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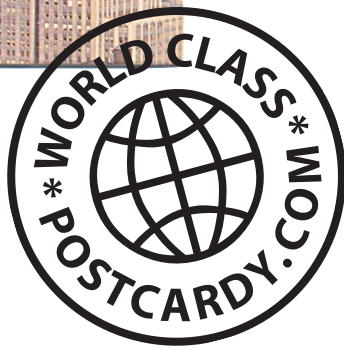
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## Postcard Collectors' Reference Guide



oversized die cut postcard



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## Early 20th Century Golden Age

Postcard collecting was a huge craze in the early years of the twentieth century, with the peak years being approximately 1907 to 1913. We have the early collectors to thank for the large supply of antique postcards which are still available for collectors today. Postcards were popular among both sexes and all ages. The cards were used to keep in touch with friends and family, for exchanging with strangers in other geographical areas, and even for courtship.

Official United States Post Office figures for the year ending June 30, 1908 cited 667,777,798 postcards mailed in this country. By 1913 the total in this country was over 968,000,000, and by this date the craze was reportedly declining (quoted in *Picture Postcards in the United States* by George and Dorothy Miller). In addition, many unused cards went directly into collections.

## Mid-20th Century Collecting

What was left of the old collections was appearing in the stock of antique and some specialized postcard dealers. Most collectors seem to have been not very discriminating about differences in the quality of either old or new cards. Most collectors seemed willing to pay only a few cents for old cards and many concentrated on topics like bridges and courthouses which are of little interest today.

Meanwhile, travel after World War II was booming. Travelers could pick up free cards from hotels, motels, and restaurants and choose from many scenic view cards of popular vacation spots. An article from the the August, 1947 *Coronet* magazine noted that "Sending picture post cards to the folks back home is a great American pastime." When choosing cards to send, travelers also bought many for themselves to save as souvenirs of their trips.

## Late 20th Century & Early 21st Century

Old cards increased significantly in value and collectors became more specialized and knowledgeable about quality cards. Many collectors refused to consider any card made after 1920. Real photo postcards became especially valued because of their historical significance. Mid-century roadside and local views have now increased in popularity and price. Mid-century city views actually tend to be scarcer than early views., and few cards show individual buildings.

At the same time there were many modern cards being issued, especially in the 1980s, that were specifically aimed at collectors. These included many cards issued in series on a variety of subjects. Well known comics such as Garfield, Teddy bears, and political topics were especially popular.

Free cards picturing the premises were no longer common in motels and restaurants. In the late 1990s another type of free card became available. These are the "rack cards" with advertising aimed at young adults with high disposable income.

Greeting postcards were easy to find in the 1980s, but seem to be much less common by the early twenty-first century. It seems more difficult to find postcards of any kind. Even in large cities, many of the current cards show nature scenes rather than local city views.

Postcards are frequently classified by the era in which they were produced. The following descriptions of five eras refer to cards made in, or especially for, the United States market.

#### Pioneers

Before July 1, 1898, postage rates were lower for cards printed on the backs of government postal cards (cards with preprinted postage). After this date, privately printed cards required the same amount of postage as the government postals. These cards are quite scarce, but are not of interest to most collectors.

#### Early Twentieth Century

The Golden Age of postcards lasted from the beginning of the century until 1918. Before World War I, most of the better quality cards were printed in Europe. Postcards were very popular as collectibles, and many were saved. Printing was usually high quality, though many of the comics are cheap looking. Greeting cards are colorful and usually embossed. View cards usually have good detail, deep colors, and no border. Real photo cards printed on photo paper were made in limited quantities on a wide variety of local subjects. Studio portraits and family snapshots were also often printed as postcards.

#### White Border

This type was produced mainly from 1919 to 1932. View cards usually have white borders and low-contrast pale colors. The printing is usually not as good as that on earlier cards. Paper stock is usually coated and has a flat non-glossy surface. Most of the cards from this era are views. Greeting cards were uncommon, unembossed, and less colorful.

#### Linen

From 1933 until the early 1950's most U.S. views and comics were printed on card stock with a linen texture. Advertising, large-letter, expositions, and comics from this era are generally attractive and collectible. The majority of view cards from this era are boring and unattractive, especially those featuring scenery. Real photos of tourist areas were also fairly common in this era. The real photos cards from this era are generally glossier and more contrasty than earlier ones and have titles in white letters near the bottom of the picture.

#### Standard/Chrome

Chrome cards have a glossy surface and are made from color photos. This type of postcard was produced as early as 1939, but was not common until the mid-1950s. Until the mid-1970s most U.S. cards were the "standard" size, approximately 3-1/2 X 5-1/2 inches.

#### Continental/Modern

"Continental" size is approximately 4 X 6 inches. This size was common in Europe earlier than in the U.S. Most of the cards sold in the U.S. since the mid-1970's are this size. View cards are relatively fewer and more generic than in earlier eras. A large variety of subjects have been produced on modern cards aimed at collectors. These include both individual cards and many books of removable postcards. Holiday greeting postcards are available but are not very common.

Super-sized postcards approximately 5" X 7" have been appearing more recently. These are smaller than most of the oversized cards of the past, but are too large to mail at the regular postcard rate (maximum size for regular rate: 6 inches long by 4-1/4 inches high).



**Early Twentieth Century**

*Nicollet Avenue, Minneapolis.*

Mailed in 1912. The message is as follows:

Dear friend,

Just a line to say hello! Am in the city for a short visit and would like to see you. Have forgotten your address.

(The card was addressed with a street name only and may have been returned to the return address on the card.)



**White Border**

*Nicollet Avenue, Minneapolis.*

Manufactured by Curt Teich, a company whose numbering system is known. The A-96610 number on the back dates the card as 1923.



**Linen**

*Nicollet Avenue, Minneapolis.*

Manufactured by Curt Teich. Number 4B-H1116 dates the card as 1944.



**Standard/Chrome**

*Nicollet Avenue, Minneapolis.*

This same view was also made without the cartoon figures and red letters.

Postcard pricing is affected by demand, condition, and rarity. Demand is probably the most important factor in determining whether a card is saleable, but condition has a significant impact on the price that a collector will pay. Postcard price guides are not very helpful for pricing because there are so many variables and types of cards. At best, the price guides can give you an idea of which categories are more valuable than others.

The following are commonly used grades used to describe the condition of postcards. Watch out for descriptions like "average" or "good considering its age" or "very good except for a small tear (or stain)." These terms usually mean the card is fair or worse, and the seller does not understand the importance of condition. Another term that is misused, especially in internet auctions, is "fine." This could mean anything from fair to excellent.

**Mint (M):** A perfect card just as it comes from the printing press. No marks, bends, or creases. No writing or postmarks. A clean and fresh card. Seldom seen.

**Near Mint (NM):** Almost Mint, but very slight aging or discoloration from being in an album for many years. Not as sharp, crisp, or fresh looking. Usually priced higher than a card in excellent condition.

**Excellent (EX):** Like mint in appearance with no bends or creases, or rounded or blunt corners. May be postally used or unused and with writing and postmark only on the address side. A clean, fresh card on the picture side. This is usually considered as the baseline for pricing.

**Very Good (VG):** Corners may be slightly blunt or rounded. Almost undetectable crease or bend that does not detract from overall appearance of the picture side. May be postally used or have writing on the address side. Most collectible cards are in this condition. Cards in "very good" condition should be priced about 20-25% less than cards in excellent condition.

**Good (G):** Corners may be noticeably blunt or rounded. Card may have noticeable but slight bends or creases. May be postally used or have writing on the address side. A small handwritten signature on the picture side may be acceptable to some collectors. Cards in this condition should be priced 40-50% less than cards in excellent condition.

**Fair (F):** Card is intact. Excess soil, stains, creases, writing, or cancellation may affect picture. Could be a scarce card that is difficult to find in any condition. Cards in this condition are not considered collectible unless they are rare. Some postcard collectors may buy cards in this condition if the price is minimal. May also be bought by someone who is just interested in the image and does not care about condition.

This card is in **mint** or **near mint** condition and is a good topic. However, most collectors would not be interested in an **oversized** card like this. Storage is a problem.





**Excellent Condition**

Has writing on back. Tiny corner bumps, but corners are not rounded.



**Very Good Condition**

Slightly rounded corners. Cutting is a little off. A slight crease on the middle of the right side which is visible to the eye but does not show up in the scan.



**Good Condition**

Rounded and scuffed corners. Slight spotting and soil. Cancellation is slightly visible on left of picture side.



**Fair Condition**

Many creases. Soiled. Rounded corners. Pencil writing in middle of picture has been erased but is visible. It is still an interesting subject.

These are some popular postcard topics. You can collect anything that interests you. There are postcards for any taste or budget. Many people collect topics related to their profession or other hobbies.

This list can also be used for sorting collections comprised of many different topics.

- |                  |                    |                           |
|------------------|--------------------|---------------------------|
| Advertising      | Entertainment      | Political                 |
| African American | Ethnic             | Postal                    |
| Agriculture      | Events             | Postcards About Postcards |
| Airplanes        | Exaggeration       | Posters                   |
| Airports         | Expositions        | Quilts                    |
| Alligators       | Fairs              | Rack Cards                |
| Amusement Parks  | Fairy Tale         | Real Photos               |
| Animals, Wild    | Fashion            | Recipes                   |
| Animals, Dressed | Fishing            | Religious                 |
| Architecture     | Flowers            | Restaurants               |
| Art              | Food               | Rivers                    |
| Art Deco         | Fruit              | Roadside                  |
| Art Nouveau      | Gambling           | Romantic                  |
| Artist Signed    | Gas Stations       | Royalty                   |
| Autos            | Golf               | Santa Claus               |
| Balloons         | Greetings, General | Schools                   |
| Banks            | Halloween          | Scouting                  |
| Baseball         | Handmade           | Ships                     |
| Basketball       | Highways           | Signs                     |
| Beer             | Historical Events  | Snowmen                   |
| Birds            | Historical Places  | Space                     |
| Birthday         | Homes              | St. Patrick's Day         |
| Buses            | Horses             | Stadiums                  |
| Calendars        | Hospitals          | Stamps                    |
| Cameras          | Hotels             | State Capitols            |
| Candy            | Hunting            | Statues                   |
| Cats             | Indians            | Stores                    |
| Children         | Industry           | Street Scenes             |
| Christmas        | Interiors          | Tacky                     |
| Circus           | Knitting           | Telephones                |
| Colleges         | Large Letters      | Tennis                    |
| Comics           | Libraries          | Thanksgiving              |
| Costumes, Native | Maps               | Theater                   |
| Cowboys          | Medical            | Toys                      |
| Crafts           | Military           | Trains                    |
| Dance            | Motels             | Trolleys                  |
| Depots           | Music              | Trucks                    |
| Diners           | New Year           | U.S. States               |
| Disasters        | Novelty            | U.S. Towns                |
| Disney           | Nudes              | Valentines                |
| Dogs             | Occupations        | Winter Sports             |
| Dolls            | Parades            | Women                     |
| Drinking         | Parks              | Women's Rights            |
| Easter           | Patriotic          | Year Dates                |

**Advertising postcard** A postcard that advertises a product, service, or event.

**Advertising trade card** A card that advertises something but is not a postcard.

**Antique postcard** Usually refers to a postcard published before 1920.

**Artist-signed** The artist's signature is reproduced with the illustration on the postcard.

**Chrome** A printed glossy-surface postcard that was made from a color photo.

**Chrome era** Mid 1950s to mid 1970s.

**Comic** A humorous postcard.

**Continental size** Size is approximately 4 X 6 inches.

**Deltiology** The hobby of postcard collecting.

**Divided back** Card back is divided into a message space on the left and an address space on the right, allowed in the U.S. in 1907.

**Embossed** The card design is printed so it is raised above the surface.

**Exaggeration** Part of the image is exaggerated by scaling it much larger than the rest of the image.

**Exposition** Usually an official World's Fair, but could refer to a smaller regional fair.

**Golden Age** Period during early 1900s before World War I when postcard collecting was very popular

**Greeting** Greeting card printed as postcard for birthdays, holidays, friendship, etc.

**Heavily embossed** Degree of embossing is greater than average and colors appear to be airbrushed rather than printed realistically. Sometimes has a flat paper backing.

**Large letter** Outlines of large-lettered place names are filled with images.

**Linen** Postcards printed on paper with a linen-textured surface.

**Linen era** Early 1930s to early 1950s.

**Lot** Multiple cards offered for sale as a group.

**Mail art** Art exchanged through the mail—includes postcards, faux postage, etc.

**Maximum card** A postage stamp with an appropriate cancellation is placed on the picture side of a postcard having a similar image

**Modern era** Mid 1970s or later, usually continental size.

**Novelty** Postcard made of unusual materials or having an unusual shape.

**Old postcard** Can mean any card that is not new, but more often means cards from the 1920s or earlier.

**Oversized** Postcard length greater than 6 inches or height greater than 4¼ inches.

**Pioneer** Card produced before the Private Mailing Card Act of 1898.

**Postal card** A card with preprinted postage supplied by the U.S. Postal Service.

**Private Mailing Card** Private Mailing Card was printed on the address side of privately produced cards between 1898 and 1902.

**Rack cards** Free modern advertising cards distributed on racks.

**Real photo** A photographic image printed on photographic paper with a postcard back. Images printed on cardstock by a printing press are not real photos.

**Series** A group of cards published on a particular subject and having a similar design.

**Stamp box** A printed box in the upper right corner of the postcard back that indicates where the postage stamp should be placed.

**Standard size** Postcard measuring 3½ X 5½ inches.

**Topical** The subject depicted on the card.

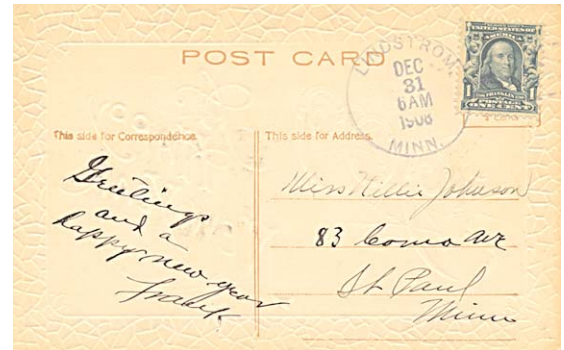
**Undivided back** Before 1907 only the address was allowed on the back of the card.

**View cards** Cards based on realistic images of specific locations.

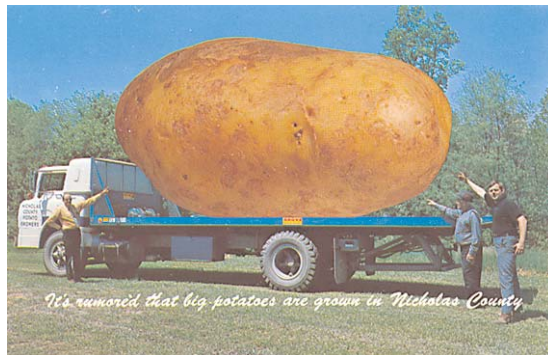
**Vintage** Usually refers to cards from the 1930s through 1960s.



Undivided back



Divided back



Exaggeration



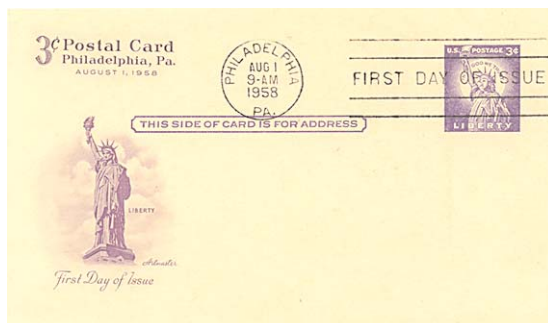
Exposition, Large letter



Heavily embossed, Greeting



Maximum card

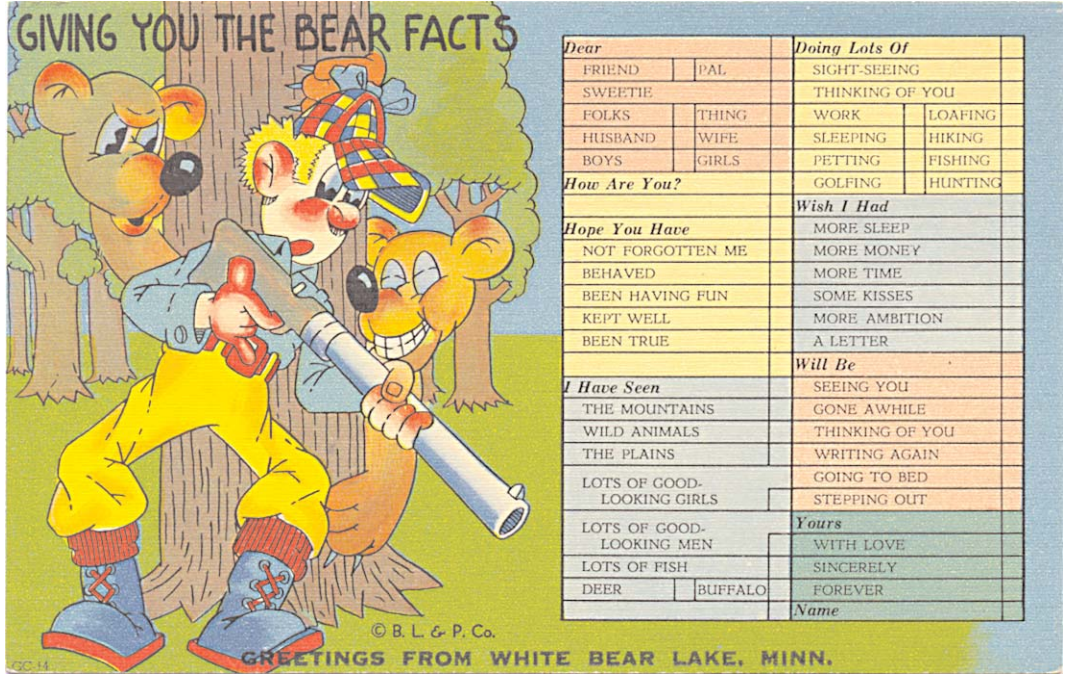


Postal card



Real photo

busy person's correspondence card



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by Lynne Appel

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