A Postcard View of Hell

One Doughboy's Souvenir Album of the First World War

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Series in Critical Media Studies

Vernon Press

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Vernon Press
C/Sancti Espiritu 17,
Malaga, 29006
Spain

Series in Critical Media Studies

Library of Congress Control Number: 2018953599

ISBN: 978-1-62273-451-1

Cover image by Frank Marhefka, "Firing a Heavy C.A.C."
Cover design by Vernon Press using elements designed by aopsan / Freepik.

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Preface

Picture postcards are such common things in today's world that most people rarely think about them. People send postcards to keep in touch with friends and relatives while they are on vacation, or collect them as keepsakes of their travels. They often end up in garbage cans or recycling bins, but sometimes they find their way into archival collections; and for those who look at them carefully, postcards can offer valuable insights into the time periods in which they were created, and the mentalities of those who bought or sent them. As historians of the military experience, we found ourselves interested in one particular postcard collection, bound in an album and now held in the archives of the Northumberland County Historical Society in Sunbury, Pennsylvania. It is a souvenir not of a vacation, but of war. The album was the property of an American soldier from Northumberland County named Frank Marhefka, who served in France during the First World War, during which he collected postcards that offer insight into several different dimensions of the war, ranging from new technologies to the total destruction they brought upon buildings and soldiers' lives alike. Inspecting Marhefka's postcards, we believed that these seemingly ordinary objects, collected by an ordinary soldier, had something to say.

Marhefka's postcards raised two interconnected lines of questions in our minds. First, what can these images tell us about the nature of the First World War experience? His images show the hard realities of war, such as battle scenes, and the destruction left in the wake of the fighting. Occasionally the images are quite gruesome, depicting the dead – their bodies twisted and distorted – individually and in groups. More common are images of the military equipment, including tanks, airplanes, artillery pieces, that created such destruction. However, there are also portraits of political and military leaders, as well as photos of scenes behind the lines. Some images come from the Allied side of the conflict, others from the German. Though the United States did not enter the war until 1917, Marhefka's postcards span the entirety of the conflict. Presented with commentary, we surmised, this collection could offer an instructive tutorial on

the world of the Great War soldier – a walk through the conflict as the fighting man saw it.

The second line of questions had to do with the role of postcards in the lives of soldiers. Marhefka was hardly alone in collecting them during the Great War. Any historian who has done research on that conflict has undoubtedly been impressed with the sheer number of postcards in soldiers' archival collections. They are frequently interspersed among letters home. Many of the troops, like Marhefka, gathered them up and placed them in albums. Sometimes there are scrapbooks chock full of photographs and other bits of ephemera as well as postcards. In their research, most historians read the written messages on these cards, but likely give little thought to the images on the other side. However, Great War soldiers were communicating through the imagery on the postcards too. Why was the postcard such a strongly favored form of communication for the soldiers of the First World War? Who produced these wartime postcards, and where did soldiers acquire them? What kinds of postcards were available to the soldiers? What were Marhefka and other Great War soldiers trying to say about their wartime experience by sending and collecting these picture postcards?

What follows is an attempt to weave together such questions, and in the process shed light on a little examined and underappreciated aspect of the social and cultural world of First World War soldiers. An introductory text outlines the history of the modest little postcard and explores its significance during the Great War. Chapter One gives a biographical sketch of Frank Marhefka, from his humble beginnings in a Pennsylvania coal mining town to his journey to France to serve in the war. Chapter Two consists of the postcards themselves. Here we offer commentary on the images, putting them into historical context and suggesting further reading. Though our study is built around one particular soldier – an American – the lives of soldiers are strikingly similar from army to army. We, therefore, place Marhefka's collection into a larger narrative of World War I military experience that goes beyond national borders.

A century after the conclusion of the "the war to end all wars," the Frank Marhefka postcard collection offers vivid and valuable insights into the First World War, in that it tells the stories, through pictures, that soldiers were often reluctant to discuss in their letters, memoirs, and oral histories. Marhefka collected these images as a souvenir of his journey through that war, and his images offer a disturbing yet fascinating "postcard view of hell."

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The authors would like to thank the following people for their vital contributions to making this work possible: Belinda Albright, Roger Alleman, Riccardo Altieri, John Haile, Tonie Holt, Cindy Inkrote, Manfred Jacob, Jack Lindermuth, Alan Petroulis, Paula Van Ells, and Eric Van Slander. In addition, we would also like to thank the archivists, librarians and staff members at the following institutions: the Croton Free Library, the Kurt Schmeller Library at Queensborough Community College, the Mount Carmel Library, the National Archives, the Northumberland County Historical Society, the Shamokin Public Library, the Sunbury Public Library, and the Library of Würzburg University, Germany.

Introduction: The Postcard and the Great War

Deltiologists (those who study and collect postcards) refer to the first two decades of the twentieth century as the "Golden Age" of the postcard. "'Postcarditis' has made its appearance in nearly every city and town [in] America with a vengeance," claimed one postcard enthusiast in 1907. "Thousands are afflicted with the disease and more are afflicted each day… Statistics from abroad indicate the same conditions. There is scarcely a store in any city or town that does not display those little squares of pasteboard."[1] The First World War broke out at the height of the postcard craze, and for millions around the world those "little squares of pasteboard" greatly shaped the way they understood that titanic conflict. Indeed, "postcarditis" particularly affected soldiers[2] of the Great War, whether they were a British Tommy, a French *poilu*, an American doughboy, a German "*boche*"[3] or an Ottoman "Mehmet." These ordinary little objects offered them a connection to home, amusement, and they could even be badges of honor. The examination of World War I postcards offers a revealing glimpse into the mentality of the soldiers, the way the soldiers viewed the war, and the way they wanted the rest of the people, who had stayed behind the front, to understand their world.

The Golden Age of the Postcard

The origins of the postcard are murky, but can be found with the postal reforms of the mid-nineteenth century. Britain's Uniform Penny Post, implemented in 1840, ushered in the era of postage stamps and low uniform rates. Though these reforms made sending letters less expensive and

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[1] Arthur L. Shaver, "Postcarditis Is Now Prevalent," *The Philatelic West* 35, 3 (February 28, 1907): n.p.

[2] For the purposes of this study, the term "soldier" is used generically for all military personnel, including those serving in naval and air forces.

[3] French soldiers would refer to their German enemies as "boche," usually used to describe Germans in a negative way. The word per se means stubborn or boneheaded.

more efficient, some saw further opportunities for simplification and advocated doing away with the envelope altogether. The first known postcard dates to Britain in 1840, when a playwright named Theodore Hook (1788-1841) mailed a card to himself with an image of buffoonish postal workers gathered around an inkwell. It is unclear what kind of statement Hook (a known practical joker) was trying to make. "While Hook clearly was an unusual person," claimed postcard historian Edward Proud, "it also seems that he was responsible for one of the greatest Victorian inventions."[4] Hook's card was a novelty, but in the 1860s postcards came into more common use. In 1861, an American printer named John P. Charlton copyrighted a postcard and went into business with a colleague named Hymen Lipman (1817-1893) to produce them. The "Lipman Postal Card" was made of cardboard, and had a blank front side for the message, while on the reverse showed lines for the recipient's address and a box for the stamp, as well as a decorative border. Similar innovations occurred in Europe. When Prussian postal reformer Heinrich von Stephan (1831-1897) first discussed the possibility of a postcard in 1865, his ideas were not met with much enthusiasm.[5] However, based on a proposal by Vienna economist Emanuel Hermann (1839-1902), the Austrian postal service in 1869 debuted what it called the "Correspondenz Karte" (Correspondence Card), a government-issued card with prepaid postage already embossed on it.[6]

Postcards soon spread to and across Europe. The U.S. Post Office issued its own penny postcards with prepaid postage in 1873. In the first seven weeks of their availability, the post office sold 31 million of them.[7] Some countries, like Britain, initially tried to maintain a state monopoly on postcards, but publishers like Raphael Tuck & Sons, recognizing their commercial potential, protested such a policy.[8] By the mid-1880s, it had

[4] "Historic Postcard Sells for Pounds 27,000," *Times of London*, March 9, 2002.

[5] Klaus Beyrer, ed. *Kommunikation im Kaiserreich: Der Generalpostmeister Heinrich von Stephan* (Heidelberg: Edition Braus, 1997). Ironically, the German Post published a memorial postcard when Stephan died in 1897. See Postkarte zum Tod von Heinrich von Stephan, Verlag Keltz und Meiners, 1897, Deutsches Historisches Museum, Objektdatenbank, PK 2014/2979. Stephan's idea was rejected, because the responsible Prussian officials considered an open message to be too immoral and probably offensive.

[6] Robert Lebeck and Gerhard Kaufmann, *Viele Grüße…: Eine Kulturgeschichte der Postkarte* (Dortmund: Harenberg, 1985), 401.

[7] Winifred Gallagher, *How the Post Office Created America: A History* (New York: Penguin, 2016), 212-213.

[8] John Fraser, "Propaganda on the Picture Postcard," *Oxford Art Journal* 3, 2 (1980), *Propaganda*: 39.

become legal to mail privately produced cards internationally. Advances in printing technology in the late nineteenth century allowed for increasingly elaborate and colorful images, though this reduced the space available to write a message. However, in 1907 the Universal Postal Union authorized the divided back postcard. On such cards, the reverse side had two sections. The left half was reserved for writing a brief message, while the right half was for the recipient's address and the stamp – allowing for the front of the card to be taken up entirely by an image. [9]

As the twentieth century dawned, a postcard craze gripped the West and then the world. The new medium had its critics. As German media studies scholar Anett Holzheid noted, some believed the postcard to be a technological regression as compared to the telegram — and, due to its mass use, considered it a lowbrow form of communication as well.[10] Others raised privacy concerns, since postal officials would be able to read the messages written on them, though as Irish postcard historian Séamus Kearns suggested, the sheer number of circulated postcards made it impossible for the officials to read all the messages.[11] Despite such criticisms, the popularity of the postcard could not be restrained. The postcard provided, as Anett Holzheid emphasized, a "timely simplification of written communication" that combined "the assets of the cost intensive and as exclusive connotated telegram … with the habitualized use of the comparatively cheap letter."[12] But for turn-of-the-century consumers, it was rather the rich, vibrant imagery that gave postcards their greatest appeal. Austrian historian Joachim Bürgschwentner characterized them as an "important visual media" that allowed people "to 'get a picture' of events or loca-

[9] For more on the history and evolution of the postcard, see Fraser, "Propaganda"; Séamus Kearns, "Picture Postcards As A Source For Social Historians," *Saothar* 22 (1997): 128-133; Lebeck and Kaufmann, *Viele Grüße*; Otto May, *Deutsch sein heißt treu sein: Ansichtskarten als Spiegel von Mentalität und Untertanenerziehung in der wilhelminischen Ära (1888–1918)* (Hildesheim: Lax, 1998); David Prochaska and Jordan Mendelson, eds., *Postcards: Ephemeral Histories of Modernity* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010); Bjarne Rogan, "An Entangled Object: The Picture Postcard as Souvenir and Collectible, Exchange and Ritual Communication," *Cultural Analysis* 4 (2005): 1-27; Dorothy B. Ryan, *Picture Postcards in the United States, 1893-1918*, updated edition (New York: Clarkson N. Potter, 1982); and Martin Willoughby, *A History of Postcards: A Pictorial Record from the Turn of the Century to the Present Day* (London: Bracken Books, 1994).

[10] Anett Holzheid, *Das Medium Postkarte: Eine sprachwissenschaftliche und mediengeschichtliche Studie* (Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag, 2011), 10-11.

[11] Kearns, "Picture Postcards," 130.

[12] Holzheid, *Medium*, 9.

tions."[13] "Immediate visual attraction," wrote art historian John Fraser, "gave the postcard a much wider range of purchasers."[14] Given their ubiquity at the turn of the twentieth century, postcards offer a rich and revealing resource for linguistic, cultural, or semiotic studies at the dawn of the twentieth century.[15]

Advertisers were among the first to recognize the advantages of the postcard, but soon millions found other uses for them. The postcard was (and still is) most commonly thought of as a souvenir of a particular event or of one's travels. "The picture postcard is the universal souvenir," wrote U.S author Frank Stefano, Jr. "It is the one that is bought in all places by everyone, even those who otherwise never indulge the souvenir instinct," and is often "found in spots that carry no other souvenir items."[16] Postcards were popular mementoes of the numerous world fairs and exhibitions in the *fin de siècle* period, such as the Paris Universal Exposition of 1889 (from which many cards bore the image of the brand new Eiffel Tower), Britain's Royal Naval Exhibition of 1891, and the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893. Postcards were perhaps most commonly associated with the growing tourist trade. By 1900, visitors to virtually every city or attraction of note in Europe or North America (and even beyond) could purchase postcards with drawings or photographs of that location's street scenes and landmarks – which typically included the words "Greetings from" of "Souvenir of" that location. "Tourists grabbed them from the racks at roadside stops, hotels, and boardwalks," wrote historian Robert Bogdan and librarian Todd Weseloh "to show, tell and document their adventures."[17]

But the significance of postcards went far beyond their souvenir value. They came in endless varieties. Many illustrators, painters, and photographers saw the postcard as a new outlet for their work. The British firm Raphael Tuck & Sons commissioned painters to produce several series of "*oilettes*" – paintings depicting rural and village themes. In Vienna, a struggling artist named Adolf Hitler (1889-1945) peddled his work in post-

[13] Joachim Bürgschwentner, "War Relief, Patriotism and Art: The State-Run Production of Picture Postcards in Austria1914–1918," *Austrian Studies* 21 (2013), *Cultures at War: Austria-Hungary 1914–1918*, 101.

[14] Fraser, "Propaganda," 39

[15] Holzheid, *Medium*, 27. For an introduction to semiotics, see: Daniel Chandler, *Semiotics: The Basics*, 2nd edition (New York: Routledge, 2007).

[16] Frank Stefano, Jr., *Pictorial Souvenirs and Commemoratives of North America* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1976), 122.

[17] Robert Bodgan and Todd Weseloh, *Real Photo Postcard Guide: The People's Photography* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2006). 2.

card form. Postcards also had political dimensions. They spread the idea of the nation by establishing a sphere of communication,[18] as well as a group identity or an imagined community[19] at the same time.[20] This means that postcards as a cheaper format for a more general exchange of ideas widened the sphere of communication of the national community as such, but also helped this community to imagine itself better by spreading images that helped to identify the idea of the nation, as well as its physical and legal expression, i.e. the nation state. Images of historical events, heroic ancestors, famous politicians, but also maps and other depictions of national values, e.g. legends and fairy tales, helped to create a strong nationalist feeling towards their own belonging to the modern nation states. The postcard consequently also helped to invent national traditions and circulated their visualization to the masses.[21]

The public often followed politics and global affairs through postcards, though as political scientist Jon D. Carlson noted, they often presented news events as a form of entertainment. Eye-catching images and brief texts, he argues, appealed to the "middle to lower classes in a newly-emerging semiliterate urban population" that was a major consumer of the medium. Military conflicts, like the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905, offered a particularly heady blend of dramatic events combined with compelling visual images that captured the imagination of a population that might not normally follow global events very closely. "Like modern infotainment," Carlson wrote, postcards brought "foreign policy issues to the attention of an otherwise inattentive public, often as a 'byproduct' of their use."[22]

Postcards usually served more mundane purposes. There were postcards with the visages of singers, dancers, athletes, and other celebrities. The emerging film industry began publishing promotional postcards of fa-

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[18] Karl W. Deutsch, *Nationalism and Social Communication: An Inquiry Into the Foundations of Nationality* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1953). The postcard as a new medium of exchange had also stimulated a "trend of short communication." Holzheid, *Medium*, 9.

[19] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, revised edition (London: Verso, 2016).

[20] Otto May, *Deutsch sein heißt treu sein.*

[21] Eric J. Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds. *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

[22] Jon D. Carlson, "Postcards and Propaganda: Postcards as Soft News Images of the Russo-Japanese War," *Political Communication* 26 (2009): 212-237.

mous actors.[23] One could send a postcard to offer birthday or holiday greetings. According to historian Daniel Gifford, holiday postcards in the United States were particularly popular with rural white women of Anglo-Saxon or Germanic heritage from the northern states, and often expressed their concerns about gender roles and social change during the Progressive Era.[24] Some provided religious inspiration, others sexual titillation. Indeed, historian Lisa Z. Sigel notes that the postcard significantly hastened the transformation of pornography from "literary to visual" outlets, and made it available to a much wider audience."[25] Publishers on both sides of the Atlantic issued cards of blatantly racist caricatures as a form of amusement, such as "coon cards" in the United States, which portrayed African Americans in demeaning and stereotypical ways.[26] "The list of subjects," claimed John Fraser, "could be extended almost indefinitely."[27] There were scores of novelty cards. Some were made of leather or wood. Some featured birds with real feathers glued onto them, or portraits with real hair. "There were hundreds of different types available, with hundreds of different reasons for sending them," wrote postcard historian Martin Willoughby:

> Postcards depicting birthday or Christmas greetings, actresses, ships, railway engines, animals, military leaders, and the works of leading artists began to appear in shops… Soon a person did not need a particular reason to send a postcard to a friend – the picture was reason enough, and if you were lucky, the recipient might send one in return.[28]

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[23] Q. David Bowers, "Souvenir Postcards and the Development of the Star System, 1912-1914," *Film History* 3 (1989): 39-45.

[24] Daniel Gifford, *American Holiday Postcards, 1905-1915: Imagery and Context* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2013).

[25] Lisa Z. Sigel, "Filth in the Wrong People's Hands: Postcards and the Expansion of Pornography in Britain and the Atlantic World, 1880-1914," *Journal of Social History* 33, 4 (2000): 859-885.

[26] JBHE Foundation, "'Coon Cards': Racist Postcards Have Become Collectors' Items," *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education 25* (1999): 72-73; Wayne M. Mellinger, "Postcards from the Edge of the Color Line: Images of African Americans in Popular Culture," *Symbolic Interaction* 15, 4 (1992): 413-433.

[27] Fraser, "Propaganda,", 39.

[28] Willoughby, *A History of Postcards*, 10.

British sociologists Tonie and Valmai Holt characterized postcards as "Victorian television"[29] – an observation equally cogent for the Edwardian period immediately preceding the First World War. In the days before social media, email, or even the widespread use of the telephone, the postcard was an ideal form for passing on pleasantries, humor, and tidbits of news and information. They were the memes, tweets, and Facebook posts of the early twentieth century.

Germany was the undisputed king of postcard production. The German industry centered on Dresden and Leipzig, where firms such as Meisner & Buch and Stengel dominated the business. Gustav Liersch and Photochrom, based in Berlin, expanded into English-language markets, while the Neue Photographische Gesellschaft established a subsidiary outside Paris at Saint-Denis to tap into the Francophone world.[30] Entrepreneurs in other countries soon followed the German example and established their own corporations, such as Munk (Austria), Traldi (Italy), De Rycker & Mendel (Belgium), and Photoglob (Switzerland). American companies increasingly got in on the action, such as the Detroit Publishing Company, Leighton & Valentine, and the Souvenir Post Card Company, just to name a few. Many U.S. companies had German connections, such as Curt Teich & Company, founded by a German immigrant in Chicago in 1898, and the E.C. Kropp Company of Milwaukee. Kropp went into the postcard business after "visiting his old home in Germany" where, according to his obituary in the *American Stationer*, he "saw the popularity of the post card there and saw the possibilities of the fad in this country." By the time of his death in 1907, the E.C. Kropp Company had produced an estimated 20 million postcards.[31]

By the first decade of the twentieth century, the world experienced a flood of postcards of near-biblical proportions. In 1906, Germany produced just over one billion picture postcards. The United States ranked second with 770 million, followed by Great Britain with 734 million.[32] In

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[29] Tonie and Valmai Holt, *Till the Boys Come Home: The First World War Through Its Picture Postcards*, updated edition (Barnsley: Pen and Sword, 2014), 8.

[30] Wilma Gütgemann-Holtz and Wolfgang Holtz, ed. *Neue Photographische Gesellschaft Steglitz: Die Geschichte eines Weltunternehmens* (Berlin: n.p., 2009). Photographs became an example of the amalgamation of a new technology with the new medium of the picture postcard. See: Ludwig Hoerner, Das photographische Gewerbe in Deutschland, 1839-1914 (Düsseldorf: GFW-Verlag, 1989), 84-87; Karin Walter, Postkarte und Fotografie: Studien zur Massenbild-Produktion (Würzburg: Bayerische Blätter für Volkskunde, 1995), 23-26.

[31] "Obituary, Emil C. Kropp," *American Stationer* 63, 1 (1908): 22.

[32] Lebeck and Kaufmann, *Viele Grüße…*, 418.

1913, Germany still ranked first with 1.7 billion, followed by Japan with 1.3 billion, and Great Britain with around 900 million sold picture postcards.[33] The number of postcards printed and mailed was staggering. "Roughly speaking," wrote Norwegian historian Bjarne Rogan, "between 200 and 300 billion postcards were produced and sold during this Golden Age."[34]

Consumers typically bought postcards at places like newsstands or drug and department stores, but there were also shops dedicated exclusively to postcards. After arriving in Chicago, a German immigrant named Otto Koehn noticed that "there were no post-card shops as there were in the old country, and I saw that this field was new and untried in America." Koehn saved his money, made connections with wholesalers, and opened his own postcard shop soon after his arrival in the Windy City. His business struggled at first, but as he learned about American tastes his profits grew, and he soon expanded his operations. "I started another store," he said. "Then I started another store, and then another, and then three more." By 1912, the *Dry Good Reporter* noted that Koehn's chain of postcard shops earned him enough money "to pay $20,000 a year rent for store buildings, buy a residence and an automobile, all in the six and a half years he has been in America."[35] There were even postcard vending machines. In Springfield, Illinois, a drug store owner developed one that could offer up to 500 cards. The customer turned a handle to view the cards individually. "When a card appears which suits the fancy of the operator," explained the *Dry Goods Reporter*, "he drops a coin into a coin slot and then turns the handle again and the selected card is fed out at the front of the machine."[36]

In addition to the countless varieties of postcards that streamed out of publishing houses, people could make their own. The development of photography in the nineteenth century had a major impact on the evolution of the postcard. In the early days of the medium, photography was only for a small group of skilled specialists, usually working out of a studio. "Access to the specialized and complex technology of photography required time, money and scientific background," wrote art professor Bob Rogers, "so that popular participation was limited to having one's portrait

[33] Fraser, "Propaganda," 39.

[34] Rogan, "An Entangled Object," 1.

[35] "Successful Retailer of Postcards," *Dry Goods Reporter*, 42, 21 (May 25, 1912): 40.

[36] "Druggist Invents Post-Card Machine," *Dry Goods Reporter* 42, 4 (27 January 1912): 51.

taken."[37] However, by the end of the century photography had effectively been democratized. The Eastman Kodak Company of Rochester, New York led the way in the developing cameras for personal use. "Freed from the structures of the studio," wrote librarian Greg Kocken, now "the photo enthusiast could pursue casual shots in more public settings … [and] amateur photographers became chroniclers of everyday life, from their own intimate circles of friends and family to individuals in the wider community, with the studio backdrop replaced by the environs of home, the public sphere, and the natural world."[38]

Kodak greatly influenced the Golden Age of postcards with the introduction of the Model 3A Folding Pocket Camera in 1903 – the first so-called "postcard camera." Film from such cameras was developed directly onto stiff postcard paper, with the address and message sections already preprinted on the reverse, creating what collectors today know as a "real photo" postcard. Many postcard camera models included a window on the camera through which the photographer could etch onto the negative captions and notes about the images they had captured. Thanks to the real picture postcard, travelers could not just send a picture postcard *of* Paris, but one with a photograph of them *in* Paris. Real photo postcards were usually printed in small batches – from fewer than a dozen to several hundred – though they could be mass produced as well. Real photo postcards tended to focus on everyday slices of life – street scenes, local landmarks, disasters and other newsworthy events. In the United States – especially in the South – local photographers captured scenes of lynchings and printed up souvenir postcards of these macabre events. From their colonial empires abroad, Europeans often sent home postcards that captured the perceived exoticism, backwardness, and savagery of those they ruled.[39]

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[37] Bob Rogers, "Photography and the Photographic Image," *Art Journal* 38, 1 (1978): 30.

[38] Greg Kocken, "The Amateur's Eye: Daniel Bastian Nelson in Eau Claire," *Wisconsin Magazine of History* 101, 2 (2018): 29-30.

[39] For more on real photo postcards, see Bogdan and Weseloh, *Real Photo Postcard Guide*; Luc Sante, *Folk Photography: The American Real-Photo Postcard* (Portland, OR: Verse Chorus Press, 2009); Rosamond B. Vaule, *As We Were: American Photographic Postcards*, 1905-1930 (Boston: David R. Godine, 2004); Laetitia Wolff, ed., *Real Photo Postcards: Unbelievable Images from the Collection of Harvey Tulcensky* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Architectural Press, 2005). For more on lynching postcards, see James Allen, Hilton Als, Congressman John Lewis, and Leon F. Litwack, *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America* (Santa Fe, NM: Twin Palms Publishers, 2000).

Postcards were, however, not just a method of communication. They were also collectible. Like stamps, dolls, coins, spoons, pins, baseball cards, or countless other such things, millions of people collected postcards. Even Britain's Queen Victoria (1819-1901) famously kept a collection. The pursuit of "philocarty" or "cartephilia" – as the love of postcards was then known – involved various accoutrements. Postcard retailers peddled a great variety of albums in which to store the cards. Some were simple, with canvas covers and die-cut slits on paper pages to hold the cards. Others could be quite elaborate, bound in wood or fine leather. "It seemed as if every American home had a postcard album on the parlor table," wrote art historian Rosamond Vaule, who also noted that "the album's role went beyond domestic entertainment and the preservation of precious souvenirs and family history." These albums, which could display one's tastes in art of the extent of one's travels, "also conveyed social standing and sophistication, depending on the quality and origin of the postcard contents."[40]

There were other ways to share one's collection. The Bausch & Lomb Company of Rochester, New York – noted for the manufacture of eyeglasses – introduced the "Reflectoscope Post Card Magic Lantern" in 1909, allowing the collector to project his or her cards on a screen. Thousands joined postcard collecting clubs. Members not only disseminated information about the latest trends in the industry, but also exchanged cards so that individuals could build their collections. *The Gregg Writer*, an American magazine dedicated to shorthand, organized a club whose members exchanged cards written exclusively in that script. Some clubs, like the Union Souvenir Card Exchange, had an international membership, in which people would typically swap views of their home communities. "I have received cards from Europe, Asia, Africa, Australia, and every civilized country in the world," wrote club member Arthur Shaver, who claimed to have met members "who have collected from 1000 to 300,000 each." Collecting and exchanging postcards "has a valuable educational side as well as being a pleasure and a token of friendship," claimed Shaver. "Friends living far apart may become acquainted, to a certain extent at least, with each other's surroundings through an exchange of cards."[41]

The Postcard Goes to War

Whatever global amity postcard collecting may have created, it did not save humanity from the First World War. The Great War is usually referred

[40] Vaule, *As We Were*, 50-60.

[41] Shaver, "Postcarditis," n.p.

to as the "seminal catastrophe"[42] of the twentieth century, ending of the "long" nineteenth century[43] and beginning of the century of extremes.[44] Almost the entirety of Europe went to war. This titanic conflict pitted the Central Powers (Germany, Austria, and the Ottoman Empire and later Bulgaria) against the Allies (Britain, France, Russia, and later Italy and the United States). After years of rising German-American tensions, the United States joined the Allies in 1917. Machine guns and modern artillery, mass-produced and in the hands of mass armies, made the First World War the bloodiest conflict Western Civilization had ever seen. The Western Front, known for its trench war, also confronted the soldiers with a totally new war experience, far away from the romantic image of a heroic fight between gentlemen. Pure destruction, a "no-man's-land" that could hardly be crossed alive, and an immanent perception of death around oneself were the determinant factors of this war. A postcard, in this melancholic environment, linked the soldiers to home, a better world far away from their daily routine of destruction.[45] On the Eastern Front, the lines seesawed back and forth indecisively, but it was the trench warfare on the Western Front where the war reached perhaps its most brutal dimensions. Armies on both sides hammered away at each other futilely. Millions died in a new kind of mechanized slaughter, yet the front lines barely budged. For the soldiers in the trenches, life seemed apocalyptic. Mud, fleas, and rats were their constant companions, and the smell of death hung constantly in the air. When there was no fighting, boredom ruled.[46]

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[42] George F. Kennan, *The Decline of Bismarck's European Order: Franco-Russian Relations, 1875-1890* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979), 3.

[43] Franz J. Bauer, *Das "lange" 19. Jahrhundert (1789-1917): Profil einer Epoche* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2004).

[44] Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes: A History of the World, 1914-1991* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996).

[45] On the experience of the new dimension of the Great War, especially with regard to the larger material battles in 1916, see Christian Stachelbeck, ed. *Materialschlachten 1916: Ereignis, Bedeutung, Erinnerung* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2017).

[46] Stephen Bull, *Trench: A History of Trench Warfare on the Western Front* (London: Osprey, 2014).

In all combatant nations, postcard production thrived despite rigid economic regimentation.[47] Postcards had a great many wartime uses. Governments of warring nations quickly repurposed them for propaganda. The picture postcard was an "ideal vehicle for propaganda," wrote John Fraser, since it was "cheap, easy to handle, with an instant visual appeal so that it was easily appreciated, more particularly by those who were illiterate."[48] Governments issued postcards, along with posters and other visual media, to promote war bond drives or for other war-related purposes. However, propaganda ministries rarely published postcards themselves. Rather, governments typically worked with relief organizations and commercial manufacturers, making government photographs or the works of official war artists available to them, in their efforts to boost home front morale.[49]

Indeed, as independent scholar Christine Brocks astutely noted, the wishes and desires of consumers were still the primary drivers of wartime

[47] For more on postcards and the First World War, see Christine Brocks, *Die bunte Welt des Krieges: Bildpostkarten aus dem Ersten Weltkrieg 1914-1918* (Essen: Klartext Verlag, 2008); Elena S. Danielson, "Russian and German Great War Postcards," *Slavic and Eastern European Information Resources* 17, 3 (2016): 151-164; Guus de Vries, *The Great War through Picture Postcards* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword Books, 2016); Thomas Flemming and Ulf Heinrich, *Grüße aus dem Schützengraben: Feldpostkarten im Ersten Weltkrieg* (Berlin: be.bra, 2004); Holt and Holt, *Till the Boys Come Home*; John Laffin, *World War I in Postcards* (Gloucester: Alan Sutton, 1988); Elisabeth von Hagenow, "Mit Gott für König, Volk und Vaterland: Die Bildpostkarte als Massen- und Bekenntnismedium," in *Bildpropaganda im Ersten Weltkrieg*, ed. Raoul Zühlke (Hamburg: Verlag Ingrid Kämpfer, 2000), 145. The collection at the German Historical Museum also provides an interesting insight into the wide portfolio of existing German picture postcards during the war period. Deutsches Historisches Museum, *Der Erste Weltkrieg in deutschen Bildpostkarten*, CD-Rom (Berlin: Directmedia Publ., 2004).

[48] Fraser. "Propaganda,"42.

[49] For more on postcards and propaganda during the First World War, see Bürgschwentner, "War Relief"; Christine Brocks, "Der Krieg auf der Postkarte: Feldpostkarten im ersten Weltkrieg," in *Der Tod als Maschinist: Der industrialisierte Krieg 1914–1918*, eds. Rolf Spilker and Bernd Ulrich (Bramsche: Rasch, 1998), 154-163; Oskar Dohle and Andrea Weiß, "'Österreich wird ewig stehn': Postkarten als Mittel der Propaganda in Österreich-Ungarn im Ersten Weltkrieg am Beispiel der Sammlung des Salzburger Landesarchivs," *Mitteilungen der Gesellschaft für Salzburger Landeskunde* 141 (2001): 293-324; Walter Lukan and Max Demeter Peyfuss, "Jeder Schuß ein Russ', jeder Stoß ein Franzos. Kriegspropaganda auf Postkarten 1914–1918," in *Jeder Schuss ein Russ — Jeder Stoss ein Franzos: Literarische und graphische Kriegspropaganda in Deutschland und Österreich 1914-1918*, eds. Hans Weigel, Walter Lukan and Max Demeter Peyfuss (Vienna: Brandstätter, 1983), 32-47.

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