

# Postal Cards, Stamped Cards, and Postcards

## Postal Cards

In 1869, Austria became the first country to issue cards imprinted with stamps, called postal cards. Other European countries followed suit, to overwhelming public response.

On November 15, 1870, following the popularity of postal cards in Europe, Postmaster General John A. J. Creswell recommended to Congress the issuance of a one-cent postal card. The postal card was intended as a convenience for non-confidential communications at a lower rate, but Congress, concerned about the privacy of messages, delayed approval.

Then, through the Act of June 8, 1872, Congress authorized "the issue and transmission by mail of postal cards at one cent each." Except for a period during World War I when the rate rose to two cents to help pay the costs of the war, postal cards cost only a penny until January 1, 1952.

The Post Office Department issued its first penny postal card in Springfield, Massachusetts, on May 12, 1873, and in other cities the next day. The card measured three inches by five and one-eighth inches and had a one-cent stamp printed in the upper right corner. The stamp bore a profile of the Goddess of Liberty surrounded by a lathe-work border, with the words "U.S. POSTAGE" above and "ONE CENT" below. The other side of the card, intended for the message, was entirely plain. The card was light buff in color, and the ink, brown.

The public responded enthusiastically. *The New York Times* reported on May 14, 1873, the day after the card was issued in New York, that the city's postal clerks sold 200,000 cards in two and a half hours. Nationwide, customers bought 31 million postal cards between May 12 and June 30, 1873, and more than 64 million between May and the end of September 1873, according to the 1873 *Annual Report of the Postmaster General*. The cards were popular not only with individuals, but also with businesses and organizations. For example, banks mailed them to customers to acknowledge deposits; libraries used them to send overdue notices.

On October 18, 1994, the first postal card sets featuring collectible artwork were issued. Collectible cards are sold in packets or booklets of 10 to 20 cards and are imprinted with postage and matching designs. The first issue featured the *Legends of the West* stamp images.

## Stamped Cards

On January 10, 1999, the Postal Service changed the term for postal cards to stamped cards, and increased their price to one penny more than the postage rate in order to pay for the paper and printing of the card. The price of a stamped card increased to two cents more than the postage rate on January 7, 2001, and to three cents more on May 12, 2008. In 2007, the term for stamped cards with collectible artwork was changed to premium stamped cards.

The *U.S. Postal Card Catalog*, published by the United Postal Stationery Society, provides detailed descriptions and illustrations of stamped cards issued by the Post Office Department and the United States Postal Service. More information on the catalog and regular updates are posted on the Society's Web site, [www.upss.org](http://www.upss.org).

## Postcards

As early as 1861, John P. Charlton of Philadelphia had obtained a copyright on privately manufactured postcards, which he transferred to H. L. Lipman, also of Philadelphia. The earliest known "Lipman Postal Card" was



Postal card mailed from Boston metalware dealers Fuller, Dana & Fitz, crediting the account of E. Plouff & Son, tinsmiths in Ipswich, Massachusetts, for the sale of a water pitcher on September 15, 1882.

postmarked October 25, 1870, and required letter-rate postage. On May 19, 1898, Congress passed an act that approved a special rate for "private mailing cards," or postcards, of one cent – the same rate used for the postal cards issued by the Post Office Department. Rates for postal cards and postcards have been identical since that time, except for a three-year period in the 1920s.

Privately-manufactured picture postcards were introduced to commemorate the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893. During the event, a set of ten cards depicting different Exposition buildings and the U.S. Naval exhibit cost 25 cents. The picture and space for a message appeared on one side, with the other side reserved for the address.

By the early 1900s, businesses were using postcards to advertise their products and services. In 1907, postcards appeared with an image on one side and, on the other side, a section for a message and another for the address.

## Rates for stamped cards and postcards

Effective Date	Postal Cards	Postcards
May 12, 1873	1	...
July 1, 1898	1	1
November 2, 1917	2	2
July 1, 1919	1	1
April 15, 1925	1	2
July 1, 1928	1	1
January 1, 1952	2	2
August 1, 1958	3	3
January 7, 1963	4	4
January 7, 1968	5	5
May 16, 1971	6	6
March 2, 1974	8	8
September 14, 1975	7	7
December 31, 1975	9	9
May 29, 1978	10	10
March 22, 1981	12	12
November 1, 1981	13	13
February 17, 1985	14	14
April 3, 1988	15	15
February 3, 1991	19	19
January 1, 1995	20	20
July 1, 2001	21	21
June 30, 2002	23	23
January 8, 2006	24	24
May 14, 2007	26	26
May 12, 2008	27	27
May 11, 2009	28	28