

The Cecil Rudick Letters

In September 2013, my cousin Kevin sent me a stack of century-old letters that his mother, Vera Rudick-Bourdon, had saved. The vast majority of them were from my great-grandfather Cecil Rudick to his future wife Mary Alice Cessna, written during the year before they were married, both of them around twenty-two years old. I had hoped to fill in a few gaps in the family story with these letters, and while that certainly did occur, much remains a mystery.

First, I arranged the documents from earliest to latest, setting aside undated documents; then the transcription began. As I learned the peculiarities of Cecil's handwriting and got used to reading pencil script on heavily browned paper, the pages became easier to decipher. By the time I had finished, I had become proficient at it.

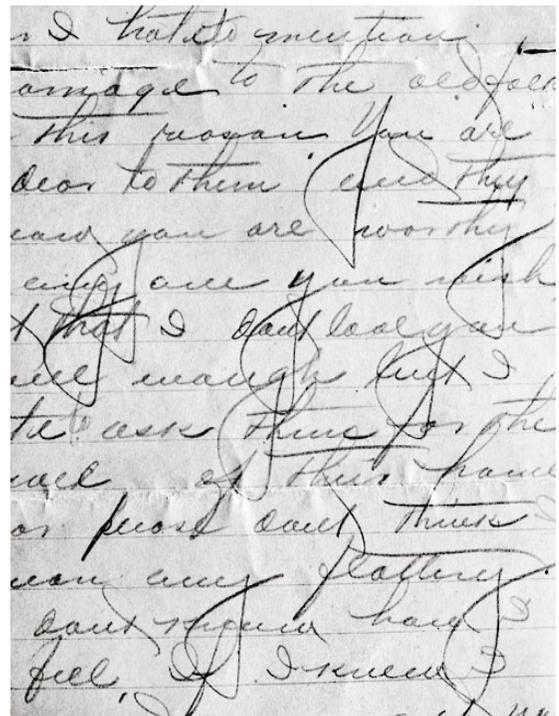
As for my transcriptions, these correspondences are lightly edited. Some of Cecil's punctuation marks had to be roped in from neighboring lines, and I replaced a few other periods and commas that had completely escaped captivity to make it read logically. I also corrected a few spelling errors, but except for putting the day of the week in front of the dates, these words are all Cecil's, none added and none dropped. Every document is presented here, no matter how mundane.

Here's some background: Cecil was born in 1888 in Big Flat, Arkansas. When he was nine years old, his father abandoned his wife and eight children for another woman. By 1910, Cecil's sister Edna and her family lived in Muskogee, Oklahoma, with brother Macon working on their farm. Cecil seemed to live in Gore, a small town less than thirty miles from Muskogee.

Mary Alice Cessna grew up in LaRue County, Kentucky, but by 1910, she, three brothers, and her parents lived in Gore, Oklahoma. Her uncle Sam Cessna's family lived in Muskogee. What year or years did the Cessna families arrive in Oklahoma, and when did they leave? These were some of my biggest questions, and I'm still asking them. Old man Walter Cessna dreamed of a fortune in the oil industry, but the dream fizzled out, and the Cessnas eventually returned to Kentucky.

Oklahoma, in that era, was a booming place. Various land rushes from 1890 onward, coupled with discoveries of oil in the area, drew people westward in droves. In 1907, the territory became one of the United States.

The locale is Gore, Oklahoma, a town of about three hundred folks, essentially a railroad stop about halfway between Muskogee (population over 50,000) and Fort Smith, Arkansas (population about 24,000). There's some confusion over Cecil's letters often being labeled as from "City," and I had wondered if perhaps he lived in Muskogee and traveled to Gore regularly. I think it's most likely that Cecil's "City" is Gore itself.



As for the cast of characters, some are obvious, others are ambiguous. Sam Cessna is Mary Alice's brother, a good friend to Cecil, and bearer of many letters and notes between the young lovers. Other couriers included Mary Alice's other brothers, LaRue and Howard Cessna. There's mention of Earl Andrew Goff and Squire Walters Goff, two brothers from another relocated LaRue County, Kentucky, family.

There was someone called Ruby in these letters, but she's probably too old to be the younger sister of Earl and Walters Goff, and she seems to be in the wrong town. Another person mentioned once is Cornelius, possibly Cecil's brother, Macon Cornelius, but again, I have doubts. And the woman named Ollie, mentioned several times, was definitely not Cecil's older sister Ollie, since Ollie Rudick was married at the time, and would not be considered in competition for Cecil's affection, as is implied in one of Cecil's letters.

This was a time when horse and train were the prominent modes of transportation, the automobile just beginning to muscle its way into the picture. When Cecil mentions the 104, I assume it's a train, but when he mentions "driving," I'm uncertain whether the vehicle is powered by oats or gasoline. It's been a fun game, but as I said, much remains a mystery.

The letters opened a fascinating window into those times and places. Over time, Cecil and Mary Alice became very real to me. These folks were born in the nineteenth century, and I am now living in the twenty-first century. Yet Cecil's death and my birth differ by only five years, so are we over a century apart, or only a few years? Holding these letters in my hand, it seems to be the latter.

Let's start with sixteen little notes or messages which have no dates:

Alice c/o Sam

Dear Alice :- Look for Cecil tonight about 7:30.

Lovingly, Cecil

Miss Alice c/o Sam

At Home

Dear Alice :-

Would be pleased to call tonight. We will go singing if you wish. Send ans. By Sam.

Lovingly, Cecil

Alice c/o Sam

At Church

Dear Alice :- If convenient I will call tonight instead of tomorrow night. If any objection call the depot before 7:30 P.M.

As ever, Cecil

Pardon This paper.

[Written on the back of a blank check-sized receipt form]

Dear Alice :- While you are dressing I will go over in town and attend to some very important business. Will be back in a short time and aggravate you a while. Take no offense.

Lovingly, Cecil

Alice c/o Wiley

Dear Alice :- Would like to come over tonight. We will go to Box Supper if you want to.

C. E. R.

Miss Mary Alice Cessna

At Home

Dearest Alice :- At Home

When I am far away, and my face you cannot see,
I will often think of you Dear Alice, will you sometimes think of me?

Yours For Ever

C. E. R.

Alice c/o [Harden?]

At Home

Dear Alice :- Would you like to have such a kid as Cecil call tonight? We will go to Literary if you wish.

Waiting your ans., Cecil

Pardon this paper. I can't find any other. Would have phoned but no operator at night.

Alice c/o [Harden?]

At Home

Dear Alice :- Would be more than pleased to call a few moments tonight. [Got? Get?] to wait two or three hours for the train.

Waiting your reply,

Cecil

[Written on stationary of the Gore Mercantile Co., Dealers in General Merchandise]

Alice c/o Sam

At Church

Dear Alice :- Say, would you like to drive down to [Visit?] this afternoon and see Edith? Send ans. by Sam. We will want to start by 1 o'clock.

Lovingly, Cecil

Alice c/o Elmer

Dear Alice :- If agreeable, I would be pleased to call for church tonight. Heard you was mad. Will explain all. Send ans. by Elmer.

Lovingly, Cecil

Alice c/o [Bay? Boy?]

Dear Alice :- Say, what about going over yonder this Eve? Tried to get you over the phone, but failed. If you want to go let me know at once and I will come over in a buggy. I would like to go this Eve. Tell them we are going over to see Ollie and will be back before night. Ans. by [Bay? Boy?]

Yours, Cecil

Miss Alice c/o Ollie

Kind Alice :- Say, would you and Sam go down to Mr. Tom Johnson's with Ollie and I? There isn't anything doing tonight, and Mrs. Johnson asked us to come. Said she would show us a nice time.

Lovingly Yours, Cecil.

[Written on stationary of O.D. Thompson, dealer in Staples and Fancy Groceries, Gore, Oklahoma.]

Miss Alice

Kind Alice :- Mr. and Mrs. [Casden?] requests the pleasure of yours and Sam's presence at a party tonight. If you would like to go, I would be pleased to call. My advice would be not to go, for I'm sure there will be boys there that will be intoxicated.

Lovingly Yours, Cecil

Dear Alice :- would you be pleased to have such a specimen of humanity as myself call this afternoon?

Most Lovingly, Cecil

[This note was folded up several times into a small triangle.]

Alice c/o Larue

Dear Alice :- Will call for church tonight. If any objections, let me know.

Yours, Cecil

Miss Alice Cessna

Gore Okla.

Dear Little Girl :- Will be over tonight if 104 is any thing like on time. Rec'd your card. (Thank you) Was you mistaken today, did you not think I was Mr. Hawkins on the [Empire? Esquire?]

Look for me tonight if I don't [come?]

Yours For Ever, Cecil

x x x x x

[The letter is on stationary of the St. Louis, Iron Mountain & Southern Ry. Co. It's in a small envelope with the return address: The Missouri Pacific Railway Company, St. Louis, Iron Mountain & Southern Railway Co.]

I imagine that these little letters and notes belong between the dated entries below, and that many other little messages have not survived for us to read. Somewhere in October, the relationship takes a more serious and rocky turn. It's hard, sometimes, to tell exactly what's going on, considering the one-sidedness of this account. Sadly, there are no surviving examples of Mary Alice's letters in reply.

I find it a bit difficult (but not *too* difficult!) to paw through these personal and sometimes anguished writings of my great-grandfather, even though he died before I was born, and no one I have talked with ever knew him. It's hard to call these "love letters." He darts from sad, frustrated, or angry analysis of his situation into recitals of everyday happenings, without much pause. At times, I want to reach into the past and slap some sense into him. But I will cut him some slack, not knowing what he was reacting to in those moments.

The narrative builds to a springtime meeting between the young lovers and her parents, a meeting which Cecil is convinced will go badly. And off we go...

Sunday July 31, 1910

City.

Miss Alice Cessna

At Home

Esteemed Friend :- Would you be pleased to have me call for Singing tonight? Miss Johnson said she might come up and go to Singing. Tell Sam.

Respt. C. E. Rudick

[A note written on the torn off bottom half of a page]

Thursday August 4, 1910

City.

Miss Alice Cessna

At Home

Kind Friend :- Would like very much to call for the Show tonight, i. e. if you would like to go. They are going to show in a Moving Picture Design the destruction of Pompeii by volcanic eruption of the Vesuvius.

Waiting your reply, Cecil

[A one page folded note with "Miss Cessna At Home" written on the outside]

Sunday August 7, 1910

City.

Miss Alice Cessna

At Home

Kind Friend :- Would be pleased to call this afternoon.

Lovingly, Cecil

[A note written on a piece of stationary from Wynn's Pharmacy (Pure Drugs and Medicines, S. A. Wynn, Prop., Gore Okla: Use Pratt's Animal and Poultry Regulators and Veterinary Supplies) The note is folded twice: on the outside is written "Miss Cessna," and halfway opened it says "Pardon open Conveyance."]

Friday August 12, 1910

City.

Miss Alice Cessna

At Home

Dear Alice :- Going to see a Show tonight. Would you like to go? If you want to go I would be more than pleased to call. Waiting your Ans.

Yours Lovingly, Cecil

[A one page note folded up into a small triangle, with "Alice" written on the outside]

Tuesday October 18, 1910

City, Okla.

Miss Alice Cessna

At Home

Dearest Alice :-

Will pen the only one I ever think of a few words. Now I'm sure you will say that is a story, and it is, but never do I think of any one else so often as you. You are the only one I think of in love of. Now that isn't any story.

Dear, I never did pass such a lonesome day as Sun., although I was with a real nice girl part of the day. I'm sure you are not offended at me for walking with Ollie. She was lonely as well as my self. I enjoyed her company but I knew she didn't love me, neither did I wish her to. But Dear, I think you do.

I would be very sad to know that I was deceived. Oh say you must not go back to Muskogee. If you do I'm going to Western Okla. and stay until you come back, for I wouldn't stay here at all if it was not for you.

Sam went over to see Ollie last night. Couldn't stay away any longer. Little [G---p] told me to tell her he was gone to Ky. And then he was over there before I could get there to tell her. What do you know about that? I was about in the same condition last night. I came very near coming to W.C.C. House, but hated to impose on good nature. I knew you were tired and sleepy. Will be there Thursday Night but care do you? You can send a note by Sam if not agreeable.

Wish I could see you tonight. Have more than a little to tell you. Guess I will close as I have three more letters to write tonight just to friends and relatives. I don't think any thing else Dear, look for me Thurs night.

Most Lovingly, Pardon scribbling, Cecil.

[A four page letter with "Hello Dear" written diagonally across the top left corner of page one]

Tuesday November 1, 1910

Gore Okla.

Miss Mary Alice Cessna

At Home

My Only Sweetheart :- With pleasure and also with sadness I address you tonight. Was so glad to receive your sweet little missive. Looks like you could come out to the party and supper last night. I went but couldn't enjoy myself you know, for the only one I love or ever will love was at home, I guess thumping on the piano. Wonder if she ever thought of Cecil.

Some boys and girls went out to take in the town and tried to get Sam and I to go with them we begged to be ashamed. One boy made the remark that we were like he used to be, afraid to go out with any one else. I says I don't suppose they care so much for us as all of that.

Can't write, for Oral and Ruby they are all around me. I just told Ruby if she would get away I would let her read the letter when I had finished.

Say, Dearest, I guess I will leave Gore in a short time if what I hear be true. Heard this Eve that Mr. Brown said he was going to make me quit work for him. He asked me this Eve to do a certain thing, and I would not, so he told some other fellow if I could not do what he wanted me to do I could quit. Don't think I belong to him. Neither do I think I'm under any obligation to him. Oh say: maybe you would hire me to work for you. If you will, I'll not leave.

Dear, I wish some things that [] my mind would not. I some times wonder if you are only trifling with my affections. Then I know you are not, or I believe it at least.

I will be at your home tomorrow night or in the P.M. if I decide to leave. I would rather leave here in a casket as to go alive, for I feel like I was leaving the truest lover I ever had. One of our charming writers says the greatest blessing a girl can receive is the ingenious devotions of a young man's heart. Dearest, you have mine with out a doubt.

Hope you will pardon this lengthy letter and ill composed. Began writing with a pen, but it wasn't any good, so I taken the pencil. Maybe you can read some of it. Will ring off. Write me real soon. If I decide to go I will come over tomorrow night or tomorrow Eve. If I don't go, I will call Thurs. night, if no objections.

Yours For Ever, Cecil

Tacky X X X X X

[It sure looks like "Tacky."]

Thursday November 23, 1910

St.L. IM. S. Depot

Miss Alice Cessna

At Home

Dearest Alice :- Will write you a few lines in ans. To your nice letter rec'd yesterday. Was so sorry to hear of your being sick. Regretted very much that you could not go to the Party last night. I went, but didn't enjoy myself very well. You know why.

Say Dear, I went in the wagon with Mrs. Hibbs, but didn't do so because I wanted to. I went to go in the wagon, and no place to ride except in the seat with her. You surely wouldn't think I cared any thing for her. She is a nice lady and I'm indeed sorry for her. I never did love her, only as (a) friend. Any one couldn't help but like her. I hope you will not be offended at me for being with her.

I couldn't love any one else but you. I called you over the phone this A.M., but they (who ever ans'd) never would say any thing but hello. I wanted to find out how my little Alice was. I will be over tomorrow night. Write me a few words tomorrow and let me know if you are still sick.

Lovingly Yours, C. E. R.

Saturday December 3, 1910

Dear Alice :- Say, there will be church tonight. The Wild Irishman will preach. Didn't know it until a few moments ago. I will be over, so if you want to go, we will go.

Most Lovingly, Cecil

[A half page note, with the date at the bottom]

Saturday December 10, 1910

Gore Okla.

[On envelope:]

Miss Alice Cessna (c/o Howard)

At Home

Dearest Little Girl :- Just a few words. Guess you are tired of reading something from me every day, But I can't help it. You are always on my mind. Wonder if you ever think of me. Now I know you do. Was indeed proud to see you this P.M. Would be so good to see you tonight, But I guess I'll not get to. Seen Ollie going to town just now. Say Dear, did you give that card to your Mama? I'll bet you didn't. If you did, what did she have to say?

I'm feeling real bad tonight, and my, my but I'm tired. Have every thing to do as Mr. May is sick. Looks like you might come over and assist me a little. I could not eat any supper tonight, so I will twist off.

Please send me a blank piece of paper with your name on it, if nothing else.

Your's Forever, Cecil

[Written on stationary of The Missouri Pacific Railway Company, St. Louis, Iron Mountain & Southern R'Y Co. - Leased, Operated and Independent Lines.]

Monday December 26, 1910

Gore Okla.

Miss Alice Cessna

At Home

Dear Alice :- Will write you a few words in regards to the past, present and future. I'm indeed surprised at what I have heard, also what I have seen. Now I can't doubt you if I wanted to, but you have been telling me for some time that you was not corresponding with Alfred, and I can't doubt but you telling me the truth, but it looks to the reverse. Now I'm not at all jealous for I would not be for any thing. I guess will not be caught wearing the worthless little ring I gave you. Oh, you seemed to be pleased so much about receiving that ring from Alfred. I heard of the ring being on exhibition on the streets this P.M.

I'm trying so hard to not think that it is as some one has predicted. If you have not been true to me you will always regret it. It surely could not be possible that you haven't been true. If you haven't, I am the worst deceived person that ever was deceived. If I'm not badly fooled, Sam is in the same condition that some one says I am. I hate very much to write you this, but owing to circumstances over which I have no control I can't help it. I would like so much to see and talk with you tonight. Would be pleased to heard from you and if no objections would like to call some time real soon. So I guess this will be enough said at present.

Hoping to hear from you soon.

A Bad Feeling Kid, Cecil

[Written on stationary of The Missouri Pacific Railway Company, St. Louis, Iron Mountain & Southern R'Y Co. - Leased, Operated and Independent Lines. The envelope this letter was found in was postmarked on December 24, 1910, two days before it was supposedly written. It list's Miss Alice Cessna's address as Box 66, City.]

Monday January 2, 1911

Gore Okla.

Miss Alice Cessna

At Home

Only Loved One :- How's this for winter? Hope you are not sick this cold day. Dear I hated to leave you last night worse than I ever did, Although I hate to leave you at any time. It is indeed a sad thing to think about the happening of yesterday Eve. Dear I know you love me and I know I love you more than any one on earth and I think it would be a sin for them to refuse. If they had any grounds for refusing it would be different. It is mature for them to not want you to marry, you being the only girl. I'm sure you are the jewel of their house, but you are the idol of my heart.

As I told you yesterday or last night I never thought I would love any girl as I do you. I have often said that I would never marry. Of course you are worthy of a millionaire and no doubt but your [friends? family?] think so. But I had rather marry a girl I loved if she didn't have but one dress [or?] to marry a wealthy girl and didn't love her. I hate to mention it to your Papa on your account. But some time I could say some thing to him.

Well I will say no more. Don't freeze to death.

Write me a few words.

Yours For Ever, Cecil

[Written on stationary of The Missouri Pacific Railway Company, St. Louis, Iron Mountain & Southern R'Y Co. - Leased, Operated and Independent Lines.]

Tuesday January 10, 1911

Muskogee Okla.

Miss Alice Cessna

At Home

Dearest Little Girl :- Will write you a few lines tonight. Sam says you wasn't feeling very well tonight. I'm so sorry. I hate for you to be sick. I had rather be sick my self than for you to be sick. Would come over and see you, but I can't get off. Hope you will be feeling OK by morning. I believe I will just quit coming to see you, for I think I can do without seeing you about as well as I can see you, and then have to leave.

Say, you had better doctor your toes and get them well so we can take that walk. You was just joking, wasn't you?

Well, I guess people are having a time at the Show. I didn't care to go, without you went. Of course I would be pleased to go any where that you wanted to go. Sam said Beulah was telling him this Eve that she was sure I was only wanting to fool her a trip when she said who I came to the show with. Said I had fooled girls, Aurelia for instance. There is one girl I would not fool for any thing, you have an idea who she is, I guess. Say, come over to the Rag___ Restaurant and eat some fresh oysters, and you will feel better.

Write me a few words and tell me when you would like to have Cecil come over. Guess you have heard that name Cecil until you are tired of it. Wish that old man Cessna would come around so I could ask him something. I'll bet you tell not to go around where I am. Well, I will say no more. Hope to hear from you tomorrow.

Yours Always, Cecil

[In the bottom left corner of the last page Cecil diagonally wrote "I'm going to write Walters a letter tonight."]

Monday January 16, 1911

Muskogee Okla.

Miss Alice Cessna

Gore Okla.

Dear Alice :- I'll be in Gore tomorrow and on tomorrow night. We are having a time. Wish you were here.

Lovingly, C. E. R.

Wednesday January 18, 1911

Gore Okla.

Miss Alice Cessna

At Home

Dearest One :- Will write you a few words. I'm sure you are so fully surprised. You no doubt thought I was gone for good. Well, I haven't come back to stay, unless things have changed to a great extent.

I had a real nice time in Muskogee. I wonder what that was you had to tell me. I'll bet you didn't give them that note Sun. Eve. Dear, I was so sorry for you Sun. Eve. If I had known that they would never give their consent I would never come back to Gore.

Say, I'll bet your Papa and Mama was good and mad at me for letting Sam go with me. I could not very well help it, I couldn't refuse him of anything he would ask of me, if I had it. If he don't come home today, I will get a letter from him. I like Earl fine. Walters and I had a good time. Walters and Earl are coming down some day.

Well, I will say no more for I feel awfully bad. Look for me about 7 o'clock tonight.

Yours Only, Cecil E. R.

[Another scrap of paper gives the Muskogee address and full name Walters Goff.]

Thursday February 9, 1911

Gore Okla.

Miss Alice Cessna

At Home

Dearest Alice :- It is with pleasure that I endeavor to address you tonight. Haven't any thing else to be doing, as my work is over for the day. I had much rather see you than to be trying to scribble to you, for scribble is all I can do. Saw you this Eve and you would not as much as speak to me, or even look at me. Don't you feel a little bit bad or ashamed to treat the one that loves you more than any one else could in such a way as that? Can't help but study about how near I came losing my little girl. What does the School Madam have to say about you not quitting me?

Written Sam a letter yesterday. I told him to come home for I wanted to see him, and you did too. I think he will come home soon. Mr. Sherrill went to Muskogee this P.M. on 104. Would liked to gone with him but couldn't. If Sam don't come home I think I'll go up Sun. morning and come back Sun. night. You wouldn't miss me would you? You could go with me, if you so desired. Don't know whether I can get off or not. I'll have to get some one to work in my place. Guess you can work, can't you?

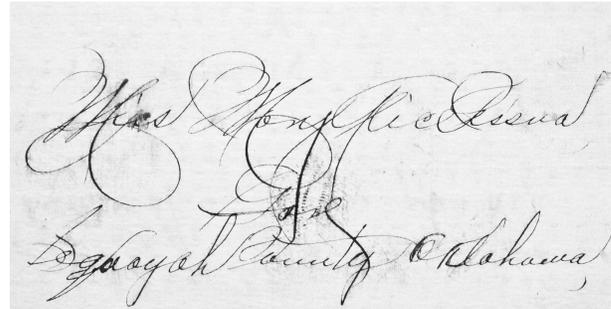
Say, tell your Mama to take a good look at your photo, for I'm going to take it away Sat. night. She can look at you all the time and I can't. She can just either give me the picture or the girl, just which ever she prefers. I'd prefer the latter.

Say, I actually did go to bed last night, about 7:30. My, but I did sleep. I'll be over Sat. night and stay about half the night. Write me a letter tomorrow or Sat. please.

If not yours, no one else, Cecil Edward Rudick
Box 86 Gore Okla.

[In the top left corner of page one it seems to say "Hell's Door." Crammed into the lower left corner of the last page is "Pardon poor writing, I'm in a hurry."]

[Removed from its small envelope, this folded letter is inscribed: "Miss Mary Alice Cessna, Gore, Sequoyah County Oklahoma" in Cecil's best flowing script]



Thursday February 16, 1911

Gore Okla

Miss Mary Alice Cessna

At Home

Dearest and Only Loved One :- After having read your letter just now I will endeavor to pencil you a few words. I was surprised at reading your letter for I thought you sure was mad at me. But as you have given [due? one?] explanation I will say no more of that. Just supposed you had heard about my going home with Beulah. Yes, I well recollect what I told you about Beulah. Please don't think me untrue to you for I certainly don't mean to be. It was nature for me to go for she was there alone and it was dark and raining, so I thought it would be an act of kindness to assist the girl home. Even if she isn't a real nice girl it is only to the worst to herself, and I didn't think it would harm me or corrupt any of my gold morals to go with her. But as I told you once before I would not go with her again, and as Old Man [Bryson?] says (Now that's dead right) I will go home and leave her before I'll go again.

You are the only girl I ever did go with that wasn't allowed the privilege of going with any other girl I wanted to go with. I always give a girl the right to go with any one they wished to. But Dearest, I don't want to go with any one else. If I'm with any one else you are always on my mind. I'll admit that I would not like for you to go with any one else, for you seem like you are mine, and mine alone. Wonder if I seem that way to you. Guess not when you heard I had gone with Beulah (Guess you don't care for me.) Please, Dear, don't write that to me again, for you ought to know I do. What did you mean about the way I did this A.M.? I didn't act mad, did I? Didn't intend to if I did. No, Dear, I did not receive your card. Didn't send me one, did you?

Came very near throwing my leg out of place this Eve. Can hardly walk on it now. Saw me climb the ladder, did you? Don't you wish I had fallen there: I wouldn't have gone with Beulah again. Say, got some thing to tell you when I see you.

Something Mrs. Robertson said I was saying in my sleep last night. Hope it will never come true.

Well, I guess I better close and make out a [C__? Car?] Report. Write me a love letter tomorrow. Sam can bring it to me. Might come over tomorrow night if you would like to see me. I mean Sat. night. So no more.

Yours Always,
Cecil E. R.

[Diagonally, across the top left corner of page one of this letter, Cecil has written "Hello Miss Hawkins."]

Monday February 20, 1911

City

Miss Alice Cessna

Gore Okla.

Most Honored One : - Will write you a few words tonight. Don't care if you don't appreciate it, I'll write it any way. Hoping to receive a few kind words from you. Bet I can guess who you'd enjoy reading a letter from. I was only teasing you. Say, got some thing funny to tell you when I see you, and if ever you tell it I'll pull all your hair out.

Tell your Papa I'll be over to collect some money from him tomorrow night. Mr. Taylor will not be there, will he. Didn't come Sunday night, did I? It was actually too bad, but if I had known what I do now I would have come. So no more. Write me a few words tomorrow.

Lovingly Yours, Cecil E. Rudick

Saturday February 25, 1911

City

Miss Alice Cessna

At Home

Dearest Alice : - Say, don't look for Cecil tonight for I have some work to do and can't come until late. I'll come over with Sam and probably stay all night.

Guess you are mad because I left last night. Well I'll come over some time tonight.

Lovingly Yours, Cecil E Rudick

Monday March 6, 1911

City

Miss Alice Cessna

At Home

Dearest One: - Just a few words to let you know I'm not dead. Now how do I know you care about that? I'm pretty sure you do though. Seen you today and waved, but no response. Guess you didn't see me wave, did you? How are you today? I'm awful sleepy. Wish I could be with you tonight, but I must go to bed.

Show in town but don't think they are going to show here. Too bad, isn't it?

Two fellows jumped on me a while ago and gave me a whipping. Would you helped me had you been present? Don't guess you would, you'd just stood off and [hollered?] [sickly?].

Well no more. Write me a few lines tomorrow and I'll come tomorrow night. Please pardon this writing; it looks like pig tracks.

Yours Always, Cecil Edward Rudick

Thursday March 16, 1911

Gore, Okla.

Miss Alice Cessna

At Home

Darling Little Girl: - Was so proud to see you a while ago, but guess you cared about seeing me though, after having read that letter from Mr. [Ba---d]. So sorry to hear of your being sick. Your Mama told me about it this AM when I was over.

Have a new agent today. Mr. [Sherrill?] has gone to Arkansas.

Well, I don't know of anything to write that would interest you, I don't suppose. Will be over tomorrow night if nothing prevents.

Lovingly Yours,
Cecil E Rudick

[Written on stationary of The Missouri Pacific Railway Company, St. Louis, Iron Mountain & Southern R'Y Co. - Leased, Operated and Independent Lines.]

Saturday March 25, 1911

City

Miss Mary Alice Cessna

Gore, Okla.

Darling Little Girl: - Will endeavor to pencil you a few words this AM. Well, I went away yesterday AM, got back this AM. Saw a good ball game at Ft. Smith. Wish you could have been with me. Guess you think I have a lady friend at Ft. Smith, but not true. Saw lots of my old friends I knew. Saw Oral Bell's father. He was drunker than seven hundred dollars. Now isn't that a pity?

Well, Dearest, I believe I'll come over and see the only one I now or ever expect to love tonight. Wonder if she will be good to see me. Honestly, I think she will. Of course I could be deceived, but I don't think so.

You can write me a few lines in ans. if you wish.

Most Lovingly Yours, Cecil E Rudick

Tuesday March 28, 1911 [postmark on envelope]

Mary Alice Cessna

Gore, Okla.

Dearest And Only Loved One: - Will write you a few words. You won't write to me. I think you treat me real mean about writing to me. Went down to the farm with Sam this AM and helped him plow. Been sleeping this Eve.

Well, Darling, I guess I'll leave Friday. Hate so bad to leave you, and I know, or at least I have reason to believe, you hate to see me go. I will miss the happy evening I spend with you. That is all the pleasure I see.

I'll be over tomorrow night, and maybe I'll stay all night. It makes me feel like crying to now write you about leaving. I have told you in a joke that I was going to leave, but this is a different thing, and I can realize in my feeling the difference. Might come over late tomorrow Eve and take supper with [no final word/words]

Write me tomorrow
Dearest, please do.
Lovingly Yours, C. E. R.

Thursday March 30, 1911

Robertson's [Rise? River?]

Miss Alice Cessna

At Home

Dearest One: - As I told you I would do, I will write you a few lines. Dear, I feel so sad I can't hardly write. I reckon I am the hard-heartedest boy living, but Darling you touched my heart this morning. Never before did a girl or any one else touch me enough to make me cry. It is sad indeed to think of leaving you. Our case is a miracle, for I never had any intention of winning your love and affections when I began going with you. And I don't suppose you had any real thought of giving your love to me. But Darling, I'm real proud I have won you yet sorry for this reason: I have won you and yet I have not. As for yourself I have, but some one else, they would never consent for us to marry. I had rather discontinue my life than to leave you, or know I would never have the pleasure of calling you mine.

I think it would be a sin for them to refuse us the privilege of marrying. Your Momma knows you love me, and ought to know I love you. I never thought it would be as it is. I never thought I would give my self to any girl, but Dear, I would die for you. Don't you think so?

You don't know how bad I feel this AM to see the tears steal down your cheeks. I have kept company with several girls and I guess they loved me, or some of them. Their claims proved it, but I didn't love them. I told them I did, which I acknowledge I ought not to have done. But Dearest, I tell you that I love you from the depth of my heart. I would not be untrue to you for the world.

Dear, I hate to mention marriage to the old folks for this reason: you are so dear to them and they know you are worthy of any one you wish, not that I don't love you well enough. But I hate to ask them for the jewel of their house. Dear please don't think I mean any flattery. I don't know how. I do feel if I knew, I would never get you. I would commit suicide for I never will be happy unless you are mine.

I have told you before now that I was going away, but I knew I wasn't going to stay. But this AM it actually did make your [Cecil?] (if you will allow the expression) feel bad. I had a letter this AM from where I was going, and he said for me to wait until I heard from him again before I came. So I will not go tomorrow Eve, I don't suppose unless I hear from him again tomorrow Morn. Wish your papa would have time to [work? wait?] for him. I wouldn't go at all. I would get to see my little girl every day, and Dear, that would be a pleasure to me.

Think I'll go down to the farm this Eve and stay with Sam. I like Sam almost as a Bro and I think Sam likes me, or it seems like he does.

Well Dear, I'm afraid of worrying you with this so I'll close. Hope to see you again come to the offices this Eve.

Please ans. Tomorrow.

Yours lovingly, Cecil E Rudick

Friday March 31, 1911

City

Miss Mary Alice Cessna

At Home

Loving Little Girl: - Just Rec'd your sweet letter. Was so glad to get it. Sorry you have the blues and feel so lonely. Wish I could be with you. Would come over this afternoon, but it seems like imposing on your mama. And you didn't even know I loved you until yesterday morning. Well I knew I did, but I never had realized I loved you so well until then. I never felt so bad in all my life. I would rather be dead than to know you would never be mine.

I have decided to stay over until Monday. I will leave on that early train Monday Morning. I will get to spend one more Sun. afternoon with the only one I love. I will be over tonight and we will go to the Box Supper if Edith and

Cornelius don't go. Say we will put the proposition to the old folks Sunday Eve and see what they will say. If they don't say "Yes" I am going away, never to return, for I could never endure to see you knowing you would never be mine.

Oh, Dear, you don't have any idea how I will miss you. I have been with you so long, and you have been true to me I know. Well I will tell you more when I see you. Oh just think how soon it will be until we will say Good-Bye, Maybe for ever. It is sad indeed to think about.

Will Close. Look for Cecil Tonight.

Yours Only, Cecil E Rudick

[Instead of numbering the four pages of this letter, Cecil labeled them "1", "Love", "You" and "Too."]

Thursday April 6, 1911

City

Farewell

Miss Alice Cessna

Home

Kind Friend: - Just thought I would write you a few lines this Eve. Saw you up in town a few moments ago and Dear, you seem so different from what you always do. Didn't seem like your self at all and imagine what could be wrong.

Would be so glad to see you tonight. I would tell you a few things. Dear, I can't understand you; sometimes you seem one way and again [two?]. This couldn't be possible. I don't reckon that you are only trifling with my feelings. I'm going to stay here until next Monday Morn, and if there isn't something done I will take my departure from Gore, never to see the place again.

If you are still in the notion of marrying, I will tell the old folks that I have treated them with all respect due them and they have treated me very nice, and if they will continue to do so I will do them the same way. But if they object without any cause what ever, I will treat things in such a way that they will get fully rewarded.

I'm afraid, Dear, you don't exactly understand what you say. It is indeed a hard problem to solve. I came very near asking your papa last night. I would not care half so bad to ask them, but any time I say any thing about it you approach me with a shake of the head and a laugh, as though you are opposed to me saying one word to them. Darling, I hate to write you in this way, but I don't reckon the truth will hurt anyone. If you would stay with me when I ask them, it would be quite a consolation to me. But Dear, if I was to start to ask them, you would hide your face and disappear.

I will possibly be over tomorrow night. What did Edith have her mouth stuck out at me about this Eve? Wouldn't even speak to me. If she don't like me I'm sure there isn't any love lost.

Now Dear, if any statement I have made in this letter is wrong, they stand for your correction, and I beg your pardon for making them. Well, I'll say no more.

I [] I [love?] [You?] [line unreadable, due to damage along fold in paper]
Cecil Rudick, RSVP

We are left hanging, but of course, we know the eventual outcome. Cecil did not get on that train, never to return to Gore, and I suppose his threat to fully reward the old folk's doubts about him was never realized. It turns out that Cecil had applied for a marriage license three days before writing that letter.

I have a small stack of papers which survived—a diary of sorts—in Mary Alice's handwriting. The papers are simply a list, day to day, stapled at the top with a cloth ribbon. The entries are short, like:

- 8-4-10 Cecil and Mary at show.
- 5 Cecil and Mary at show.
- 7 Cecil and Mary at Home. Sunday night Cecil and Mary at church.

This goes on for months and ends about a week after that final letter. The last entries, in April 1911:

- 8 Cecil and Alice at home Saturday night at home
- 9 Cecil and Alice at home Sunday night at church
- 11 Cecil and Alice in grave-yard and Tuesday night at home (wonderful)
- 12 Cecil and Alice at home
- 12 Cecil and [A___] [Illegible: pieces of paper missing along seam]
- 120 up to date.

I do not know Mary Alice Cessna's writing style, so I can only suppose that a day or two before April 11, Walter Cessna and his wife, Susan, gave their consent for Cecil Rudick to marry their daughter. Maybe it was on April 11 itself, since Mary Alice described that night as wonderful. Cecil and Mary Alice were married the next day, on Wednesday, April 12, 1911, in Gore, Oklahoma.

A little over a year later, on April 26, 1912, Walter Cessna Rudick was born in Gore, Oklahoma, named after his grandfather. Two months later, Cecil, Mary Alice, and little Walter had moved about a hundred miles away to Bartlesville, Oklahoma, where Cecil had a job. What job? Cecil seems in his letters to willfully avoid any specifics about his actual work. And how do I know about Bartlesville? From a letter from Walter Cessna to his daughter:

Sunday, June 30, 1912

[Walter Cessna] Box 73, Gore Okla.

Mrs. Mary A. Rudick
108 Cheyenne Av.
Bartlesville, Okla.

Dear Mary Alice. I was so sorry when I got home to learn that you worse. Your Mama and Sam'I had gone the evening before. So I called Tom May. I new he was at the depot, and I could find out by him how you was. He told me you was better. Sammie got home yesterday and said you was still improving. I do hope you will soon be well. I believe if you could get sulfur water to drink for a while it would be good for you. You may half to go to Claremore and stay a while. How is the baby getting along at night, I hope?

We got a card from Hattie. I will send it to you so you can see what she says. I hope she may soon be well. Sam wrote to her and to Joseph to day. Your mama can write a card every few days so we will know how you all are.

How does Cecil like his work by this time? Sammie think [A___s] will go back as soon as he can. He may like better later on.

I am by my self tonight. The boys are at Church. How does your Mama like Bartlesville? I'll close for this time as I am tired. I wrote to [Fred?] and Nick to day. Will close for this time. Answer soon.

Love to all,
Father

Claremore, Oklahoma, is mentioned in relation to the town's "Radium Water," marketed as a remedy for many ailments.

There's a sad footnote concerning this letter's reference to Hattie. She was the wife of Mary Alice's older brother Joseph, the only Cessna family member not to go west to Oklahoma. Hattie died of tuberculosis in April of the following year, leaving Joseph with three young daughters. While those girls were raised by their other grandparents, the event could only have added to whatever drove the Walter Cessna family out of Oklahoma and back to Kentucky.

One more document:

Christmas, 1912

[A check drawn on The Farmers Bank of Illinois; Gore, Oklahoma]

PAY TO: Mary Alice Cessna
365 Happy Days C E Rudick

One hope in transcribing these old letters was to find out more about Cecil himself, maybe to learn about his early employment, but I only got a few hints at best. Cecil is missing (so far) in the 1910 Census, which would give us his occupation. A good guess would be that he worked for a railroad company. He certainly had access to railroad stationery and envelopes for some of his letters. A letter from his father, dated June 5, 1915, offers small advice to Cecil about work:

The different Bakeries here in Joplin are doing an immense business. All want to see the party who desires work and try them to see they can do the work, or such is offered as an excuse. If you are up on the Con. business, you would stand a good chance to get work on the street car line. There is a demand in all cities for those who are efficient - for those who can do their work rightly and willingly.

I only wish you were here to get a job when the opportunity came.

I suppose the "Con. business" refers to conducting trains. (Or was John Rudick mentioning bakeries for a reason?) When John Rudick sent his letter, Cecil's second child (my grandmother Dorothy Bonita Rudick) had just been born in Louisville, Kentucky. In the 1920 census, five years later, Cecil and family were still in Louisville, and Cecil worked as a delivery clerk for the "R. Road Co."

A third child, Vera Mae Rudick, was born in 1923, but in Michigan, and by 1930, Cecil, Mary Alice, Sam Cessna, LaRue Cessna, and Howard Cessna all lived in Detroit, Michigan, joined about 1940 by their father, Walter Cessna. Sam worked as a conductor on the streetcar lines, as did LaRue for a few years before moving on.

Cecil Rudick worked in Detroit as a streetcar motorman for the rest of his career and remained married to Mary Alice for over forty years, until his death in 1952. Mary Alice Cessna-Rudick died the following year.

