The New York Public Library

Picture Collection:

A Century of Inspiration

March 20, 2015
1915
Europe, Holland 11
Germany 16
Hungary 14
Austria 12
Belgium 11
Cathedrals 70
N. Y. State 1
Asia, Japan 4
Japan 4
Transportation 1
Costume 10
South America 33
Costume 93
Holm, Const. 112
Liberty Bell 1
Lighthouses 1
U. S. Penn, Phila. 1
Europe, Italy, Venice 111
Cathedrals 24
Florence 91
Churches 34
Cathedrals 85
Piazzas 5
Turk Trade 11
Mining 15
Production 11
Canning industry 12
Alaska 11
Cost Roman 15
Port 11
U. S. H. West 12
Animals 1
Fur trade 1
Cost Roman 25
Bebe, O.T. 9
Illes 3
Port 1
Ilios 1
Port 1
France, Hist. 1
Illes, Scott. 1
Europe, Eng. 1
Napoleon 1
Port 1
Painting French 1
N. Y. City 1
South America 11
Europe, France 11
Germany 1
Lombard churches 1
Cathedrals 1
Port 1
Europe, Eng. 1
Illes, Coloring 1
Houses, H. Hay 1
Arthur, Noel 1
Chamber, Theatre 1
Painters, Mythology 1
Port 1
Houses, A. Sculpture 1
Sculptors 1
Birds 1
Costume 1
Sculpture, Peap. Prints 1
Reptiles 1
Rhino 1
Custard 1
Dolls brought to Mexico by Montezuma & Cortez. Dolls being carried into France on donkey by an Italian in the 18". Spanish children of 19". Sioux Falls, S.D.
Today
Dear Picture Collection,

I did such a good job with your pictures that I got a job - and now I can't return them until Sat.

Respectfully,

O'Hara
New York Public Library. 

Nov. 15, 1933

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

I would appreciate very much any courtesies extended to bearer in his efforts to obtain certain materials and information for my use.

Sincerely yours,

Diego Rivera
Cordially,
Lewis W. Hine

Walter Evans

Sincerely,
Studem Lmay

I'll hope to see you again,
Paul Strand
"MAIN STREET LOOKING NORTH FROM COURTHOUSE SQUARE"

A portfolio of American picture postcards from the trolley-car period.

The mood is quiet, innocent, and honest beyond words. This, faithfully, is the way East Main Street looked on a midsummer afternoon. This is how the county courthouse rose from the pavement in sharp, enduring ugliness. Presently, the downtown telegraph poles fretting the sky, looped and threaded from High Street to the depot and back again, hawking of deeds and transactions. Not everyone could have seen them as just emerged from the main-era period, or those trolley cars under the high lines. But those who did lived well, and were somehow sounded thereby.

What has become of the frank, five-nickel postcards that kindled images of all these hands? They arrived from the next town up the line, or from across the continent, inscribed for all to see: "Your Ma and I stepped at this hotel before you were even born," or, "shamelessly: "Well if she doesn’t care any more than that I don’t either. See you soon." On their stilted surfaces were some of the treatist visual images ever made of any period.

They are still around. Tens of thousands of them lie in the dust of attics and junk shops. Some of them,files of good ones are carefully stored in libraries, museums, and in the homes of serious private collectors. Postcard collectors today are a knowledgable and organized lot, well aware of what to look for, where to look, and how much to pay. An old postcard showing early cars (c. 1890-1910) is financially reasonable; prices range from a penny to a dollar an item.

In the 1900s, mailing and saving picture postcards was a pastime and often a deadly boring task in a million middle-class family homes. Yet the plethora of cards printed in that period now forms a solid bank from which to draw some of the most charming, or, occasions, the most lyrical memories ever before one generation by another. As this mail, the port of the humble vintage American card shines recording bright in 1948. For postcards are now in an aesthetic slump from which they may never recover. Quaintness of small towns, most recent postcards serve largely as grudging boasts that such and such a person visited such and such a place, and for some reason had a fine time. Gone is all feeling for actual appearance of street, of news architecture, or of human mien. In the early-nineteenth-century photography was of course in its infancy. Color was usually made from black-and-white photographs subsequently tinted by hand lithography. What the best ones achieved was fidelity and a restraint that must current color photography prints have yet to match—widely in flash film and in the rendering of pets and the subtle tones of town buildings and streets.

But here in the mild morning of forty years ago in "Book Square, Five Corners," Fiddlers-Lochholm, N. Y., epitome of Yankee self-satisfaction in subject, in execution, and in mood. Made as a routine chore by hands knows what anonymous photographer, the picture carries as a possible composition, a competent handling of color, and a well-hewn perfect record of place. Indeed, transcending place, it was a classic note on the theme of small-town main streets. On these pages are a dozen and a half samples from the rich postcard field of realism, sentiment, comedy, fantasy, and minor historical document. They invite you to consider them as foil only, as patricianly, or as historically as you like. If you don’t think there is such a thing as period photography, look at the faces in this group some entitled "Where All Men Are Equal" on page 10. For the serene possibilities of "Looking to the Road, Hills Park, Hudson, Pa.," under those summertime leaves, watching the movement of those stone doors. And also, what were the ghostly events leading to this fantastic walk in the woods recorded on page 14. What black-sequined roof that sports half trow, with its monstrous cupola, that姿态 pose made him up against the steepling cornices and length that intangible nail shores?"
Above is a photo of the British pilot Henry Farman, one of the Paris correspondents of the London Daily Graphic. The aeroplane Farman made one of the first flights in 1909, at Le Bourget, near Paris. The flight lasted 67 seconds, and the distance flown was over 1000 yards, at about 30 miles per hour. On the right is the Paris Aeroplane which in an advertisement shows an aeroplane flying over a cityscape.

Picture Collection #41,492

Picture Collection #27,692
Happy December 1964

Andy Warhol
Dear Miss Javits,

Thank you for your kind note.

I am particularly grateful to you and your grand staff of the picture collection for the gracious and efficient service you render all artists and help some of us to get a break like this Caldecott Award.

Sincerely yours,

Louis Slobodkin
billyparrott@nypl.org

@billyparrott

@nyplPictureCollection

@nypl