

A Tale of Two Holiday Cards

By Patrick Crosby

The two cards shown, one from 1906 and one from 1907, are from an era when picture postcards were popularly used for season's greetings. They were a quick, simple way to wish the best with only 1¢ postage required instead of the 2¢ postage an envelope would cost. And besides, there was a picture postcard collecting craze going in full swing.



So why was the 1906 card (on the left) "Returned for Postage"? Because not until March 2, 1907 (effective date - often incorrectly noted as March 1, 1907) was correspondence allowed on the left portion of the address side. Before this date only the sender's name and address were allowed to qualify for the 1¢ card rate. Otherwise, as with the 1906 card, 2¢ letter rate postage was required.

On December 22, 1906 this card received a Brockton, MA machine flag cancel. But it

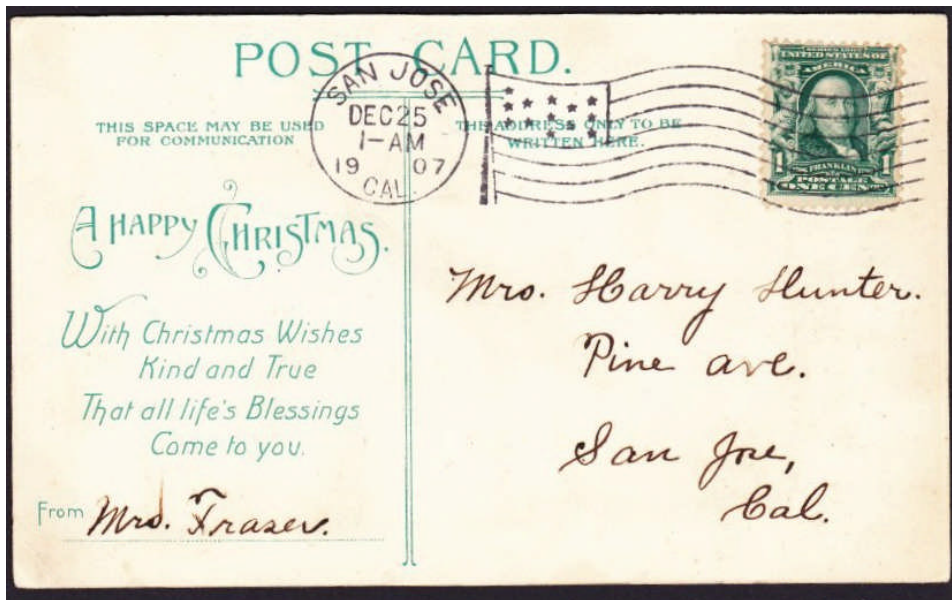
wasn't until December 30th that additional postage was received from the sender or addressee and placed over part of the flag cancel. A rubber stamp "This is the Mail You sent postage for" and a December 30th Brockton handstamp cancel were applied. The card was received in Purling, NY on December 31st.

The picture side of the card (on the right) is highlighted with glitter. Less than 2 months later (February 16, 1907) this card would not have been allowed in the mail stream because of the glitter unless it was enclosed in an envelope or properly coated (the latter starting April 26, 1907). There was legitimate concern with glitter (particles of glass, metal, mica, sand, tinsel, or similar substances) damaging postal equipment or injuring postal employees.

Before the left side correspondence area was allowed to be used in the U.S. domestic mails there were cards, especially some made in Germany for use in the U.S., which included such a space, like on the 1906 card shown. In deltiology (the hobby of collecting postcards) these would be called "divided backs." So, there was some confusion. Adding to the confusion was that such correspondence on cards arriving in the international mails were allowed by the U.S. without additional postage due beginning August 21, 1906. Cards from a few countries, notably Canada, Germany, Great Britain and France, were allowed even earlier with varying effective dates. For example, for Canada this was February 11, 1904.



Was there a Grinch involved in the holding for additional postage and subsequent late delivery of the 1906 card? Probably not. A true Grinch would have also charged the required penalty of “double the deficiency” for being shortpaid – another 1¢ due.



Having seen many postcards from 1907 my observation is that it took many months before the public warmed up to the idea of using the left portion of the address side of a card for correspondence, even if it had a divided back. Finally, around the holidays in 1907 usage is common. For a challenge, try finding domestically used postcards close to March 2, 1907 with a message on the left of the address side.

This 1907 card was postmarked on December 25th and may have been delivered on the same date since the San Jose, CA post office was large and would deliver mail as needed on holidays. This card's greetings ring true over 110 years later.

Patrick Crosby is a member of the Nevada Stamp Study Society and collects U.S. postal cards, especially used, including first days; the 1886 Grant Letter Card (or Sheet); UC16, the first U.S. aerogram; and postal history on business or picture post cards.