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Review of Larger Than Life: The American Tall-Tale Postcard, 1905-1915.

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Larger Than Life: The American Tall-Tale Postcard, 1905-1915. By Cynthia Elyce Rubin and Morgan Williams. New York: Abbeville Press, 1990. 132 pp. \$24.95

If the trials and tribulations of everyday living have you down you should pick up this wonderfully amusing book. Inside is revealed a fascinating and funny slice of the early 1900s Americana known as the tall-tale postcard.

The text is informative, easy to read, and gives historical insight into the genre. But the real fun is perusing the 150 black and white reproductions of the postcards. Through photo image collaging and tongue-in-cheek captions, we're amused by such unbelievable scenes as six-foot-long frogs, corncob the size of hay wagons, and little boys riding on the backs of giant fish.

The phenomenon of the tall-tale postcard came about through a combination of events and circumstances: the opening of the American West to mass homesteading, the introduction of the new inexpensive and portable Kodak camera, the popular use of the privately printed postcard in the U.S., access to communication provided by the Rural Free Delivery postal system, and a need to cope with and understand the often difficult reality of life in rural America.

Several enterprising gentleman photographers, mostly from the Midwest, saw a need for humor as well as a chance to make money and began to produce postcards that stretched reality a bit. By skillfully combining multiple

photographs they created montages, often of complex action, understatement, and pun.

Perhaps the best was William H. Martin of Kansas, who used a wide range of subjects with a good sense of action. "Pumpkins Grown on Our Soil Are Profitable" reads the caption on one of his cards, above three giant pumpkins on a flatbed wagon. Atop the front pumpkin stands the wagon driver, fifteen feet in the air. Another postcard pictures two farmers grasping each end of a huge corncob. Their wagon is loaded with corncobs seven feet long, and

behind the cart is perched a pig the size of an outbuilding! The card reads "To raise this corn see directions other side."

The postcards provided a source of neighborly communication and humor while good-naturedly piquing the interest of city folk unfamiliar with life in the American West.

This is an enjoyable book. And the cards are even today amusing.

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