

**Information about National Postal Museum objects and suggested articles related to Postmarks & Paperbacks program on January 10, 2022**

**Correspondence between Smithsonian Staff and the Public**

The following three items in the National Postal Museum collection are past correspondence between the public and Smithsonian curators. They are representative of the Smithsonian's work to share knowledge with and learn from the public. These examples are not unlike the initial letters and envelopes exchanged between the characters in *Meet Me at the Museum* (2018) by Anne Youngson.

***V-Mail letter sent to Smithsonian curator, 1944, NPM 2007.2004.121.1-2***

[https://postalmuseum.si.edu/object/npm\\_2007.2004.121.1-2](https://postalmuseum.si.edu/object/npm_2007.2004.121.1-2)

On April 2, 1944, Captain Leonard W. Jarcho, MD, US Army Medical Corps, wrote to Dr. Doris M. Cochran, associate curator of reptiles at the Smithsonian, US National Museum, while he was serving in the Pacific Theater. His letter expresses his interest in the Smithsonian's initiative for global collecting during World War II and he seeks Dr. Cochran's advice on collecting lizards.

You can read more about groundbreaking research and career of Dr. Doris M. Cochran (1898-1968) with links to her Smithsonian papers and more at <https://siarchives.si.edu/history/artists/doris-mable-cochran>. Dr. Cochran's efforts to break the glass ceiling are discussed in the 2006 blog, "Women in Science, Historical Edition: Doris Cochran's Struggle for Promotion at the Smithsonian," by Leslie Masden-Brooks, The Clutter Museum Blog, at <http://cluttermuseum.blogspot.com/2006/08/women-in-science-historical-edition.html>.

***Remnant of packaging sent to Smithsonian, 1944, NPM 2010.2004.84***

[https://postalmuseum.si.edu/object/npm\\_2010.2004.84](https://postalmuseum.si.edu/object/npm_2010.2004.84)

In August 1944, Lt. R. G. Miller, US Navy Reserves, sent a parcel wrapped in brown papers and marked "Live Harmless Lizard Eggs" to the Curator of Reptiles at the Smithsonian, US National Museum. This is likely in response to the Smithsonian's initiative for global collecting during World War II, and Lt. Miller had obtained the specimens while serving on the minesweeper USS YMS 394, which was deployed in the Pacific Theater in the summer of 1944.

You can read about the work of Smithsonian staff during World War II, in the Smithsonian Institution Archives' website: <https://siarchives.si.edu/history/featured-topics/wartime/smithsonian-during-wwii>. The Smithsonian's collaborations with deployed military personnel helping to study and collect around the globe is described at: <https://siarchives.si.edu/history/featured-topics/wartime/wwii-collecting-and-interpreting-war>.

***Smithsonian official envelope converted for personal use, 1882, NPM 2006.2020.1***

[https://postalmuseum.si.edu/object/npm\\_2006.2020.1](https://postalmuseum.si.edu/object/npm_2006.2020.1)

Cover with corner card imprint for Smithsonian Institution, Bureau of Ethnology, was postmarked on June 19, 1882 with a 3-cent George Washington stamp. Note that the "Official Business" printed in the return address is struck out to indicate that the envelope

was used for personal mail and thus the sender was responsible for the cost of postage. It is unknown who sent this envelope or what it contained.

You can read about the work of museum staff who were responsible for answering public inquiries, see the 2018 blog “Dear Sir’: Letters to the Smithsonian, 1948-1971” by Emily Bierman, intern with the Smithsonian Institution Archives at <https://siarchives.si.edu/blog/%E2%80%9Cdear-sir%E2%80%9D-letters-smithsonian-1948-1971>. The blog has samples of letters and links to the papers and interview with Helena M. Weiss (1909-2004), Chief of the Office of Correspondence and Documents for the US National Museum.

### **“An Answer to a Letter”**

The novel *Meet Me at the Museum* begins with an excerpt from an actual letter by the Danish archaeologist P. V. Glob who answered inquiries in the early 1960s from a group of British school children about the discovery of the Tollund Man. The “long letter” that Professor Glob wrote to the schoolgirls was in fact his study entitled *The Bog People*. In the forward, “An Answer to a Letter,” Professor Glob dedicated the book to the schoolgirls and his daughter. He quoted from the student’s correspondence: “Dear Doctor Glob, We were very interested in the Tollund Man. We learned about him in History. We would like to know where he is now because we want to visit him when we are older. We have been told that you are very busy and so we hope you do not mind our bothering you but we would like to know more about him.”

To learn more about Professor Glob and the Tollund Man, see the 2017 article by Joshua Levine: <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/europe-bog-bodies-reveal-secrets-180962770/>.

### **Mail in Denmark and Britain**

Professor Glob may have used a mailbox like this 1965 version in National Postal Museum’s (NPM) collection [https://postalmuseum.si.edu/object/npm\\_0.299384.6](https://postalmuseum.si.edu/object/npm_0.299384.6) and stamps such as [https://postalmuseum.si.edu/object/npm\\_2011.2005.217](https://postalmuseum.si.edu/object/npm_2011.2005.217).

There are British stamps that can be accessed through NPM’s collection search too, including [https://postalmuseum.si.edu/object/npm\\_2009.2004.74](https://postalmuseum.si.edu/object/npm_2009.2004.74) from 1965. There are no British mailboxes in the collection, however, the school children from Bury St. Edmunds, of which the novel’s fictional character Tina is one, would have found the British Colonial post box from Hong Kong, circa 1952-1997, [https://postalmuseum.si.edu/object/npm\\_1997.2010.1](https://postalmuseum.si.edu/object/npm_1997.2010.1), looked much the same as the mailboxes in Great Britain.

### **Pen Pals**

The letters between Tina and Anders in the novel transition from professional and transactional to an amiable exchange like that of pen pals. To view an example of a pen pal’s letters in the National Postal Museum, see hand-illustrated envelope from Jack Fogarty to his pen pal Mary MacDonald (pictured looking at model homes), 1945, [https://postalmuseum.si.edu/object/npm\\_2012.2006.15.1](https://postalmuseum.si.edu/object/npm_2012.2006.15.1) and the matching letter, which is online at [https://postalmuseum.si.edu/object/npm\\_2012.2006.15.2.1-3](https://postalmuseum.si.edu/object/npm_2012.2006.15.2.1-3). You can read more about these pen pals at <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smithsonian-institution/a-memorial-day-memory-love-from-the-pacific-theater-81584309/>