

A BRIEF HISTORY OF POSTCARDS

A brief history and fun facts about postcard collecting.

Deltiology

Deltiology, the formal name in the U.S. for postcard collecting, is currently the third largest collectable hobby in the world. It is surpassed only by coin and stamp collecting (in the U.S. baseball collecting is greater, but that is a national past-time not worldwide). The popularity of post cards can be attributed to their broad subject appeal. Almost any subject imaginable has been, at some time, portrayed on a postcard. The broad subject range comes as a result of the social usage cards were designed for. Postcards continue today to be the most popular form of souvenir for travelers as well as economical means of communication both personal and business related. BELOW: Click on links to view pictures, then use your back button to return.

The History of Postcards

Pre-Postcard Era, 1840 - 1869

Due to government postal regulations, postcards were a long time in developing. Prior to postcards came the lithograph print, woodcuts and broadsides. The direct ancestor seems to be the envelopes printed with pictures on them. These first envelopes were produced by D. William Mulready, E.R.W. Hume, Dickey Doyle, and James Valentine. The envelopes were often printed with pictures of comics, Valentines and music. Thousands of patriotic pictures appeared on U.S. envelopes during the Civil War period of 1861-1865, these are now known as [Patriotic Covers](#). The first postal type card in this country was a privately printed card copyrighted in 1861 by J.P. Carlton. This copyright was later transferred to H.L. Lipman. The "Lipman Postal Cards", as we now call them, were on sale until replaced in 1873 by the U.S. Government Postals.

Pioneer Era, 1870-1898

The first postal card was suggested by Dr. Emanuel Herrmann, in 1869, and was accepted by the Hungarian government in the same year. The first regularly printed card appeared in 1870, a historical card, produced in connection with the Franco-German War. The first advertising card appeared in 1872 in Great Britain. The first German card appeared in 1874. Cards showing the Eiffel Tower in 1889 & 1890 gave impetus to the postcard heyday a decade later. A Heligoland card of 1889 is considered the first multi-colored card ever printed.

In this country, the earliest known exposition card appeared in 1873, showing the main building of the Inter-State Industrial Exposition in Chicago. This card as well as other early advertising cards, usually bearing vignette designs were not originally intended for souvenirs. Thus the first card printed with the intention for use as a souvenir were the cards placed on sale in 1893 at the Columbian Exposition in Chicago. During this period all privately printed cards required the regular two cent letter rate postage, the [new government printed Postals](#) required only one cent.

Private Mailing Card Era, 1898-1901

Starting in 1898, American publishers were allowed to print and sell cards bearing the inscription, ["Private Mailing Card, Authorized by Act of Congress on May 19, 1898"](#). These private mailing cards were to be posted with one cent stamps (the same rate a government postals). This was perhaps the most significant event to enhance the use of private postals. As with government postals and previous pioneer cards, writing was still reserved for the front (picture side) of the cards only.

Undivided Back Era, 1901-1907

In 1901, the U.S. Government granted the use of the words "Post Card" to be printed on the [undivided back](#) of privately printed cards and allowed publishers to drop the authorization inscription previously required. As in earlier eras, writing was still limited to the front. However, during this time, other countries began to permit the use of a divided back. This enabled the front to be used exclusively for the design, while the back was divided so that the left side was for writing messages and the right side for the address. England was the first to permit the divided back in 1902, France followed in 1904, Germany in 1905 and finally the U.S. in 1907. These changes ushered in the "Golden Age" of postcards as millions were sold and used.

Divided Back Era, 1907-1915

By this period, [divided backs](#) were almost universal, except in a few monopolistic governments. Previous to and during this period, a majority of U.S. postcards were printed in Europe, especially in Germany whose printing methods were regarded as the best in the world. However the trying years of this period, the rising import tariffs and the threats of war, caused a swift decline in the cards imported. Thus the political strains of the day brought about the end of the "Golden Age".

Early Modern Era (White Border), 1916-1930

During this period, American technology advanced allowing us to produce quality cards, although we often produced inferior ones in order to compete in the saturated market place. Public appeal changed and greeting card publication declined. However the view card market remained strong. The cards of this era were usually printed with white borders around the picture, thus the term ["White Border Cards"](#).

Linen Card Era, 1930-1945

Changing technology now enabled publishers to print cards on a [linen](#) type paper stock with very bright and vivid colors. View and comic cards were the most often published. Sets and series were few and far between and the greeting card was almost exclusively replaced with the new French-fold cards. Among the best cards of this era are the political humor cards of World War II.

Photochrome Era, 1939-present

The Union Oil Series began in 1939, launching the new era of photochrome cards. Photochromes are commonly called ["Modern Chromes"](#), are still the most popular cards today. Since the earlier days of fine printing craftsmanship, these are the best reproductions to come along in years. Collectors are expressing interest in these cards. Also despite the increase in postal rates for postcards from one cent to the current twenty-three cents, postcard popularity continues to rise. Even the greeting post card is making a big return, though usually seen as reproductions of old cards, more and more new original art is being produced.

Postcard Types

View Cards

View cards have, since postcards began, been the mainstay of the collecting field. People have long collected and traded cards of their [home towns](#) and places they have visited. View cards offer historic reference to buildings, streets, and even towns which may no longer exist or that have changed significantly over time. Even views produced in the photochrome (chrome) era may no longer look the same. The earliest cards offer much in the social history of the times as we look at early forms of travel and the beginnings of telegraph, telephone and power lines. The messages written on the cards often give us insight as to the picture shown or the sentiments of the day.

Greeting Cards

The greeting card is almost as basic as the view card in the earlier eras, though as the time graph has shown, it's popularity declined in later era's. Christmas, Easter, Birthdays and most other holidays and [special occasions](#) were well represented and are fairly common. However some greetings such as the "Labor Day" cards, are considered scarce. Today most collectors choose a topic within a specific holiday in order to limit their searches. For example some choose Christmas cards depicting Santa in green robes only. Early greeting cards are some of the most beautiful cards every printed. Publishers competing for sales, printed cards using intricate embossing techniques, high caliber art work, superior inks, expensive lithographic processes and even novelty additions such as glitter, ribbons, silk and feathers.

Historical Cards

Historical cards are printed to commemorate events such as war, [social problems](#), [expositions](#), parades, coronations, [politics](#)...These cards offer much to the serious collector in the way of increased value. This is a wide open field with much to offer anyone interested in twentieth century history. Often this type of card was made of a real photograph with few copies being offered for sale. This is especially true of disaster cards depicting floods, fires, wrecks...Often the historical significance of a card comes from the message written by the sender.

Art Cards

The art card is probably the most important category in antique postcards. Unlike the view or greeting card, most [art cards](#) were special interest cards when they were printed and in most cases brought a much higher price. This rarity, combined with the skill of the artist of this period, make these cards very popular among collectors today. To better understand this popularity, think of these cards as 3 1/2" x 5 1/2" original high quality prints, which they are, instead of as postcards. No where in the world of art, does such quality material exist at such low prices. The postcard market, in the first decade of this century, was a very large business. Over \$200,000,000 in pre-inflation dollars! This booming market drew the very best artists of the period, creating a wealth of quality material unmatched in the art world. Also at this time, some German publishers produced a series of "Old Master" art reproductions, the card's intensity and depth of color is without parallel as they spared no expense in printing the best.

Photographic Cards

Coming into their own recognition as art cards are the fantastic photographic art cards. These [real photo](#) art studies of beautiful women, children, lovers...are often hand tinted in great detail and in colors which

almost defy description. Also made popular were the photomatage techniques which allowed photos to be altered into original art creations.

Conclusion

Postcard collecting is a lot of fun and a good investment, as millions world-wide will attest. The antique cards are beautiful and historical. Cards have been printed on everything from metal, [leather](#), wood, plastic, to fine silk. Some cards have been individually [hand-made or painted](#). Some have autographs of important personalities. Some will make you laugh while others will make you cry. From Nazi Germany to Sunday School notices and from woman Suffrage to KKK cards. From [Clapsaddle children](#) to Kirchner nudes. From tiny Tiger Georgia to New York City. From cute puppy dogs to exotic wildlife. All races, religions, nationalities, social groups, topics and holidays have been shown. The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly! So whatever your interests, Happy Collecting....Vickie

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