Guide to the Santa Barbara Presidio Postcard Collection MS-49

Chris S. Ervin CA
Santa Barbara Trust for Historic Preservation
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Presidio Research Center

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215 East Canon Perdido St.
Santa Barbara, CA 93101
chris@sbthp.org
URL: http://sbthp.org/research.htm
Abstract: The Santa Barbara Presidio Postcard Collection contains postcards accumulated from multiple sources by the Presidio Research Center. This collection emphasizes the Santa Barbara Presidio, the surrounding Presidio neighborhood, the City of Santa Barbara, and the California Missions.

Scope and Contents
The postcards in the Santa Barbara Presidio Postcard Collection include examples from the Undivided Back Era (1901-1907), Divided Back or Golden Age (1907 to 1915), White Border Era (1915-1930), Real Photo Postcards (1906-1950s), Linen Era (1930-1945), and Photochrom or Chrome Era (1939 to present).

Biographical / Historical
The first American postcard was developed in 1873 by the Morgan Envelope Factory of Springfield, Massachusetts. These first postcards depicted the Interstate Industrial Exposition that took place in Chicago. Later in 1873, Post Master John Creswell introduced the first pre-stamped "Postal Cards", often called "penny postcards". Postcards were made because people were looking for an easier way to send quick notes. Postcards, in the form of government postal cards and privately printed souvenir cards, became very popular as a result of the Columbian Exposition, held in Chicago in 1893, after postcards featuring buildings were distributed at the fair.

The Post Office was the only establishment allowed to print postcards, and it held its monopoly until May 19, 1898, when Congress passed the Private Mailing Card Act, which allowed private publishers and printers to produce postcards. Initially, the United States government prohibited private companies from calling their cards "postcards", so they were known as "souvenir cards". These cards had to be labeled "Private Mailing Cards". This prohibition was rescinded on December 24, 1901, from when private companies could use the word "postcard". From March 1, 1907 the Post Office allowed private citizens to write on the address side of a postcard. It was on this date that postcards were allowed to have a "divided back". On these cards the back is divided into two sections: the left section is used for the message and the right for the address. Thus began the Golden Age of American postcards, which peaked in 1910 with the introduction of tariffs on German-printed postcards, and ended by 1915, when World War I ultimately disrupted the printing and import of the fine German-printed cards. The postcard craze between 1907 and 1910 was particularly popular among rural and small-town women in Northern U.S. states. In 1908, more than 677 million postcards were mailed.

Another type of postcard that began to be produced and popularly used during the Divided Back period is the "real photo" postcard. "Real photo" postcards were first produced using the Kodak "postcard camera." The postcard camera could take a picture and then print a postcard-size negative of the picture, complete with a divided back and place for postage. With the beginning of World War I, American printers supplied most of the postcards in the United States. American printers did not have the same technology as German printers, so the quality of available postcards fell, and people lost interest in collecting them, effectively ending the "Golden Age" of postcards. Printers saved ink during this time by not printing to the edge of the card and leaving a white border around the image, giving the time period its name. Postcards from the White Border Period also had a description of the image on the message side, which retained the divided back. The White Border Period lasted from about 1916 to 1930.

Mid-century linen postcards were produced in great quantity from 1931 to 1959. Despite the name, linen postcards were not produced on a linen fabric, but used newer printing processes that used an inexpensive card stock with a high rag content, and were then finished with a pattern which resembled linen. The face of the cards is distinguished by a textured cloth appearance which makes them easily recognizable. The reverse of the card is smooth, like earlier postcards. The rag content in the card stock allowed a much more colorful and vibrant image to be printed than the earlier "white border" style. Due to the inexpensive production and bright realistic images they became popular.

The last and current postcard era, which began about 1939, is the "chrome" era, however these types of cards did not begin to dominate until about 1950. The images on these cards are generally based on colored photographs, and are readily identified by the glossy appearance given by the paper's coating.

Sources:
Smithsonian Institutional Archives. Postcard History.
Guide to the Santa Barbara Presidio Postcard Collection

Arrangement
This collection is organized into 18 series by locale with the Santa Barbara Presidio serving as the geographic "center of the world." Using the Santa Barbara Presidio as the starting series location, subsequent series emanating outward geographically to the surrounding Presidio neighborhood, the City of Santa Barbara, and to the State of California. Out of state and foreign locales can be found in later series. Thus, the further down the series entry in the collection guide, the further its subject matter's physical location is from the Santa Barbara Presidio.

Processing Information
The Santa Barbara Presidio Postcard Collection was processed by Ambi Harsha and Chris Ervin in September and October 2018.

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Related Materials


UC Santa Barbara Special Collections. Santa Barbara picture postcards collection, 1900s-1950s. SBHC Mss 36. https://alexandria.ucsb.edu/collections/f3k35rv9

Conditions Governing Access
Collection is open to researchers.

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Subjects and Indexing Terms
Santa Barbara Presidio (Santa Barbara, Calif.)
Missions—California
Postcards
Real photo postcards

Binder 64
El Presidio de Santa Bárbara / El Cuartel undated
Physical Description: 4 Items
Physical Description: 1 Sheets

Binder 64
Santa Barbara -- Casa de la Guerra 1905-1935
Physical Description: 40 Items
Physical Description: 10 Sheets

Binder 64
Santa Barbara -- El Paseo undated
Physical Description: 35 Items
Physical Description: 7 Sheets

Binder 64
Santa Barbara Presidio Neighborhood
Physical Description: 2 Items
Physical Description: 1 Sheets

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MS-49
Binder 64  Santa Barbara -- Courthouse 1908
Physical Description: 5 Items
Physical Description: 1 Sheets

Binder 64  Santa Barbara Houses and Hotels 1909-1942
Physical Description: 22 Items
Physical Description: 4 Sheets

Binder 64  Santa Barbara -- Mission 1918-1954
Physical Description: 21 Items
Physical Description: 6 Sheets

Binder 64  Santa Barbara Earthquake 1925
Physical Description: 18 Items
Physical Description: 2 Sheets

Binder 64  Santa Barbara Views 1937-1943
Physical Description: 55 Items
Physical Description: 5 Sheets

Binder 64  Santa Barbara Area undated
Physical Description: 2 Items
Physical Description: 1 Sheets

Binder 64  Missions -- California 1948
Physical Description: 50 Items
Physical Description: 9 Sheets

Binder 64  Ramona Pageant undated
Physical Description: 5 Items
Physical Description: 2 Sheets

Binder 64  California -- Views undated
Physical Description: 14 Items
Physical Description: 2 Sheets

Binder 64  Missions -- New Mexico 1947
Physical Description: 3 Items
Physical Description: 1 Sheets

Binder 64  Missions -- Texas 1910
Physical Description: 5 Items
Physical Description: 2 Sheets

Binder 64  Missions -- Mexico 1909
Physical Description: 3 Items
Physical Description: 1 Sheets

Binder 64  Outside the State of California 1909-1952
Physical Description: 10 Items
Physical Description: 2 Sheets
Binder 64  Miscellaneous undated
Physical Description: 14 Items
Physical Description: 4 Sheets