

A Short History of Postcards

January 14, 2021

By Kerry Mohn

1) Undivided Back Era (1901 – 1907)

So, named because the message and address were not permitted on the same side. A small space was reserved for the message on the front of the postcard. Millions of postcards were printed for the U.S. market during this era – over 75% of them imported from Europe.

2) Divided Back Era, “The Golden Age of Postcards” (1907 - 1915)

An Act of Congress allowed the sender to write the message and address on the same side in this era. Between the spring of 1907 and July of 1908, according to the USPD, over 677 *million* postcards were mailed!

3) White Border Era (1915 - 1930)

Given this name due to appearance, this postcard style was adopted as a conservation measure during World War I. The disruption of the German publishing industry during World War I, along with high tariff rates and popularization of telephones caused postcard use to decline.

4) Linen Card Era (1930 – c. 1950)

These embossed paper stock postcards produced a textured appearance and feel. The finish helped to maximize the use of bright dyes in their image colors. The embossed finish looked like canvas. Curt Teich of Chicago developed the product and was a leading producer.

5) Photochrome, or “Chrome,” Era (1939 - Present)

New processes produced high quality, color postcards and helped to partially revive the industry with extremely cost-effective printing techniques.

Real Photo Postcards (c. 1903 - Present)

Eastman Kodak Co. developed cameras that took postcard size negatives. The pictures were developed on card stock with a postcard back. Real photo postcards were an exception to the decline in postcard production and use during the White Border Era.

Keep in mind, that as styles changed, picture postcards were produced that may have characteristics of more than one era.