

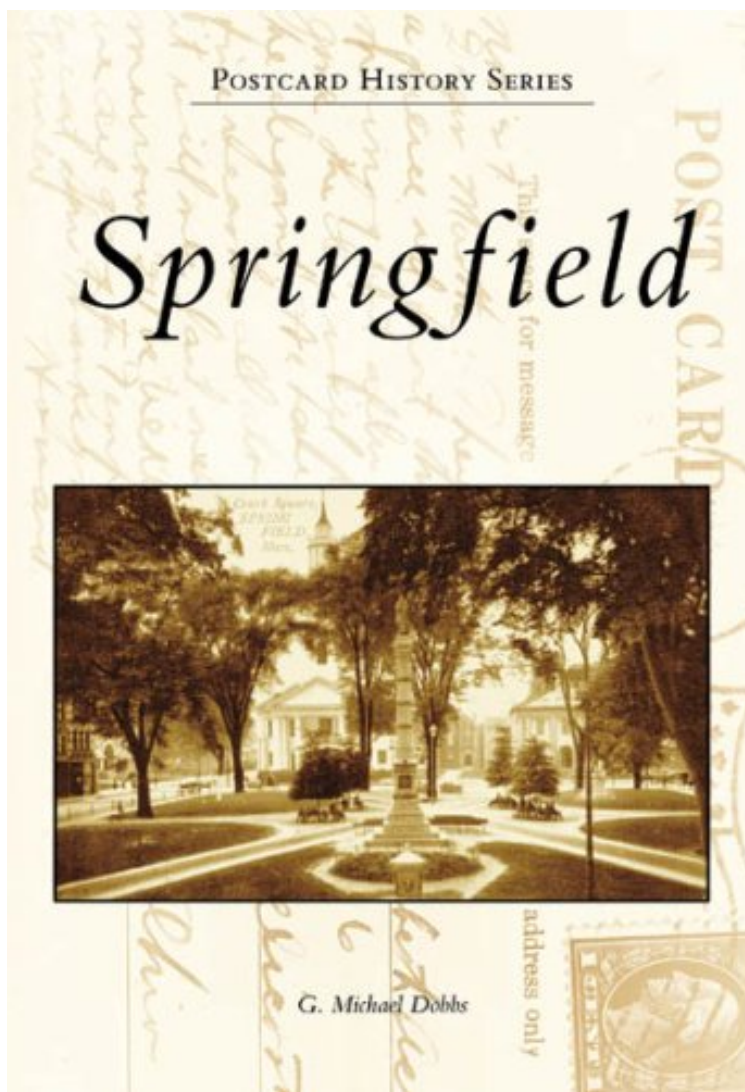
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G. Michael Dobbs

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Springfield (Postcard History: Massachusetts)

G. Michael Dobbs : Springfield (Postcard History: Massachusetts) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Springfield (Postcard History: Massachusetts):

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Return to SenderBy Melanie GilbertArcadia Publishing specializes in producing picture-logue books of historical people and places. These are nicely made, soft cover books on glossy, bright white paper filled with black and white pictures identified by interesting captions.It's quality work even if only for the select audience of the target demographic. The pictures are culled from the photo morgue (most are vintage photographs) of the local newspapers and the writers are usually members of the area's historical society, newspaper or

college faculty. So these are complete and accurate works. SPRINGFIELD is part of Arcadia's "Postcard History Series." Having joyfully written and received postcards from all over the world, I was particularly interested in this book since this is the Massachusetts city where my kids were born. And while Springfield may have been known for many things - my kids, Birdseye, basketball, Dr. Seuss, Milton Bradley and many others - based on the images in this book, it was not known for its postcards. Presumably, this is not Arcadia's fault since they are merely reproducing the material with which they had to work, but this is a dull book. The captions are really good and I enjoyed reading them. The pictures, however, are muddy, busy and not super interesting. Overall, based on this presentation, SPRINGFIELD doesn't look like it was a fun place despite its storied history.

Springfield is a city rich with history and a tradition of innovation. Dubbed the "City of Firsts," it has been influencing change since 1786, when the city was the site of Shays' Rebellion, the revolutionary uprising that prompted early Americans to form the Constitutional Convention. The city is the birthplace of the first American gas-powered car and the American motorcycle. In the 1930s, the pioneering Granville Brothers manufactured the airplanes that tore up the skies over Springfield during the golden age of air racing. Springfield is also the home of Dr. Seuss, the counter-culture hero Timothy Leary, and the Merriam-Webster dictionary.

Publication: The Valley Advocate Article Title: Springfield: A Life in Postcards Author: Maureen Turner Date: 10/30/08 Let time be your tour guide to one of the country's most vigorous, cultured middle-sized cities. It's hard to read Mike Dobbs' new Springfield history book without a sense of loss, and a sharp-edged nostalgia for what the city once was. Flip through the book, Springfield which is organized around a collection of historic postcards, knit together by historical context provided by Dobbs and the evidence is all there: a lively downtown with grand theaters, hotels, department stores. The factories and other major companies that once provided well-paying jobs for a healthy working and middle class. The monuments, libraries, parks and other cultural institutions that speak to a city's collective pride. That pride has taken a beating in recent decades, in a series of well-chronicled developments: the devastating loss of industry, the flight of the middle class, and, more recently, the embarrassing public corruption scandals and a financial near-collapse that led to the state's taking over control of much of the city government. It's not stretching to say that Springfield has been hampered by a perception held by many residents and outsiders alike that it's not only past its prime but will never flourish again. Anyone familiar with Dobbs' other writing knows he's the managing editor of the *Reminder* newspapers and writes several blogs, including "Out of the Inkwell" and knows he's no Pollyanna, quick to dismiss Springfield's current difficulties and willing to believe that its problems will just disappear with a chipper attitude and a fresh coat of paint. As his book makes clear, Dobbs has a deep appreciation for his adopted hometown's past, tinged with a sadness for what's been lost. But for all his interest in Springfield's vaunted history, he's also grounded in the city's present, including its often overlooked and underappreciated strengths. When Dobbs writes of Springfield, "Its best days are not behind it," the words don't sound like wistful thinking, but rather like a call to rethink old notions of what makes a community strong. Springfield is published by Arcadia Publishing, which specializes in local history books (www.arcadiapublishing.com). Dobbs' book is part of its Postcard History Series, and makes use of his extensive personal collection of local postcards, as well as cards borrowed from two fellow local history buffs, Jim Boone and Robert Walker. While Arcadia has published several books on certain aspects of Springfield (including histories of its fire department and its pro hockey teams), the city hadn't been represented in the company's postcard series until Dobbs approached them with the idea. The project was a perfect fit for Dobbs, given his interest in the ephemera that provides a picture of what life in the city was like for earlier generations. Dobbs scours flea markets and the like for additions to his collection. His favorite place to shop, he says, is the Hadley flea market; his least favorite, mark-up-inclined antique shops. "I'm a collector, but I'm a cheap collector," he says. In addition to his roughly 230 Springfield postcards, Dobbs also collects pamphlets and promotional materials, including many produced in 1936 to mark Springfield's 300th birthday. The reporter in him has a special fondness for a 1945 booklet released by City Hall that broke down exactly how the city was spending its money. The quirk-lover in him was excited to find, for a buck apiece, two embroidered patches from the Rialto, a long-gone skating rink on what is now the site of the Mason Wright retirement community. "It's that weird little chunk of Springfield pop culture history that's the type of thing you find at the flea market," Dobbs says. "I love anything that's going to give me an insight into the history of the city," he adds. "If you want to understand why our community is the way we are today, you have to understand our history." Take, for example, the dormant Union Station, in recent years the subject of endless, expensive and, to date, still unrealized redevelopment plans. For several decades after its construction in 1926, Union Station was a lively and vibrant spot, a "gateway to downtown," as Dobbs puts it, supporting other facets of local life, like the once grand Hotel Charles, which sat adjacent to the train station. But those years, Dobbs notes, were "a relatively brief period of time"; before long, the developing highway system led to a decline in rail travel. "From the '50s on, they were struggling with that building," he says. The Hotel Charles, meanwhile, spent several decades in a downward spiral, morphing into a flophouse, then an abandoned shell, before it was finally demolished in the mid-'90s, amid protests from historic preservationists. Ironically, Dobbs notes, developers are now pointing to the

spot where the Charles once stood as a good spot for a new hotel. Remembering this history, Dobbs says, helps explain in part why attempts to redevelop the station and the surrounding neighborhood have been so problematic.

"The question is, do we need another downtown hotel? Is that the spot for another hotel? We knocked down an interesting building years ago because it was in disrepair and could not support itself," he says. "What history affords us is the opportunity to see these pieces of this puzzle, and then to understand whether or not redeveloping them makes sense, or whose idea for developing them makes sense." While Dobbs might seem quintessentially rooted in Springfield, he is not actually a native. His father was in the Air Force, and the family moved around a lot, landing three separate times at Westover Air Force Base. When his dad retired, they settled in Granby, where Dobbs went to high school before heading off to UMass to study English and journalism. In the interest of full disclosure, Dobbs began his journalism career writing for the Valley Advocate in the mid '70s. On his blog, he recently recalled getting paid \$12 for one article, then finding he couldn't cash the check because the paper didn't have adequate funds to cover so great a sum. Over the years, Dobbs has also taught college journalism classes, hosted a local radio show and edited two magazines on film animation. Last year, he published another book, *Escape! How Animation Broke Into the Mainstream* in the 1990s. Since 1990, Dobbs and his wife, Mary Cassidy, have been homeowners in Springfield's Maple High/Six Corners neighborhood, where they raised a Vietnamese foster daughter, Chau, who joined them when she was 15. As part of a multi-racial family, Dobbs appreciates his city's diversity. "That's another reason I love Springfield the way I do," he says. "Ethnically it's a very diverse community—a Vietnamese, Russian and eastern European, traditional European, Spanish-speaking nations, people from Africa, African-Americans...." "I find it to be a very embracing kind of place to live because you've got the ethnic cultures, because you've got the ethnic markets," he continues. "To me that's a huge appeal." And, the historian in him points out, that diversity has deep roots. "Springfield has been traditionally a place of immigrants, waves of people coming here looking for work," he says. "People talk about living in Springfield and what the challenges are," Dobbs says. "There are challenges. But every urban area has challenges." To Dobbs, those challenges are more than outweighed by the benefits. "What urban life in a town like Springfield means is I'm 10 minutes from my job, and my wife is five minutes from her job," he says. "People living outside the community where they work really need to rethink it in this day and age. Let's face it: living in a city is going to come back." And in fact, he says, the city's recent financial woes could make it an appealing place for would-be urbanites, who are drawn to city living but turned off by the cost of bigger cities. Next door to Dobbs' house is a vacant two-family that a bank had foreclosed on; a realtor told him the house will probably go for about \$40,000—an appealing price tag, even after you factor in some necessary renovations. "The bright side of this terrible situation we're in is, if you're qualified for a loan, you can get a lot of houses in Springfield," Dobbs says. "That's the way you rebuild—just by people making those decisions." In the introduction to *Springfield*, Dobbs offers a quick history of the city, including its founding by trader William Pynchon and the establishment, in the late 18th century, of the Springfield Armory, the endpoint of Shay's Rebellion, which served as the nucleus for a vibrant industrial scene for almost 200 years. Dobbs makes note of Springfield's famous natives Dr. Seuss and Timothy Leary, its inclusion as a stop on the Underground Railroad, and the invention, in 1891, of basketball at the city's International YMCA Training School, now Springfield College. But the city's history really comes alive in the book's 100-plus pages of postcard images. Dobbs has arranged the postcards in five sections. "Beginnings" includes images of the city's oldest buildings and historic sites, including a 19th-century view of Court Square, anchored by the still-standing Old First Church, and several interiors of City Hall that show just how little it's changed over the years (peeling paint notwithstanding). The second and third chapters, "A Thriving Downtown" and "Around the Town," contain many ghosts from Springfield's past: the now-gone Hotel Charles; Kresge's 510, which was knocked down for the "new" federal building on Main Street (now replaced by a newer site on State Street); the Forbes and Wallace department store, which was demolished in 1982 and is now the site of Monarch Place; the Wesson (as in Smith and Wesson) mansion, home to About the Author G. Michael Dobbs is a newspaper editor, college instructor, and broadcaster. He has made Springfield his home for over 25 years.