

Washington, D.C. Postcard Collection

An inventory of the Washington, D.C. Postcard Collection at DC Public Library

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English

Describing Archives: A Content Standard

Stage

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Summary Information

Repository:	Stage
Title:	Washington, D.C. Postcard Collection
ID:	P030
Date [inclusive]:	1848-1940
Physical Description:	7 boxes
Language of the Material:	English
Language of the Material:	English
Language of the Material:	English

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Biographical / Historical

As common as American society considers the postcard today, it was not until the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago that the first souvenir "post cards" were available for purchase in the United States. These cards featured illustrations of the various fair buildings printed on government-issued postal cards and privately printed souvenir cards. The government postal cards were imprinted with one-cent indicia while the privately printed souvenir cards required two-cents postage to be applied. Writing was not permitted on the address side of these cards.

Five years passed before private printers were granted, by an act of Congress on May 19, 1898, permission to print and sell post cards that bore the inscription Private Mailing Card. These cards could now be mailed at the same one-cent rate as the government issued cards.

The Federal government granted use of the word Post Card to private printers on December 24, 1901. Writing was still not permitted on the address side. Use of post cards with "divided backs," allowing both the address and a message on one side, was permitted on March 1, 1907. Thus marked the beginning in which millions, if not billions, of Washington, D.C. post cards have been printed and sold.

Besides depicting images of places that may no longer exist, postcards often contain messages offering documentation representative of a time and place. From observations of historic events to matters of personnel concern, insights are given into the life and times of the postcard's sender.

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Scope and Contents

The collection consists of three linear feet, consisting of about 2000 postcards and 24 postcard folders. The earliest postcards in the collection date from circa 1898. Due to Washington, D.C.'s continual focus as a tourist destination, contemporary postcards continue to be added to the collection. The greatest percentage of material dates from the 1920s to the 1940s.

The collection consists almost exclusively of imprinted (ink) postcards with less than a dozen being of the "real-photo" (gelatin silver) variety. The collection leans heavily towards images of tourist Washington but many images of "hometown" Washington are included as well (Businesses, Churches, Organizations, Restaurants, Schools – Private/Public, Stores, and Streets).

Postcards are arranged by specific subject headings. Please use the marker provided in each box to assure that postcards are returned to their proper place. Further information on deltiology, or postcard collecting, may be learned by visiting the following web sites.

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Administrative Information

Publication Statement

Stage

Custodial History

The postcards in this collection have been donated ongoing to the Washingtoniana Division since circa 1934.

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Controlled Access Headings

- Architecture

- Business
- Neighborhoods
- Photographs

Collection Inventory

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