

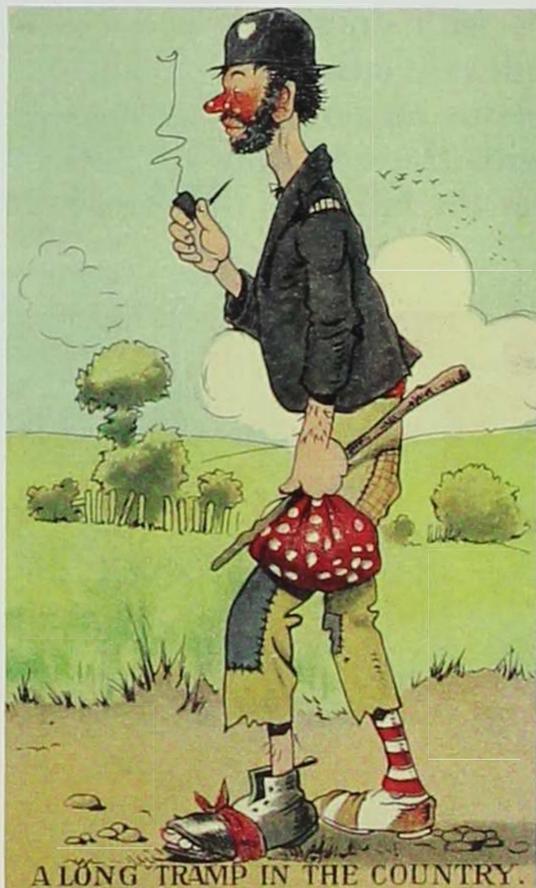
The Postcard Tramp

The wanderer on picture postcards is always dressed in oversized shoes, a crumpled hat, and patched trousers. With a tin can slung around his neck and a bundle tied to a stick, the bearded tramp chomps on a cigar or pipe, sharing the joke of the postcard's caption. His image has become an American icon, one that our society sometimes accepts affectionately through the humor of a Charlie Chaplin or a Red Skelton.

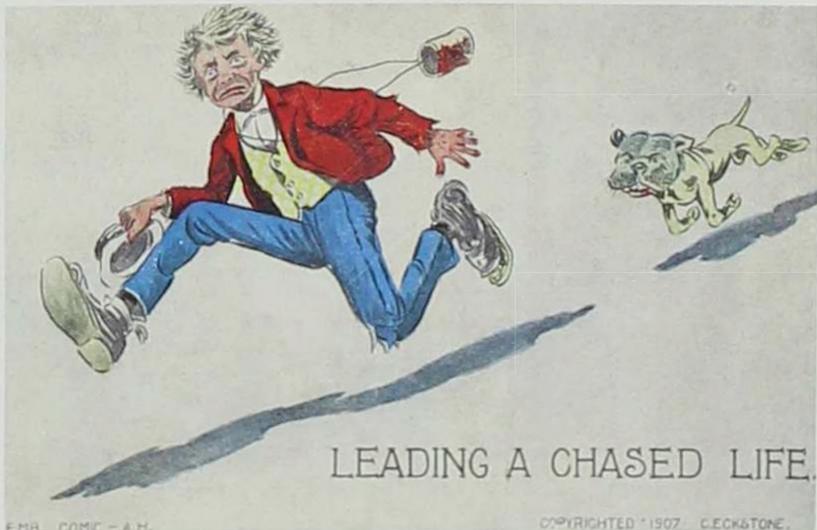
The popular motif of the postcard tramp appears in this sampling, part of *Palimpsest* contributor George Horton's extensive collection of hobo memorabilia. These examples generally date from 1906 to 1919 (sending and collecting picture postcards were quite popular in these decades), but the stereotype continues on cards printed in subsequent decades.

In choosing a picture postcard with the tramp motif, the sender slips into that character to convey travel details or to share a joke. Looking underneath the humor, however, one detects stronger messages from mainstream culture, messages about our society's attitudes towards the vagabond.

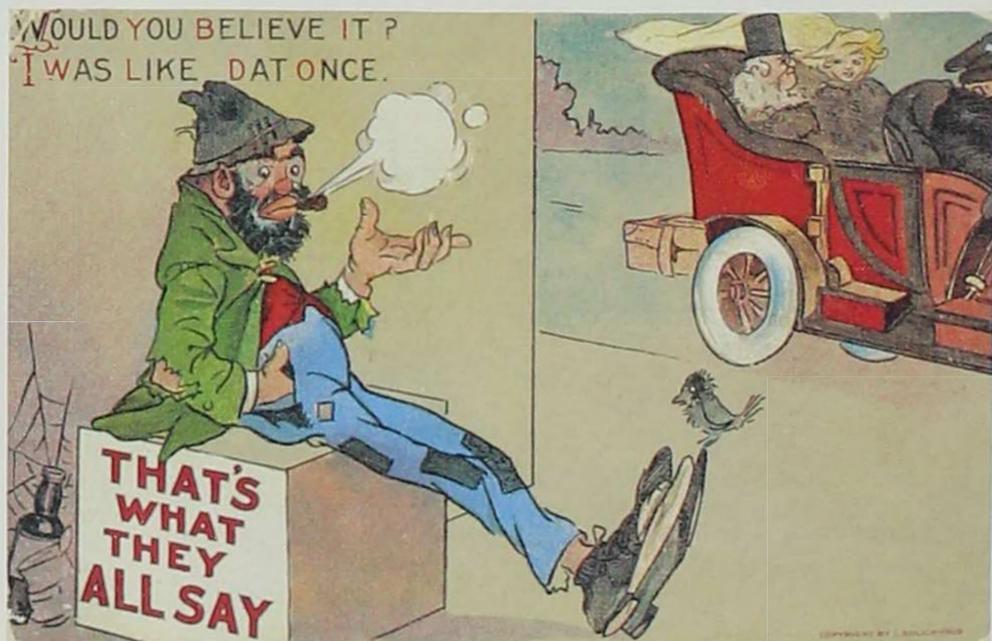
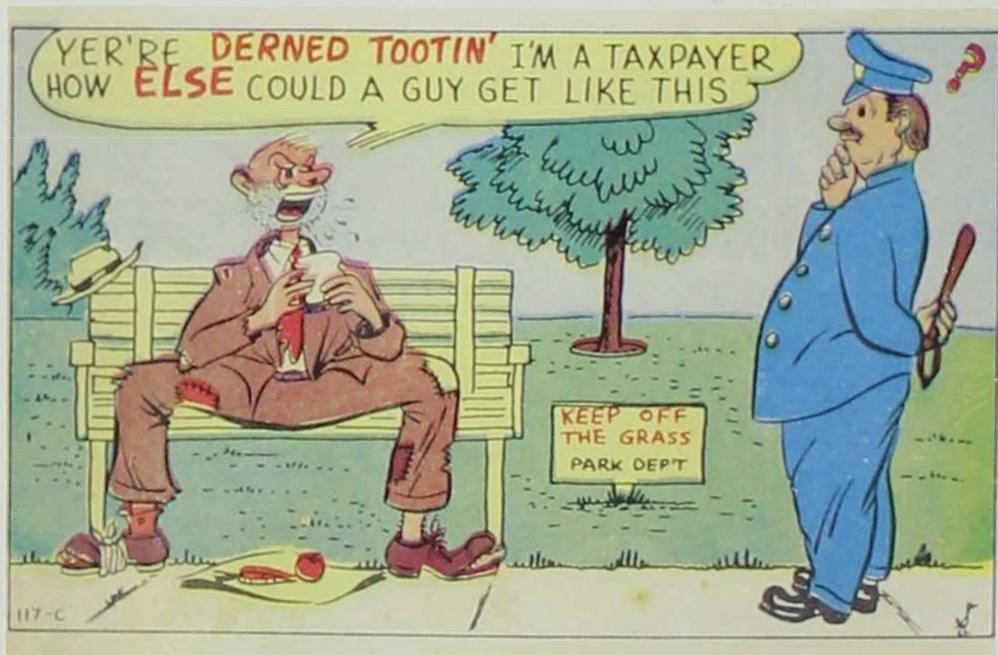
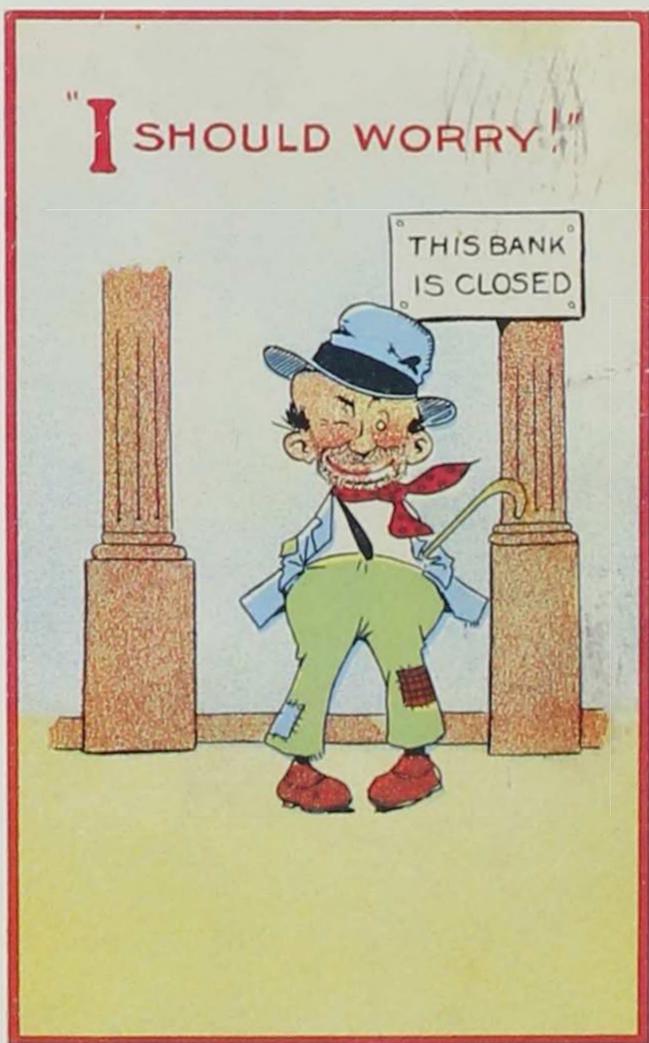
—The Editor

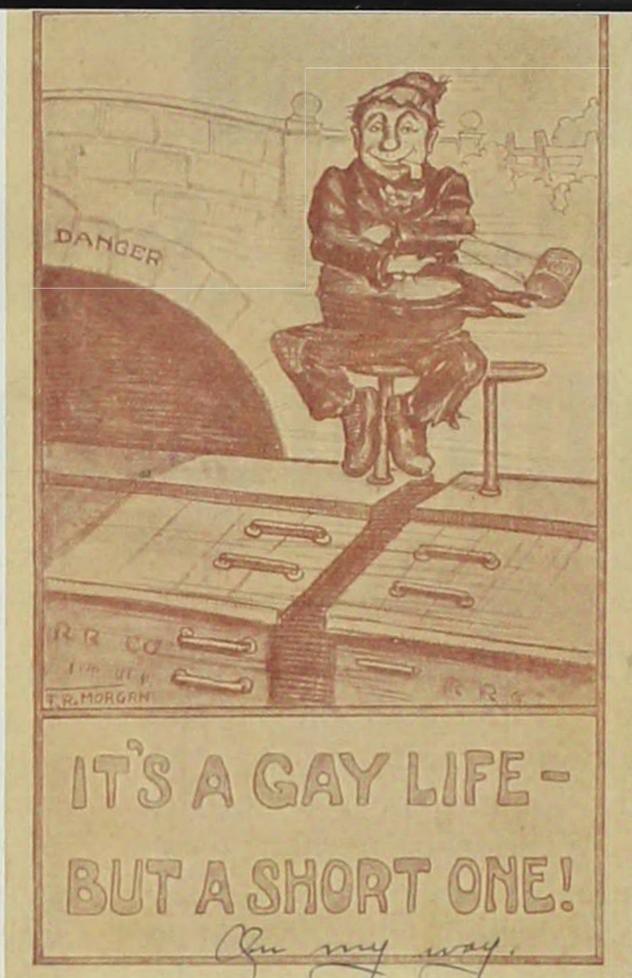


Double meanings and puns abound on cards portraying the tramp as an unwelcome visitor.



The postcard tramp speaks for all of us with empty pockets. The peniless, victimized character complains on our behalf, finding fault with the economy or government for the fall from riches to rags.





Above: Frequent elements of the wanderer's life — misfortune and danger — are turned into humor on these picture postcards. One individual's misfortune triggers no compassion in the stern-faced lady of the house, and the very real danger of riding freight trains becomes a joke about the risk of a carefree life.

Right: To most of us, the life of the vagabond appears to represent a break from propriety and obligations. Discarding social expectations and responsibilities and donning a favorite floppy hat, we seek the open road on our too-short vacations — and send a postcard to the folks at work back home.

