

Synopsis

SYMBOLS ADD MEANING TO CENTURY OLD EASTER POST CARDS

Using symbols, each post card tells a story which is meaningful to both the sender and receiver. Post cards were the most popular method of communication available at the turn of the 20th century, rather like email and twitter are today.

This exhibit highlights the religious and secular motifs on vintage Easter post cards and explains what the symbols mean in each design.

The symbols found in this exhibit have their origins two thousand years ago. The cards shown here reveal a synthesis of motifs associated with Christian Easter and with the Saxon pagan spring festivals of northern Europe. Christianity borrowed heavily from the pagan goddess *Eostre*, by taking her name and her symbols and modifying them. The post card artists of the era adapted and updated them in charming designs intended to appeal to the general public and to increase sales as showcased in this exhibit.

By the end of the 19th century, publishers in Germany had the finest inks, papers and printing presses in the world. They turned out postcards to fill the demand for holiday celebrations like Easter. Distinctive trademarks on these post cards can be used to determine the name of the publishing company although it is not always possible to do so since the same designs were sometimes used by more than one company and not every card has a trademark. The wood cellulose paper was held together by glues that allowed the paper to be compressed by heavily polished presses. Some rollers embossed or pushed up designs in the paper, even giving them a linen like finish. Blocking was the opposite of embossing and made depressions in the card surface. A number of cards illustrate these processes.

Colour was added most often by chromolithography and glitter by foil stamping or adding fine metal dust on the varnish. Artists were in great demand and it was a position suitable for women as noted in this exhibit. Real photographs were popular as postcards too and the post card negative used by those photographers became the standard for most pictures in the future. Two cards show actual black and white photos that are remarkably clear: they were after all simply contact prints that were hand coloured.

Early postcards were undivided on the back which had room only for the address. The front held room for a short message in addition to the design. A number are included in this exhibit. By 1903, cards in Canada had divided backs for both address and message so the front could be wholly devoted to the design. The golden age of postcards was over by the end of WWI.

References:

metropostcard .com, The Postcard Album: tpa-project.info
Greater Toronto Area Philatelic Alliance: gtapa.org/member-services/handout-3-postcard