

## **A Hundred Years of Arizona Postcards**

Last April I used four of my Brother Al Ring's old Arizona postcards to illustrate my articles on Arizona's traditional Five C's, copper, cattle, cotton, citrus, and climate. That leaves almost 20,000 postcards in Al's collection that I haven't used yet.

### **Postcard History**

Postcards have been around in America since the mid-1800s, starting out mostly as advertising or souvenir cards. The U.S. issued its first official postal card in 1873. One side was reserved exclusively for the address, the other for a message, and it cost a penny to mail regardless of distance. The first divided back postcard was issued in 1907, allowing for the address and message on one side, leaving the other side available for a picture. Over the years, advancements in photography and printing permitted better and better images through today's brilliantly-colored picture postcards. Postage rates gradually increased from one cent to today's 34 cents.

### **Postcard Types**

Real Photo Postcards (1899-1930s) were made possible on a large scale by George Eastman, of Eastman Kodak Company fame, who developed the simple, easy to use Kodak camera that produced black and white images to fit postcards, plus a photo developing process that enabled many people to make their own postcards.

White Border Postcards (1913-1930s) are somewhat of a misnomer. Some of them indeed have white borders, due to production printing on large sheets, cut down to sizes afterwards, where white borders were forgiving to small miscuts. Some companies, with more skilled workers, did not use borders. Postcards from this period were often printed in tinted halftones (color), after transferring a photograph to a printing plate.

Linen Postcards (1931-1959) used new color dyes for image coloring on postcards with a linen texture to speed drying time. The images were based on photographs but sometimes contained handiwork of the production artists.

Photochrome Postcards (1939-present), sometimes called chromes, were made possible with the development in the 1930s of Kodachrome, the first high quality, multilayered, color slide film, and the parallel development of halftone offset lithography. Chrome postcards approach the clarity of color photographs, with color quality improving continuously since the 1930s.

### **Collecting Postcards**

My brother began collecting Arizona postcards in the early 1990s while living in Louisville, Kentucky and dreaming of retiring to Arizona. He frequented postcard conventions and dealers in places like Louisville and Evansville, Kentucky; Indianapolis, Indiana; and Cincinnati, Ohio. Slowly, he built up one of the largest private collections of Arizona postcards around.

We had some family ties to Arizona that spurred Al's keen interest in the state. Our Mother grew up in Bisbee in the 1920s, our paternal Grandfather was a mining engineer on the Mexican border near Ruby in the early 1900s and managed the Silver Bell copper mine near Tucson in the 1940s, and our parents attended U of A and retired to Tucson. I moved here in 1993.

You can learn a lot about history from postcards and Al certainly did. This was the start of our historical research on Arizona, particularly southern Arizona mining history that would lead to our writing three books together.

Al moved to Arizona in 1998 and just kept on collecting, noting that prices in Arizona were higher than in the Midwest. Al's latest count is 19,322 Arizona postcards, on every conceivable subject relating to Arizona, including cards from the early 1900s through today. Early on he emphasized collecting cards on Bisbee and its suburbs Lowell and Warren.

Al stores his postcards in 15 large cardboard boxes, each box over two feet long and six inches wide, and each card encased in a plastic sleeve. He built a humongous Excel spread sheet to keep track of them.

Al and I live in the same area, only about a mile apart. After three books together, Al's Fire Department History, and all those columns I've written, we have over a hundred boxes of reference materials and notes that needed a place to reside. Luckily we found a storage facility between our houses that we use to offload our data and our collections – a minor inconvenience I suppose for such productive hobbies.

In 2005 Al and I decided to share our research and writings about Arizona history on a website: [ringbrothershistory.com](http://www.ringbrothershistory.com). That's where you can find half of Al's postcards: about 2,550 real photo cards, 4,460 white border cards, and 1,715 linen cards, along with a detailed list of subject contents. The cards are carefully organized by category, several to a page. The direct link is: <http://www.ringbrothershistory.com/alsprojects/alscollection.htm>

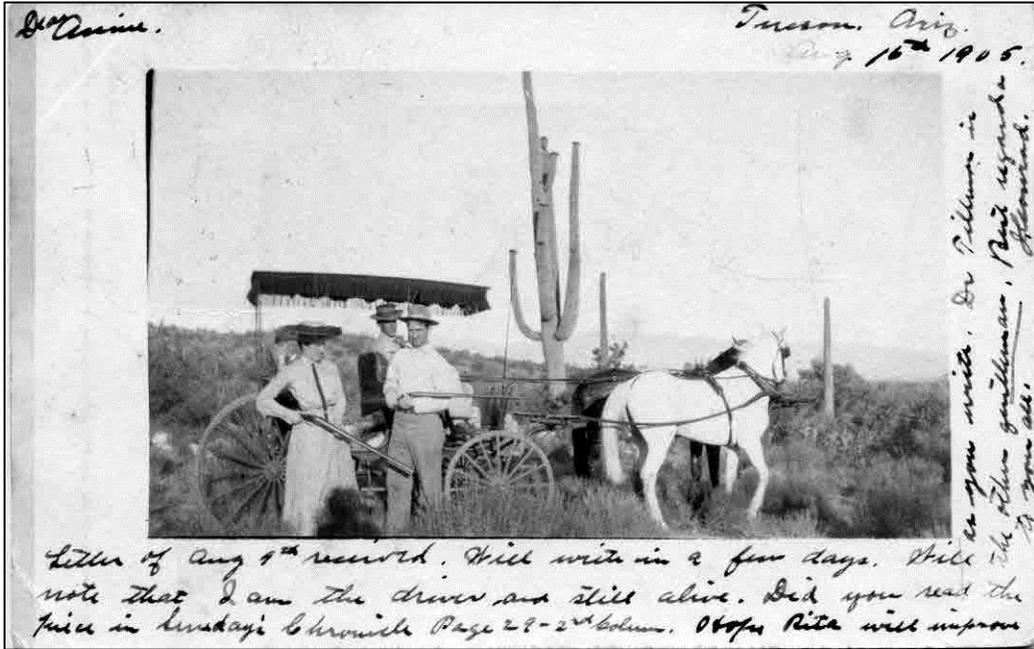
Al's collection also includes about 7,450 photochrome cards and 3,110 modern postcards, but these are not currently on our website.

In order to get a postcard image to our website, Al has to scan each card individually – something he has done now almost 9,000 times.

Happy viewing!

Next Time: Ah ... maybe I'll write about Al's Arizona postmark collection, or his Arizona postage stamp collection, or his ... collection.

**Selected Sources and Information:** A Brief History of Postcard Types, [lisapostcards.com](http://lisapostcards.com); A not so Concise History of the Evolution of Postcards in the United States, [metropostcard.com](http://metropostcard.com).



This real photo homemade postcard is postmarked August 16, 1905 – sent from Tucson to San Francisco with one cent postage. Front of card is reserved for address only. Writing at bottom of photo includes phrase, “Note that I am the driver and still alive.” Picture shows two people holding large guns.  
(Postcard courtesy of Al Ring)



*This white border postcard shows Bisbee's famous Copper Queen Hotel.  
(Postcard courtesy of Al Ring)*



*The Catalina Mountains and desert near Tucson are highlighted in this linen postcard.  
(Postcard courtesy of Al Ring)*