoan, a granddaughter of John 'Monkey Jack' Stowers who settled in Savai'i about 1840 and married Malia, from the chief's family in Lano. Susana spoke Samoan only, as an early attempt with English had caused her new husband to laugh at her. She never spoke English again and her children all spoke Samoan .

In 1891 after Kingi (as he was always known) and Susana married in Apia, they went to Susana's village in Savai'i, Saleaula, where Kingi worked with his father-in-law, Jack (Siaki) Key, mainly trading in copra, the dried flesh of coconuts shipped overseas to be pressed for its oil. The European families built big houses in the village, but these were destroyed when Mt Matavanu erupted and the lava reached their village. The family moved to Upolu.



Kingi's house after the eruption, 1905

King/Hunt family photo



The ruins of the house, 2016
Photo Dr Clel Wallace

A cutting from the Samoan newspaper (1905) reads -

From Savai'i we hear the unwelcome news that the recent overflowing of lava at Lealatele has done considerable damage to properties there. Mr A.A. King was the greatest sufferer for he lost all that he possessed. The whole of his plantation and his house was utterly destroyed by the lava and he is now in a destitute condition with his family, of whom there are five young children. This case is a very deserving one and we sincerely hope that public subscriptions will be raised to help the unfortunate man out of his present great difficulty.

Mr King would be grateful to anyone who would take his eldest daughter to help in household work, and would give her a little schooling (German). He is also prepared to accept any billet offering for himself. He would like to have mentioned in these columns that the natives were very kind to him and rendered him every assistance they could to save his property.

Florence was given work in Apia in Mr Emil Haaben's home. He was a German settler who had a plantation and also an ice-making business. Florence worked in the house, and went to a German school for a time, learning to speak German very well, but not English. The family spoke only German. They appear to have been a happy family, wealthy, and socially active in the German community in Apia.



The King family, Apia, 1909.
Florence centre back.

THE SENDER



Anthony Brunt, who has researched the lives of the German settlers in Samoa, was able to provide information about the sender of the postcard.

“A.H.” would be Auguste Haaben, born Apia 24/5/1892. She appears to have been named after her mother, Mrs Haaben. He surmises that Auguste is the young, severely clad woman in the photo (above) which was taken around 1919-1920.

Emil Haaben, who is the man sitting on the ground, was an engineer and owner of the Apia Ice Company. He was often seen in the company of his tame white parrot. Mrs Haaben is on the horse on the left.

Auguste was the same age as Florence, so they became friends. She must have travelled to Australia, and posted the card before she returned to Samoa. After World War One, the British deported most of the Germans, confiscating their land and possessions. Auguste was deported in June 1920, alone, on the *SS Main*. Emil returned to Germany in August 1920, probably as part of the forced repatriation process.



Another photo of the Haaben family and friends in Apia, gathered together for some special occasion.

POSTAGE STAMPS

Two half-penny New South Wales stamps

Australian postage stamps first appeared in 1850, issued by the State of New South Wales. In 1903 these gradually changed to 'Commonwealth' postage, but it was not until 1913 that the stamps of New South Wales were superseded by those of Australia.

MORE ABOUT THE POSTCARD

Valdaa Palenski , who is familiar with postcards, provided more information.

On the New South Wales stamps, the part of the postmark which is legible reads as Sydney, but the Post Office name before that is only partly there and is indistinguishable.

The date on the postmark is JL 09 (for July 1909 with the day date not showing) and the time posted is 10.45 a.m.

The rectangular boxed cachet mark translates roughly as short paid 5 centimes + 5 centimes fine due, totalling 10 centimes. (Postage Due rates were always, and still are, charged at double the amount shortpaid.)

The postage rates between Australia and Samoa at this time are not known, but from this marking, it would be presumed to be twopence rather than the one penny paid with stamps. The one-penny rate was between British Empire countries and Samoa would probably have been classed as a foreign territory and should have had the higher rate.

This explains why this marking was applied in an effort to have the shortfall paid upon delivery. There is no evidential receipt marking to show this postage due amount was collected or not.

It was usually international protocol worldwide for Postage Due markings to be shown in French.

Peter Gilderdale notes -

The publishers went out of business in 1908 and their stock of 1.5 million postcards was liquidated, so the sender of this card probably bought it for a very reasonable price.

Florence King moved to Auckland, New Zealand, in 1917. In this photo she is wearing a carved mother-of-pearl pendant made by her husband, James Baxter Fleck, whom she married in 1925. They lived in Palmerston North for the rest of their lives.



*One small card with a short message,
but it conjures up so much history
and so many personal stories .*

