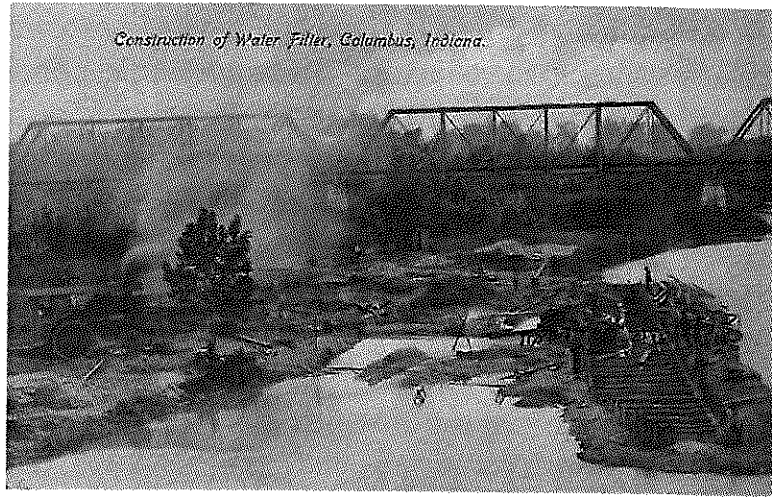


The Postcard Collectors

Paired text to
"The Unknown
Hall of Famer"



When you go on vacation, it is often customary to send friends and families postcards from the places you visit. The postcards not only let them know where you are and how you're doing, but they provide them with a keepsake from your vacation. Today, the ritual of sending postcards has been somewhat supplanted by posting vacation pictures on Facebook, Instagram, and other social media sites. Not long ago, however, it was not uncommon for people to amass many hundreds of postcards received from acquaintances. As these collections grew, a hunger for more postcards arose, and some people became amateur postcard collectors.

As postcard collecting became more popular, many collectors sought out one another to buy, sell, and trade cards. Some of them formed clubs, which gathered regularly. In New York City, the oldest and largest such club is the Metropolitan Postcard Club of New York. The club meets every month, usually in a small conference room in a hotel, where members can examine one another's collections. Most of the members of the club are middle-aged or elderly, but there are some young collectors as well. They bring their card collections in shoeboxes. The collectors sit at folding tables and spend many hours flipping through cards, pulling out the ones they like.

Every collector looks for something different. Some collectors look for cards from a specific place. Often, people like to collect postcards from the place where they were born or grew up. Others like to collect cards showing certain buildings. One man claims to have 200 different postcards of the Empire State Building. Some collectors like postcards with photos on the front, while others prefer illustrations. A lot of the collectors specialize in postcards from New York, but many have postcards from all over the world. Some organize their collections by state, while those with lots of foreign postcards organize them by country.

While we may typically think of postcards as showing places, old postcards can actually show many different subjects. In particular, there is a specific type of postcard called a “real photo postcard” that is particularly valuable to collectors. These postcards, popular in the early part of the 20th century, were produced by amateur photographers, mostly residents of small towns. The photographers would take photos and produce them as postcards in very small quantities, usually only several hundred cards per photo. Instead of advertising a place, the postcards show scenes from small town life. There are photos of celebrations, disasters, and visits from famous people, as well as portraits of the photographers’ friends and family. These cards give a sense of what American life was like during that time.

Every six months, the club holds a big show in which many collectors gather together to talk about postcards and view each other’s collections. In October of 2012, the convention was held in the ballroom of the New Yorker Hotel. Dozens of collectors had brought their collections with them. Some were very broad, while others were very specialized. One collector had only postcards of animals, while another had only ones of famous people. The collectors who were there to buy cards would sometimes walk up to the collectors selling cards and ask them if they had a particular type of card.

“Excuse me,” an old woman asked a man. “Do you have any postcards of a hotel?”

“I do,” said the man. “From where?”

“Miami Beach,” said the woman.

“Darn,” said the man, throwing up his hands. “I’m all out.”

The woman scowled.

All the collectors said they were drawn to collect postcards for different reasons. Some said they liked collecting postcards as a way of understanding American history. Others said they had started out collecting stamps, but then they had grown more interested in the cards the stamps were attached to. A few said they collected all kinds of photographs, but that real photo postcards offered scenes they couldn’t find anywhere else. A couple of collectors said they didn’t have any special interest in postcards. They were buying cards as an investment, like some people buy financial stocks or pieces of art.

One collector, named Lisa, explained that she got into postcard collecting when she was very young. As a child, her father liked to wake her before dawn and schlep her from their home in Old Bridge, New Jersey, to the sprawling flea market in Englishtown, to forage for old postcards.

For three decades, his collection grew. When he died, he left behind more than 100,000 cards, cached at random in a jumble of albums, envelopes, and shoe boxes, all crammed into a special annex to the garage, built explicitly for their preservation.

Several years ago, doctors told Lisa, then a spritely 48-year-old, that a tumor was growing in the pituitary gland of her brain. One night, unable to sleep, she went out to the garage, gathered up the postcards, and spread them across her dining room table. For the next 18 months, the family ate dinners in the kitchen while Lisa organized the cards, first by geographic region, then by topic.

“My brother said, ‘Of course you have a brain tumor,’” Lisa recalled. “‘No sane person would do this.’”

Her brain tumor having been safely removed, Lisa brought a small portion of her collection—a mere 10,000 cards—to the hotel with her. All day, she had been trading with other collectors. Lisa liked to collect postcards with cats, as well as cards that related to Halloween. She loved the postcard show, but she was worried because the crowd was smaller than in previous years. Young people were not as interested in collecting postcards as their elders, and those who were tended to buy and sell their cards on the Internet rather than in person.

“I think it’s a shame,” said Lisa. “Part of the fun of collecting is all the people you meet. The cards all have their own history, but so do the collectors.”

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. What has somewhat supplanted the ritual of sending postcards on vacation?
 - A) sending emails with pictures
 - B) sending pictures via text message
 - C) posting pictures on social media
 - D) video-calling on Skype

2. What does the author describe in the passage?
 - A) the hobby of postcard collecting
 - B) a collection of postcards from the 20th century
 - C) members of the Metropolitan Postcard Club of New York
 - D) different types of postcards that can be bought in New York City

3. Emotions can run high as collectors hunt for new cards at postcard conventions. What evidence supports this conclusion?
 - A) "The collectors who were there to buy cards would sometimes walk up to the collectors selling cards and ask them if they had a particular type of card."
 - B) "Excuse me,' an old woman asked a man. 'Do you have any postcards of a hotel?'"
 - C) "'I do,' said the man. 'From where?' 'Miami Beach,' said the woman."
 - D) "'Darn,' said the man, throwing up his hands. 'I'm all out.' The woman scowled."

4. Collectors enjoy postcard shows because of the fun of trading postcards. Based on the passage, why else might collectors enjoy postcard shows?
 - A) They enjoy the pressure of trying to find the postcards they are looking for.
 - B) They enjoy interacting with other collectors and learning about their past.
 - C) They enjoy trading in ballrooms.
 - D) They enjoy advertising the postcard shows on different social media sites.

5. What is this passage mainly about?
 - A) a postcard collecting convention in New York City
 - B) why "real photo postcards" are valuable
 - C) Lisa, a collector with over 100,000 postcards
 - D) postcard collectors and why they are drawn to the hobby

6. Read the following sentence: "When he died, he left behind more than 100,000 cards, **cached** at random in a jumble of albums, envelopes and shoe boxes, all crammed into a special annex to the garage, built explicitly for their preservation."

What does "cached" mean?

- A) stored
- B) jammed
- C) fixed
- D) thrown out

7. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence below.

Each collector has a different type of postcard he or she is looking for; _____, some people collect only postcards with photos of New York, while others are only interested in postcards with cats on them.

- A) first
- B) in contrast
- C) for instance
- D) moreover

8. What makes "real photo postcards" valuable to collectors?

9. What are some of the reasons why people collect postcards? Give three examples from the text.

10. Why might young people not be as interested in collecting postcards as their elders? Use information from the text to support your answer.
