

# “How To” *Advice for Beginning PPC Collectors*

by Barbara A. Harrison

There are so many topics to consider when you are beginning to collect picture postcards that it is practically impossible to select just a few. Most people have particular interests from other areas, and those interests are often the ones on which they begin to build their postcard collection. Stamp collectors who are entering the PPC field often choose topics that are similar to the stamps they collect, especially if they are exhibitors. PPC collectors are often collectors of many other items, including ephemera, antiques, all kinds of collectibles, and various aspects of history.

Some new collectors decide beforehand to specialize exclusively in the older cards, from the “Golden Age of Postcards: 1898–1918,” while others are interested only in the more modern “chromes” (c1940 to present day). In recent years, linens (c1930–1950) have

become increasingly popular, with prices continuing to rise and even sky-rocket in some instances. Linens that were in 25-cent boxes ten years ago are now commanding prices of \$5–\$10 and sometimes much more. Even though they were once thought garish and ugly, times and ideas have changed, and today linens are highly sought after, especially those now considered to be “stunners” (colorful artistic images, often with an Art Deco look).

Other new PPC collectors fall quickly in love with **every** kind of picture postcard, including those with undivided backs (c1901–1906), divided backs (c1907–1915), and white border cards (c1915–1930). These are the collectors whose spouses soon begin to complain about having to share their living space with growing piles of postcards sitting everywhere, boxes of PPCs and supplies appearing in the corners of the rooms, and shelves and bookcases gradually filling with three-ring binders overflowing with picture postcards! But these are **also** the collectors who most likely have been gathering ephemera and all sorts of other goodies for years. And once they feel the overwhelming impulse to prepare their first picture postcard exhibit, that often quickly leads to entering the exciting field of display class exhibiting, because they have hoards of material right in their own collections from which to choose.



Modern chromes can be wonderful reminders of your favorite trips, as well as the backbone of your “modern” collection. Cathedral of the Resurrection, built 1883–1907, St. Petersburg, Russia, copyright 2006.

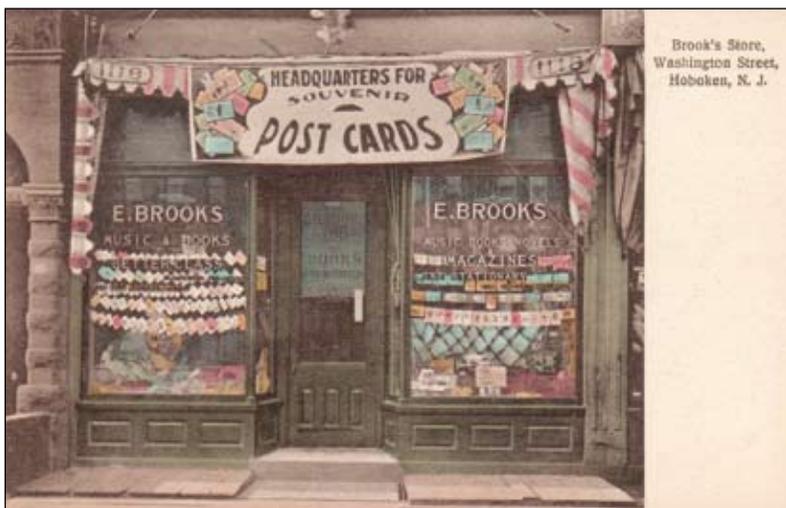
## What Topics Should I Collect?

The best answer to this question is “whatever pleases you.” If you love animals, you could begin with house pets, such as cats and dogs, perhaps branching out into animals of all kinds. You may enjoy birds, butterflies, or flowers. Perhaps you love antique cars, antique tools, farming, or architecture. If you’re a grandparent, you may enjoy looking for PPCs depicting several generations interacting, or children in fancy clothes, or beautiful babies, or storks delivering babies. You can look for old cards of the city where you were born, or county court houses, or high schools, or state capitol buildings. If you enjoy eating, you can look for cards showing food, food preparation, and restaurants. The choices are without limit, and you will have lots of fun during the hunt!

You can build an interesting collection without huge expenditures of money, depending on your topics of choice. Many subjects are available at very reasonable prices and will allow you to put together interesting and worthwhile collections. Other subjects or types of cards command higher prices due to many variables — such as rarity, condition, topic, publisher, artist, to name just a few. While desirable common cards often can be purchased for under \$1 each, cards that are extremely desirable or hard to find can command anywhere from \$10 to \$50 or more, while unusual cards can cost in excess of \$100, and really rare cards have brought many thousands of dollars at auction. The enjoyment you derive, however, cannot be measured in terms of money. You will have one or many goals toward which you can work; you will be acquiring new knowledge as you progress; and you will be having a lot of fun, meeting interesting new people all along the way. You also will become part of a huge fellowship of PPC collectors who are helping to protect and preserve those little bits of past history known as picture postcards. Many times, the buildings and way of life pictured on the older cards have long since vanished from the scene. If it were not for the people who carefully preserved these cards

### A sampling of beginning PPC topics might include the following:

Advertising	Holidays (all or specific)
Airplanes	Hotels
Angels	Humor — Golden Age
Animals (all or specific)	Jewelry
Architecture	Ladies/Lovers/Romance
Autos	Local History (county, towns)
Babies, Storks	Merry Widows
Big Letters	Motels
Buttons	Movie Stars
Cats	Places Traveled
Children	Post Offices
Chromes	Real Photos
Cities (all or specific)	Restaurants/Diners
Comics	Santa Claus
Court Houses	Shell Borders
Detroit Publishing	Ships
Dogs	Signed Artists
Expos	Special Publishers
Greetings (birthday, general)	Washington, DC



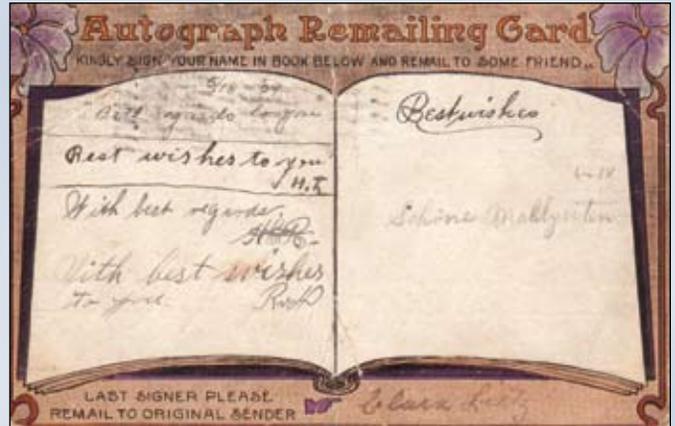
An interesting challenge for the deltiologist (postcard collector) is to find early cards showing postcard stores, postcards, postcard racks, postcard prices. Divided back, hand colored, mint copy, made in Germany, c1908.



There are several PPC categories related to philately, including RPOs, DPOs, flag cancels, tied Christmas seals, and penny stamp collection. This card, with undivided back, dated 1904, has both a fancy back and a penny stamp not commonly used on a PPC. It also has both a CDS cancel and a machine cancel, adding further interest. A penny stamp collection would include examples of all penny stamps used during the period



A "fun" item for your philatelic category is an autograph remaining card, quite hard to find, and which would be unacceptable to the post office today. Each sender affixed a penny stamp to the right and mailed the card to a friend. The last stamp was affixed on the far left and by then the card had accumulated six postmarks.



The last signer returned the card to the original sender.

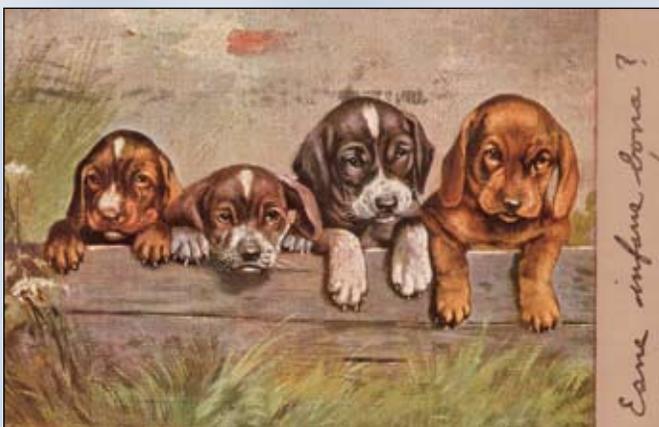
By making careful and wise purchases, your collection will probably increase in value but, just like stamps, you must consider the enjoyment value of your collection.



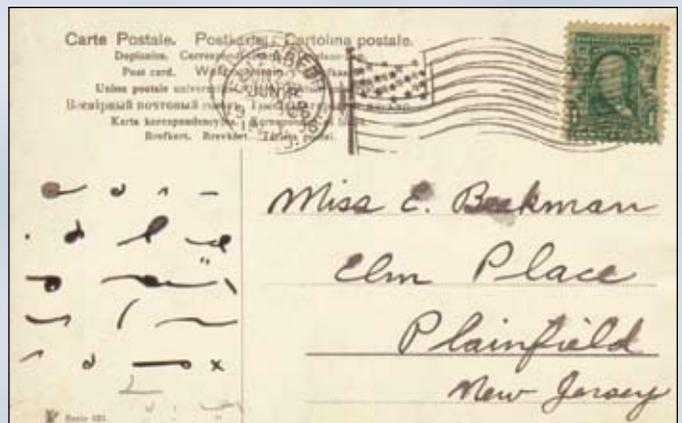
Very artistic fancy back with flag cancel and a typical penny stamp of the period. Attractive script enhances its beauty, undivided back, dated 1905.



Deeply embossed cat card with added ribbon. Chromolithograph, made in Germany, divided back, c1908.



Occasionally, a less-than-perfect card has a surprise awaiting the purchaser. This dog card has an interesting back, written in an early, old form of Gregg Shorthand.



The message reads: "I will see you in a few days, Eloise, my girl. Will you be glad to see me?" from C. A. Line (?)



An unusual card for an auto collection, divided back, c1910.

nearly 100 years ago, and the people who are discovering, organizing, and protecting these cards today, many glimpses into the past would be totally lost.

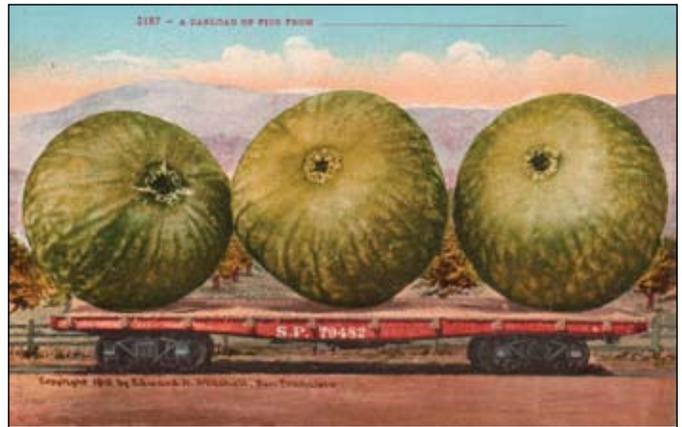
## How Can I Begin To Acquire Picture Postcards?

Here are a few suggestions:

- Clean out drawers, attics, old boxes; wonderful cards are sometimes found in old scrapbooks or Golden Age postcard albums.
- Obtained from relatives and friends, who may have saved a few postcards over the years and would be happy to give them to you. Be sure to tell everyone you are interested in old picture postcards.
- Ask relatives and friends to send postcards to you when they travel. The modern cards of today are the history of tomorrow.
- Send cards to yourself when on vacation (a daily postcard to yourself provides an excellent trip diary).
- Purchase old cards and collections from flea markets, auctions, postcard auctions, at postcard club meetings, and at postcard and stamp shows. Occasionally you will see some in antique stores, but they are often more common, quite worn, and overpriced.
- Look for postcards wherever you go (on vacation, in stores, museum shops, gift shops, drugstores, airports, bookstores, supermarkets, flea markets, and antique/stamp/postcard shows), depending on whether you want new or old PPCs.
- Look for free rack cards, often available at restaurants, hotels, and stores.
- NEVER, NEVER refuse a card which is given to you. Even if it doesn't interest you at the moment, you may find it of extreme interest later, as your collection grows and your interests become more diverse. You can always give it to a friend, a new collector, or trade it for another card you need for your collection.



Those interested in Victoriana could include the ostrich topic, as ostrich plumes were widely used as both fans for ladies and "bouquets" in vases, divided back, c1908.



Exaggeration cards are always fun to find, and include giant fruits and vegetables, fish, rabbits, grasshoppers, and much more, divided back, copyright 1910.



"Spoons" are fun to collect, relate to the old term "Spooning" (courting, cuddling, or smooching), and often lean to the humorous side. There are also Thanksgiving cards, with large spoons pictured referring to serving the dinner. This divided back card, dated 1912, was sent anonymously to Mr. J.J. Seidel, Avon, NY, with the note, "How about it?"



This card fits into several categories: Ladies and Lovers, Christmas, and satin appliqué add-on (pieces of satin are cut to shape and glued on the card, to conform to the embossed pattern underneath). This divided back embossed card was made in Germany, c1910.



Flower face (or “fantasy”) card features a girl’s face in the center of the flower. Example shown is also a Valentine card, divided back, c1912, embossed. Vegetable people cards (or “vegetable heads”) are similar, usually featuring a large head on a vegetable (or melon).



All kinds of music cards can be found for those who love music. Undivided back, mint condition, published by Tulla-Meredith Co., NY-Chicago, c1906 (copyright on music is 1899).

- Once you have enough nice cards, ask for permission to put up a board of PPCs at your local post office or library. Others will enjoy the fruits of your labor and you will get occasional calls from people who have found some old family postcards and don't know what to do with them.
- If you are lucky enough to find some old postcard albums at yard sales or auctions that were tucked safely away in a dry attic many years ago and are just now emerging, you may be able to acquire a nice quantity of quality cards at a reasonable price. Such

albums usually contain cards that were lovingly placed in the album about a hundred years ago, during the Golden Age of Postcards (1898–1918). The albums often were placed in the parlor for the enjoyment of family and friends, and after the height of the postcard craze were tucked away in the attic, to emerge many years later and find their way to the yard sale, auction house, or dealer's table at a show.

## Arrange in a Logical Way

Once you begin your collection, you may change your mind many times on what to collect and how to file your PPCs. It is often wise to file by topic in archival storage boxes (about the size of shoe boxes and available in craft stores or office supply stores), divided by topic. Once you are committed to your topics, you may wish to store your cards in three-ring binders, using acid-free, archival divided clear plastic pages made just for postcards (four per page for the older cards, two or three per page for the modern continental-size chromes).

The most basic arrangement is by geographical area or topic. If you arrange by country and state, you can further break down by city or county. If you arrange by topic, you can make dividers for each topic and possibly break them down further into sub-topics.



Embroidered card of World War I, made by French women as souvenirs for the soldiers near end of the war. Note on back reads, “This is what I got while in Arris when coming out of the lines. John”



Early performers present lots of opportunity. Miss Edna May, born Edna May Pettie in 1878, became the highest paid actress and singer of her day, the toast of London and New York, married copper millionaire Oscar Lewisohn. Died 1948, Lausanne, Switzerland, buried in London. This hand-colored tinselled card was made in London, mailed in New Zealand, divided back, c1905.



Advertising cards present varied topical opportunities. This includes a "lovely lady," a Merry Widow hat, an old-fashioned push mower, a "Philadelphia" product, and is in nearly mint condition, c1908.



Real photo cards offer endless opportunities for topics — children, people, animals, stores, horse & wagons, trucks, towns, and much more. This card pictures a pretty young woman, holding real flower bouquets.

## Which Cards Should I Buy?

Always purchase cards in the best condition you can find and that you can afford. These will hold their value the best and also may be more likely to increase in value in the future. But remember, this is **your hobby**, not an investment, and it is for your enjoyment. By making careful and wise purchases, your collection will probably increase in value but, just like stamps, you must consider the enjoyment value of your collection. If you plan to exhibit your PPCs, you will want to find examples in the best condition possible. Certain cards, however, are just not available in excellent condition, for a variety of reasons. If you have searched for a better copy but have been unable to find a better example than the one you own, this must be explained to the jury in your "Synopsis." If you are looking for postcards just for your own pleasure, or your funds are rather limited, you may want to lower your standards a bit in order to purchase enjoyable cards.

The postcard hobby has been spiraling upwards in recent years, prices have been rising quickly, and postcard shows occur nearly every weekend all around the country. Postcards are being offered more and more often at stamp shows, especially now that PPCs may enter competition at APS shows. The quality of cards offered by dealers at both PPC and stamp shows is very good. The selection is PPCs is generally quite broad, offering something for almost every collector.

## How Can I Learn More About Picture Postcards?

There is a mountain of information available to the collector. First, there are literally hundreds of books available on the subject. So my first advice is to READ, READ, READ! Where can I find these books, you ask? Some may be found at the public library, but the greatest number will probably be available from the libraries of the dozens of postcard clubs located all around the country. The serious PPC collector will



In addition to the image of a lawnmower on the front, there is an informative ad on the reverse. Such a card demands a healthy price.



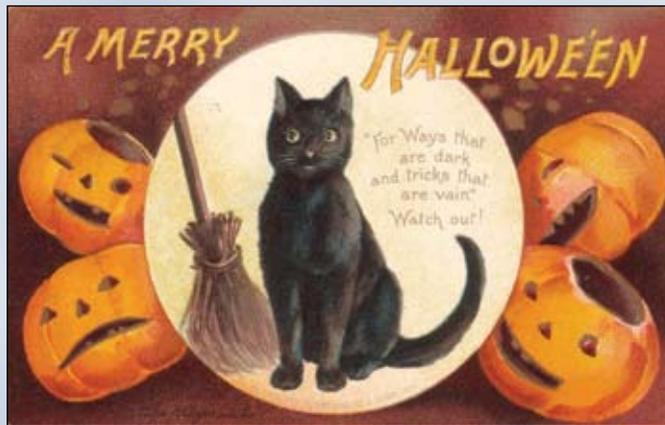
Holiday cards can make an interesting and beautiful collection. Valentines are especially delightful. Lightly embossed, divided back, 1909.



Washington and Lincoln cards can easily be found and are generally quite colorful. This is also a signed artist card, with divided back, c1908.



Thanksgiving cards are still abundant, at reasonable prices. Cards such as this signed artist card by Frances Brundage will command a higher price. Sub-topics would include turkeys, corn, dinner tables, Pilgrims, Native Americans. This card is embossed, printed in Germany, divided back, c1908.



Halloween cards have become harder to find, as the original supply was not as great as for holidays such as Easter and Christmas. Prices have risen greatly in the past ten years due to higher interest and the dwindling supply. This is an Ellen Clapsaddle card, embossed, divided back, printed in Germany, c1908.



Christmas cards are easy to find, most at reasonable prices. Santa cards are still available, and prices are generally related to the size, quality, and beauty of the Santa, with special features such as purple or green coats, or brown fur trim, generally raising the price. This Santa is embossed, with divided back, nearly mint condition, c1908.



Comic cards often have secondary topics. This could be used for gas lights, clocks, sewing, and signed artists (R. F. Outcault). Undivided back, copyright 1905, nearly perfect condition.



Philip Boileau (1863–1917) painted beautiful women in the style of Harrison Fisher. “Boileau Girls” are regarded as the most dignified of all those of early twentieth-century illustrators. Copyright 1907, divided back, near mint condition.



Signed artist card, F. Earl Christy, one of the leading American artists, who depicted the beauty of the prestigious American college girls. He painted them as high class and beautifully dressed, whether attending football games, or playing golf and tennis. Divided back, printed in America, mint condition, c1912.

Remember, this is your hobby, not an investment, and it is for your enjoyment.



Charles Dana Gibson (1867–1944), originator of “Gibson Girls,” with hair piled high in a chignon, usually topped by a big plumed hat, wearing a stiff shirtwaist and flowing bustled skirt. He found his early pen-and-ink work hard to sell, but once he sold to *Life Magazine*, his career took off. This card is most likely from his early work. Divided back, Dated 1906 (overseas cards allowed messages on the backs of cards several years before the U.S.) in New South Wales and went to Tasmania.

want to join a local club, where many dedicated and knowledgeable collectors can be found who will enjoy sharing their expertise, interesting programs are presented, and you will be able to borrow their library books! Many clubs sell copies of the new PPC books as they are published, and often at prices below retail, which still allows a small profit for the club. You also can find PPC books from time to time in auctions. And of course there are dozens of opportunities to find used books on the Internet from used book dealers, e-Bay, and other sources. Another great avenue for learning will be the many postcard and stamp shows, where dealers are very helpful in sharing their knowledge and in helping you to find the cards you want.

## The Wonderful World of Postcards

You’ve chosen four or five (or twenty or thirty!) topics to collect, have already purchased a few dozen (or several hundred) PPCs. You’ve carefully placed them in protective sleeves behind the dividers in your PPC box under your bed. Here is where the fun begins! You’re going to look under your bed a few months from now — and what do you think you’re going to find? Those pesky postcards, which numbered around 200, have suddenly multiplied in the darkness of night, and you now have 50,000 postcards under the bed! Don’t laugh! It happened to me — and trust me, it’ll happen to you, too!

## The Author

Barbara Harrison is a retired executive secretary who has been a stamp and postcard collector for more than thirty-five years. Her wide collecting interests include ephemera, small antiques, Victoriana, and cats. She and her husband enjoy foreign travel and experiencing other cultures, including Africa, Egypt, China, Tibet, and Russia.

Barbara speaks at local schools, senior citizens and historical groups, and stamp and postcard clubs. She has written articles in publications including *Barr’s*, *Postcard Collector*, and *The Philatelic Exhibitor*. In 2007 she wrote a brochure, “Collecting & Exhibiting Picture Postcards,” published by AAPE. She also provides monthly PPC exhibits for the Ringoes, New Jersey, post office. She is a member of APS, AAPE, RPSL, ATA, Washington Crossing Card Collectors Club, Coryell’s Ferry Stamp Club, and Merchantville Stamp Club.