

IOWA HISTORY



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Egg Leads to Romance

“Lizzie Gilday, Fort Dodge, Ia. May this reach my true love.” The message was written on an egg that Charles Percy H. Smith held in his hands in his office in Guines, Cuba in 1900. It came to him in an unusual way, and his curiosity led him to a woman who might have been his true love.

In the summer of 1899 Lizzie worked as a clerk in the A. R Loomis egg house in Fort Dodge. The city was a hub of the egg and poultry industry at the time. Trainloads of live and dressed poultry and hundreds of thousands of dozens of eggs shipped from Fort Dodge each year.

On a whim Lizzie scribbled her message along with her address on an egg with permanent ink. The *Iowa City Press-Citizen* reported that she was in “a romantic, daring and sentimental mood” at the time. The Loomis company shipped its eggs all over the world. This particular egg, nestled in a crate with 277 other eggs, left Fort Dodge by train for New York

where it sat in cold storage for almost a year. In 1900 it was loaded onto a ship for Cuba, where a Cuban merchant had purchased a shipment of eggs.

When the Cuban noticed the writing on the egg from the United States, he was baffled. He couldn't read English so had no idea what message the egg carried. Taking the egg to the office of the U.S. Signal Corps, he showed the egg to an acquaintance, Charles Percy H. Smith.

"I wonder what sort of a girl it is who sends her address around like this?" Charles wondered. "It won't do any harm to write her a polite note and ask her for her picture."

The signal corpsman sent off his letter to Lizzie in Fort Dodge. "I am curious to know the one who adopted so novel a method of correspondence," he wrote. "I have a camera and have had a snapshot taken of myself with the egg in my hand," he added. He wrote that if Lizzie replied that she would like to see the photo, he'd send it in his next letter.

Lizzie did request the photo of Charles, and he provided more information about himself. He said he was in charge of the government office in Guines and that the Cubans "think an American is a small god." Over the next few months letters were exchanged between the two. Some were of "such a nature" that the public was "not entitled to their contents."

However, in one of those letters Charles indicated that he would secure a leave from his duties in Cuba and planned a vacation in Iowa. The Web site, "In Old Fort Dodge" provides a follow-up to the story. According to the *Fort Dodge Messenger* from 1903, Lizzie never married Charles. He wasn't able to get a leave from his Cuba post. She married a man named Fay Cronlin.

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Sources

In Old Fort Dodge: <http://inoldforddodge.com/tag/gilday/>

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"A Message on An Egg," *Austin's Hawaiian Weekly* (Hilo), Apr. 28, 1900.

Romance of an Egg, *Garrett Clipper* (Garrett, Ind) March 15, 1900.