**Zeitschrift:** Swiss express: the Swiss Railways Society journal

**Herausgeber:** Swiss Railways Society

**Band:** - (2016)

**Heft:** 127

**Artikel:** Postcards - a short history

Autor: [s.n.]

**DOI:** https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-854060

## Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. Mehr erfahren

## **Conditions d'utilisation**

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. En savoir plus

## Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. Find out more

**Download PDF: 21.11.2025** 

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, https://www.e-periodica.ch

of are interested in railways have over the years also become de-facto Postcard collectors. Apparently we are 'Cartophilistes' according to Jean-Marie Michellod, a Swiss who is of the member Philatelic Club of Martigny and who recently authored an article on the history of postcards in 'Rhône Philatélie', the journal of the Association of Philatelic Clubs of the Rhône Region. This was reproduced in the Helvetia Philatelic



## **Postcards A Short History**

Society of Great Britain's 'Newsletter'. I had never heard of the word but it appears to be a title that has developed in Francophile philatelic circles to describe those collectors who are as interested in the front of postcards as philatelists are in the stamps, cancellations, etc. on the back.

I was surprised to learn from Jean-Marie's article that the illustrated postcard that we know today did not arrive on the scene until 1869, when the first were published in Austria. Up until that time Postal Administrations had refused to accept single pieces of card into the mail system and it was only in that year that the Austrians took the initiative, with the British and German authorities following soon after. The early postcards were in essence simply correspondence cards with some having a lithographed image on the front, and the rear being solely for the address. The photographic postcard dates from 1891 when the first were printed in Marseille, France. The idea took off like wildfire and within a very short time cards became the 'social media' of the day, enabling people not just to send mementoes of their holidays, but also to picture significant local scenes, events and personalities. It was a medium that even a photographer with a business in a small community could become involved in, and it is through their efforts that we now have access to images of long-forgotten buildings, disappeared views, and even the long-scrapped locomotives and rolling stock of former railways. The Golden Age of the photographic postcard was from the 1890s to the 1920s, although it was only after 1904 that the Universal Postal Union allowed anything other than the address on the rear of the card, hence why we often see a message written across an image that we may have wished to see in a pristine condition.

Although we generally associate postcards with holidays and travel, after 1904 they often became the medium of choice for sending urgent messages ("Please meet

off the 12.00 train.") or for making business appointments, Remember this was the era when many places had multiple postal deliveries per day. It was the of the telephone from the mid-twenties that brought an end to that business, and it was the spread cheap mass printing processes doomed the short print runs of local producers. Economics also meant that publishers moved towards

tomorrow

producing timeless, all purpose cards, that could stay on sale for as long as possible. The decline in postcard sales was slightly arrested around 1960 when cards in full colour entered the market, and in more recent years there has been an upsurge in the distribution of 'artistic' photographic images rather than simple views. Now, with the introduction of smartphones and the slow 'rationalisation' of postal services, we could see the traditional postcard go into terminal decline. With a smartphone travellers can send a personalised image to friends and family - even on the other side of the world - in an instant. On the up-side though the ease in which images can now be printed digitally, in very small numbers and at a quite low cost, could see some forms of postcard remaining in circulation for the appreciation of future collectors - the 'Cartophilistes'.

One interesting adjunct to the spread of photographic postcards was the ability for publishers to make photomontages that could manipulate views, etc. The saying that the camera cannot lie has never been true! Two examples of this technique were shown in the article on the 'Lake Thun Rightbank Railway' in the March magazine. Apart from inserting the different forms of transport on different editions of the card of Beatenbucht, the Eiger, Mönch and Jungfrau in the background could never be seen from the photographer's viewpoint. Another example is the Brienzer Rothorn postcard that accompanies this article. Here the mountains are actually almost behind the photographer. I have seen for sale in Basel a view of its frontage along the Rhein with the main alpine range in the background - an extreme example of the genre!

The Editor wishes to thank: Jean-Marie Michellod; Jean Louis Emmendegger, Editor-in-Chief of 'Rhône Philatélie'; the Genève Region Philatelists Federation; Richard Donithorn, Editor of the HPS (UK) 'Newsletter', and the translators of the original article for permission to use the précis that forms the majority of this article.

19 SEPTEMBER 2016