

Leather Cards By Patrick Crosby

Quite simply, leather is not cardboard. The U.S. Post Office Department (USPOD) requires a postcard (or post card) to be on cardboard, and postcards get a cheaper postage rate for first-class postal service than letters. It doesn't matter that "leather cards" (I'll call them that for this article) look similar to postcards and call themselves "Post Card." Leather cards are not postcards.

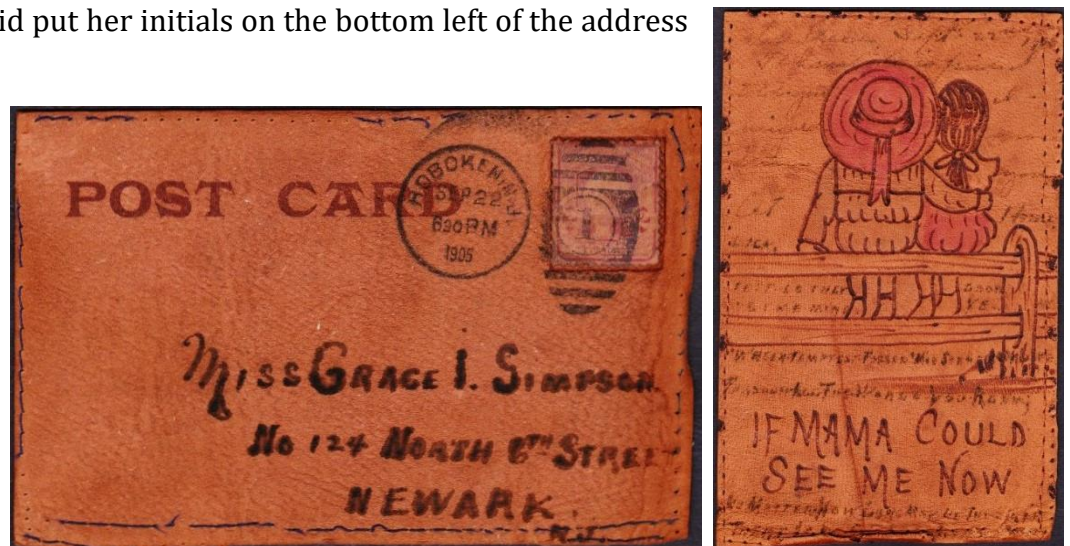
I've searched the USPOD's *Postal Laws and Regulations* and *The Daily Bulletins* but, could never find anything about leather items besides referring to mailbags. Then in reviewing some notes for "tinsel" cards I found a reference from *The Little Falls Herald* [Little Falls, MN, October 4, 1907], "Leather cards are classified as merchandise and will go for one cent an ounce or fraction, but if written upon, the postage is two cents."

Bingo! Now I know why I couldn't find any USPOD references – they just fall into a large category called "other" that are eligible for third-class rates if third-class rules are followed. The USPOD never spelled out everything that was included in "other." Following the rules meant there could be no message or date or else the higher first-class letter rate was required. Allowable was a return address and/or name.



Occasionally when a leather card went through a machine canceler, the canceler could damage the stamp(s), or postmark irregularly because of the flimsiness of the leather. **Example 1** (above) shows a Des Moines, IA receiving machine cancel with its cds (circle date stamp) split in two. This card is an example of third-class mail matter at the 1¢ rate with the usual, boring Scott #300. There is no added message, but the sender did put her initials on the bottom left of the address side.

Quite often a leather card is seen with holes punched all around the perimeter. This was to facilitate lacing leather cards together to make a craft item, like a pillow. **Example 2** (right) is one of three cards I have addressed to the same



woman. All three cards have sewn perimeters from a one-time pillow. This example shows a problem for the collector – leather can cause stamps to fade and, worse yet, fall off. **Example 2** used to have a bright red (carmine) 2¢ stamp, now the color has mostly faded. The sender of these three leather cards always wrote long messages and she knew first-class letter postage of 2¢ was required.

Neither post office clerks nor postal patrons received much direction in the use of leather cards, so don't expect the used items seen to have the correct postage. Sometimes 2¢ was paid instead of 1¢, and vice versa. Postage due would sometimes be assessed, but not always.

An early leather card I've seen (I'm sure not the earliest) was dated 12-20-1904, which is in the beginning stage of the postcard mailing and collecting craze in the U.S. Then the frequent use of leather cards faded out suddenly by the end of 1907, with light usage during 1908. Regulations had been put in place during 1907 to protect postal workers and equipment from novelty postcards, so perhaps the manufacturers of many of the leather cards were being cautious.



Railway Post Office and town cancels, auxiliary markings, and overseas use can all be collected on leather cards. **Example 3** (above) is a souvenir from the 1907 Jamestown Exposition in Norfolk, VA. It has the 1¢ exposition issue Scott #328 and an exposition duplex hand cancel Bomar N07-01. William Bomar wrote the often referenced *Postal Markings of United States Expositions* and says there are less than 30 of these hand cancels known, with his book and the 2019 Scott Specialized Catalog valuing the hand cancel on cover at \$125. For the usual collectable leather cards, many are available for \$2 to \$10 apiece.

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.