



FROM THE HISTORY OF PICTURE POSTCARDS



A picture on a piece of cardboard, with writing on the reverse side, with an affixed stamp to cover the postage, cancelled with a rubber stamp – that's a picture postcard sent by post, something quite ordinary each of us has met with countless times.

The picture postcard as we know it today emerged as a result of a long and interesting development. The first copies of what we could by today's criteria call picture postcards appeared in the late eighties and early nineties of the 19th century. The form we have been using up to now was officially adopted in 1906. The origin and history of picture postcards can now no longer be traced back in minute details. Firstly, there is not enough original material and, secondly, people have always collected picture postcards rather than studied their history. However, it has turned out that picture postcards possess an exceptionally high documentary value and that they are often the only pictorial sources of information on various areas of human activity. Philocarty (picture postcard collecting, the science of picture postcards) has by now won a recognition as an auxiliary discipline of architecture, fine arts and history.

And, last but not least, old picture postcards are nowadays interesting works of art for antique dealers and collectors alike.

Until quite recently the history of picture postcards had not figured among the subjects of scientific researches. They have come to be studied in more systematic ways only since the 1970's.

The emergence of picture postcards had been influenced by several facts. One of them was the invention of photography in the 1830's.

In 1854 the first photographic visiting cards appeared, a patent of the Paris photographer André Disdéri. These were small photographs stuck on pieces of cardboard, roughly 6x10 cm in size. They were portraits at first, but very soon pictures of cities and countryside appeared on them as well. In the early 1860's visiting cards were joined by the larger cabinet cards. The reverse side of the visiting and cabinet cards was used by photographers for their own publicity. This also included all awards and medals they had received for their work. The expansion of tourist travel brought along an increased interest in them, and they were bought as souvenirs but also as suitable gifts.

On 6th May 1840 the first postage stamps in the world became available in all post offices in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, issued for senders to cover the postage for their letters. Prior to that the cost of postage had been borne by the addressee. A part of the postal reform was also the introduction of envelopes, as until then letters had been dispatched folded and sealed or glued up.

In 1865th 5th Austro-German postal conference took place in Karlsruhe. Its participants became acquainted with the proposal put forward by the German delegate Heinrich von Stephan, who recommended the introduction of an „open postcard“, to be issued and sold by the state. In spite of a positive resonance among the conference delegates, the proposal was rejected by the German postal authorities. However, the proposal aroused the interest of the Austro-Hungarian delegate Kolbensteiner, who in turn informed of it Dr. Emanuel Herrmann, an economics professor at the Military Academy in Wiener Neustadt. The latter was so taken by this idea that he began to study it intensively.

On 26th January 1869 he published an article in the Viennese newspaper *Neue Freie Presse*, in which he proposed the introduction of the open correspondence card within the territory of Austria-Hungary, of the size of a letter envelope, which would carry a postage fee of two Kreuzer. His proposal was based on his assumption that the letter postage was too high. At the same time, the content of almost one third of all letters sent by post was only a short note without any confidential character whatsoever, which could therefore be written on an open card. The otherwise so plodding and conservative Austro-Hungarian Ministry of Posts reacted this time very fast. By the decree of 25th September 1869 it decided to introduce the correspondence card into the postal traffic, effectively from 1st October 1869. The first correspondence card was printed on smooth, cream-coloured paper with a yellowish tinge in three variants – one for Austria with the title CORRESPONDENZ-KARTE and the Austrian state coat of arms, two for Hungary (with the Hungarian title *Levelezési Lap* alongside the German one) with the Hungarian state coat of arms. All three variants had on their address side a pre-printed yellow 2-Kreuzer stamp with the profile of the Emperor Francis Joseph I in an oval. The card had one side reserved exclusively for the address, the other for the text. The correspondence card won immediately enormous popularity. Within three months in 1869 over 2.7 million cards were sold, in 1870 almost 10 million. This success forced other countries to follow suit. The first to react was the North German Confederation, which began using cards on 25th June 1870. Correspondence cards were gradually introduced into the postal traffic throughout the world. Von Stephan's idea, brought to fruition by Dr. Herrmann, thus gave the world the correspondence card and hence the picture postcard, which developed from the former through various preliminary, concurrent and other forms.

Shortly after the introduction of the correspondence cards, impressions of various firm stamps as well as additional company and private prints produced in printing works began to appear on them. Among the best known was the picture of an

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artillery trooper operating a cannon, commissioned to be printed on the address side of the card by the German bookseller and printing works owner August Schwarz in Oldenburg. A correspondence card illustrated in this way was posted on 16th July 1870. Another interesting illustrated card was one used by the administration of the periodical Zmaj („Dragon“ in Serbian), published in Vienna. Illustrated was again the address side and its main motif was a dragon holding an unfolded paper roll – the actual place intended for the address. The specimen comes from May 1871. Some authors consider these specimens to be the first picture postcards in the world. However, seen from the point of view of the technology used in their production, they were illustrated cor–respondence cards.

As regards further developments, the following decisions and legal steps were important for the emergence of picture postcards as we now know them.

In 1872 private companies were officially permitted to place additional publicity impressions on the address side of the correspondence card. This was the foundation of the emergence of illustrated correspondence cards as precursors of picture postcards.

On 1st July 1875 the Universal Postal Union recognized the validity of correspondence cards also in international postal traffic.

On 4th July 1881 private additional impressions were allowed to be placed only on the text part of the cor–respondence cards, and this only by means of printing technology.

Since 1st January 1885 private printing of entire correspondence cards was permitted, on condition that they bear the inscription *Correspondenzkarte/Levelező Lap* on their address side. The additional impressions could be placed on the text side only and the cards did not have to bear a pre–printed postage stamp. The permission to print private cards laid the legal foundation for the emergence of picture postcards. During its session in Rome in June of 1906, the congress of the Universal Postal Union determined that the original address side should be divided into two parts, one serving as the text part and the other reserved for the address (in Austria–Hungary this was permitted already by the decree from 24th November 1904). The congress thus definitely put an end to the era of the „long addresses“ in the history of picture postcards, during which the address side was reserved for the address alone and the text was written on the picture side.

Taking the outline just sketched out into consideration, the permissions to place additional private impressions on the cards and to print private correspondence cards can be considered to have been the decisive milestones in the history of picture postcards. The picture postcard developed gradually out of the correspondence card with an additional pictorial impression. In contrast to the correspondence card issued by the state, which is a state postage stamp, the picture postcard emerged as a product of private production and industry.

The period between 1898(97) to 1910(12) can be considered to have been the golden age of the picture postcards. They were issued in millions of copies, in sets with motifs difficult to imagine today. Picture postcards were collected on a large scale, collectors' clubs kept cropping up, collectors' periodicals were published. Several worldwide exhibitions were held.

The World War I meant a definitive end of the golden age of picture postcards and their original glory has not returned ever since.

The business of publishing picture postcards was not carried out by publishers alone, but also by photographers, booksellers, book printers, various businessmen, associations and others. What is needed for the creation of a picture postcard is an author (photographer, graphic artist, painter), who creates the draft. The publisher, who finances the issue, orders the picture postcard issue from the editor. The editor takes care of the draft, eventually processes the graphical design and places the picture postcard printing order with the producer (printing works). This scheme of picture postcard publishing was relatively rare. The individual functions mostly overlapped and united, and it's usually difficult to determine who was the publisher, editor, printer and photographer, whose name appeared on old picture postcard only exceptionally. There were also large publishing and art houses, who combined the functions of publishers and editors and who had their own photographers and printers. Among these were e.g. the German publishers Edgar Schmidt in Dresden, who also had a subsidiary in Budapest, Stengel & Co, Dresden, Dr. Trenkler Co in Leipzig, and Karol Divald in Budapest. On most of the picture postcards appeared the name or the abbreviation or, eventually, the pressmark of the publisher/editor.

Picture postcards from Slovakia in the period before 1890 are extremely rare. The literature tells us of a correspondence card with an additional impression of a Tatra motif on its text side, posted in Štrbské Pleso on 18th August 1888. The largest collection of picture postcards in Slovakia can be found in the Slovak National Library in Martin. Recorded here are a picture postcard of Budatín (now a part of Žilina) from 1890, of Stará Lubovňa and Piešťany from 1891, Rajecké Teplice from 1892. In private collections can be found an illustrated correspondence card with an additional impression of a motif from Dobšinská ice cave, postally cancelled in June 1891, as well as a lithographic picture postcard, likewise with a motif from Dobšinská ice cave, dated 14th August 1893. Thus far the oldest known picture postcard of Bratislava was postally cancelled in March 1893.

Postcards with Romany themes also became popular, postcards introducing their way of life, dress, trades, the beauty of their women. Picture postcards with Romany themes were published not only by local publishers but also by what were at that time major and well–known postcard publishers such as Stengel in Dresden, Dr. Trenkler in Leipzig, Ede Feitzinger in Těšín, Römmler und Jonas in Dresden. Among those from within the territory of today's Slovakia were Adolf Divald in Bardejov and Moritz Lichtig in Prerov. But one could also find such publishers as the Spa Management in Piešťany or the Club of Czechoslovak Tourists in Ruthenia. Publishers outdid each other in themes and unconventional ideas, technically and as regards their reproduction often complex and curious.

In the current book you will find reproductions of 239 picture postcards, divided into seven chapters. The period covered is that from 1895 up to the 1930's. They come from the territories of central Europe, Ruthenia, Russia, the Balkans and Spain.

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