

**Finding Aid to the Martha's Vineyard Museum
Record Unit 359**

The Postcard Collection, 1900-

By

Linda M. Wilson and Eileen Robinson

Descriptive Summary

Repository: Martha's Vineyard Museum

Call No.

Title: Creator:

Quantity: 2 cubic feet

Abstract: This is an artificially compiled collection. There are an estimated 2400 unique postcard views relating to Martha's Vineyard. There are postcards in all formats: private mailing cards, undivided backs, divided backs, white border, linen era, real photo cards, and photochromes. They represent the entire history of this souvenir travel genre. Also included are panoramic views, greeting cards, humorous cards, oversized cards, souvenir folders, map cards, advertising cards for Island businesses, and offset 1950's line drawing cards. Non-Vineyard views include Cuttyhunk, New Bedford, Woods Hole, and Alaska. Most of these are real photo cards and are related through vessels pictured and unique subject matter like 20th century whale ship activities taken perhaps during an Arctic Ocean voyage. As the Island continues to evolve and change these small glimpses into the past become valuable points of reference and resonate as a conscious and unconscious record far beyond their original intention to document one's presence in a distant locale.

Acquisition Information: The postcards in this collection were acquired by the Martha's Vineyard Museum from many sources.

Processing Information:

Access Restrictions: none

Use Restrictions: none

Preferred citation for publication: Martha's Vineyard Museum, The Postcard Collection, Record Unit 359

Index Terms

Gay Head, MA - Postcards, 1900-

Chilmark, MA - Postcards, 1900-

West Tisbury, MA - Postcards, 1900-

Tisbury, MA - Postcards, 1900-

Oak Bluffs, MA - Postcards, 1900-

Edgartown, MA - Postcards, 1900-

Chappaquiddick, MA - Postcards, 1900-

Aquinnah, MA - Postcards, 1900-

Series and Subseries Arrangement

Series I: Oak Bluffs and Cottage City Postcards

Series II: Edgartown and Chappaquiddick Postcards

Series III: Tisbury, Vineyard Haven, West Chop Postcards

Series IV: Up-Island Postcards

Subseries A: Chilmark Postcards

Subseries B: Gay Head/Aquinnah Postcards

Subseries C: West Tisbury Postcards

Series V: Other Categories

Subseries A: Real Photo Postcards

Subseries B: Souvenir Postcards

Series VI: Photochrome Postcards

History Note:

The earliest postcards printed were labeled Private Mailing Cards, a designation printed on the address side of the cards as required by the U.S. Congress. Writing on the address side was illegal. That meant that the sender's message was confined to a small space left blank on the picture side of the card. These cards date from 1898-1901.

From 1901-1907 writing was still not allowed on the address side of the cards. The backs were undivided. Most of these cards were printed in Germany. The use of the words "Post Card" was granted in 1901 and appears on these cards.

Between 1907 and 1914 the image filled the fronts of the cards and the backs were divided with a separate space for the address and another for the message. Many of these cards were printed in England.

1915-1930 was the era of white border cards. The images were not high quality and the use of the white border was a printing economy. Images from earlier cards were commonly reprinted in this format often with a description of the view on the address side of the card.

From 1930-1944 linen cards were the most commonly published postcards. These cards are printed on textured paper, and they have often have white borders. The colors are vibrant, flat and gaudy.

Since 1945 photochrome postcards have prevailed. They were first sold in the Western states in 1939. Some were coated in plastic which tended to peel off. Some were published by a Boston company, Colorpicture. They called their cards Plastichromes and they often had scalloped edges. Photochrome cards are not real photo cards. They are still sold today as travel mementos.

Another category can be called souvenir cards. They might have glitter on them, or show maps of the Island and Nantucket, or have generic joke messages and drawings. Some souvenir cards could be adapted to any locale by changing the small picture vignettes on the card. More appealing were panoramic cards which had to be folded and taped for mailing. Another example is the postcard folder that contains multiple views and is larger than standard postcards. These were produced throughout the history of the postcard.

Two other categories of postcards deserve mention.

Real photo postcards are perhaps the *crème de la crème* of the form. They appeared early on from the turn of the century and were printed on photographic paper from negatives. The kind of paper used is often noted on the address side of the card in the upper right hand corner where the postage stamp is attached. Two familiar Vineyard publishers were Woods and Rogers.

Hand-colored postcards first appeared in 1939 and were published by the Albertype Company of Brooklyn, NY. The Albertype Company had for many years provided a veritable national visual documentation of the entire United States with their extensive postcard inventory. Their photographers went everywhere and photographed everything. Then they upped the ante by hiring women watercolorists to hand-color their stock images. These cards were often saved rather than suffering at the hands of the US Post Office and so have survived by and large in near mint condition. The purchaser understood that the colors would run if the card got wet and saved them rather than using them.

Scope and Content Note: The Postcard Collection consists of approximately 2400 unique postcard views of Martha's Vineyard. The collection covers the entire history of this appealing visual document from 1900 to the present. The collection provides insight into the social history, geography, architecture, and chronological history of Martha's Vineyard. The cards are arranged by town and subdivided by topic. Two unique categories have been separated out: real photo postcards and souvenir postcards.

Series Descriptions:

Series I:

Box 1 of 6

Oak Bluffs and Cottage City Postcards

Series II:

Box 2 of 6

Edgartown and Chappaquiddick Postcards

Series III:

Box 3 of 6

Tisbury, Vineyard Haven, West Chop Postcards

Series IV: Up-Island Postcards

Box 4 of 6

Subseries A: Chilmark Postcards

Subseries B: Gay Head/Aquinnah Postcards

Subseries C: West Tisbury Postcards

Series V: Other Categories

Box 5 of 6

Subseries A: Real Photo Postcards

Subseries B: Souvenir Postcards

Series VI: Photochrome Postcards

Box 6 of 6