

# Post Cards

## Collector Craze

Soon after the introduction of the postcard in the early 1900s, collecting became a worldwide phenomenon. Millions of cards printed from amateur snapshots and professional photographs were sold, exchanged and collected. This dapper young collector with a pocketful of postcards proudly pours over his collection.

A collector.

## HISTORY'S SNAPSHOT

Penny Postcards and a Quick Scrawl  
Capture Everyday Life



**IN 1908**, a postcard arrived in Oak Park, Illinois, from a place called Roosevelt in Arizona Territory. On the front was a picture of burros laden with wood and on the back a message:

"This is a most wonderful country," the sender wrote. "Wish you prairie kids could see these mtns. & canyons."

That same year a postcard went to Los Angeles from a place called Bisbee. On the front was a photo of a town full to the rooftops with people celebrating the arrival of the first streetcar. Another card went out that year with an image of the manly men of the Normal School in Tempe, later known as Arizona State University. Cheap and quick, postcards were the e-mail of the early 1900s. You could buy them two for a nickel down at the News Store in Phoenix in 1908.

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IMAGES FROM THE  
COLLECTION OF  
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PHOTOGRAPHY

Affix a green Ben Franklin 1-cent stamp and the postal system would take them far and wide with its daily delivery service. And, they had pictures.

They had pictures of main streets and banks and awning-shaded office buildings and shops and saloons and two- and three-story hotels where you stayed or wished you had. The choices at the Postoffice News began with churches and included the public library and the high school. Last on the list was the category called "The Desert."

Who needed to look at the desert when you had booming towns, mines hiring and 400 men needed to build a highway from Prescott to Phoenix? You could send that image of growth and stability, of citified living in Winslow and Oatman

**GOT MILK?** Uncle Bill, the traveling milkman (above), makes a delivery at a home next to the railroad tracks in Metcalf, the Greenlee County town that developed around the Shannon Copper Co. mines, circa 1910.

and Miami to the disbelievers back in Philadelphia and Salt Lake City and New York. You could also send a picture of yourself.

Smaller cameras costing as little as the \$1 Brownie of 1900 and faster film gave birth to the first generation of amateur photographers. No more massive equipment, no need for subjects to stare motionless and grim-mouthed into the lens. You could get a quick shot of your family, friends or be snapped sitting pretty on the back of a burro.

Whether the image was yours or a professional's, you could send cards of parades in small towns where more people marched than watched, or of drilling contests in towns where onlookers crammed together to see miners proving their brawn over chunks of granite.

The wild and woolly West of the penny dreadful novels had become towns like Tucson. By 1900, the population was more than 7,500 with three daily newspapers. By 1907, you couldn't find a legal poker game in Tucson. In 1910 Tombstone, you could forget the O.K. Corral. They were running church service information on the front page of the *Sunday Tombstone Epitaph*. Bisbee had several movie houses by then, and the postcards kept going out.

In some cards, the Old West lived. They carried the images of a time where stagecoaches still ran, horses still hauled, mules still balked, milk came in cans, women wore long skirts and men always donned hats. They also told of a time where jobs were to be had in gas stations. The first car had

**FIRST AIR-CONDITIONED THEATER**

Motion pictures were popular, but projector fires and explosive film stock combined to make them a dangerous pastime. An entrepreneur in Warren, a new community near Bisbee in southeast Arizona, tried a concrete outdoor "Airdome," circa 1908, to make movie-viewing safe (right).



**THE GOLD ROAD**

Photographer N.E. Johnson documents the active center of Oatman during its boom (below) in the Tom Reed-Gold Road district in northwestern Arizona. Thousands of miners and speculators flocked to the boomtown after a major gold strike in 1915.



**MUSIC MEN**

Parades were popular social events that drew miners from miles around (above). Brass bands were popular, and many became the pride of the camps and towns. These marching musicians led the 1910 Labor Day parade in Miami.



**MOUNTAIN (MAIL) MEN**

Morenci was a bustling community that grew around the Arizona Copper Co. and Detroit Copper Co. mines in Greenlee County. This mailman (left) is loaded and ready to start his route, circa 1910.

arrived in Tucson just before the turn of the century.

The three C's of Arizona earned daily headlines during the years of the postcard heyday. Copper exports were up, cattle prices holding their own, cotton-growing perfect for local agriculture. And, the future industry of tourism had begun. The population of 1913 Phoenix stood at 21,000, with an additional 3,000 visitors showing up for the winter. And the cards went out.

Yuma got mixed reviews. "This without a doubt is the worst town I was ever in," harrumphed one visitor.

"Well, Yuma is quite a town if they would only get rid of the saloons," commented another. That card could have rightly been sent from any number of Arizona towns.

One man in Yuma chose to blame his lack of work on a hiring preference for "Indians & Mexicans." His was not the only postcard with a benign civic image on one side and the face of prejudice on the other.

Violent images earned the 1-cent stamp as well. The revolution south of the border left bodies behind as camera fodder. Someone made three cards out of a hanging in Prescott—prisoners standing, sitting and sprung.

However, the postcards soon faced visual competition. By 1917, newspapers like Clifton's *The Copper Era* had photographs of what made news and put them on the front page. Every day millions of Americans enjoyed moving pictures in local theaters and the instant

give-and-take of their own telephones.

The heyday of postcards was coming to a close, the images to be relegated to collections.

But, the faces still look out, from buggy or burro's back, from behind a bar or shop counter, from a place in a parade. They smile, look proud and hold one second for the camera and for all those who might look back. ■

**ADDITIONAL READING:** For more about early photographic images of the West, see *Photographers in Arizona: A History & Directory*, Jeremy Rowe, Carl Mautz Publishing, Nevada City, California, 1997.

Kathleen Walker of Tucson often uses historic photographs as her first step in researching articles on Arizona.