



Haakon Kristian Hauge (1862-1912)

An American railroad engineer and Norwegian immigrant made famous 97 years after his death. An exercise in psycho-genealogy led to a letter written to a dead man, a cryptic message etched on a cardboard token, and clues to the past.

• **The Letter.** Missoula City Cemetery received a letter on October 28, 2009 addressed to Haakon Hauge, a man buried in the cemetery who had died 97 years earlier. There was no return address. The envelope was mailed from France. A letter was written on pink note paper and inside the neatly folded paper was a cardboard token with writing on each side. The letter was written in Norwegian and read:

Colmar (France), 15/Oct/2009



Dear Haakon Kristian Hauge,

I have for a long time admired you and wanted to know more about your life in America. You have done much, been part of many exciting events, and been brave to start new things. I think you should have made it, for it has been very difficult for your wife Henna and your daughters to make it alone in Oslo. They have missed you very much. They have made it at last, because they have been both hardworking and skilled in all ways. You never came back from America, died of (unable to translate word) it's said in the family. But why can one find no sign, tracks of you there? Who took your stuff? Have someone killed you and stolen all from you? I cannot believe that you ran from the family, but if you did, then it is just like that and you get to be in peace. You have chosen the wrong card and made the wrong decision, but this card is not mine. Therefore I send it back to you with this letter. The card is no longer mine, it belongs to you, I shall now live free and easy without being scared of losing everything, make the wrong decision at the wrong time. Goodbye. Annick Dorsdal Levillain, your great-granddaughter

Dubbed “The Loser Card” story in the local newspaper, the letter garnered national attention as Haakon’s life story was pieced together through the diligence of cemetery staff, local historians and researchers, and eventually, the author of the mysterious letter, Haakon’s great-granddaughter. The letter was written as an exercise in the scientific study of psycho-genealogy.

- **1862-Birth.** Haakon was born in 1862 in Skien, Norway to Andreas and Gabrielle Hauge. Andreas was a parish state-church minister. Gabrielle was 15 years younger than her husband. Research shows the Hauge family had only one horse which seems extremely conservative because the local minister basically ran the town at that time which should have placed them in a solid financial position.
- **Education.** Haakon was highly educated and by 1878 he had received numerous technical degrees.
- **1883-America.** Haakon brought his wife, Henna (Svendsbakken) with him to America. He worked as an engineer for various railway companies in the western and northern states and also in British Columbia. Haakon and Henna would make numerous trips back and forth to Norway. They had four daughters: Ella (1902), Karen (1905) who only lived seven weeks, Anna (1906), and Kirsti (1908). The oldest and youngest girls were born in Norway and the two middle daughters were born in America.
- **1890.** He became the “first engineer” with the Montana Midland Railroad, probably the Montana Central.
- **1895-Norway Stone Quarry.** Haakon and Henna traveled back to Norway where he owned and operated a stone quarry for a few years.



- **1901-America.** They returned to America where Haakon secured a position as division engineer with the Northern Pacific. In the next few years he engineered for railroads in Pennsylvania, West Virginia and Virginia.
- **1905-Arizona mine.** Haakon worked for a short time on a southern railroad line. In 1905 he made an investment by partnering on a purchase of a mine in Arizona. He helped manage the mine for less than a year then left his partner in charge to run the operation.
- **1906-Norway Peat Bog.** Henna did not like this new country and insisted upon returning to Norway to raise their family. Haakon loved everything about America but obliged his wife and returned to Norway with his family. He purchased and operated a peat bog in Hjuksebo. Until now, Haakon's business adventures had proven to be very successful. Not much is known about what happened in this final venture except that everything went wrong. His entire fortune was lost and he found himself and his family penniless and forced to move into the home of his in-laws. There was only one thing left to do. He must return to America to cash in his holdings in the Arizona mine.
- **1910-Final trip.** Haakon made his final trip to America alone. He promised Henna and his daughters that he would be gone no longer than one year and would write to them regularly. Family lore says the gold mine was dried up and his business partner had taken the money and disappeared by the time Haakon returned to the mine. Henna never heard from her husband again. A few years later it was rumored that he had left Arizona and traveled north to Missoula, Montana and died there.
- **1912-Death.** Haakon Hauge died on July 12, 1912 in a rear room of the Stockholm Saloon in Missoula, Montana. The coroner's report said he died of a protracted spleen due to alcoholism. His obituary noted he had been hired as a cook on the Deschamps ranch the day before his death.

***Note: Missoula City Cemetery Administrative Manager, Mary Ellen Stubb, headed the research on this project and contacted the great-granddaughter from France who wrote the mysterious letter. The letter was an exercise in psycho-genealogy: the belief that our lives run parallel courses to a specific ancestor and in order to stop any future destruction in our life course, a person must break free from that ancestor. A letter is written and usually burned on the gravesite to complete the process. In this case, the letter was written and sent to the only cemetery found for Missoula after an internet search. Mary Ellen Stubb authored a narrative of the events in the American Cemetery trade magazine in September 2010.*

Some Hauge family members came to Missoula a few years after these findings to visit the gravesite. The great-granddaughter continues to piece together the events that led Haakon to his death in Missoula. Maybe one day those answers can be added to this information to complete the puzzle and allow the family a sense of closure.

Researchers who worked on this project:

Annick Drosdal-Levillaine (author of the letter and Haakon's great-granddaughter)

Mary Ellen Stubb (Missoula City Cemetery Administrative Manager)

Jane Plummer (Missoula City Cemetery receptionist)

Betty Wing (Sons of Norway, Missoula Chapter President)

Simon Roaldset (University of Montana Norwegian student)

Marcia Porter (Records Management Supervisor, Missoula County)

Steve Davolt (Funeral Director, Missoula Funeral Homes)

Kim Briggeman (News Reporter, Missoulian)

Janet Barnes (Records clerk, Missoula County)

Paulette Parpart (Library genealogist, Missoula County)